

12

The Political Geography of Whites Adopting Black Children in the United States

Heath Fogg-Davis

The adoption of black children¹ by white parents in the United States takes place in a geographical context that is marked by high levels of residential segregation between whites and blacks (Logan and Stults, 2011). The public debate over these adoptions has focused on the moment of adoptive placement—the policy question of whether whites should be permitted to adopt black children. Thus, the future-oriented question of *where* these biracial families will reside has often receded from explicit scrutiny. From a law and public policy perspective, this is justified, given that a core tenet of all constitutional democracies is that neither the government nor other individuals may dictate where someone lives. But legal questions are not the only relevant questions to consider in adoption. In this chapter, I expand the locus of the debate to consider some of the moral aspects of residential freedom as it pertains to the adoption of black children by whites in American political geography. Are white adoptive parents of black children *morally* obligated to search for and make homes for their biracial families in neighbourhoods that are not predominately white, and where they are likely to have at least some black neighbours?

I believe they do. The moral ought here is not based on the contention or speculation that a black adopted child cannot develop a healthy self-concept in a predominantly white community. Instead, the moral ought is a more magnified version of the general moral responsibility that we all have to make residential decisions that do not perpetuate long-standing patterns of racially segregated housing. Because whites by and large have much greater social and economic power than blacks do to enact their race-based

¹ In this chapter I will use the term “black” to include biracial individuals in adherence to the long-standing American cultural, and to some extent legal, norm of the “one drop” rule. According to this rule, anyone with one black ancestor (one drop of “black blood”) is considered to be black.

housing preferences, it follows that whites have a moral duty to *lead* processes of desegregation, even and especially when such action brings about real and imagined economic and social sacrifice. White and black adults often invoke their children's welfare as a primary reason for choosing to live in predominantly white communities. "We would love to live in (gentrified parts of) the city, but we moved to the suburbs for the schools." This chapter troubles the status quo and culturally accepted assumption that parents must live in predominantly white neighbourhoods "for the sake of their children." While the prospect of depriving one's child of resources such as a high or even decent quality of education is cause for real concern, this strikes me as a very narrow way of conceiving of the short- and long-term costs and benefits of racial integration. When parents with higher levels of economic and social capital move to areas where their neighbours have lower levels of economic and social capital, they and their children will incur costs, both real and imagined. But it is also true that these parents bring their resources with them to impart to their children in these new locations. These resources can also bolster their new communities, especially when it comes to the funding of public schools, which is generated by local property taxes in most US school districts. Non-quantifiable positive outcomes flow from such integration too. For example, in living in a racially mixed neighbourhood the parents themselves are likely to be changed by their new environments, to think of their own racial identities in different, unexpected ways that should not be thought of in strictly negative terms. How would our conception of the political geography of white-black transracial adoption change if we considered the process of white-led racial integration as yielding these benefits, instead of viewing residential racial integration as a zero-sum game in which whites, and their children—adopted or not—always and only lose resources that they currently possess or may acquire in the future?

When whites parent black children, these extra-legal questions become even more pressing because the family itself, and not just a particular neighbourhood, is a place of racial integration. Blacks and whites are not equal parties to the prospect of American racial integration. And this racial power disparity is magnified in the case of whites adopting black children because children must live where their parents purchase or rent a home. By taking the time and making the effort to select a racially diverse community for the family, white adoptive parents convey an important message to their black adopted children: that the racial integration of the family is a collective endeavour led by them, and that they are willing to sacrifice the racial familiarity of living in a community that mostly reflects their white racial identity and experience. If the white parents are like most white Americans they will have grown up and spent most of their lives in predominantly white communities. Moving out of such communities may mean physically moving outside of their racial comfort zones. It may require other compromises, too, such as having to commute greater distances for work.

Our racial comfort zones have a geographical location that we often take for granted, and thus fail to question. What feels comfortable to us can be at odds with what morality demands of us. Policy-makers and judges do not have the final word on our moral

responsibilities. In my 2002 book, *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption*, I called attention to some of these extra-legal moral considerations by arguing that race-consciousness, in the form of *racial navigation*, should supplement the liberal principle of non-discrimination in adoptive placements. In retrospect, I paid insufficient attention to the actual political geography to be navigated when whites adopt black children, especially the political geography of residential location and homemaking. My intention in using the verb *navigate* was to underscore black adoptees' individual agency in constructing and revising their own racial identities, both as children and as they mature into adulthood. I did so in response to my sense that the public debate over these transracial adoptions too often conceptualized black children in need of adoption as passive receptacles of racial culture, and forever-young pawns in a more diffuse and long-standing racial debate between colourblindness and race-consciousness. In doing so, I neglected to explicitly anchor such navigation in the political geography of American race. I also paid too little attention to the parents' own racial navigation, especially the asymmetrical power that they possess in determining where the family will reside and make a home together.

I begin with a brief overview of the major philosophical differences that have shaped the public debate over the ethics of whites adopting black children in the US. I situate my race-conscious argument in support of these adoptions within this theoretical framework. Next I introduce the concept of political geography, and explain both its theoretical and empirical dimensions. I discuss some of the formal and informal factors that sustain and perpetuate high levels of residential segregation between whites and blacks. In the following section I demonstrate how the theoretical trope of racial navigation relates to political geography. I highlight the role that power and racial privilege play in normalizing the *de facto* or extra-legal racial segregation that marks out the political geography to be navigated in contemporary U.S. society. Having discussed the macro-political geography of whites adopting black children, I conclude that section by zooming in on the micro-political geography of homemaking. I invoke Sally Haslanger's use of feminist phenomenology to describe her own experience of parenting black children as a white adoptive mother to exemplify the sort of white-led racial integration I have in mind.

The Political Debate

The political debate over white-black adoption has focused on the up or down question of whether whites should be permitted to adopt black children. To its supporters, the desire and willingness of whites to adopt black children exemplifies the principle of colourblind non-discrimination that fuelled much of the 1960s American civil rights movement (Bartholet, 1991; Kennedy, 1994). Those opposed to the practice of whites adopting black children view these adoptions in a less optimistic, even discriminatory,

light. They laud the legal gains of the civil rights movement, but call attention to the structural aspects of anti-black racism that the movement's liberal legal approach left intact. The desire and willingness of some whites to adopt black children in need of homes does not address the structural racism that makes black children disproportionately in need of adoption in the first place (Roberts, 1997; Perry, 1993–41993–4). Many of these critics also question whether whites are culturally equipped to teach black children the “survival skills” necessary for coping with the everyday racism of being black in American society. More extreme critics placed these adoptions within a black nationalist framework that conceptualized black children as community resources and progenitors. On this narrative, black children belong to the black community, and their adoption out of the community by members of the white majority is tantamount to genocide (NABSW, 1994).

The preposition and definite article are instructive here because being raised *in the* black community does not require that the black adoptive parents of black children reside in a black or predominantly black neighbourhood. “The black community” refers instead to a set of cultural values and coping strategies, and the assumption is that black adoptive parents, no matter where they live, uniquely, or are at least more likely than white adoptive parents to, possess these values and strategies *and* transmit them to black children. But this assumption falters in at least two respects. First, there is no set definition of “black values” that black parents possess simply in virtue of being black (Appiah, 1992; Gooding-Williams, 1998). Second, coping strategies are manifold and situational, and not coterminous with cultural values. Conflating these two concepts and attaching a racial valence to them detracts from the more exacting question of how parents will navigate their geographical situation *with* their children in the residential location they select.

This sense of togetherness is missing in liberal defences of white-black adoption that emphasize a strong conception of individual rights. Of course, families are comprised of individuals with their own set of rights, moral obligations, and life-projects. Yet families are also intimate associations that should be navigating many of life's vicissitudes together, especially the formidable challenges that race and racism pose. Feminists have pointed out that families are political institutions with internal relations of power disparity that require negotiation over time (Okin, 1989; Young, 1990). The isolation that many black adoptees experience in white adoptive families is not just about being the only black child at school or church or synagogue, but also, and perhaps more profoundly, of having to “go it alone” without the sense that the family is navigating race together as a unit or team (Smith *et al.*, 2011). My earlier work overestimated the navigational agency of children. I bypassed, or moved too quickly over, childhood, the time when we can no more racially navigate on our own than make other critical decisions tied to the acquisition of life experience, and the development of the brain's prefrontal cortex. Just as we do not expect or allow kids to traverse cities and towns on their own without parental guidance, we should not expect them to navigate the racial

meaning of that geography all, or even mostly, by themselves. Nevertheless, in doing so, we should not lose sight of the adopted person's increasing autonomy in navigating racial meaning as they mature into adulthood.

The 1996 federal Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA, 1994, as amended by The Interethnic Adoption Provisions, 1996) reflects the liberal individual-rights position by prohibiting adoption coordinators from using racial consideration to deny or delay an adoption. This federal legislation governs the practice of adoption, a family law matter that falls under the jurisdiction of individual states. As in non-adoptive family law, no state legislation requires adopters to raise their adoptive children in a particular geographical location, and I am not advocating such legal restriction. The legal freedom to choose where one will make a home, however, does not obviate the moral duty to take critical stock of the racial inequity in housing patterns, and to consider how our legally permissible private choices sustain and exacerbate such inequity.

My book urged white adopters to consider the race-conscious environment in which their adoption of black children transpired, but I did not directly address the extra-legal moral question of residential choice. I was more concerned to expose the insincerity of a colourblind approach to non-discrimination in a nation rife with race-based thinking and race-based private decision-making. I presented a thought experiment of racially randomized adoptive placement as a way of debunking the myth of liberal colourblindness. I argued that if we apply the same liberal individual rights-based argument to children in need of adoption that colourblind liberals apply to prospective adopters, then it follows that children have an ethical, even constitutional, right not to be chosen based on their racial classification. Racial randomization generates two outcomes that betray the insincerity of liberal colourblindness. First, although whites want the opportunity to adopt a child of any race, most still want to select their adoptive child based on racial classification. Secondly, the likely outcome that some white children would be matched with black adoptive parents is an adoption scenario that many whites find disturbing because of its cultural strangeness.

The unfamiliarity, even absurdity, of that scenario communicates an underlying set of assumptions about where such a family is likely to reside, and the “goodness” and “badness” of racially coded neighbourhoods. The image of blacks adopting white children as a result of randomized placement challenges a racially coded rescue narrative prevalent in cultural depictions of adoption—of who needs rescue, of who qualifies as a rescuer, and what qualifies as rescue. This narrative takes place in a place. Why does the mere idea of blacks raising white children in black neighbourhoods become the antithesis of rescue: a story of reckless endangerment? To answer this question we must first understand how race factors into the political geography that many, if not most, Americans take for granted, and thus never question. Or when they do question this racial geography, they justify their residential decisions by referencing their own parental obligation to live in neighbourhoods with “good” schools for their children.

The Political Geography of Race

We often fail to notice the political boundaries of our location, and how our actions give meaning to the lighted lines on the GPS devices we use to guide us from place to place. Katherine McKittrick (2006) notes the seductiveness of “[g]eography’s discursive attachment to stasis and physicality, the idea that space ‘just is,’ and that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations.” For, “that which ‘just is’ not only anchors our selfhood and feet to the ground, it seemingly calibrates and normalizes where, and therefore who, we are” (McKittrick, 2006: p. xi). Our racial comfort zones determine many of the decisions we make on a daily basis, from the mundane instinct to cross to the other side of the street upon seeing a young black male who seems “suspicious,” to the major life decision to purchase or rent a home. Both decisions take place in places—the sidewalks lining a specific street, a particular residential neighbourhood with its history, reputation, price point, and rules—unspoken and codified, alike. Adoption involves two decisions that democratic liberalism deems quintessentially private: the freedom to “have” children and the freedom to choose where to make a home for oneself and one’s children.

When whites adopt black children they do so within a context of persistently high levels of residential segregation between whites and blacks. Data from the 2010 US Census indicate that the rates of residential segregation between whites and blacks are higher than between any other racial groups. Moreover, when white-black racial integration occurs it is typically unidirectional, meaning that blacks move into predominately white communities, but whites do not typically move into predominantly black communities. I do not argue that whites who adopt black children are ethically required to move into predominantly black neighbourhoods, although this would certainly not be immoral. Instead, I argue that white adoptive parents are morally bound to search for and move into neighbourhoods that are not predominantly white, and where the family will have at least some black neighbours. Again, this ethical responsibility is not based on the speculation that black children cannot navigate their racial identities in white environments. Clearly, many have done so. My focus is on parental leadership. Based on the principle of fairness, parents are morally obligated to convey the message to their black adopted children that the racial integration of the family will not be entirely unidirectional, that they are willing to physically move out of their geographical racial comfort zones. The parents show good faith in leading the family’s process racial integration by interrupting the unthinking cycle of selecting a neighbourhood that is racially familiar to them. The adoption of black children by white parents magnifies this moral obligation, but as I noted earlier, the moral imperative to break this cycle falls on the shoulders of all whites, given their disproportionate power to enact race-based housing preferences.

Some of the formal historical barriers that have kept blacks and whites from becoming neighbours include racially restrictive housing covenants that were used by whites in many locales to ban the successive sale of real estate to non-whites, the prevalent practice of banks and insurance companies refusing to sell mortgages and housing

insurance to the residents of neighbourhoods racially coded as black (the practice of “red-lining”), and real estate agent practices of steering black buyers away from properties in white neighbourhoods. Whites intent on keeping blacks from moving into their neighbourhoods often resorted to extra-legal tactics as well, such as harassment and intimidation, sometimes subtle and sometimes overt, that were aimed at forcing black pioneering families out of white neighbourhoods, and discouraging other blacks from moving in. The civil rights movement of the 1960s succeeded in overturning formal racist policies and practices via court rulings and anti-discrimination legislation. In 1948 the US Supreme Court declared racially restrictive housing covenants unconstitutional (*Shelley v. Kraemer*), and in 1968 the Congress passed the federal Fair Housing Act, which charged the federal Justice Department with monitoring and enforcing fair housing practices. These and other governmental actions have reduced segregation between whites and blacks, but the levels of segregation between these two groups still remains very high (Logan and Stults, 2011).

According to the 2010 US Census, the typical white person residing in a metropolitan area (this includes suburban neighbourhoods proximate to cities) lives in a neighbourhood that is 75 per cent white, 8 per cent black, 11 per cent Hispanic, and 5 per cent Asian. In stark contrast, the same data show that the typical black person living in a metropolitan area resides in a neighbourhood that is 45 per cent black, 35 per cent white, 15 per cent Hispanic, and 4 per cent Asian. Whites have lower levels of toleration for living in the same neighbourhoods as blacks than blacks do of white neighbours. After the demise of legally enforceable restrictive housing covenants, the major factor in maintaining high levels of residential segregation between whites and blacks has been the extra-legal practice of white flight. African Americans with the economic wherewithal have been able to move into wholly or predominately white communities. But their white neighbours start to move out of such communities once the number of black neighbours reaches a “tipping point.” Most whites prefer to live in neighbourhoods with no more than 20 per cent black residents. At the same time, the majority of whites personally disavow racist attitudes. Most blacks would prefer to live in racially integrated neighbourhoods that are at least 50 per cent black, but also know that such racial balancing is extremely unlikely, given whites’ lower threshold for tolerating black neighbours. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for blacks to secure housing in a neighbourhood that is racially balanced 50-50 between blacks and whites, leaving them the option of either residing in an entirely black community or a white community in which they and other blacks comprise no more than 20 per cent of the population.²

² The cycle that maintains racial segregation in housing thus goes as follows: “Whites stay in their neighborhoods when a few Blacks move in; other Blacks follow the pioneers into a desirable neighborhood, but continue to move in past the comfort zone of some Whites. More Whites move away, and the people who buy their houses are Black. The Whites who are comfortable with a larger number of Blacks living near them then decide to move out as more Blacks enter. This cycle continues until there are few Whites left in the neighborhood” (Spinner-Halev, 2010: 114).

These data convey important information about the political geography in which the adoption of black children by whites occurs. First, they substantiate the descriptive basis of the moral argument I am developing by showing that whites generally have much greater power than blacks to enact their race-based housing choices. The normalization of this one-way integration makes it likely that whites adopting black children will choose neighbourhoods that are predominantly white. Indeed, the data show that most white adopters raise their black adoptive children in predominantly white neighbourhoods (Smith *et al.*, 2011).

Navigating the Political Geography of Race

Racial navigation is the active process of interacting with one's environment and deciding for oneself how race should factor into one's self-concept. It differs from the passive notion that we inherit or get our racial identities from our parents. Philosopher Naomi Zack puts a fine point on this critical distinction by delineating between racial *identity*, a third-person imposition, and racial *identification*, which she interprets as a first-person and ongoing process of active decision-making in light of the imposition of racial identity from sources external to oneself (2007: 102). My earlier work stressed the importance of this active first-person racial navigation for adoptees, but said too little prescriptively concerning the practical steps that white adoptive parents of black children should take in leading the family's racial integration amid high levels of white-black residential segregation. When the parents choose to reside in a predominantly white neighbourhood, they enact a passive racial choice that evades moral scrutiny because it is so utterly common. By contrast, active racial navigation means being attentive to the "background rules," both formal and informal, that function in residential living patterns to accommodate and sustain racial segregation and inequality. These background rules are neither abstract nor unchangeable, but they are deeply ingrained.

Black adopted children come to their adoptive families from another place—the place(s) where the original family members resided. This geographical history, no matter how brief, matters ethically because it is part of the story of where the adopted person "came from." Upon meeting someone, we are culturally primed to ask, "Where are you from?" This can seem like a superficial question, and in many instances it is perfunctory. But its commonness belies its social importance. For adopted people, the antecedent question of the original family's geographical location complicates this social custom, even when this information is wholly or partially unavailable to her or him. What adjustments, even sacrifices in racial comfort, did the parents make in light of their black adopted child's relocation? The decision of where to live will mark out the racial terrain that must be navigated, so it should be questioned rather than assumed. The residential location of the biracial adoptive family will become an integral part of the black adopted person's origin story, and hence their identity narrative.

We grow accustomed to seeing and sensing the legal territories we live in and move within, and those we avoid, as facts of life that just are, and that we cannot alter. But in fact the rules of jurisdiction are a set of identifiable rules and practices that we collectively reinforce via our everyday individual behaviour. Legal theorist Richard Thompson Ford analogizes jurisdiction to dance notation to draw out this point concerning individual agency. Just as people learn to dance the tango by studying its diagrammed movements and observing how others perform it, we learn to “dance the jurisdiction” by mimicking peer behaviour, looking at maps, and reading descriptions of where danger lurks, what counts as “prime real estate,” and what criteria to use in deciphering the goodness and badness of neighbourhoods. Charles Mills (1997) theorizes that “the racing of space” involves “the depiction of space as dominated by individuals of a certain race.” In turn, individuals become “imprinted with the characteristics of a certain kind of space” (Mills, 1997: 46). The metaphor of dance is helpful because it breathes life and human agency into housing decisions that are often theorized as structural—a term that can connote ossification and permanence. The lines on maps appear fixed in time and space, a done deal, but the actions of this “deal” must be performed over and over again by individuals in order for the agreement to carry social and personal meaning. Tango dancers sustain and vivify tango notation, just as residents sustain and vivify jurisdictional mapping by heeding and performing political boundaries via their housing preferences and decisions.

When whites fail to acknowledge and make residential choices for their biracial families that are not based solely on what is racially familiar to them, they “dance the jurisdiction,” too. In other words, they fail to exercise their capacity to make housing decisions that disrupt the *de facto* segregationist cycle described. The racial comfort zones of white adopters are potentially at odds with the racial comfort zones of their black adoptive children, yet they must make a way together, as a family in a racially coded neighbourhood or setting. I say “potentially” because one important consequence of being an isolated black kid in a white family and community setting is that one is likely to absorb many of the racial and racist stereotypes from that home environment. These children learn to dance the same jurisdiction as their family and friends, even as they are made acutely aware of being racially out of place where they live and attend school. In interviews with young black adults who had been raised by white adoptive parents, Darren Smith and colleagues (2011: 112) report being “stunned by the adoptees’ beliefs and how they, with no apparent awareness, reinforced the stereotypically negative views of African Americans as represented in the media.” One might find similar cultural absorption among blacks raised in black families and black neighbourhoods. I would thus draw a different conclusion from such interviews. The uniqueness of these families is found not in the presence of a white racial knowledge framework in a black child’s life, but rather in the absence of a black racial knowledge framework in that child’s home and hometown. This reality begs an explanation that goes beyond the optimistic civil rights narrative that many whites tenaciously grip.

Most Americans denounce racial segregation as immoral, but at the same time reject the proposition that whites and blacks should be forced to share residential space, or attend the same schools. As Ford puts it, most Americans claim to live by the logic of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark US Supreme Court decision that declared racially segregated public schools inherently unequal and unconstitutional. Yet, they live by the logic of *Plessey v. Ferguson*, the notorious 1896 Supreme Court ruling that the *Brown* decision overturned, which asserts that racial co-mingling must not be forced. Even as Justice Harlan in *Plessey* vociferously disagreed with the idea of a legal racial caste system, he threw his full support behind the *social* concept of racial separation based on what he described as the “natural” superiority of the white race, which he predicted to last for all time. The current high levels of *de facto* segregation between blacks and whites in public schools did not “just happen,” but can instead be traced to specific court rulings during the 1970s and 1980s. To name just a few critical Supreme Court decisions: *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) exempted suburban communities from school desegregation mandates. *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) held that property tax-based school funding was constitutional in spite of vast tax burden–expenditure ratio disparities among local school districts. And *Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.* (1977) ruled that a facially race-neutral local zoning ordinance barring multifamily housing did not violate the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment to the federal constitution in spite of the racially exclusionary impact of the zoning ordinance.

These decisions might have been decided differently, which would have changed the race-class segregated living patterns that the adoption of black children by whites takes place within. Their little-known status contributes to the current sense of what Ford calls “racism without racists” (2011: 235). He traces the power cord to state legislatures because these political bodies are responsible for drawing up and approving the mapping of political localities such as municipalities, which control the relationship between taxation and the provision of local public services, lines of residency that determine who votes in which locality, and zoning rules that function as *de facto* immigration laws at the local level. “Local government boundaries are simply another set of state laws subject to the state political process. It then follows that the only relevant political process occurs at the statewide level” (Ford, 2011: 226). Municipalities are state actors subject to the federal constitution’s equal protection clause. This means that the rules they enact governing taxation, residency, and land use must not use racial distinctions to deprive those residing in the *state* of the equal protection of the law.

It is safe to assume that whites making the decision to adopt black children are not overtly racist. In some sense the decision to parent a black child can be read as a strong commitment to the principle of *Brown*, and a vehement rejection of *Plessey*’s principle of natural racial separation. But private non-racist decisions can, and often do, effectively reinforce racial inequality. Adoption occurs within what Clarissa Rile Hayward and Todd Swanstrom call the “thick injustice” of contemporary American city life, and the false escapism of rural life. This thick injustice consists in “the deep historical

roots of unjust power relations in America's cities and suburbs, their intersection with the institutional structure of local governance in the United States, and their embeddedness in physical places" (Hayward and Swanstrom, 2011: 9). The state no longer mandates legal racial segregation, and most Americans have edited explicitly racist language out of their personal vocabularies. But American political geography still bears the organizational structure of a racial caste system once upheld by racially restrictive housing covenants, red-lining by realtors and banks, and racist terrorism. And the organization of rural life has its own segregationist history, which persists in current patterns of rural living (White, 2007).

The Micro-Political Geography of Homemaking

Families, whether adoptive or not, are political entities that are regulated by the state and have their own internal power structures and struggles. They are also zones of intimate care that develop and change as time goes by and the members age, relocate, disperse, and reunite according to certain cultural traditions and situational circumstances. In this final section, I narrow my focus from the macro-political geography of race to the micro-political geography of race as it relates to the everyday and ongoing process of homemaking. I use Iris Marion Young's feminist theory of homemaking, and Sally Haslanger's incorporation of Young's work to describe her own residential (dis)location as a white mother of black adopted children. The word "homemaking" has traditionally been used to describe and too often denigrate "women's work" of tending to the maintenance of the domestic realm, apart from the public sphere of politics and commerce. Young redefines and revalues homemaking as political work that is both misunderstood and wrongly devalued by most people, including many women. Homemaking, on her account, differs from "housework" because it involves preservation of a certain kind. In arranging the material effects that constitute the interior design of homes, women have traditionally been responsible for preserving and thus constructing meaning for families over time and across generations. The fact that women have been traditional homemakers does not mean that homemaking is something that men cannot or should not undertake. Both men and women, regardless of familial configuration, should explicitly and self-consciously incorporate homemaking into their leadership in helping the family navigate racial meaning. Young stresses that homemaking is not about fixing meaning or identity in time and place (the business of museums). Instead, homemaking is an active, fluid process of interpreting and telling stories that comprise the self and group identities of those who dwell together.

The concept of dwelling is distinct from merely sharing time and space with one's immediate family members under a shared roof. Young (2005: 139) borrows D. J. Van Lennep's definition of "dwelling": to dwell is to acknowledge and feel one's "spatial existence." Phenomenology breaks down the mind/body division, and brings awareness to subjective feeling that often cannot be adequately described in words. Sally

Haslanger draws on Young's "materialist feminism" to note the ways in which the intimate care of her black adopted children has affected her own sense of being white:

This empathetic extension of body awareness, this attentiveness to the minute signals of another's body, does not in any metaphysically real sense make the other body part of your own. But taking on the needs and desires of another's body as *if* your own, perhaps especially if the other's body is marked as different, alters your own body sense, or what some have called (following Lacan) the "imaginary body," (Haslanger, 2005: 279)

She goes on to describe how such caretaking has altered her own racial comfort zones, but is quick to acknowledge that her white social privilege remains intact no matter these alterations.

When whites adopt black children, their sense of race at the level of subjective feeling is likely to shift regardless of the family's residential location. But the political geography of particular places sets the historical and material background for racial navigation. So, it is not enough to say that one sees and feels race differently as a consequence of parenting a black adopted child, parental leadership calls for critical attention to familial emplacement. White parents should take the time and make the effort to locate their biracial adoptive families in neighbourhoods that are not predominately white, and where the family will have at least some black neighbours. Haslanger and her white husband decided to make a home for their biracial adoptive family in a predominantly black neighbourhood. They also negotiated the terms of their open adoption to involve frequent visits and interaction with several of the children's black birth relatives. Both of these features produce a kind of racial dislocation that challenges assumptions about the geography of racial belonging. Of moral concern for Haslanger are the cases of transracial adoption "in which the parents' identity does not shift" (2005: 288). I would amend this slightly to add that the cases of moral concern are also those in which the parents fail to shift residential *location* in light of the shifting racial composition of their family.

Conclusion

Legal narratives are necessary, but they do not give voice or feeling to the pragmatic concerns of navigating racial meaning within the political geography of the places wherein we dwell. The active, individual, and familial project of racial navigation presented herein will in many ways be easier to initiate and sustain in a community that is not all or mostly white. It is harder to "dance the jurisdiction,"⁴ to obfuscate racist decision-making, when one is no longer in the overwhelming racial majority. No matter where homemaking takes place, white-black adoptive families will be racially dislocated because these adoptions take place within the "thick injustice" of a political geography deeply scarred by "racism without racists."

Young distinguishes between *nostalgia* ("longing for elsewhere") and *remembrance* ("the affirmation of what brought us here") (2005: 143). For her, "Home as the

materialization of identity does not fix identity but anchors it in physical being that makes a continuity between past and present. Without such anchoring of ourselves in things, we are, literally, lost” (2005: 140). I find Young’s words helpful in rethinking racial navigation as a relational, self-conscious process that is tethered to the materiality of residential location and homemaking. With Haslanger I reject liberal models of identity formation that focus too much on individual intentionality. I find fault, too, in structural accounts of racism that ignore, or give short shrift to, our individual intentions. Missing from this binary is a somatic self-understanding and understanding of others *in place* that is also, and simultaneously, cognitive.

References

- Appiah, K. A. (1992). *In my Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Arlington Heights v Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.*, 429 US 252 (1977).
- Bartholet, E. (1991). Where do Black Children Belong? The Politics of Race Matching in Adoption. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 139(5), 1163–1256.
- Fair Housing Act*, 42 USC 3601–3619 (1968).
- Fogg-Davis, H. (2002). *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ford, R. T. (2011). The Color of Territory: How Law and Borders Keep America Segregated. In C. R. Hayward and T. Swanstrom (eds), *Justice and the American Metropolis* (pp. 223–36). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gooding-Williams, R. (1998). Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy. *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 5(1), 18–36.
- Haslanger, S. (2005). You Mixed? In S. Haslanger and C. Witt (eds), *Adoption Matters: Philosophical and Feminist Essays*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hayward, C. R., and Swastrom, T. (2011). Introduction: Thick Injustice. In C. R. Hayward and T. Swanstrom (eds), *Justice and the American Metropolis* (pp. 1–29). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kennedy, R. (1994). Orphans of Separatism: The Painful Politics of Transracial Adoption. *American Prospect*, 17(Spring), 38–45.
- Logan, J., and Stults, B. (2011). *The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census*. New York: Russell Sage.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of struggle*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Milliken v Bradley*, 418 US 717 (1974).
- Mills, C. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, MEPA*, PL 103–382 (1994), as amended by the *Interethnic Provisions, IEP*, PL 104–188 (1996).
- National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) (1994). *Preserving African-American Families (Position Statement)*. Washington, DC: NABSW.
- Okin, S. M. (1989). *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Perry, T. (1993–4). The Transracial Adoption Controversy: An Analysis of Discourse and Subordination. *New York University Review of Law and Social Change*, 21, 33–108.

- Roberts, D. E. (1997). *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- San Antonio Independent School District v Rodriguez*, 411 US 1 (1973).
- Shelley v Kraemer*, 334 US 1 (1948).
- Smith, D. T, Jacobson, C. K., and Juarez, B. G. (2011). *White Parents, Black Children: Experiencing Transracial Adoption*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Spinner-Halev, J. (2010). The Trouble with Diversity. In J. S. Davies and D. L. Imbroscio (eds), *Critical Urban Studies: New Directions* (pp. 107–20). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- White, J. A. (2007) The Hollow and the Ghetto: Space, Race, and the Politics of Poverty. *Politics and Gender*, 3(2), 271–80.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Young, I. M. (2005). House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme. In I. M. Young, *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* (pp. 123–54). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zack, N. (1997). Race, Life, Death, Identity, Tragedy, and Good Faith. In L. Gordon (ed.), *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existentialist Philosophy* (pp. 99–110). New York: Routledge.

