

**Anna-Esther Younes**, Graduate Institute of  
International Studies and Development,  
Geneva

---

**Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (eds). 2008. White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology. Lanham: Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 416 pp. Paperback**

ISBN-10: 0-7425-4281-5

---

The debate among ‘minority’ scholars and people of color over hegemonic research methods and theories in social sciences has not yet come to a halt. Indeed, Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva continue the legacy that started in the United States of America with W.E.B. du Bois. The two have edited a book that critiques ongoing research methods that treat ‘race’ as a social constant rather than a social construct. Zuberi is known for his versatile and international engagement in academia, human rights activism, filmmaking and his extensive knowledge of W.E.B. du Bois’ writing. While Bonilla-Silva is primarily known for his broad knowledge and research of the racialization of Latin Americans in US society.

Taken as a whole, this book is an ideological critique of academia in

its various formations. It claims ‘the language used by social scientists is usually reflective of an unarticulated causal theory. It is irrelevant whether the social scientist is aware of this or not.’ (9) Describing their book project as political within a ‘war of position against White Supremacy’ (23), the editors and authors question [white] positionalities, reflecting upon the ways positional oblivion whitewashes colorblind-racism and subsequent academic knowledge re-production. Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi call this debate on race, positionalities and knowledge reproduction an ‘overdue conversation in the discipline [of sociology]’ (137), especially since most whites in the post-civil rights era believe that racism doesn’t matter anymore or that race simply became a question of ‘cultural identity’ (163). Although

most of the book's authors share this attitude toward mainstream theorization, one author – Stanfield II – takes this 'unawareness' further: He believes that the active neglect of racial matters in academia is in fact caused by 'the deep emotional roots of race' (273), which makes the discovery of race almost unbearable for well-situated academics who cannot grapple with changing world realities (281).

Zuberi's and Bonilla-Silva's editorial ambition is to 'tell the real story of the hunt' (329), the theoretical footing of which is found in the first and final chapter. Accordingly, both authors define the backbone of their professional critique: White logic is the 'context in which White supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts' (17), whereas white methods delineate the 'practical tools used to manufacture empirical data and analysis to support the racial stratification in society' (18). Moreover, as the title indicates, whiteness is seen as the structure that generates racism. Yet, only one article touches upon the difficulty of researching whiteness, the generating structure of racism so to say, within such a statistical area: Gallagher (article 10) explores methods to interview white people. He gives examples of potential interviewee answers, and asks an important question, namely whether researchers can 'ask questions that challenge our [white] respondents to think about race as a

political category [...].' (176) Overall, it would not go amiss to have more examples of how one could methodologically expose whiteness in quantitative research without taking the 'scientific detour' via the racialized Other. Finally, it is essentially the interlocking of white logic and method that furthers racialized knowledge reproduction in racially stratified societies. Ultimately, what connects all authors is their view of academia as 'a form of [White] cultural and political hegemony' (275).

The book is subdivided into seven main chapters – each with three to four articles – that aim to deconstruct the bond between statistics and race. The second chapter entitled 'Race as a Variable' criticizes the use of race as a fixed and immanent variable, and is followed by 'The Logic of Method', where questions of causation and social dependencies are raised. An 'interactive model of racial inequality' (121) in statistics is called for, one which is able to treat race as a changing, interlocking system of social stratification that is socially constructed and recurring in various formations. Importantly, Paul Holland ('Causation and Race') notes that '[p]roperties or attributes [race, age, gender, test scores] of units [individuals] are not the types of variables that lead themselves to plausible states of counterfactuality' (100) and have the potential for a great methodology text in class.

Chapter 4, 'Interpreting the Problem', tackles definitions of words such as race, racism or post-racism. The insistence of racism as a structure and not simply an individual shortcoming ('Anything but Racism: How Sociologists Limit the Significance of Racism') or a clash of different cultural identities (i.e. "The End of Racism" as the New Doxa: New Strategies for Researching Race'), is a topic just as important as color-blind racism in the US post-civil rights era. At the same time, that experimental methodology remains untouched by critical race theory ('Experiments in Black and White: Power and Privilege in Experimental Methodology'). Article 11 - 'White Ethnographers on the Experiences of African American Men: Then and Now' - a fantastic overview of ethnographic research of white researchers, analyzing urban U.S. Afro-American masculinities and lives between the 1960s to the 1990s, dissects the intersections of the White male middle-class gaze with that of knowledge reproduction.

Chapter 5, 'Dimensions of Segregation and Inequality Typically Missed', starts out with an article on racial residential segregation calling on more sophisticated and overlapping macro-, micro- and meso-level analyses (article 12). It moves on to deal with questions of educational achievement (article 13), and critical demography challenging conventional measurements of racism relative to wealth, status and power

in the USA (article 14). The chapter closes with an article by Zuberi and Bratter questioning the notion that 'interracial marriages' are fading racial boundaries. It contends that increased diversity may as well serve 'to redraw the lines of race' (252).

'The Gospel of Feel-Good Sociology' by Stanfield II is an academic highlight in this book and rightly launches the chapter on 'The Practice of Racial Research'. In his article, he draws a belligerent account of academic research and its race-exclusive feel-good bubble. Ultimately, he attests that only an opening to critical race research in sociology can prevent the discipline from becoming obsolete in the future (282). The next article 'To Win the War', maps out the US American Pioneer Fund and its support and lobby of race biased research in modern US social sciences. This is then supported by 'Being a Statistician Means Never Having to Say You're Certain' outlining the biased use of statistics by journalists, lawyers and public intellectuals, and the way their writings in turn reinforced public opinion and thereby stiffened Afro-American responses to the legal system and the police. Having said the latter, Austin ('Crime Statistics, Disparate Impact Analysis, and the Economic Disenfranchisement of Minority Ex-Offenders') shows how such reiterated public opinions connected to crime statistics repeat racial discrimination, making it almost impossible for people belonging to

minority groups to 'engage in such mundane activities as shopping [...] without being closely watched, having a pizza delivered to their door, or paying for a purchase by check' (308).

For people suspicious of or not using quantitative methods this book could only partly deliver useful advice. However, the book's significance lies in its aim to criticize the most common assumptions about race as fixed variable in today's statistical practices, which is unfortunately still of utmost importance. Particularly in fields such as sociology, education, political science, and criminology, analyses according to fixed categories are the backdrop for most contemporary research. Yet whether it concerns regression models, statistics or numbers of various kinds, it is not the use of unified quantitative methodologies per se that are under attack in this book, but the way categories are established, used and interpreted by 'white logics'. It is reasonable to demand that those academic fights at the front of the social sciences are tackled, yet at the same time, most authors highlight directly or indirectly that those daring to talk about race as a structural phenomenon are facing challenges in their career, something that the editor Bonilla-Silva is easily able to echo from his own experience (15).

Overall, the collection of articles is well chosen in terms of their length and mix between statistic-

heavy, ethnographic and theoretical articles. The importance of the Chicago School for the development of 'race' in research and society in the USA re-appears in many of the articles. This can serve as a call to others to trace the development of 'racial thought' in other countries' respective academic worlds. Along with recent work on indigenous research methods and people of color queer methodologies, this book deserves its place in scholarship on critical race or ethnicity studies, due to its implicit emphasis on critical statistical research methods, a seldom popular topic within academia.