Still getting the blame

Tamsyn Dent

Tracey Jensen, *Parenting the Crises. The Cultural Politics of Parent-Blame*, Policy Press 2018

This book is a captivating exploration of the relationship between policy-driven discourses on bad parenting and their use as a justification for punitive state policies that disproportionately affect the lives of women and those from disadvantaged social backgrounds. It opens with a reference to the shooting of Mark Duggan by specialist firearms officers in Tottenham, London on 4 August 2011. Mark Duggan's death and the subsequent failure by the Metropolitan Police to communicate with his family sparked a public reaction which led to outbreaks of street violence and riots across London and other British cities over a period of three days. Jensen acknowledges the work of criminologists and cultural theorists who have explored the English riots of 2011 in terms of their broader historical and social contexts, including the increasing penal activities led by the state that had contributed to a public sense of grievance and resentment against the invasive surveillance and harassment that were being experienced within certain areas of urban populations in the UK. But her focus on this topic is to look at how the political class's response to the riots, instead of considering the issue of police brutality, became centred around, and directed at, the figure of the bad parent. Jensen shows how, in political and media discourse, the family - or certain types of families - became the scapegoat for the civil unrest.

The book continues to unpick how this idea of the failing, pathological family, nurtured through bad parenting, has been manufactured, re-iterated and reproduced across policy and the media. Jensen draws on wider empirical research that exposes

10.3898/SOUN.71.REVIEWS.2019

how constructs of bad or absent parenting, articulated both in public political speeches and in the popular press, led to a concept of a 'crisis in parenting' (p4). Basing her theoretical framework on the legacy provided by Stuart Hall and others from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, Jensen exposes how the related machinery of politics and popular culture have led to a 'cultural industry of parent blame' based on gendered and classed constructions of parental identities and practices. The book demonstrates how this culture of parent blame has become a tool to justify the withdrawal of welfare benefits and other support for those most in need. Jensen identifies the particular gendered consequences of this rhetoric: women have been the main target for parental condemnation, and constitute the majority of victims of welfare reduction.

The book starts with a consideration of the popular digital media platform *Mumsnet* as a site that demonstrates the historical significance of 'mothercraft' - how motherhood can be conceived of as a craft, a learned practice of childcare. Jensen shows the historical shift and development over what counts as 'good' parenting, from nineteenth-century scientific constructions of motherhood to the self-reflexive, individualised and competitive construct of neoliberal motherhood that underpins parenting culture today. By charting the evolution of mothering practice, Jensen is able to demonstrate how chats conducted on the *Mumsnet* discussion boards exemplify both postfeminist sensibilities and neoliberal feminism.[1] Citing Richenda Gambles's work on the platform, Jensen is able to articulate how the very scaffolding of the discussion boards generates a 'structure of feeling' that exposes a symbolic circulation of classed identities based on concepts of good motherhood.[2] She argues that, through this maternal public, wider concerns around issues such as maternal inequality, racism or maternity discrimination are diminished, are displaced by the self-reflexive, individualised concerns of neoliberal parenting practice.

The following chapters break down the cultural construction of parent-blame as operationalised through a wider media focus on what is considered the right kind of parenting practice. Chapter three looks at the popular television programme *Supernanny*, a Channel 4 reality television programme first aired in the UK in 2004. The programme, fronted by nanny Jo Frost, followed a structured format: Frost would observe a parenting crisis within an individual family and then provide a set of rules and suggestions to ensure that good parenting practice would be learned and implemented. Applying Helen Wood's 'text in action' method, Jensen explores

how the popularity of the programme led to a 'lucrative cultural industry of parent-blame … driven by the media and taken up strategically in subsequent policy debates about family intervention' (p55).[3] What this cultural depiction of parent-blame exposes, Jensen argues, is a particularly gendered and classed construction of what 'good' parenting is. Jensen traces how the conception of being a parent has over time shifted - from an identity to a verb: 'parent' refers not to something that you are, but to something that you do.

Public discourse presents a specific construction of what good parenting is, and it is this that drives the interventions proposed in the cultural parent-blame economy. Jensen explores the relationships between the apparatuses of the media and those of the state as the culture of parent-blame fed into policy discourse, and the 'New' Labour government under Tony Blair began to target parents as part of Labour's social renewal project. Labour used what it defined as a 'parenting deficit' (p76) to develop a set of targeted interventions based on the idea that it was part of civic duty to re-educate parents into forms of contrived good parenting. Jensen shows how political interventions such as compulsory parenting classes fed into the 'machinery of parent-blame' that emerged in mediated discourse. The teaching of the 'good parenting' exemplified in middle-class habits was seen as a means to alleviate social inequality.

In her introduction, Jensen states that, due to the gendered nature of parenting, parent-blame should be read as 'mother-blame'. But this book is more often a consideration of social class than of gender. Apart from the argument that parent-blame is gendered, and the review of the multiple forms of classed mothering practice in her chapter on Mumsnet, the main body of the discussion focuses on classed constructs of abject parenting. Race is considered in connection to the 'thin multiculturalism' that is referenced in considering Labour's parenting policy.[4]

The book considers how a particular psychological vocabulary, linked to neoliberal parenting values of self-reflexivity and self-regulation, has been applied to the emotional politics of parenting culture. Building on Angela McRobbie's work on the production of neoliberal politics through middle-class mothers, Jensen explores how the emotional values of middle-class parenting based on narratives of 'tough love' techniques endorse liberal feminist values whilst simultaneously discrediting the social obligation to support those who are marginalised under liberalism.[5] Jensen charts, through references to popular television programmes and political rhetoric,

how the discourse of tough love produced a representation of troubled families which worked to discredit any sympathy in the public sphere for disadvantaged and vulnerable families. These discourses fed into the new era of parenting policy that emerged with the UK coalition government that came into power in 2010, and was further consolidated by the subsequent Conservative government. Building on the 'Broken Britain' rhetoric that emerged following the 2008 financial crisis, austerity became the buzzword to describe the new system of enforced economic stringency that was allegedly needed to bring Britain out of its financial deficit. For Jensen, one of the 'most grotesque narratives' to emerge following the financial crisis was that it was caused not by speculative capitalism but by those that 'subsist upon the public purse' (p121). In developing this theme, Jensen considers the case of Mick Philpott, the father found guilty of the manslaughter of his six children through arson in 2013; she sees the way the tragedy was reported as part of the media's ongoing construction of the 'benefit brood', which in turn acts as a justification for severe reform. She shows how a broader political economy of 'welfare disgust' is constructed through mediated representations of families like Philpott's, and used as a justification for the 'weaponised' policy of welfare 'reform'. The continued rhetoric around welfare dependency, coupled with the growth of 'poverty porn' television content, builds on narratives of poverty as personal failure, and the trope of the undeserving poor, and enables a political drive towards benefit reduction.

The epilogue considers the manifestations of power and culture brought about through the 2016 Brexit vote and premiership of Theresa May, and the election of Donald Trump as US president. Populist reactions to the cumulative effects of neoliberalism, continued from Thatcherism by New Labour and then extended under the Coalition/Conservative governments, 'cracked' under Brexit, bringing us to the position we are in today.

This book is a reminder of the impact of state apparatuses on the public. By working within a cultural studies framework Jensen demonstrates how mechanisms of popular culture, mediated discourse and public rhetoric work to legitimise interventions which widen social inequality, increase poverty and erode social solidarity. You can detect the ways in which the emergence of wider political divisions is fuelled by the pathological constructions of bad parents and benefit brooders, sponging off the state at the expense of the good parents - the ones who are held up as the models for policy initiatives. This is a fascinating read: its account

of the political and social construction of parenting provides a compelling example of the way in which mythological conceptions of identity can be used as weapons against those placed outside the fields of social discourse.

Notes

1. R. Gill, 'Post-feminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol 10, No 2, 2007; A. McRobbie, 'Notes on "What Not To Wear" and post-feminist symbolic violence', in L. Adkins and B. Skeggs (eds), *Feminism After Bourdieu*, Blackwell 2004; Catherine Rottenberg, 'The rise of neoliberal feminism', *Cultural Studies*, November 2013, DOI: 10.1080/09502386.2013.85736.

2. R. Gambles, 'Going public? Articulations of the personal and political on Mumsnet.com', in N. Mahony, J. Newman and C. Barnett (eds), *Rethinking the Public: Innovations in Research, Theory and Politics*, Sage 2010.

3. H. Wood, *Talking with Television: Women, Talk Shows and Modern Self-Reflexivity*, University of Illinois Press 2009.

4. J. Clarke and J. Newman, 'The alchemy of austerity', *Critical Social Policy*, Vol 32, No 3, 2012.

5. A. McRobbie, 'Feminism, the family and the new "mediated' maternalism"', *New Formations* 80, 2013.

We need community now more than ever

Jannat Hossain

Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain* [1978], new edition Daraja 2018

Amrit Wilson's *Finding a Voice* was first published in 1978, when the UK was in a period of intense political turmoil. Vicious racism from the mouths of politicians was the norm as the country continued to recover from the recession earlier in the decade, and the post-war boom was a distant memory.

The book tells the stories of South Asian women living in 1970s Britain. Through seven chapters covering family, isolation, employment, immigration, schooling, adolescence and sisterhood, Wilson tells the stories of numerous women, spanning age, ethnicity and faith, charting much of the history of South Asian women in Britain. This new edition is a brilliant example of the value of updating and reissuing a book decades after its original release. Wilson opens her introduction by stating that 'reclaiming our collective past is an act of resistance', a reminder of the need to tell stories, both our own and those of our communities.

I first came across the book in early 2017, a recommendation from one of Amrit's friends. It was out of print, but I managed to get my hands on a worn copy of the third edition, published six years after the original. By this time, the original publishers, Virago, had settled a lawsuit from a then well-known factory owner, unhappy at how his exploitation of workers had been memorialised in the book. It's a reminder of the power he and others like him held over the ability of people of colour to freely tell our stories.

The fortieth-anniversary edition serves as a reminder that, regardless of these barriers, determination and courage can help us reclaim space to construct our narratives. The 2018 edition contains a new chapter with writings from young South

Asian women living in Britain today, allowing voices from subsequent generations to explore what the book meant to them and how it impacted their lives. They include stories about the continued resistance to the hostile environment, and insight from Amrit's own daughter on the impact the book had on her; and, for the first time, we hear stories from queer South Asian women. I was privileged to be asked to contribute a piece on my experiences of racism growing up and living in London, and how that has changed over the course of my life.

The purpose of the book was always to tell the stories of South Asian women in Britain, and it never feels like an open call to arms. However, reading about the pain and struggles of women such as Surjeet, a bright university-educated woman pulled into an arranged marriage and desperate to leave it (we never find out how her story ended), or of Zubeida - whose story of acute isolation and loneliness has stayed with me since I first read it - leaves the reader feeling that they have a duty to do more.

In the decades since its publication, the rise of neoliberalism and continued western imperialism has contributed to increased division amongst Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in the UK, which in recent years has been further exacerbated by right-wing political extremes on the subcontinent. Not only has this resulted in misunderstandings about each other's faiths; it has also impeded solidarity between our interconnected struggles. The cross-faith Asian Youth Movements of Amrit's youth are long forgotten. This point is highlighted by Wilson herself in the new edition, as she ponders whether the women who spoke to her four decades ago would do so today.

Perhaps unintentionally, I think the book sends a powerful message about community and the need for us to take care of each other in a world which is unable and unwilling to do so. The rise of social media and the ability to more easily stay in touch with each other hasn't necessarily led to greater connectedness; many of us are experiencing an erosion of community and an increase in crippling loneliness across generational divides.

Re-reading the book for this review reminded me of some words from Angela Davis:

> I think that this is an era where we have to encourage that sense of community, particularly at a time when neoliberalism attempts to

> force people to think of themselves only in individual terms and not in collective terms. It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism.

Given the current political climate the world over, holding onto each other is more important than ever before. This book reminds us that our struggles may be very different, but they are also fundamentally connected. Our liberation can only come from a togetherness of community - understanding each other's differences and similarities, and actively working together to create a different world - so that in another forty years, we might be telling remarkably different stories.

‘I never did this when I was a man’

Katharine Harris and Peter Ridley

Season 11, *Doctor Who*, BBC 2018

In summer 2017, the BBC announced that Jodie Whittaker would become the thirteenth Doctor in the *Doctor Who* series, the first woman to take the role. Precedent had to some extent been set for such a gender change in previous episodes: other characters with the same ability as the Doctor to regenerate - to die and be revived as an apparently different person (whilst remaining, in some fundamental sense, the same person) - had also regenerated as different genders. But, clearly, this was a regeneration of a different order of significance.

The news was met with both outrage and outpourings of enthusiasm.[1] Whittaker’s first full-episode appearance was in the first of the eleventh series, ‘The Woman Who Fell to Earth’;[2] and perhaps it was in response to the scale of these reactions that the episode somewhat underplays the change: Whittaker’s Doctor does not initially realise that she is no longer a man, until a police officer calls her ‘Madam’. ‘Why are you calling me Madam?’ she asks, and the officer replies ‘Because you’re a woman’. The Doctor replies with excitement: ‘Am I? Does it suit me? … Oh yeah, I remember! Sorry, half an hour ago I was a white haired Scotsman’. This lack of awareness, however, does not undermine the fact that this is a meaningful shift for the programme, which has, for twelve incarnations of the Doctor, and over fifty years, shied away from allowing anyone other than white cis-men to be its central focus. These men have always been the ones to wield the most power and knowledge in the narratives. Whittaker’s thirteenth Doctor thus represented a substantial change in direction, which has had a meaningful, if limited, impact on the show’s tone and content.

'This is the best thing ever. I never did this when I was a man', Whittaker's Doctor cheerfully announces when getting henna tattoos in preparation for a wedding in Punjab in 1947, on the night before the Partition of India (Episode Six, 'Demons of the Punjab'). The Doctor's glee during this experience is evident: she celebrates the benefits of her new gender, and her newfound ability to participate in enjoyable women's activities. We could read a striking cis-gendered element in this, in that the Doctor has immediately, and unequivocally, been permitted access to a women-only space, as well as access to a cis-female politics of representation ('my references to body and gender regeneration are all in jest. I'm such a comedian'). And in Episode Eight, 'The Witchfinders', her outrage at the misogynist practice of burning witches in seventeenth-century Lancashire appears to come very much from a place of guaranteed and assured 'cisterhood'.[3] As she complains of the seventeenth-century context, 'These are hard times for women. If we're not being drowned, we're being patronised to death'. That 'we' is another of the many markers of her shared experiences with other women. 'The Witchfinders' episode explores the Doctor's frustration with her gender, but also the community she finds within it. 'Set a woman to catch a woman', she suggests of herself. Being a woman is often a unifying, joyful experience for the newly female Doctor. Although she was previously a man, she is now, in keeping with the tradition of the Doctor's regenerations, in some sense also an entirely new character; in this transformation she has become a completely cis-gendered person - she is not battling against an anti-trans politics that threatens to exclude her. Her femaleness brings her joy: a new gender seems to be another planet for the Doctor to explore with interest and enthusiasm.

'The Witchfinders' episode, however, also introduces us to the ways in which the Doctor finds being a woman frustrating. She here finds herself (for the first time) marginalised and unheard because of her gender: 'Honestly', she says, 'if I were still a bloke, I could get on with the job and not have to waste time defending myself'. As a character long-used to holding power and staking an often self-righteous claim to being the most-respected person/alien in the room, it becomes apparent that her previously easy access to power and respect might, in fact, be related to the fact that she had previously presented as a white man. James I (played with a gleefully camp twinkle by Alan Cumming) dismisses the Doctor's evident knowledge, and instead favours her baffled companion Graham (Bradley Walsh), because 'a woman could never be the general'; he mocks her as a 'wee lassie' using her 'innate aptitude for nosiness and gossip'. Her shock at this treatment, and her mounting irritation

when the King talks over her, reveals that she had never before realised the white male privilege she was wielding in her previous incarnations - and she is suddenly recognising that she might now lack access to it. 'We're staying here and sorting it', she says, 'even if I am "just a woman"'.

The Doctor's lack of awareness of white male privilege also has precedent. In Season Ten, Episode Eleven, 'World Enough and Time', the twelfth Doctor, Peter Capaldi, argued that his species, the 'Time Lords', are 'the most civilised civilisation in the universe, we're billions of years beyond your petty human obsession with gender and its associated stereotypes'. This elevation of the Time Lords above 'petty humans' - and, by implication, 'petty' gender - conveniently erases anti-misogynist struggles by suggesting that gender is, after all, just a stereotype. But the twelfth Doctor's self-aggrandising arrogance is pleasingly punctured by his then-companion Bill (Pearl Mackie), when she says, 'But you still call yourselves "Time Lords"'. 'Yeah', Capaldi's Doctor replies, 'Shut up'. The exchange is light-hearted, and the Doctor's 'shut up' suggests he might be aware of the hypocrisy of his previous statement. However, it is also revealing of the ways in which Whittaker's predecessor has failed to interrogate the ways in which his language, and the language of his species, have continued to shore up a deeply sexist 'associated stereotype'. The Time Lords, are, by definition, and by name, codified as sexist and female-exclusionary.

The Doctor is lucky in one respect, however: in all their incarnations, the name 'the Doctor' is gender neutral. The successive incarnations of another Time Lord in the series, 'The Master', struggle much more with the gendered implications of their name; when 'The Master' regenerates from a man into a woman, they become the superbly characterised, but reductively named, 'Missy' (Michelle Gomez). This is perhaps a subtle play on the complex threat Missy represents for the Doctor, in that she might be underestimated because of her gender, but it remains a name with frustratingly infantilising gendered associations. Although Whittaker's Doctor remains a Time *Lord*, Missy insists on being called a 'Time *Lady*, please, I'm old fashioned' (Season Eight, Episode Eleven 'Dark Water'). This is hardly a linguistic improvement with regard to gender, and it is one that marks her as separate to the rest of her species, given the Doctor's insistence that they are all Time Lords, regardless of gender.

Each regeneration of the Doctor produces a new and mostly distinct character. The shift between the eleventh (Matt Smith) and the twelfth (Peter Capaldi) was

perhaps the most marked of the 'New Who' transitions. Capaldi's Doctor, older in appearance, played on the Doctor's dark side, a feature that had formed a clear part of Smith's Doctor, but had mostly taken second place to Smith's particular 'Geronimo' brand of playful enthusiasm. This raises questions about the ways in which the Doctor is characterised differently in this thirteenth incarnation, as a woman - and whether the differences are gendered. These are difficult questions to answer without resorting to precisely those 'petty stereotypes' that the twelfth Doctor hypocritically dismissed as insubstantial. Press reviews have lauded Whittaker and new showrunner Chris Chibnall for the continuity they have brought to the role and to the series. Ed Power in the *Independent*, for example, described the thirteenth Doctor as 'reassuringly familiar', and Caroline Framke in *Variety* wrote that the thirteenth 'might not be a brand new Doctor', but suggested that she is 'a new version of the same character that has fueled the show for decades … it's so impressive that "The Woman Who Fell to Earth" is, for the most part, an extremely typical episode of *Doctor Who*'.[4] But reviews have not all been positive in this regard. Nico Hines wrote in *The Daily Beast* that the first episode of the series introduced 'a gentle, self-deprecating and inoffensive Doctor', who 'felt disappointingly safe' and 'behind the times' (especially when contrasted with the complexity of the female protagonists of the simultaneously-airing *Killing Eve*).[5]

There is a sense in which we could read the new Doctor as gentler, and more self-deprecating, certainly than Capaldi's dour incarnation, with his rage apparently constantly bubbling under the surface and overspilling at key moments (he tells people to 'shut up' a lot, something that it is hard to imagine Whittaker's Doctor doing). In 'The Woman Who Fell to Earth' episode, Whittaker's Doctor gives the impression of asking questions more than she answers, and seems a little unsettled, at least at first ('that's exciting. No, not exciting. What do I mean? Worrying'). She is keen to give both protection and emotional support to her new companions: 'I'll be fine. I have to be, because you need help'; and 'don't be scared. All of this is new to you, and new can be scary. Now, we all want answers. Stick with me and you might get some'. And she is caring and gentle when they grieve over losing a loved one, sharing her own experiences of grief and offering supportive silence when it is needed. But none of this is especially new: David Tennant's tenth Doctor spent much of his first episode (when he wasn't unconscious) asking what kind of a man he would be, and Matt Smith's eleventh Doctor was excited to meet - and care for - a small child, Amy Pond, in his first appearance. The Doctor is often a gentle and self-

deprecating person/alien, so these aspects of Whittaker's portrayal do not appear to be especially gendered in the ways Hines suggests.

The first episode of the series takes place in the present-day, on Earth, and features the death of Grace (Sharon D. Clarke), grandmother and wife, respectively, of new companions Ryan (Tosin Cole) and Graham. This could be read as creating an opening for a stereotypically maternal figure who will nurture and support her new companions - in the first scene we see Grace attempting to teach dyspraxic, nineteen-year-old Ryan to ride a bike ('who says you can't?' says Grace, gently). Grace even mothers the Doctor herself, when she starts to feel woozy: 'that was a big fall you had, love'. The episode title in part refers to that fall: the Doctor falls to Earth as she crashes down onto the planet and through the roof of a train. But it also refers to Grace, who dies by falling to the ground from a heroic feat, defeating a villain who threatened her family. She and the Doctor are both women who fell to Earth. This might lead us to expect that the Doctor will work to fill the maternal gap that Grace's death leaves. However, this is not how the remainder of the series develops. The Doctor generally describes her three new companions - Ryan, Graham and Yaz (Mandip Gill) as her 'mates', and this is a good way to characterise their relationships throughout (in the first episode she dismisses 'troops' in favour of 'team', 'gang', or 'fam' - all far more egalitarian and less combative options). The group are friendly and mutually affectionate, and in 'The Witchfinders' episode, the Doctor emphasises that this is 'a very flat team structure'. That said, the Doctor's position of power and authority, as well as the responsibility she feels for her companions - as the Doctor always has done - remain markers of continuity in her character into this new regeneration.

None of this, however, is to suggest that the Doctor's being gentler, more self-deprecating, or indeed more maternal (had this been the case), should be seen as something to be regretted. Nico Hines's dismissal of these traits as inherently negative is telling and reductive. (So, too, is the unfair comparison with *Killing Eve*: although the programmes are similarly important in terms of mainstream gender representation on the BBC, they are hugely different.) Whittaker's Doctor isn't displaying more of these traits than her previous incarnations; it would have given rise to some important conversations about gender stereotypes in mainstream media if she had. However, only a chronic adherence to a Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In*, brand of deeply-troubled feminism could lead to the suggestion that kindness, gentleness

and self-deprecation are inherently negative qualities that should and must be abandoned to create a successful protagonist, whether male or female.

In fact, the Doctor's regeneration into a woman has not been especially politicised. A few episodes have addressed gender directly - most explicitly 'The Witchfinders' episode, discussed above - but, as already suggested, the character's gender regeneration has been much more about continuity than change. In 'The Witchfinders', the Doctor finds herself tied to the stake because of the threat she poses, as an intelligent woman, to the established order and power of James I. However, this event is not typical of the series as a whole: the Doctor is not portrayed as struggling against profound sexism and misogyny at every turn. Her realisation of white male privilege and misogyny in this episode is, rather, an unusual disruption to her general enjoyment of being a woman.

The rather heavy-handed manner in which 'The Witchfinders' addresses misogyny is echoed in the wider treatment of politics in the series. The most obvious example of this is Episode Three, 'Rosa', which takes the Doctor and her companions to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, the day before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus.[6] They become instrumentally entangled in events, thankfully without minimising Parks's own agency. (This was the first episode of *Doctor Who* to feature either a black writer or black director, and this series was the first to have a black composer - a damning indictment of its production history.)

In the episode, Ryan offers a white woman her dropped glove and, to his bafflement and surprise, her husband slaps him, shouting 'Get your filthy black hands off my wife'. A conversation follows later between Yaz and Ryan, in which Ryan argues 'It's not like Rosa Parks wipes out racism from the world forever', and they each describe occasions when they have experienced twenty-first-century racism - Ryan gets stopped by the police 'way more than my white mates', and Yaz faces racist insults in her work as a police officer. However, Yaz reassures Ryan that attitudes on race have improved dramatically since 1955; in their own time, they would not be refused service in restaurants, or have to sneak in through the windows and hide during police inspections of white-only hotels, as they have had to do here. She maintains:

> … they don't win, those people. I can be a police officer now because people like Rosa Parks fought those battles for me. For us. In fifty-

> three years, they'll have a black president as leader. Who knows where they'll be fifty years after that. That's proper change.

Ed Power in the *Independent* wrote that this conversation, between two companions of colour (whose simultaneous introduction as long-running characters is another first for *Doctor Who*), 'prevents the episode … pretending the racist past is a foreign country'.[7] Power is right that there are clear efforts to acknowledge and critique contemporary racism while looking back at its historical manifestations, but there is also an element of heavy-handed simplicity and a didactically educational tone. This could, perhaps, be read as the inevitable limitation of a 'family' programme, but given *Doctor Who*'s previous willingness to directly confront death, occasionally fairly graphic violence, and, less directly, sex, the need to appeal to 'families' seems to be a fairly weak excuse for not tackling racism with acuity and nuance. There might, perhaps, have been scope for working with a less-well-known, British-based event, one which would avoid a self-congratulatory comparison between US and UK racism, and could perform similar consciousness-raising work without the same 'informative' tone.[8]

'I hope intersectionalist feminist propaganda is always this much fun', wrote *Guardian* reviewer Lucy Mangan of the first episode of the new series.[9] This was a carefully tongue-in-cheek statement, mocking those who had responded with kneejerk conservatism and misogyny to the announcement that Whittaker would play the Doctor. Needless to say, this new series, despite its female protagonist, is not intersectionalist feminist propaganda - as Mangan well knows. We can acknowledge, however, that this latest series of an immensely popular programme, long-hampered by its own conservative choices of protagonist, has begun to gently push at some of its boundaries and existing limitations. The Doctor can be a woman without the show losing its drive or its appeal. And the increase in viewing figures (which averaged around 7 million, where the tenth series averaged about 5.5 million) suggests that its appeal not only is undiminished, but has grown - not back to the heights of David Tennant's tenth Doctor, but a big return to popularity nonetheless.[10]

We may have to wait a while before 'family-friendly' intersectionalist feminist propaganda is widely available. *Doctor Who*'s preliminary steps along an important road have not been an unqualified success, but they have gestured to its potential - and that is a potential that was opened up by the Doctor's change in gender. As the

Doctor says in 'The Woman Who Fell to Earth':

> We're all capable of the most incredible change. We can evolve, while still staying true to who we are. We can honour who we've been and choose who we want to be next. Now's your chance. How about it?

Notes

1. 'Doctor Who: fans react to Jodie Whittaker casting', *BBC News*, 17 July 2017, bbc.co.uk. Examples include: 'The Doctor is a Time LORD, not a Time LADY' and 'I'm sorry, this is an exercise in pleasing the PC brigade'. In contrast, a memorable and much-shared video was posted by Twitter user @Jenny_Trout of her daughter watching the announcement and shouting with joy 'The new Doctor is a girl!'

2. *Doctor Who* series are numbered here from the start of the 2005 reboot, sometimes referred to as 'New Who' - as distinct from the programme's first showings 1963-1989.

3. Florence Ashley, 'Sisterhood not cisterhood: inclusion as a politico-moral issue', *Medium*, 16 March 2017, www.medium.com.

4. Ed Power, 'Doctor Who, The Woman Who Fell to Earth, review: Jodie Whittaker delivers blockbuster performance as BBC sends out statement to Netflix', *Independent*, 7 October 2018, www.independent.co.uk; Caroline Framke, '"Doctor Who": the first female Doctor makes her mark', *Variety*, 7 October 2018, www.variety.com.

5. Nico Hines, 'First female "Doctor Who" misses her shot to stun the world', *The Daily Beast*, 7 October 2018, www.dailybest.com.

6. Other episodes, for example, critique in thinly-veiled terms Amazon's market-monopoly and its abusive employment practices (Episode Seven, 'Kerblam!') and the impact of celebrity in Donald Trump's rise to political power (Episode Four, 'Arachnids in the UK').

7. Ed Power, 'Doctor Who, Rosa, review: a thoughtful look at the civil rights movement', *Independent*, 21 October 2018, www.independent.co.uk.

8. Constance Gibbs suggested the Bristol Bus Boycott as a possible location for such an episode, in analysis written before the series aired, 'For Black Doctor Who fans, the TARDIS is a legendary, loaded image', *Polygon*, 5 October 2018, www.polygon.com.

9. Lucy Mangan, 'Doctor Who review: great Jodie Whittaker debuts in new series with heart(s) and soul', 8 October 2018, *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com.

10. Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, www.barb.co.uk. The first episode was the most watched programme that week, and other episodes have been in the top ten. Cameron K. McEwan, 'How's Jodie Whittaker's Doctor Who *actually* doing so far?', Digital Spy, www.digitalspy.com.

Reviews

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