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University of East London

School of Social Sciences,
Media and Cultural Studies

Yearbook II

PhD research in progress

July 2007



UEL
University of
East London

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Preface

The School of Social Sciences and the School of Cultural and Innovation Studies of the University of East London merged in the autumn of 2004 to constitute the School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies. The merger brought together almost 50 registered PhD students in each School. This seemed an ideal opportunity to organise PhD student seminars which would explore the boundaries between the disciplines which had traditionally been represented in the two different Schools of the university.

Since October, 2004, therefore, there have been five discrete series of seminars which have attempted to provide a framework within which PhD students can situate their personal research in relation to the research of others and in relation to different intellectual perspectives within the broad field of the Humanities and Social Sciences. These seminars have been framed in slightly different conceptual ways in part to meet the needs of students at different stages in their research, differentiating mainly, for instance, between the initial stage in which a research project is proposed for registration and the subsequent stages in which research is undertaken and findings are prepared for submission. The five series were:

1. Semester A, 2004/5. This was designed for the 2003/4 student cohort in their second year. Student presentations were framed by an introduction to the reflexive sociology of research proposed by Bourdieu et al in *The Craft of Sociology* (1991, 1968).
2. Semester B, 2004/5. The 2003/4 cohort in their second year were joined by the 2004/5 cohort, post registration. Student presentations in every session were matched with presentations given by active staff researchers in the School.
3. Semester A, 2005/6. Student presentations for the 2003/4 and 2004/5 cohorts, culminating in the student-led organisation of a national conference on Inter-disciplinarity in the Humanities and Social Sciences funded by the AHRC, with guest speakers, including representatives of the relevant AHRC and ESRC inter-disciplinary committees.
4. Semester A, 2005/6. This was distinct from 3 above and was designed for the 2005/6 cohort in their first year as part of their preparation for submitting registration documentation. Student presentations were framed by introductory sessions on the state of German social theory in the 1960s; the state of French social theory in the 1960s; the Franco-German social theory debate of the 1980s; concluding with a session on the state of contemporary social theory in Britain with a view to enabling students to contextualise their own work.
5. Semester A, 2006/7. Student presentations framed by introductory sessions which presented the changing social conditions in the UK for the production of Humanities and Social Science Research from 1945 to the present, focusing on the post-war work of Karl Mannheim; the emergence of New Left cultural analysis in the 1960s; and the post-1980s implications of the work of journals and publishing houses founded at that time such as *Theory, Culture and Society*, and Polity Press.

The organisation of these seminars has been based on two related principles, both of which are themselves scrutinised during all the series:

- a. that the relationship between disciplines is not to be understood abstractly or a-historically by reference to an idealist philosophy of knowledge but, rather, to be understood in terms of the changing social conditions of production of knowledge.
- b. that an intrinsic part of the process of undertaking research is that researchers, including PhD students are agents who modify in their practice the conceptual structures within which they operate – that there is a constant tension whereby the logics of discovery which may be non-disciplinary often have to be expressed in disciplinary discourses.

In March, 2007, the university's Graduate School invited Schools to apply for funding to encourage Interdisciplinary Research Seminars. The successful bid from the School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies sought funding which would, in part, enable the limited publication of Yearbooks of PhD research in the School which would reflect the ethos and the intellectual character of the sessions of the seminar series.

Yearbooks I and II are the outcomes from this internal funding from the Graduate School and are the results of collaboration and discussion between myself, contributing students and other PhD students during the period of this funding from April to July, 2007. Yearbook I represents the character of the first three of the series described above, whilst Yearbook II is based on the last two.

The form and purpose of the seminars and of these associated publications relate substantially to my engagement with the thought and practice of Pierre Bourdieu. Put boldly, the form and purpose have been designed to encourage **a reflexive sociology of social and cultural research**. It is completely appropriate that these Yearbooks should reflect my involvement in the processes of discussion – pursuing my own intellectual project through participation in the projects of PhD students, not as a *lector* transmitting pre-established knowledge and information but as an *auctor* seeking to foster new insights and approaches. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that the contributions are examples of 'work in progress' and are assembled in the same spirit as encouraged Bourdieu to establish his own journal in 1975 to publish research activity rather than findings, which, accordingly, he named the *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. The student papers have their origins in work leading towards the completion of their PhD theses. In some cases they have been presented only internally whilst in other cases they have been presented at conferences and are being prepared for publication elsewhere. It is important to stress that these are not finished pieces of work and are published here without prejudicing either the possibility of other, modified publication or the views of examiners of final theses.

The intention of each Yearbook is to represent the ethos of the seminars but, again, it is important to emphasize that in no sense are the contributions properly 'representative'. In each case, an appendix gives information about the research activity of registered PhD students in the School. Of these, only a proportion have found it possible to attend regularly the fortnightly seminar series. Of those who have attended regularly, only a proportion have been able to spare precious time to become involved in this publication project. The contributions are, therefore, unashamedly random indications of the totality. There has been no selection of contributions, either in terms of the supposed quality of the work or in terms of relevance to any thematic principle guiding the collection. Each Yearbook includes a discussion of the contents, as a virtual Table ronde of contributors, and this chapter does enounce some *ex post facto* consensus about each collection, but it remains the case that the 'organizing' principle of the texts is based on a commitment to articulated 'difference' or dissensus.

There is a progression from Yearbook I to Yearbook II. My Introduction to Yearbook I explores the analogy between the construction of a research culture for PhD students within a multi-disciplinary School and the historical construction in Paris in the 1960s of the Centre de Sociologie Européenne, reinforced ideologically by the publication, in 1968, of *Le métier de sociologue*. (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1968, 1991). The emphasis of this collection is on the *social encounter* of persons from different cultural backgrounds, coming together almost arbitrarily at UEL from 2004 to 2007. The emphasis of Yearbook I is on the way in which inter-disciplinary work is perhaps based on this social encounter within an institutional setting as much as on the abstract relations between instituted disciplines. The second appendix to Yearbook I reproduces the paper which I gave at the student conference which was the climax to 2005/6 in which I tried to set the work which we had undertaken in the seminars in the context of discussion of the way in which Bourdieu had made use, in *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988), of Kant's text on the 'Conflict of the Faculties'. The point of Yearbook II is to move on from the symbolic interactionist emphasis of Yearbook I to explore what might be the implications for the production of research of the ways in which historically the boundaries between disciplines have been constructed. My Introduction to

Yearbook II represents the case-studies examined in the seminars – especially the historical production of social research by Mannheim in the immediate post-World War II period in the UK, and then the development of Cultural Studies by the New Left in the 1960s as a form of socio-political critique. The intention is that these two publications will stimulate the production of annual Yearbooks which will represent ongoing dialogue between research students and, through them, between academic discourses.

Derek Robbins, July 2007

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Introduction: “The instituted capitals of intellectual disciplines: some exemplary socio-historical case-studies”

Derek Robbins

In the Introduction to Yearbook I, I discussed some of the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in the 1960s when they developed the research activity of the Centre de Sociologie Européenne, Paris, and, in collaboration with Jean-Claude Chamboredon, published a working handbook for research students entitled *Le métier de sociologue* (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron, 1968). They advocated an ‘epistemological vigilance’ in conducting social science research, but this could be read, and has been read, as a recommendation that the sociology of knowledge should be deployed to situate social research and, therefore, that sociological research should be reflexive. It seemed as if the recommendation was that sociological analysis should be used, rather incestuously, primarily to strengthen its own credentials. I suggested, however, that this was not the main thrust of *Le métier de sociologue*, in spite of its title. The intention was rather that, following Bachelard, all forms of scientific knowledge should be subjected to sociological scrutiny. I implied that Bourdieu was inclined to take this argument further and to suggest, following Husserl’s *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970, first published in 1954), that all scientific construction is grounded in the pre-logical or pre-predicative experience of the ‘life-world’ and that, therefore, reflexivity is not just a device to be deployed to legitimate social scientific findings but, rather, a procedure of the same kind as the ‘eidetic reduction’ of phenomenology, designed to evaluate all objective understanding by reference to fundamentals which might be described as ‘experiential’, ‘inter-personal’, ‘inter-subjective’, anthropological, or ontological. I have argued this interpretation of the movement of Bourdieu’s thinking from the late 1960s to the early 1970s in detail in “Sociology and Philosophy in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, 1965-75” (Robbins, 2003) which is reprinted as chapter 4 of Part II of *On Bourdieu, education and society* (Robbins, 2006), but the purpose of emphasizing this point was to contend that a peer community of PhD students working in different disciplines within the Social Sciences and Humanities in one School of the University of East London in the early years of the 21st century might establish itself most effectively by overtly recognizing inter-subjectively and inter-culturally the origins of those problems which were articulated objectively in terms of instituted academic discourses.

Nevertheless, developing an argument on the basis of the influence of Husserl on Bourdieu has to be undertaken cautiously because there is no evidence that Bourdieu had any sympathy for the early work of Husserl which is normally described as a form of ‘transcendental idealism’. That is to say that there is no evidence to suggest that Bourdieu thought that ‘reduction’ would disclose the dispositions of universal, common humanity. His critique of early Husserl would have been similar to his critique of Kantian idealism in respect of aesthetics, as given in his postscript to *Distinction*, (Bourdieu, 1984) entitled “Towards a ‘Vulgar’ Critique of ‘Pure’ Critiques”. Instead, Bourdieu was influenced by the ‘late’ work of Husserl of the 1930s, most of which was published posthumously after Husserl’s death in 1938 and mediated by several significant interpreters, such as Merleau-Ponty and Tran Duc Thao. The key text of Husserl, other than *The Crisis* already mentioned, was *Experience and Judgement. Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, first published in 1948 (Husserl, ed. Landgrebe, 1973). The key mediations of Husserl of the 1940s were Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in French in 1945, and Tran Duc Thao’s *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, first published in French in 1951. The consequence of the reception of Husserl’s ‘late’ work – whether or not this was his intended meaning – was that the ‘life-world’ in which all scientific constructions are generated is a diverse world which is itself subject to empirical investigation. The ‘life-world’ is not a state of nature but it is a world where constituted meanings are shared in mutual recognition of their provenance rather than by reference to metaphysical abstraction. This understanding of Husserl could be reconciled with sociology as long as sociology is interpreted to be the instrument for sharing the articulation of the grounds

for objective sciences rather than as itself one of those sciences. This use of Husserl meant that Bourdieu was able to recommend both the analysis of debates within intellectual 'fields' in their own terms and the analysis of the social historical conditions for the rise and fall of these 'fields'. Bourdieu used a sociological equivalent of Husserl's eidetic reduction to disclose the experiential foundations of objective discourses, but his procedure was not 'reductive' in that he did not deny the potency of those discourses in social exchange. He acknowledged that we operate with intellectual artifacts all the time. His endeavour was to diminish the extent to which these artifacts are the instruments of 'symbolic violence'. This was the philosophical and political intention of *Distinction* and Bourdieu's position at the time can be most clearly represented by reference to an article which he wrote in the same year as *Distinction*, entitled "Les trois états du capital culturel" (Bourdieu, 1979). There he revisited the concept of 'capital' which he had developed with Passeron in the 1960s, and he wrote:

"Cultural capital can exist in three forms: *in an incorporated state*, that is to say in the form of the durable dispositions of the organism; *in an objectivated state*, in the form of cultural goods, pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, which are the marks either of realised theories or of criticisms of these theories, of problems, etc.; and finally *in an institutionalised state*, a form of objectivation which must be kept separate since, as can be seen in relation to scholastic titles, it confers on cultural capital the supposed capacity to guarantee completely original properties." (Bourdieu, 1979)

Our cultural capital in an incorporated state is the product of our inherited characteristics. These are not 'natural' but they are the dispositions over which we have had little control. Gradually we define ourselves by assimilating cultural capital in its objectivated state – by acquiring defining 'tastes' and attitudes based on reading books or absorbing theories which were themselves the products of previous assimilations by previous readers or theorists. Cultural capital is active at a third level, according to Bourdieu, when, for instance, texts which should find their value in a free market exchange acquire, instead, the status of 'set-texts', the understanding of which secures the social recognition provided by academic awards. In other words, for Bourdieu, the reification of value is to be resisted or, to put this the other way round, the market contingency of values and theories has to be recognised and preserved. The cultural capital which we all acquire during our lives always relates back to our capital in its incorporated state but, as free social agents, we steer our path through life by deliberately recognising the contingency of the objectivated capital which we absorb. It was Bourdieu's value position that he thought that institutionalised capital eroded the limited freedom of manoeuvre which remained to us after the unavoidable, 'soft' determination of our incorporated capital or *habitus*.

If the emphasis of Yearbook I was on the value of disclosing the 'incorporated' origins of our research projects, the emphasis of Yearbook II is on the analysis of the effects on these projects of cultural capital in its 'objectivated' and 'institutionalised' states. The focus is on the historical contingency of the discourses which frame our current thinking. The rest of this introduction provides two short case-studies which are preludes to a concerted social history of concepts and discourses which is designed to relate forms of British thinking since World War II to their social contexts so as both to stimulate a consciousness of our own living contingency as researchers in the present and to retrieve for consideration some modes of thinking which once were thought to possess validity or utility.

Case-study 1: Social science and social reconstruction in the post WWII period (1945-60), with particular reference to the work of Karl Mannheim.

Mannheim was born as Karoly Mannheim in Budapest in 1893. He was early influenced by Austro-Hungarian intellectuals, such as Lukacs, and by Hegelian and Marxist thought. He gained his PhD from the University of Budapest in 1918, but he left Hungary in 1920 when Horthy, leader of the reactionary Hungarian counter-revolution, took over the government. He migrated to Germany where he became a lecturer at the University of Heidelberg in 1926 before being appointed Professor of Sociology and Political Economy at the University of

Frankfurt in 1930. Like the members of the 'Frankfurt School' with whom he was acquainted but not associated, Mannheim left Germany when Hitler came to power. In 1933, he was dismissed from his post at Frankfurt and joined the London School of Economics and Political Science as a lecturer in sociology. In 1945, he was appointed to the chair in education at the Institute of Education, University of London, where he taught the sociology and philosophy of education. He died in London in 1947.

Although Mannheim's work is largely neglected today, it is of special interest for our purposes because the nature of his research and publications was clearly influenced significantly by his career trajectory in migration between European societies and intellectual traditions. In particular, his experiences in Hungary and Germany of oppressive regimes led him to idealise the possibility that the British socio-political system could lead the way in showing the world how the kind of central state planning which seemed to be an inevitable corollary of the increasing complexity of all social organization could be reconciled with liberalism and not fall into the hands of authoritarian fascists. His *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929) was published in English in 1936 as *Ideology and Utopia: an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, and two new texts were published in English during his lifetime: *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: Studies in Modern Social Structure* (1940) and *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist* (1943). These represented his attempts to ensure that sociological analysis engaged with the social and political problems of his time, an orientation which was confirmed in the posthumous publication entitled *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning* (1950). It was only as the 1950s progressed that it became readily possible to comprehend the theoretical foundations on which were based Mannheim's commitment during the war to a sociology of planning and social reconstruction which he hoped would shape developments in the post-war period. The 1950s saw the publication of a series of collections of his theoretical papers: *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (1952); *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (1953); *Systematic Sociology: an Introduction to the Study of Society* (1957); *An Introduction to the Sociology of Education* (1962); followed, finally, by *From Karl Mannheim* (1971).

What emerges most clearly from these posthumous publications is that Mannheim shifted from an early disposition towards an idealist philosophy of knowledge and culture towards a commitment, instead, to the development of sociologies of knowledge and culture. However, although he made an adjustment of his thinking away from philosophy towards sociology so as to become socially useful and to participate in the actions of the post-war Labour Government in introducing the welfare state, he retained aspects of his idealism. This was most notably the case in respect of his commitment to the need for an 'intelligentsia' which would manage the social reconstruction that he was recommending. In other words, Mannheim's assumptions about the mechanisms for decision-making in government and politics remained essentially conservative – a legacy of the institutionalised intellectualism embodied in the academic institutions of the Weimar Republic as analysed by Fritz Ringer in *The Decline of the German Mandarins. The German Academic Community, 1890 – 1933* (Ringer, 1969). [See Yearbook I, Appendix 2, for more discussion]. He could not readily contemplate the possibility that the planning of a social democracy required social democratic participation in the process of planning, or, to put this differently, he did not sufficiently realise that the top-down process of social reconstruction would necessarily generate a form of society which would question the legitimacy of the process of its own construction.

These brief comments depend heavily on Gunter W. Remming's *The Sociology of Karl Mannheim* (Remming, 1975) which situates the development of Mannheim's thinking in the context of socio-political events in Europe and Britain during his lifetime. Some support for the summary can be given by reference to some quotations from *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: Studies in Modern Social Structure* (Mannheim, 1940). This had originally been published in German in 1935, but was revised and enlarged for the translation. Mannheim was very conscious of the implications of the cultural transfer:

"The German edition of this book was dedicated to 'My Masters and Pupils in Germany'. Thus it was originally dedicated to those who had experienced in their own lives the tremendous changes of an age of transformation. If this book appears in English, its

function alters automatically. It is no longer an attempt at self-enlightenment, made for the benefit of those who have actually lived through these experiences; it attempts to explain the standpoint of these people to a world which has only hearsay knowledge of such changes and is still wrapped in an illusion of traditional stability" (Mannheim, 1940, 3)

and he also added explicitly:

"The author has derived the greatest profit from learning to think about this very matter both from the German and the English points of view." (Mannheim, 1940, 4)

The implications of cultural transfer, in other words, relate both to the changed contexts within which the text intervenes, and to the differences in the ways in which the issues are cross-culturally conceptualised.

Mannheim's diagnosis of the problem of his time was articulated in the same text a few pages later when, in a section entitled 'The clash of the principles of laissez-faire and planless regulation as the main cause of maladjustment in modern society', Mannheim, writing oddly in the third person as if wanting to conceal the subjectivity of his perceptions, comments: "He feels it is important to remember that our society is faced, not with brief unrest, but with a radical change of structure; for this realization is the only guarantee of preventive measures. Only if we know why Western society in the crisis zone is passing through a phase of disintegration, is there any hope that the countries which still enjoy comparative peace will learn to control the future trend of events by democratic planning, and so avoid the negative aspects of the process: dictatorship' conformity, and barbarism." (Mannheim, 1940, 6) Mannheim's discussion of 'The place of the intelligentsia in society' indicates his position about social democratic participation in social planning. There is the sense that his concentration on education in the last phase of his career was to use the social planning of education as a way of regulating or managing democratic participation in social self-construction. He wrote:

"The first negative consequence of the modern widening of opportunities for social advancement through education is the proletarianization of the intelligentsia" (Mannheim, 1940, 99)

He continued:

"The glut of intellectuals decreases the value of the intellectuals and of intellectual culture itself. The fact that this overcrowding did not appear in the preceding phase of democratic society is closely connected with the fact that it was an era of minority-democracy. Apart from the families of the aristocracy, the cultured class was recruited so predominantly from the property-owning class that wealth came to be an inseparable prerequisite for education." (Mannheim, 1940, 100-1)

By contrast, Mannheim comments:

"Whereas in an aristocratic society in which a very small minority was culturally active, the low average level of culture of the less fortunate classes was confined to their own sphere of life; now as a result of large-scale ascent, the limited intelligence and outlook of the average person gains general esteem and importance and even suddenly becomes a model to which people seek to conform. A gradual influx from the lower classes can be assimilated by the upper classes, as is still very largely the case in England today; when, however, the influx assumes mass proportions, the older intellectual classes lose their assimilative power and are themselves submerged." (Mannheim, 1940, 102).

This feeling for the need for a gradual cultural assimilation of the lower classes so as to maintain the dominant values of the dominant classes could stand as the tacit rationale for the

kind of cautious expansion of British higher education which was to be proposed by the Robbins committee in 1962.

There are two important collections of essays which give us a perspective on world sociology in the period immediately after World War II. *Twentieth Century Sociology*, edited by Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert E. Moore, was published in the United States in 1945. It was based on a symposium in which mainly American sociologists attempted to take stock of the status of their discipline. [Gurvitch was born in Russia, naturalized as a French citizen in 1928 where he became professor of Sociology at Bordeaux and then Strasbourg, but an émigré who moved to the New School for social Research, New York, in 1940.] The stock-taking is conceptually imperialist and appropriative as Part II offers inventories of the condition of sociology in 12 national traditions, subsumed under the editorial framework of the whole text. The chapter on British sociology (chapter XIX) was written by Jay Rumney who had graduated from the London School of Economics in 1926 and moved to the United States in 1938. The final section of his piece is entitled 'Sociology and the Social Sciences Today'. His perception was still that Hobhouse and Ginsberg and the tradition which they had established at the London School of Economics was dominant. The article makes only one passing reference to Mannheim – 'whose presence in England augurs well for the development of social theory' (Gurvitch & Moore, 1945, 583). It concludes with the comment that:

"The present war, with its profound economic and political changes, may be turning point in English sociology. But whether it will stimulate it or retard it depends on the social transformations the peace will bring about." (Gurvitch & Moore, 1945, 585)

There is little recognition that Mannheim sought to make social theory functional in transforming society, but rather there is the sense that we shall have to wait and see whether the autonomous discipline of sociology will be adversely or beneficially affected by political changes beyond its jurisdiction.

The second text is *Modern Sociological Theory. In continuity and change*, edited by Howard Becker and Alvin Boskoff, and published in 1957. Again, this was an American compilation, inspired by an initiative of Florian Znaniecki shortly after he had been elected president of the American Sociological Society in 1953. The collection has a Part V devoted to 'Sociological Research and Theory Abroad', containing reviews of the situation in 5 nation states. The entry entitled 'Sociology in Britain: Preoccupations' [chapter 21], was written by W.J.H. Sprott in 1955. In summarising the state of British sociology, Sprott regretted the 'present neglect of theory' and only referred to Mannheim once, in the same breath as Westermaarck, 'both of whom have thrown considerable light upon general sociological problems, and both of whom, be it noted, came to us from the Continent' (Becker & Boskoff, 1957, 621). Sprott concluded that the institutionalised state of British sociology was healthy, but repeated his disquiet about the prevalence of a-theoretical empiricism:

"Sociology, at any rate in its applied form, is on the map. *The British Journal of Sociology* was started in 1950; *The Sociological Review*, which almost died – although in its sickness it still contained interesting material – has recovered, and is published at the university College of North Staffordshire. The British Sociological Association was founded in 1951. An enormous amount of research is being done, much of which, alas, is buried in thesis form in the libraries of universities. My own hope is that among the increasing number of students who study the subject some may come forward, endowed with scientific imagination, who will refrain from knocking at doors and presenting questionnaires until they have formulated some theoretically significant hypothesis for verification." (Becker & Boskoff, 1957, 622).

My point is that, in these two American collections (of 1945 and 1957), the attempt was being made to define the international essence of sociological discourse. Both texts contained surveys of sociological literature which were *internal* to the developing field of sociology and which were designed to consolidate that development. There was little attempt to understand that development socio-historically and, therefore, to understand the separate conditions which determined differences between national traditions. As it happens, both surveys of British

sociology singularly failed to recognize either the nature or the significance of the work of Mannheim. It remains disconcertingly the case that A.H. Halsey's *A History of Sociology in Britain* (2004) is weak in not offering a social history of the conditions of that development but, rather, an essentially internalist account of the development of a discipline whose validity is never subjected to criticism or scrutiny. Again, consideration of Mannheim is minimal. Halsey only refers to what Dahrendorf described as the 'Mannheim-Ginsberg problem' (Halsey, 2004, 58) - the animosity between the two men at the London School of Economics. What is lacking is an adequate sociological understanding of the relations in the 1940s and subsequently between mainstream theoretical and demographic work at the London School of Economics and a developing sociology of Education at the Institute of Education. More particularly, what is lacking is an adequate sociological analysis of the post-war development of sociology alongside a parallel analysis of the changing structures of the higher education institutions in which it was disseminated, initially in the years 1950-70 when the traditional liberal system of British higher education was expanded, and then, post-1970, with the accreditation of new courses in sociology in the new polytechnics which, after 1992, were themselves to be incorporated into the university system. This absence of institutional analysis in respect of the history of British sociology is also evident in relation to the history of the development of Cultural Studies which could itself be seen as a strategy for countering the mutually reinforcing dominance of established disciplines (such as sociology) in established universities.

Case-study 2: Cultural research and political intervention, 1960-80, with particular reference to the work of Raymond Williams.

A.H. Halsey lists the first chairs in sociology in UK universities by year of foundation. Pre-1950, these were only at Liverpool and London School of Economics. Between 1950 and 1961, they were at Bedford College, London, Birmingham and Sheffield. Between 1962 and 1965, they were at Aberdeen, Bristol, Cardiff, Durham, East Anglia, Edinburgh, Essex, Exeter, Kent, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading, Salford, Southampton, Swansea, and York. Between 1966 and 1969, they were at Bangor, Bath, Bradford, Cambridge, Keele, Loughborough, Queens Belfast, Stirling, Strathclyde, Surrey, and Sussex. In spite of the establishment of 30 new polytechnics in 1969/70 and their validation of degree courses in the following decade, these institutions remained outside Halsey's mental map. He listed 8 first chairs between 1970 and 1974 - at Aston, Brunel, City, Glasgow, Hull, Lancaster, Leeds, and Warwick - and, for 1978-2000, he listed: Oxford and 'some post-1992 universities'. (Halsey, 2004, 154). In a chapter (4) entitled 'British Post-war Sociologists', a version of which had first been published in the *European Journal of Sociology* in 1982, Halsey also offers a table which shows that a large proportion of these new chairs were filled by graduates from the LSE of 1950-2 (who were contemporaries of Halsey). Halsey lists 13 holders of chairs, including himself, and he was able to comment, therefore, that:

"This chapter ... is about an LSE group that became a significant part of the sociological establishment by the mid-1960s" (Halsey, 2004, 71)

This chapter is the best in the book in that it attempts to explore the social trajectories of the ten 'natives' amongst these thirteen. Halsey asks: 'Who were they?' and answers:

"A short answer is that most were provincials: provincial in social origin, provincial in political preoccupation, and provincial in their early jobs." (Halsey, 2004, 72).

and he continues:

"The ten natives were born in the slump years between the Wars on the periphery of English society, not in its central circle of the well born and well connected. By no means all of their parents were working class, but none of them, gentile or Jew, sprang from the metropolitan professional or administrative families or from the class of big business. Most, if not all, had 'won the scholarship'. There was only one woman (Olive Banks). There were no 'public' school boys among them. They went to their

grammar schools and absorbed the curious provincial patriotism that that experience afforded in the 1930s ...' (Halsey, 2004, 72-3)

The chapter provides an illuminating glimpse of the social backgrounds of those LSE graduates who were to become dominant in the British sociological profession in the 1960s and beyond, but it is weak in not adequately correlating the social trajectories of the individuals with the content of their thought and research. This analysis of the substantive development of British sociology in terms both of the social origins of the protagonists and of their deployment of imported social theory needs to be carried out and would provide an important basis for comparison with the constitution of contemporary sociology as the product of an encounter between new research student trajectories, new social phenomena, and new sources of theoretical explanation, but the purpose of this second case-study is simply to draw attention to the fact that it was precisely when the LSE graduates described by Halsey were beginning to occupy the new chairs of sociology in British provincial universities, that the focus of attention shifted dramatically away from exclusively 'social' questions as defined in the post World War II context, towards a highlighting of the social dimension of cultural production and transmission.

As far as his social background is concerned, Raymond Williams fits readily the identikit description provided by Halsey for the post-World War II British sociologists. He was born in Wales in 1921. He gained a scholarship to his local grammar school and then a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge to study English Literature. This last step differentiates Williams from the sociologists, but it was perhaps the Second world War itself which ensured that Williams would not become an ordinary student of English Literature. He entered college in October, 1939, one month after war was declared on Germany. At the end of his second year as an undergraduate, he was conscripted and served for two years in the army. He returned to Cambridge in October, 1945. Graduating in 1946, he decided to become politically engaged by writing novels, undertaking periodical journalism, and teaching disadvantaged men and women. From 1946 until 1960, he worked in adult education. This experience was the origin of his *Culture and Society* which was published in 1958. Meanwhile, Williams had met Stuart Hall at Oxford in 1954 and, at the same time, in the North of England, Richard Hoggart was writing *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and E.P. Thompson published his first book on William Morris. These elements came together in the early 1960s. Hoggart reviewed Williams's *Culture and Society* in 1958; Williams published his first novel - *Border Country* - in 1960 as well as the sequel to *Culture and Society* entitled *The Long Revolution*. The New Left Review was established in 1960 under the editorship of Stuart Hall, and E.P. Thompson wrote a two-part review of *The Long Revolution* in the New Left Review in 1961. These were the key components of the movement of the New Left which culminated in the production of a May Day Manifesto criticising from a far-left position the policies of the Harold Wilson Labour government. Institutionally, Williams had been appointed a lecturer in English at Cambridge in 1961; Hoggart had also moved from adult education to become Director of a new Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, and he was to be succeeded as Director in 1968 by Stuart Hall.

The May Day Manifesto movement collapsed. It did not, as once seemed possible, run candidates for the 1970 General Election. Williams was pleased by the defeat of Wilson in 1970 even though this was to be the last Labour Government until the election of Blair in 1997. In 1968, the new editor of the New Left Review, regretted the theoretical inertia in England and cited Williams as the most promising English social theorist of his generation. Williams was still writing socially committed English literary criticism - his *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* was published in 1970, but Williams was beginning to present himself as a theorist. Lucien Goldmann had come to Cambridge in May, 1970. Williams arranged for his return in 1971, but Goldmann died suddenly and Williams gave a commemorative lecture a year later. Williams wrote a small book on George Orwell at this time as well as his *The Country and the City* before publishing *Marxism and Literature* in 1977.

The New Left English theorists had all come from intellectual backgrounds in the Arts and Humanities and History. They had little to do with the 'new directions for the sociology of education' which were launched by the book edited in 1971 by M.F.D. Young entitled

Knowledge and Control. As a collection, this had inaugurated an approach to educational research emanating from a new generation of researchers at the Institute of Education, London, and was in competition with the kind of sociology of education which was the product of the generation of LSE graduates described by Halsey. But there seems to have been little close intellectual engagement between the proponents of mainstream Sociology, the new sociology of education, or the emergent field of Cultural Studies. Equally, in spite of the establishment of 30 new polytechnics in 1969/70, there was, in Britain, little sign of the inclination of radical intellectuals to affiliate themselves with radical new institutions which was evidenced at the time by the movement to the newly established University of Paris VIII in 1968 of Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Passeron and others.

My point, therefore, is that in the period from 1960 to 1980 the politically radical orientation of post-war sociology was usurped by a cultural critique of society which emerged out of a 'high culture' tradition of Literary and Historical study. Just as Mannheim had advocated a top-down social reconstruction, based on an idealist conception of culture, so the generation of the 60s tried to launch a social and political programme without renouncing the inherited value judgements of traditional literary and historical study. Their materialist critiques were still intellectualist. The emergent Cultural Studies were insufficiently sociological whilst at the same time mainstream Sociology paid too little attention to cultural phenomena.

Williams was well aware that the study of culture had to be totally different from the study of the relationship between 'culture' and the separately understood conditions of its production. He made it clear in *The Long Revolution* that he thought that the tradition of study which had been dominant in Cambridge under the influence of Basil Willey – the study of literature and its 'background' – was no longer satisfactory. He wrote:

"We cannot say that we know a particular form or period of society, and that we will see how its art and theory relate to it, for until we know these, we cannot really claim to know the society. This is a problem of method, and is mentioned here because a good deal of history has in fact been written on the assumption that the bases of the society, its political, economic, and 'social' arrangements, form the central core of facts, after which the art and theory can be adduced, for marginal illustration or 'correlation'". (Williams 1961, 62)

However, Williams was mainly equipped by his formation to analyse the relations between culture and society through an analysis of language and literature. In the Introduction to *Culture and Society*, Williams discussed the shifts in meanings of several keywords, one of which was 'culture'. He wrote:

"The word which more than any other comprises these relations is culture, with all its complexity of idea and reference. My overall purpose in the book is to describe and analyse this complex, and to give an account of its historical formation. Because of its very range of reference, it is necessary, however, to set the inquiry from the beginning on a wide basis. I had intended to keep very closely to culture itself, but, the more closely I examined it, the more widely my terms of reference had to be set. For what I see in the history of this word, in its structure of meanings, is a wide and general movement in thought and feeling." (Williams, 1958, 17)

He proceeds to announce that his text will consider 'a number of nineteenth century thinkers', 'certain writers at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century' and 'some writers and thinkers of our own century' (Williams, 1958, 18)

Culture and Society was a pioneering and influential book, but I am suggesting that, in spite of the content of its analysis, the method remained, as Bourdieu was to say of much anthropological analysis, essentially 'logocentric', lacking any procedure to come to terms with social practices.

Williams knew that the context within which he was teaching acted as a constraint on his intellectual, inter-disciplinary curiosity. His *Communications* (1962) contains much 'content

analysis' of magazines and newspapers which amounts to a transference of literary critical technique to 'low' culture publications, but he admitted, in the Preface to the second edition of 1965, that the nature of his work was constrained by the contexts in which it was produced. He recalls that part of the work had arisen out of his adult education classes and that he had changed his job, from 'extra-mural to internal university teaching' (Williams, 1965, 9) at the time that he had been writing it. In producing a revised edition, he had not been sure that he would be able to retrieve the immediacy of the engagement which had generated the first text:

"...I was not sure, in my own very different teaching situation, that I could go back and revise it, so that it could be made available again. University teaching is extraordinarily stimulating, but it is remarkable how much it excludes: both in the simple sense of the syllabus, where this kind of work is only just beginning, in England, to enter the university field; and in the more complex sense, of the cultural atmosphere of the university, in which there are strong pressures to confine oneself to the traditional interests and habits of minority education, so that issues and institutions affecting majorities tend to fade." (Williams, 1965, 9)

In other words, Williams was constrained not only by his own intellectual formation but significantly by the objective contexts within which he was seeking to pioneer a new field of analysis. This same tension is more explicitly articulated in the first chapter of the book which Williams wrote on *Television*, following a study visit to Stanford University. It is entitled 'The technology and the society'. The discussion marks a decisive break away from the privileging of 'content' in literary analysis – a break which was consistent more with Williams's work on drama than on literature. Necessarily he found that questions of theory and practice were inseparable:

"... all questions about cause and effect, as between a technology and a society, are intensely practical. Until we have begun to answer them, we really do not know, in any particular case, whether, for example, we are talking about a technology or about the uses of a technology; about necessary institutions or particular and changeable institutions; about a content or about a form. And this is not only a matter of intellectual uncertainty; it is a matter of social practice. If the technology is a cause, we can at best modify or seek to control its effects. Or if the technology, as used, is an effect, to what other kinds of cause, and other kinds of action, should we refer and relate our experience of its uses? These are not abstract questions. They form an increasingly important part of our social and cultural arguments, and they are being decided all the time in real practice, by real and effective decisions." (Williams, 1974, 10)

Summary

The choice of these two case-studies has been deliberate in that they draw specific attention to the historical contingency of the relations between Sociology and Cultural Studies which are the key intellectual axes of the contemporary work of the School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of East London. The intellectual orientation of this School can be plotted historically by reference to the post-1968 development of British higher education and to the place found within what began as a Polytechnic for the kind of Sociology which was the legacy of the post-war generation of LSE graduates and for the kind of Cultural Studies which significantly transferred across the binary divide after the decline of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. A similar historiography – both of disciplines and the differentiated institutional incorporations of those disciplines - should be attempted in respect of all the subject areas of the School, notably in relation to Anthropology, History, English, Media Studies, Development Studies, Refugee Studies, Politics, Film Studies, and more. The purpose of this mere sketch in relation to just two established disciplines is to propose an approach which will enable students, including those whose work is assembled in this

collection, to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of disciplinary constraints in relation to their own research.

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Chapter 1

Accessing retro knowledge: reflections on ethnographic research

Sarah Baker

On Saturday 26th May 2007 *The Guardian Weekend* magazine went retro. In this special retro issue editorial was focused on retro food, cars, fashion, gardening, and homes. The style section of the magazine featured consumers in their living rooms surrounded by their retro objects and interiors from various decades.

This is just one of the many examples that demonstrate the proliferation of the term retro to describe particular objects and styles in contemporary culture. Retro is global as well as local. It can be found in the mainstream media and on high streets, as well as in fanzines, on the Internet and on market stalls. It is used to describe clothing, music, food, and events, as well as objects, furniture and interiors. My PhD thesis, from which this paper is drawn, grew out of these observations. The thesis explores the production and consumption of retro objects and styles for the home in relation to taste and class.

This paper, which derives largely from the methodological chapter of my PhD thesis, considers the politics of ethnographic research and the role of the researcher in that process. It begins by discussing more general epistemological and ontological issues involved in representing experience. It goes on to consider some of the research methods used to understand the consumption and production of retro style and the debates that these methods raise in more detail. Before moving to the main body of the paper it is necessary to introduce the definition of retro style on which my research is based.

Defining retro style

Although retro is used to describe objects frequently, its definition is complex and relatively unexplored. In the first instance, it is an acknowledgement of stylistic or sensual references to past styles and fashions, for example the categorisation of a 1960s leatherette sofa as retro is partly due to its look, smell, and feel. However retro objects are not just any objects with stylistic or sensual references to the past, otherwise almost any old or new object (as objects are not designed in a vacuum) could be defined as retro.

In a discussion of previous theorisations of retro style, unable to be explored in detail here, I argue that the characteristics of retro and the problems that previous theorists have had in

defining the style can be highlighted by the art-culture system (Clifford, 1988).¹ The more successful theorisations of retro style position its popularity within postmodernism and identify that it blurs or challenges the established hierarchies of the art-culture system (Jameson, 1985; Gregson et al, 2003b; McRobbie, 1994; Samuel, 1994). Retro is a style that seems to have become more overt in the 1960s, and is consistent with the theorised changes of that time; it transcends the binaries of the old and new, the original and the reproduction, and the high and the popular, as defined by the art-culture system. For example retro transcends the distinction between 'the original' and 'the copy', as unlike second hand, vintage, or reproduction, it does not specify its origin. Retro includes 'authentic' second hand objects produced in the past and newly produced objects produced in a past style. Newly produced objects, such a reproduction 1950s style fridge (fig.1), can be defined as retro. Retro consumption and production also often involves the elevation of objects and styles that were previously considered 'vulgar', 'popular' or 'everyday' to 'fashionable' or 'high art' objects. This often involves objects that were previously owned by the working class becoming middle class prized possessions. For example (see fig. 2) flying ducks, once considered a symbol of the working class and tasteless, have been deemed fashionable and 'good taste' by trendsetters and the media.²



Fig.1. A SMEG fridge: Source: www.SMEG.com
Gillilan (2003)



Fig.2. Flying Ducks: Source:

However, I argue that by attempting to transcend the boundaries of the art culture system, retro style also maintains them. For example, retro objects must obviously reference the past, they seek the status of the authentic original, and by elevating everyday objects to high

¹ The art-culture system represents the ways in which aesthetic value is created. It 'classifies objects and assigns them value relative to one another', (Lury: 1996:56). This establishes hierarchies of value and positions, for example the original as synonymous with authentic high culture and the reproduction with 'inauthentic' or 'kitsch' popular culture.

² This is not to argue that the meaning and value of flying ducks has been transformed in all contexts. For example the meaning and value of flying ducks may not have changed for someone who has had them on their wall since the 1950s.

culture (or at least high style) it confirms the status of that culture. Thus the definition of an object as retro is highly ambiguous.

This ambiguity highlights that the definition of an object as retro is a social, cultural, and aesthetic judgement. The defining factor of the difference between a retro object or style and simply an old-fashioned one is the knowledge of the person making that categorisation (Gregson and Crewe, 2003:100; Jenß, 2005:194). For example, in Fig. 4 the homeowner sits in his house decorated in the style of lower middle class décor of the 1930s. His style demonstrates his knowledge of the 1930s, but also contemporary fashion cycles.



Fig. 4 Clive Hooley in his 1930s living room. Source: The Guardian Weekend, October 15, 2005

The naming of an object as retro means ‘that a knowingness is inserted into it; the classifier knows of the prior...signification and association of the object, a position that can be seen to give it authentic value,’ (Skeggs, 2004:107). The social, cultural and aesthetic judgement of an object as retro is also based on the context of the object and the identity of the classifier or the owner of the object. For example, the meaning of a set of flying ducks changes whether owned by a working class elderly women who displays them in her front room, or by a young middle class couple who display them on the wall of their designer apartment.

The ‘knowingness’ that enables the categorisation of an object as retro demonstrates high levels of cultural capital. Cultural capital has a very close relationship to ‘educational capital’ and ‘social origin’ and therefore to class, (Bourdieu 2005[1979]:13). Beverly Skeggs (2004) has developed the Bourdieusian concept of capitals to argue that class has not disappeared in contemporary society, but is made and given value through culture. She (2004:148) argues that the middle class self generates status through ‘boundary plundering rather than boundary maintenance’. Rather than a middle class that is reliant on maintaining ‘elite status

through hiding and restricting knowledge and practises', it is premised on 'the display of this knowledge and practice: exclusivity to transparency' (Skeggs, 2004:148). She suggests that this plundering by the new middle classes is predicated on holding others, such as the working classes, in place. Therefore retro consumption may be limited to the middle classes who have the appropriate form of cultural capital and the ability to legitimate their own tastes. This line of argument questions the extent to which the production and consumption of retro style represents 'schizophrenic identities' (Jameson, 1985), a 'mass interest' (Samuel,1994), or 'fluidity across old class lines' (McRobbie,1994) as previous theorisations of retro have suggested.

By adopting this argument I suggest that as the physical features of retro objects and styles are often unchanged, it is the discourse of designers, retailers and consumers that transform the meaning of objects from old-fashioned to retro. This approach considers producers, consumers and intermediaries to all be agents in the creation of value and meaning.³ Thus to understand the meaning and value of retro style ethnographic work is essential.

Representing experience

As this project seeks to document and understand the past and present experiences of those involved in the consumption and production of retro style it is concerned with 'lived cultures'. However, claiming to represent experience is problematic in both ethnographic and historical research.

The legacy of poststructuralism and standpoint epistemologies has led researchers across a variety of disciplines to question their truth claims.⁴ 'The critique of objectivity and emphasis on the significance of social position and lived experience has, in particular, always been a central theme of feminist epistemology (Darling-Wolf, 2004:32). Feminist scholars have argued that all researchers take positions that are shaped by an experience of being (Haraway, 1988; Harding,1987). This approach has questioned the ways of 'disowning responsibility' and renouncing accountability for research, common in positivist methods (Stanley, 1990). This epistemology, often referred to as feminist standpoint theory, argues that experience and social position can be a source of knowledge, and can challenge 'the structures of oppression operating in the dominant social order,' (Darling-Wolf, 2004:33).

³ However this is not to suggest that the design and materiality of objects is irrelevant to their categorisation, but to argue that some categories, and thus some objects, are more 'material' than others. For example a chair, although its definition can at times be uncertain, (for example when does a chair become a work of art, in the case of design art [Roux, 2006]?), is defined by its material features. Its function, that it can be sat on, makes it categorisable as a chair. When defining styles this becomes more fluid, for example the definition of a gothic chair as opposed to regency one. In the case of retro style, as has been discussed; this seems even more ambiguous and subjective.

⁴ However, as Darling-Wolf (2004:30) notes, 'considerations of the epistemological significance of social position have long been a central component of critical theory.'

Most commonly in this approach, the experiences of women have been used to question the hegemonic position of masculine theory and knowledge.

Although feminist standpoint theory made advances in the academic arena by acknowledging experience as a form of knowledge, this methodology has been questioned in more recent approaches to ethnography (Gray, 2003; Skeggs, 2004). Ann Gray (2003;183) notes that feminist standpoint theory can often lean towards essentialism. She argues that it assumes that individuals possess an identity before experience and it continues the positivist project as it claims experience can produce better 'truths'. She also argues that it privileges certain types of experience. For example, a standpoint position can imply that a female academic could produce a more 'authentic' and 'realistic' account of gender inequality than a male academic. This is clearly problematic and potentially paralysing, particularly in relation to class. As Darling-Wolf (2004:35) asks 'How can issues of class, in particular, ever be adequately addressed by highly educated middle-class intellectuals—the kind of people who may have the means to publish their works?' The way that Beverly Skeggs conceptualises experience addresses this problem. She (1997:27) argues that experience informs the take up and production of positions, rather than being a source of 'authentic' knowledge. This suggests that although an academic from a working class background may be more likely to study the working classes, and their background would shape their position, their account would be no more 'authentic' than a researcher with a different background that had gone through the same research process.

The claim that historical research represents 'true' experience has also been questioned. Raymond Williams (1965) acknowledged that writing history was not a neutral activity. He argued that through 'selective tradition' past cultural products were canonised (or forgotten) according to the value systems in the present. For example, due to shifts in attitudes towards popular culture, everyday objects, such as Tuppaware, are considered iconic pieces of twentieth century design and are in the collections of both the Design Museum and the V&A. It can be argued therefore, that history is constructed in the present, by historians with their own political and moral viewpoints. Historians, like any other researchers, are positioned.

The implications of poststructuralist methodologies go even further in questioning the legitimacy of historical knowledge. Hayden White (1989:297) has argued that every approach to the study of the past 'presupposes or entails some version of textualist theory of historical reality of some kind.' He (1989) argues that the representation of the past (history) is always constituted textually through narrative. From this perspective 'the privileging of empiricism used in much historical research is questioned, as it refuses to see how narrative constitutes the grounds whereon one decides what shall count as 'fact' in the matters under consideration in the first place,' (Jenkins,1995:25). However this is not to deny that the past existed or that certain events did not take place, rather to argue that writing history is

always an intervention. Chris Jenkins (1995:25) argues that 'any 'context' which is constructed to contextualise the facts has to be ultimately imagined or invented; unlike facts, the contexts can never be definitely found.' The picture that is created of the past when history is written cannot be checked. From this perspective, he argues that history is a debate among historians; there is 'nothing outside the text', (Derrida,1997:158).

However, if academic work is no more than fictional narrative, why should it be based on 'lived cultures' or empirical methods at all? After all, purely theoretical work can be just as valuable as 'performative' political intervention; in the sense that it is seeking to produce the effect that it names. However culture is ordinary and material. It is 'not a free floating set of ideas or beliefs', it is materialised in institutions, texts and the practices of everyday life (Gray, 2003). Practices of everyday life cannot be fully understood, as Bourdieu (2005 [1979]:1) argues, 'unless 'culture', in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is bought back to 'culture' in the anthropological sense.' In addition good ethnographic or historical research can challenge 'theoretical reductionism,' (Hall et al, 1980:74). Therefore a greater understanding of cultural practices using ethnographic and historical research methods is of value in creating knowledge. There is still merit in attempting to make sense of how culture is produced and lived in everyday life, as long as we are aware that these will only ever be attempts. As Gray (2003:21) notes, 'we can never capture the 'whole truth' of the social and the cultural, rather we can, from our specific vantage points, produce a version of the truth, but one which we present modestly for others to consider.' This approach both problematises research methods that claim to represent 'true' experience, whilst also suggesting that ethnographic and historical research are of value in generating knowledge.

In more practical terms, this means, as Les Back (1996:5) has suggested, neither presenting historical and ethnographical research as the 'as the privileged arbiter of 'what is [or was] really happening on the streets', neither is it to characterise these new developments in cultural theory as removed or uninformed...[I]t means embracing a contingent and modest epistemology that attempts to achieve rigorous forms of reporting alongside a reflexive consciousness of the codes, textual moves and rhetoric integral to the process of writing.' In this quote, Back quite rightly emphasises a reflexive approach to the process of writing research. This, I would suggest, should be part of a wider reflexive approach that acknowledges the researchers' social, cultural and political position. Reflexivity, as Skeggs (2004) acknowledges, is more than simply a telling of the self. It is more than writing a paragraph about your self at the beginning of a book. These types of gestures, Skeggs (2004:128) argues, assume that by adding a piece about the self, the problems of power, perspective and privilege are dissolved. Rather truly reflexive work is about practice. In this regard Skeggs is greatly influenced by Bourdieu, who, she argues when discussing reflexivity, did not mean direct self-examination. He meant an exploration of 'the relationship between the properties of discourses, the properties of the person who

pronounces them, and the properties of the institution which authorises him to pronounce them,' (Bourdieu, 1992:111). By implication, this suggests that the process of conducting research and reflections on that process, are as important as the content and analysis of the product of the research itself.⁵ It is an introduction to the process of accessing retro knowledge that I move onto now.

Acquiring a feel for the game and selecting sources

As I have argued above, the categorisation of a material object as retro is based on subjective social, cultural, and aesthetic judgement. This has prompted me to question the extent to which my thesis is simply an exercise of my own taste, as I am the one who has identified the objects as retro, and classified the producers and consumers as involved in its consumption. As Bourdieu (2005[1979]:19) argues 'nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies'.

However, the thesis is not solely based on my own categorisations. Most of the sources that I have drawn on in my study have identified themselves as retro (apart from the earlier period, where terms like 'recycling' were used instead). The archival research, including the images that I have used has usually been contextualised by text defining them as retro, and where possible I have endeavoured to include this with the images that I have reproduced. The retailers and designers that I spoke to in the tastemaker interviews defined themselves as selling or interested in retro, vintage or 20th Century modern objects. Similarly the consumers all identified themselves as having a passion for retro, vintage or past popular culture.

In addition, throughout my thesis I have adopted a 'reflexive practice', which attempts to make my own journey obvious by accessing the knowledge required to recognise retro style (Bourdieu, 1990)⁶. This was a quick and necessary journey, as I was only on the periphery of retro cultures when I started the research. Although I started collecting 1950s ceramics when I was young, and my clothing as a teenager was mostly from the 1960s, I did not know many people who were interested in retro style and design for the home. I knew no one committed to obtaining the style and it was essential that I spoke to these individuals for this study.

My learning curve was made easier but also more dramatic by in-depth interviews that I conducted with key tastemakers, including designers, retailers, writers and advertisers

⁵ However, as Mica Nava (1992:6) notes, ' [h]ow to disentangle the specific [our positions, biographies and the research process] from the general [interpretations, methods, theories, histories] is a problem with no solution.'

⁶ A reflexive project I would argue that Bourdieu (2005[1979]) did not fulfil in *Distinction*.

involved with, or interested in, retro style.⁷ As Bourdieu (2005[1979]) argues, tastemakers are the arbiters and creators of the rules within a particular field. The tastemakers interviewed for the purposes of this thesis were selected because of their interest in retro style, their availability for an interview, and their notoriety and/or power within the field. These were the first interviews that I conducted for the purposes of the thesis. They enabled me to understand the knowledges required by the field of retro style before I conducted the rest of the research. This research strategy was pre-planned and one of the most important that I have adopted. The interviews taught me what was at stake in retro cultures, its history, and my participant's feelings of its future. It made it possible for me to get, as Bourdieu (1992) has theorised, a 'feel for the game'. The interviews helped me to explore the definition of retro style and to confirm its nuances and ambiguities. For example, it highlighted how the definition of retro style transcends the boundary between original and reproduction (as shown by Fig.1 above), whilst internally the difference between these two categories is maintained (for example many retro retailers prefer to use 'vintage' to describe their products as these objects are considered more authentic and often command higher prices). In retrospect, however, the difference between a 'consumer' and 'tastemaker' is difficult to define, as both produce and consume retro style and both were often in a position to subvert 'the rules of the game'.

It was necessary for me to learn about retro style, not only because I needed to recognise what retro consisted of in order to begin defining its characteristics, but also in a practical sense. I found that I could not get interviews with tastemakers or consumers without making references to my own interest in, and knowledge of retro style. Potential interviewees would ask me, 'what era I was into?' and 'who I had interviewed so far?' and in some cases I felt only by giving the 'right' sort of answers according to the 'rules of the game' would I be given permission to interview. I was also aware that I had to give information about my interest in retro in order for the interviewees to answer my questions and get fruitful answers⁸. This made posing as a 'unknowledgeable outsider' to elicit more detailed information in interviews infeasible.⁹ In their study of retro retailing Nicky Gregson, Louise Crewe and Kate Brooks (2003) adopted this method. They (2003:79) note that the 'positionality we adopted as interviewers was as 'unknowing outsiders' keen to learn what our respondents would tell us about their work and lifestyles'.

As I have mentioned I found this approach impossible. There are numerous circumstantial reasons that may have produced this difference in approach. It may have been due to the

⁷ I conducted six interviews with tastemakers. They were asked if they would like to take part in an interview via email, or in person at their shop or market stall. The interviews were conducted in either the place of work of the interviewee or in an informal setting, such as a café or bar. The interviewees were asked to reflect on the history of their interest in retro style, both in the context of their work, but also their own personal history including their class position. The interviews were informal and quite often led to discussions of other related topics. This was advantageous as it introduced me to issues related to retro style that I had not previously considered, such as gentrification.

⁸ This was most pronounced in interviews conducted with retailers.

⁹ This is the method usually advised for conducting interviews (Silverman, 2004).

consumer and producers of retro style being more difficult to access in London, (Gregson, Crewe and Brooks' study was mainly conducted in the North of England). It could have been that in the eyes of the potential participants I had to compensate for my age and student status with knowledge of retro style. Or it may have been that since Gregson, Crewe and Brooks' study in 2003 retro style has become more exclusive.

However, apart from these circumstantial differences, I would argue that the position of 'outsider' that Gregson, Crewe and Brooks adopted, would be difficult to take on in any ethnographic research, especially in an environment where interviewees possess high levels of cultural capital such as retro cultures. In this context, as Gregson and Crewe (2003b) themselves argue, possession of and demonstration of cultural capital is essential and therefore is a barrier to entering the field. Perhaps Gregson, Crewe and Brooks underestimated the knowledge that they needed to access the field and did not actually adopt the position of 'unknowing insiders'. In addition, even if it was possible for Gregson, Crewe and Brooks to take this approach, it may not have been so successful in eliciting personal and sensitive information, such as the questions of class and bad taste with which this study is involved.

This is not to suggest that I was a 'complete insider', a position that is unachievable as a researcher, especially when it is constantly highlighted with a tape recorder, camera or a camcorder. The role that I took was that of a 'semi-insider' as a researcher with some knowledge of retro style, but a researcher none the less. The ability to take on this role was undoubtedly aided by my own class position, age, race, gender and appearance. My own identity as a middle class, white female in my late twenties enabled access to the field. As a female, I believe I was at an advantage, as I was viewed as non-threatening and more likely to be asked into participants homes. My appearance also aided access to the field, as although I do not wear retro clothes, I have been told that I have an 'arty' style of dress. In addition my age enabled me to both to enter the field but also to elicit more information in interviews. Whilst my youth gave me capital within consumer culture¹⁰, the discrepancy between my age and the age of my participants (I was often ten or more years younger than interviewees) meant that they often adopted a pedagogical approach to the interview. It seemed as though they wanted to train me in the knowledges required for the consumption and appreciation of retro style. One of the interviewees even gave me a book on retro design at the end of the interview. Although undoubtedly intended as a kind gesture, this can also be interpreted as an eagerness to pass on knowledge whilst also demonstrating superior cultural capital, which will be discussed in more detail in the rest of my thesis.

Differences in my identity also made this research difficult. Although I am of a similar class position to the consumers that I interviewed, they had more status. Participants had

¹⁰ For example Lury (1996) argues that youth have become key intermediaries in the development of consumer culture.

significantly more economic capital and were older than me. They also usually had more knowledge of design and retro style.¹¹ The combination of these differences made me feel as though I was ‘researching up’. This caused problems with access, as I mentioned I had to quickly learn about retro style. In addition, it sometimes made the interview process tricky. Interviewees tried to ask probing questions about the research and occasionally turned the tables on the interview. They would also mention past designers and manufacturers who they would assume I would know and I felt I had to pretend to know or learn who they were talking about, in order to maintain the authority of an interviewer. As Gray (2003) notes, access to participants and the power relations at work between the interviewee and the interviewer are often the problems of researching more powerful groups. She (2003:51) considers this to be one of the reasons why ‘crucially important groups – cultural producers, consumers of middle or so called ‘high’ culture, policy makers – who in different ways shape and form the cultural landscape, have been under researched in cultural studies.’

The position that I adopted as a ‘semi-insider’ and the gratitude that I felt towards my interviewees for participating in interviews has often clashed with my theoretical motivations for studying retro style and my understandings of retro style and class. For many individuals, the subject of class has become irrelevant and distasteful (Skeggs, 2004). This was made obvious in the first tastemaker interview that I conducted. I found that when I told the participant that my research was focused on class he became defensive. Subsequently, I told interviewees that I was researching retro style and only revealed my interest in class if they questioned me further. This strategy, although perhaps ethically questionable, was necessary both to get enough participants to interview, and for them to be open regarding their taste and retro style. Although in most cases I did not reveal the class angle of my research, I did ask interviewees about class and taste. Interviewees often questioned the relevance of class to modern life. Some also considered themselves working class, when I felt they were middle class, a point which I will go on to develop in the rest of my thesis.

I have been aware not to erase these power relationships by succumbing to the ‘democratic impulse’ to celebrate or become one of the ‘community’ that I was studying (Gray, 2003:51). Thus, the semi insider position that I have adopted has been coupled with a ‘traitorous’ role. Developing the concept of traitorous identities referenced by Sandra Harding (1991), Alison Bailey (1998) argues that a traitor is an individual holding a privileged position who is aware and reflexive of this privilege. She (1998) theorises that identity is shaped by historically pre-established scripts. These scripts differ according to a person’s location within systems of domination. She (1998:32) argues that ‘traitors’ decentre, subvert, or destabilise the centre position by deviating from normative or dominant scripts. I consider this argument to be rather simplistic, as I would argue that normative or dominant scripts are much more nuanced and fluid than Bailey implies. Nevertheless I have found the concept of a ‘traitorous’ role

¹¹ I have sometimes found this experience demoralising as it undermined my position as a researcher (someone who should have extensive knowledge of their research area.)

useful¹². It has allowed me to speak both from a semi-insider position, as a consumer of retro style, and as a cultural theorist, critical of its previous theorisations and popular understandings of its democratic potential.

Consumer interviews, the home, and 'epiphany' objects

In its approach to the consumption of retro objects, style and taste this study draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2005[1979]), especially *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. However its method is considerably different. *Distinction* is a largely objective mapping of taste that uses methods that have been likened to market research questionnaires (Miller, 1987:155). This method, although useful in mapping the tastes of a large population, is unable to capture taste as process. It lacks an in-depth understanding of taste as an ongoing narrative, and fails to capture the changing meanings of objects over time.¹³ Although I have collected the demographic information from my participants, I have also used ethnographic and narrative approaches. These methods have enabled me to understand the relationship consumers have with their objects in more detail. They have made it possible for me to analyse the motivations for consuming retro style and to explore the changing meaning of retro style over time.

The interviews took place in consumer's homes¹⁴. This seemed the most fitting setting for a study of domestic retro style, as the only way to understand the relationship that people have with their interiors is to look 'behind closed doors' (Miller, 2001). However, an academic researcher stepping over the threshold of a home belonging to a stranger, can seem intrusive. I have been aware of this difficulty and have been careful not to intrude without invitation. Interviewees largely seemed comfortable and enjoyed showing me their objects and giving me a tour of their homes¹⁵. Nevertheless a certain amount of encroachment was inevitable, especially as I was using video to record the interviewees. The feelings that I had of being an intruder were heightened when interviewees showed me objects in more private rooms, such as bedrooms.¹⁶ Interviewees also seemed uncomfortable showing me areas under construction. They were keen to highlight that a previous owner had decorated certain rooms, or that they had been meaning to update areas of their homes. This emphasised inconsistencies between 'ideal homes' and 'real homes' and confirmed that the decoration of the home is a 'gradual and ongoing process' (Clarke, 2001).

¹² Although I would not compare myself with the great 'traitors' that she identifies, such as Anne and Carl Braden, race 'traitors' in the US in the 1950s.

¹³ However in his later work Bourdieu (1998) did acknowledge and address this.

¹⁴ Although the difference between 'consumers' and 'tastemakers' may be slight in actuality, the approach that has been taken to interviewing these two groups was significantly different

¹⁵ At the end of the interview participants often mentioned that they had enjoyed talking about their objects and reflecting on their taste.

¹⁶ Some interviewees choose not to show me the bedrooms of their houses.

The home has been the core of anthropological study and the debates surrounding the politics of the researcher as a guest within the home have been explored in detail in this field (see Miller 2001). However the role of the researcher has changed in newer studies of the material culture of the domestic environment. Rather than living in the home and the community of the participant, the researcher is more likely to visit. The reasons for this are twofold. In studies of Western culture, which have become more common in anthropology and studies of material culture in recent years, the researcher may already live in the country that are studying, hence they are less likely to stay with the participants. Daniel Miller (2003) also suggests that the change in anthropological approaches may be due to a shift in the importance placed on the community in Western societies. He (2001:3) suggests that emphasis has shifted from the community to individual homes and in modern ethnography 'there is no particular community and there is no reason to expect that knowing one family will lead to an acquaintance with its neighbours.' This was reflected in this study, as although many groups and subcultures exist within retro style (often linked to specific periods, objects, or music) the consumers that I interviewed did not know each other previously. Only two out of the eight participants that I interviewed were involved in retro groups or subcultures. The other interviewees did not know anyone interested in retro style to the extent that they were. Therefore, apart from my selection, the consumers of retro style represented in this thesis do not form a community in a 'traditional' sense.

However the consumption of retro style for the home is by no means an individual pursuit. Due to the nature of the domestic environment, taste is negotiated with other family members. An unforeseen implication of this was that five out of the eight interviews I conducted were with couples, sometimes with the children present. Interviewees often felt more comfortable being interviewed together and considered the decoration of the home to be a joint undertaking. Interviewing the couples together was advantageous, as had I conducted interviews separately data would have been duplicated. The strategy also gave clues to how taste was negotiated within the home, and which spaces were private or shared.

The interviewees were selected in a purposive sample chosen for their interest in retro style (Patton, 1990). This allowed me to observe how class manifested itself within the phenomenon of retro consumption rather than presupposing how it was spread through a stratified sample. However, I was keen to represent varying commitments to the consumption of retro style, from the consumption of a few things from a variety of different eras, to the decoration of a whole house in one 'authentic' style and this was reflected in my sample. The interviewees were found both through contacts made with retailers, through friends and family, and over the Internet. The Internet has played a large part in the development of retro culture. For example Internet market places such as ebay have enabled producers and consumers with an interest in retro to contact each other. This enables the researcher to tap into virtual 'communities' linked by taste, style or consumption patterns. By posting adverts for

interviewees on style forums such as *www.modculture.com* I was able to contact a large number of potential participants. However, this was not without its problems. The relative anonymity that the Internet provides for users makes selecting participants difficult, especially in relation to my own personal safety¹⁷. It also caused me to question the possible disparities between the interest in retro style that the users claimed they had, and their actual homes and interiors. This question emphasised the importance of narrative in the expression of taste and the construction of a 'credible identity' (Woodward, 2001).

The choices of objects and styles that consumers make in their domestic interiors are accompanied by narrative. These narratives, Ian Woodward (2002:115) argues, 'link one's choices [of objects and styles] to the desired characteristics of self.' He argues (2002:134) that 'having taste and making legitimate aesthetic choices is inextricably linked to creating an accountable and convincing narrative.' I would suggest that this is especially apparent in the consumption of retro style where it is narrative that often marks the material object as retro¹⁸. For example narrative may be needed to highlight that a 1950s coffee table is a conscious style choice and therefore a retro object. Thus, this approach conceptualises the narratives told about retro objects as 'contingent and co-constructed in the interview by the informant, researcher and objects' (Hurdley, 2006). Rather than questioning the validity of the research this highlights that taste and aesthetics are always constructed and negotiated in relation to the guests that enter the home. Cultural capital expressed as symbolic violence varies according to context. For example, the extent to which the interviewee considered me to be a 'knowledgeable insider' influenced the content of the interview.

Therefore, although this study is primarily concerned with taste, it does not conceptualise objects simply as signs in a structured system as early semiotic studies did (Barthes, 1993; Baudrillard, 1996), but as embedded within a social, cultural and practical context. In addition, objects in the domestic setting inhabit the intersection between 'the social and the personal' (Hurdley, 2006). For example, the same 1950s coffee table may create and reflect cultural capital, but also be of psychological use and hold sentimental value if it has been the centre of the living room for many years. Narrative methods can reveal both the social and the personal. They can reflect the role of material objects as both 'socio-semiotic' and 'socio-cultural'; as signs of status, taste and style, but also as forming and managing 'self-identity and family relations' (Woodward, 2002:120).

Using this approach interviewees were asked to give me a tour of their homes, reflecting on their motivations for possessing retro objects and styles. In the tour, interviewees selected and explained different items¹⁹. Ian Woodward (2001) has defined these objects as 'epiphany objects'. He developed the concept, originally conceived by Denzin (1989), to argue that

¹⁷ I made sure that I met my participants in a public place prior to the interview if had made contact with them over the Internet.

¹⁸ This is also determined according to the object, its context, and the identity of the owner.

¹⁹ In only a few cases did I notice objects and ask participants about them.

objects can be used as anchors in interviews to stimulate narrative. He (2001:131) sees this method of interviewing as advantageous as epiphany objects 'act as resources for thinking through broader social and cultural distinction'. Using objects in this way also allows for taste to be described as a historical narrative, which was useful for contextualising the consumption of retro style. This strategy also animated the interviews, with participants remembering more information and being more candid than in the first part of the interview when they were asked to reflect on their background, class and taste²⁰.

However, as Hurdley (2006) acknowledges, studies of the home should step beyond the narrative interview. The home and the objects within it are 'pluri-sensory'; they are experienced by sight, sound, touch, and smell (Pink, 2004). By entering into the home and keeping a field diary I have attempted to record my observations of the 'pluri-sensory' relationship that participants had with their retro objects. In addition, by videoing the interviews with consumers I have attempted to record audio and visual data. Moreover although interview narrative strategies and the use of epiphany objects has been central to the research, this study has also moved beyond the verbal to understand the sensory experiences of the consumption of retro style and the domestic environment.

The ethics and practicalities of video interviews

In order to explore the 'pluri-sensory' character of the home, video was used to record interviewees and their domestic spaces. Out of the eight interviews that I conducted, only one couple did not want me to video them directly, but allowed me to video their objects and the decoration of their home. Interestingly, this was the eldest couple, who were perhaps less comfortable with technology. However, overall, interviewees seemed to appreciate the need to record interiors visually and were keen to discuss and display their objects in this way.

The use of video as a recording method, rather than with the view of producing a documentary or film, influenced my decision to both interview and operate the camera myself. Although the video footage is shaky and interviewees are sometimes out of shot, it was decided that two people (an interviewer and a camera operator) entering the home would have been too intrusive. In addition, the advantage of operating the camera myself was that I was able to record and analyse my own reactions and my position as a researcher in more detail.

Advances in technology made operating the camera and interviewing an easier task. The video camera had a fold out mini-TV screen that allowed distance between my eye and the camera, and enabled me to view both the camera screen and the scene recorded²¹. This technology

²⁰ Before the tour started interviewees were asked to talk about their background in general and the background of their interest in retro style. They were asked about their consumption choices and tastes in relation to their friends and family.

²¹ I used a Sony DCR-HC23E Handycam

made it possible for me to obtain good eye contact with interviewees. In video interviews, as Pink (2001:79) notes, 'the camera becomes part of its user's identity and an aspect of the way he or she communicates with others.' There was, however, often a noticeable difference between interviewee's manner in the pre-interview chat and when I pressed record. At the beginning of the interview, participants showed unease at being filmed. They often avoided the lens. They also sometimes performed or adopted a playful approach to the camera. In fig.5. shown below, Steve points to the fireplace in his 1940s style house. He poses to the camera in a manner typical of 1940s and 50s films. He says 'I should have a pipe', laughs and says 'it's spiffing'. This is an obvious reference to the camera and to his retro identity. I would also suggest that the joke masked the slight awkwardness that he felt being filmed.



Fig. 5. Steve by the fireplace in his 1940s interior

Throughout the research I have adopted a 'reflexive practice' that considers analysis as an ongoing process rather than a stage. However, after conducting the interviews they were analysed in two stages, focusing on both the content and the context of the video. The first stage as Sarah Pink (2002:111) recommends, used 'time coded log tables with information on camera angles and distances, spoken narrative and visual content', focusing on the both the content and context of the video. In the second stage the interviews were analysed by locating key markers and discursive themes in relation to class, cultural capital and knowledge.

Representing video in an academic text is slightly problematic. Historically, the visual has been marginalised in ethnography. As Pink (2001:96) notes, 'The modern project of ethnography has largely been 'to translate the visual into words...This approach, which assumes that while ethnographic information may be recorded visually, ethnographic knowledge is produced through the translation and abstraction of this data into written text.' I acknowledge this problem, however due to the codes and conventions of academia

the visual is primarily translated into text in my thesis. However I try to include as many images and video stills as possible, whilst their explaining movement, sound, and context.

Conclusion

In this paper I have reflected on the politics of my position as researcher in the process of ethnographic research. This has led me to consider the journey I have undertaken to understand what is at stake in retro cultures and the barriers and enablers to gaining that understanding. In many ways this has provoked more questions than it has answered. For example the gap between 'ideal' and 'real' homes and the importance of the Internet for retro producers and consumers are just some of the topics that I have raised and will analyse further in the rest of my thesis. Most importantly these reflections have raised many questions regarding retro style and class, in particular the difference between my understanding of class the views of my participants. However by raising these questions and being transparent about this process I hope to have demonstrated a reflexive practice that is integral to and embedded within my PhD thesis.

Making consumption choices based on social, cultural, and aesthetic judgments is a process in which we are all involved. Thus in conclusion I would argue that a sensitivity to the research process and the power relationships involved in that process is not only ethically necessary in all research, but is essential for a thorough and valid study of class and consumption.

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Chapter 2

‘Fill full the mouth of famine’:

Voluntary action in Indian famine relief 1877-1900

Georgina Brewis

*‘Take up the White Man’s Burden
The savage wars of peace
Fill full the mouth of famine
And bid the sickness cease’*

(Rudyard Kipling, ‘The White Man’s Burden’, 1899)

In August 1877 the leading citizens of Madras appealed in Britain for donations to an Indian famine relief fund. Although similar relief funds had been organised in previous famines, the 1877 appeal came at a turning point in the history of famine administration in colonial India. The Government of India, under the Viceroy Lord Lytton, was pushing an uncompromising relief programme and had appointed Sir Richard Temple as special envoy for famine.¹ Temple’s instructions, repeatedly publicised in 1877, reveal the principles on which Government was operating: ‘We must plainly admit that the task of saving lives irrespective of the cost is one which it is beyond our power to undertake.’² The charitable relief fund was organised by British and Indian volunteers, but had been sanctioned by the Government of Madras and the Lieutenant-Governor, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, had presided at its inauguration. Lytton took this appeal as an act of insubordination on the part of the Madras Government. Lytton’s hope of avoiding criticism of the stringent relief programme not been fulfilled, with a very public debate ensuing in India over the notorious ‘Temple’ ration experiment³. By calling for public donations, the organisers of the Madras fund were questioning the Government of India’s ability to cope with the situation⁴. Lytton acted swiftly to suppress a meeting in Calcutta called to discuss the opening of a Bengal branch of the fund, sending a coded telegram to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.⁵ This move provoked outcry when leaked to the Indian and British press. As the newspapers were quick to point out, Lytton’s opposition to the fund placed all donors in the wrong, including the newly designated ‘Empress’ of India and a host of former Governor-Generals who had headed the subscription lists in Britain. When Lytton’s action was reported in London, a *Times* leader expressed great regret that the ‘Viceroy should have interposed to repress the impulses of private charity’ and denounced his policy of pursuing famine relief ‘solely with economy in mind’⁶.

This paper explores voluntary action in famine relief in late nineteenth century India. The British in India developed famine relief programmes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

¹ William Digby, *The Famine Campaign in Southern India* (London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1878); Lytton to Mallet, January 11th 1877 (Lytton Collection, India Office Records MSS/Eur E.218/19)

² Government of India Resolution No.45, *Gazette of India Extraordinary* Calcutta, January 16, 1877

³ The Temple ration was a reduced, 11b wage rate for labourers on public relief works imposed by Sir Richard Temple in February 1877.

⁴ Digby, *Famine Campaign* p52

⁵ Lytton to Eden August 12 1877 (Lytton Collection); Digby, *Famine Campaign* p54

⁶ *The Times*, 29 August 1877

centuries as a way of strengthening the legitimacy of their rule. To the end of the nineteenth century the colonial Government was committed to providing only a minimum level of emergency relief. It has been estimated that between 12 and 30 million Indians died in the last quarter of the nineteenth century from starvation and famine related diseases⁷. Behind Kipling's potent images of heroic officials battling with famine and sickness lay the reality that government only reluctantly accepted responsibility for preventing famine deaths and continuously urged relief could not be pursued 'irrespective of cost'. Such a record of hunger proved an important plank in the wider critique of British colonial rule offered not only by Indian nationalists but also by those intimately involved in the distribution of voluntary famine relief.⁸ From the early nineteenth century, in the absence of government relief provision for groups other than the able-bodied poor, voluntary agency developed a range of responses to famine hunger and destitution. These efforts drew a broad spectrum of British non-officials, off-duty civil servants, missionaries and middle-class Indians into voluntary service distributing record sums raised through international appeals.

Indian famines have received historical attention since the late nineteenth century yet most of this work has focused on the role of government.⁹ Although the historical neglect of voluntary activity and philanthropy has been reversed following a resurgence of academic interest in civil society and voluntarism since the 1980s, this is only beginning to be felt in studies of colonial India. In writing this paper I have drawn on a wide range of non-governmental sources, including reports of famine relief funds and missionary publications, reports and letters, to tell the important story of voluntary action in Indian famine relief.¹⁰ The neglect of non-governmental sources might be justified if voluntary action had played only a minor role in famine relief in colonial India. However, voluntary contributions of time and money were significant. The reports and appendices of the Indian Famine Commissions of 1880, 1898 and 1901 provide another view on the administration of both government and charitable relief, because they invited written submissions from officials, non-officials, members of relief committees and missionaries. Common to all historical research on voluntary action is the problem that the viewpoints of the beneficiaries of charitable aid are largely missing from the sources. Donors to famine relief funds are recorded in published subscription lists but the recipients of the relief are not. As Peter Shapely and Ann Borsay argue in a recent book on recipients 'too many studies in the past have taken an institutional stance, concentrating on the benefactors and officials who were responsible for implementing policies'¹¹. In the absence of recipient voices it is necessary to 'read against the grain', following the lead of scholars from the subaltern studies group.¹² This can be done in several ways. Volunteers administering relief recorded their impressions of the process and of recipients' attitudes to different forms of relief (such as food, clothing, money, in-kind gifts). Volunteers also recorded the many rumours circulating among the people specifically regarding the administration of charitable famine relief. In this, Arnold's study of rumour as a form of popular discourse has been particularly

⁷ These estimates are discussed in Ira Klein, 'When the Rains Failed: Famine, relief and morality in British India' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 21 (2) 1984 pp185-214; See also Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*, (London, Verso, 2002)

⁸ R.C Dutt, *The Economic History of British India* (London, Kegan Paul, 1902); R. C. Dutt, *Famines and Land Assessments in India* (London, Kegan Paul, 1900); William Digby, 'Prosperous' *British India* (London, T Fisher Unwin, 1901); William Hare, *Famine in India: Its Causes and Effects* (London, O S King and Son, 1901)

⁹ B. M Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India with Special Reference to Food Problems*, (Delhi, Konark, 1963; 3rd edition 1991); H. S. Srivastava, *The History of Indian Famines and Development of Famine Policy 1858-1918* (Agra, Sri Ram Mehra and Co, 1968); Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*

¹⁰ Report of the Central Executive Committee of Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897, 2 Vols (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1898); Report of the Central Executive Committee of Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 with complete accounts and proceedings including the reports of the provincial committees (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1901)

¹¹ Anne Borsay and Peter Shapely, *Medicine Charity and Mutual Aid: The Consumption of Health and Welfare in Britain, c.1550-1950* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007)

¹² Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, OUP, 1983)

influential for my understanding of famine relief.¹³ The tendency of official reports is to treat recipients of famine aid as an undistinguishable mass, or at best categorised as ‘able-bodied’ or ‘non able-bodied’. My research using non-governmental sources shows that administrators of voluntary relief were acutely aware of the varied needs of different classes of recipients of famine aid; recipients who ranged from beggars, orphans and widows, who might require charity even at the best of times, to highly skilled artisans, teachers on low fixed wages and even to noble families fallen on hard times.

Recently historians such as Gwilym Beckerlegge and Carey Watt have explored the evolution of Indian (particularly Hindu) philanthropic traditions into modern social service through the redefining of older traditions of *seva*, *dana*, and *dharma* in the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ A large number of new social service organisations were formed between the 1890s and the 1920s.¹⁵ Developments in India were part of a global shift to organised social service in which reformers sought to replace traditional forms of religious charity with secular social work infused with an ideal of personal service. Such changes were particularly evident in Britain, the USA and Germany but these ideas also found resonance in India, Japan, Turkey and Persia.¹⁶ These ideas influenced the missionary movement worldwide and found expression in international organisations such as the Red Cross. In this paper I suggest that the voluntary famine relief of the 1890s provided important opportunities for the reorientation of some established groups towards social service, including the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission, and prepared the way for the emergence of Indian organisations dedicated to social service in the early twentieth century, such as the Seva Sadan and the Servants of India Society. I also suggest that participation in famine relief in the last quarter of the century was important in broadening the Christian missionary role to include social service activities – agricultural, industrial and medical. For missionaries, famines entailed both ‘exceptional duties’ and ‘exceptional opportunities’ and I argue that famines played a part helping to form what has been called a ‘new missionary order’ by the early twentieth century.¹⁷

Indian Famines and Government Responses

The colonial Government of India saw famines as ‘events’ rather than ‘structures’ or ‘processes’ as they are now more widely understood¹⁸. This enabled colonial administrators to treat famines as exceptional episodes, sharply differentiated from ongoing scarcity. While Indian famines were for those affected periods of extreme distress marked by unusual mortality, the boundaries

¹³ David Arnold, ‘Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague 1896-1900’ in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies V Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi, OUP, 1987) pp55-90; See also David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993)

¹⁴ Carey Watt, *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association, and Citizenship in Colonial India* (New Delhi, OUP, 2005); Gwilym Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda’s Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (New Delhi, OUP, 2006)

¹⁵ For a list of Indian social service organisations formed between 1897-1918 see Watt, *Serving the Nation* pp208-210

¹⁶ For a contemporary account see Charles Richard Henderson, *Modern Methods of Charity: An account of the systems of relief, public and private in the principal countries having modern methods* (New York, Macmillan, 1904); on Russia see Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996); On Germany see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, OUP, 1984); On the USA see Peter Dobkin Hall, *Inventing the Non-profit Sector and Other Essays on Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Nonprofit Organizations* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); and Robert H. Bremner, ‘“Scientific Philanthropy”, 1873-93’ in Frank R. Breul and Steven J. Diner (eds.) *Compassion and Responsibility: Readings in the History of Social Welfare Policy in the United States* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980) pp197-202

¹⁷ Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion 1700-1914* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004) p313

¹⁸ See David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crises and Historical Change* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988); David Hall-Matthews, *Peasants, Famine and the State in Colonial Western India* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

dividing famine from 'ordinary' times were blurred¹⁹. Famine-affected people perceived famine as a process which may have resulted in widespread death, whereas for government administrators it was increased mortality which indicated the start of famine.²⁰ By the late nineteenth century the British administration had created codified criteria that enabled district officers to distinguish 'famines' from 'scarcity' and begin the emergency operation that was aimed at containing large scale mortality²¹. Famines were defined as primarily work-famines caused by drought-induced crop failure, with only rarely an absolute failure of food supplies in the bazaars. Treating famines as 'events' allowed the British to sanction relief measures that were understood as exceptional breaks with ordinary administration. Interference in the labour market was acceptable for finite periods of extreme distress as long as numbers on public works were kept as low as possible. Gratuitous relief of those unable to labour in no way constituted an acceptance of state responsibility for the poor, sick or disabled in 'ordinary' times.

Pre-British rulers of India had accepted responsibility for supporting famine-affected populations by banning food exports from famine-affected regions and fixing grain prices.²² In the early decades of British rule the East India Company continued with some of these relief methods.²³ However, by the early nineteenth century ideas of free-trade were becoming influential with Indian administrators and Adam Smith's strictures on non-interference in the grain trade began to be observed. Until 1877 provincial Governments were responsible for their own famine administration and followed strict principles of non-interference with trade and offered relief only in exchange for labour. Those unable to work were left to the care of charity.²⁴ Following the disastrous relief campaign in Orissa in 1866, in which one third of the population died, provincial Governments began to accept greater responsibility for saving life. Successful relief policy in Bengal in 1874 proved the ability of the colonial state to prevent mass mortality, but the cost proved too high for the administration to consider repeating. The overwhelming fear of the Government of India, influenced by political economy and Malthusian theory, was that over-generous relief would 'pauperise' the people and leave millions dependent on the state for support.²⁵

In 1877, inspired by a determination not to repeat the 'extravagance' of 1874, the Government of India moved to centralise famine administration. Sir John Strachey, the architect of centralised famine policy, believed 'it is better, although it seems hard to say so, that we should give somewhat too little than too much'²⁶. Government relief in South India in 1877 reached just ten per cent of those whose lives were in danger and was unable to prevent six million deaths. Such high mortality led to the introduction of famine codes in each province, which were to be severely tested in the famines of the 1890s. Numbers on state relief at the height of the 1896-7 famine were four million out of an affected population of forty million. An increasing percentage of aid was given as 'gratuitous relief', that is not in exchange for work, amounting to 42% in 1896-7²⁷. The 1898 Famine Commission strongly criticised certain provincial Governments for deviating too far from the provisions of the famine codes: in several cases rations were reduced

¹⁹ Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001)

²⁰ Stephen Devereux, *Theories of Famine* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) p18

²¹ For example Famine Code, Madras Presidency; for a discussion of relief paradigms see Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989) p67

²² S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India* (Cambridge, CUP, 1978) p63

²³ Kate Currie, 'British colonial policy and famines: some effects and implications of "free trade" in the Bombay, Bengal and Madras Presidencies, 1860-1900 in *South Asia* 15 (2) 1991 pp23-56 p27

²⁴ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880 (London, HSMO, 1880) Part I p12

²⁵ D. Hall Matthews, 'The Historical roots of Famine Relief Paradigms: Ideas of Dependency and Free Trade in India in the 1870s' in *Disasters* 20 (3) 1996 p217

²⁶ Strachey quoted in J.C. Geddes, *Administrative Experience Recorded in Former Famines: Extracts from Official Papers* (Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Press, 1874) p17

²⁷ Bhatia p276.

and relief works opened belatedly²⁸. However the next famine broke before the recommendations of the Famine Commission could be fully implemented and before famine codes were revised. The population on government relief at the height of the famine in July 1900 was 6.5 million.²⁹ Expenditure was greater than in any previous famine at around ten million pounds sterling.³⁰ Despite this extension of aid, in some districts such as Gujurat, the relief machinery broke-down completely. Recorded deaths in 1900 were double the decennial average.³¹ Government relief was further extended in subsequent famines in the early twentieth century, although these did not match the severity of the 1896-7 and 1900 famines.

Voluntary Famine Relief

Voluntary agency developed a range of responses to famine hunger and destitution in nineteenth century India. David Arnold has suggested that people living with fear of famine evolve social and cultural practices to militate against hunger³². In India these included the caste system, the joint family and patron-client relationships. However, this moral economy of the poor could break down in the face of severe hardship and scarcity. In such times wealthy landowners or merchants sometimes assumed responsibilities for providing charitable relief to the poor, either in the form of work on their estates or doles of food.³³ For Hindus, feeding the poor in times of scarcity was *dharma*, a religious duty. However traditional forms of indigenous relief came under attack with the extension of British rule in the early nineteenth century.³⁴ Indiscriminate relief was held to encourage pauperism. Indians were encouraged to organise famine relief along British lines, by forming committees to investigate individual cases and introduce tests of need before distributing relief. Typical of this attitude were the views of Justice Turner, a member of the Central Committee of the 1869 Relief Fund in the North West Provinces. Praising Indians who contributed to the relief fund, he hoped this example would induce their countrymen 'to restrain within proper bounds or to distribute through legitimate channels, the liberality which is productive almost of as much harm as benefit to the community.'³⁵ Famine relief committees were organised in every famine after the 1837-8 North Indian famine, when relief committees were formed in the affected towns of Cawnpore, Agra and Farrukhabad.³⁶ A report on the 1861 famine in North India notes that the 'helpless poor were rightly the charge of European and Native community and the organisations for their relief were formed exclusively on the basis of voluntary and non-official efforts'.³⁷

1861 was the first famine in which large subscriptions were raised in Britain for the relief of their 'fellow subjects' in India: roughly £150,000 was collected by the Mansion House Fund in London³⁸.

In 1877 Lord Lytton was eventually forced to sanction the existence of the Madras relief fund. An extraordinary *Gazette of India*, rushed to print in September to protect the Viceroy's reputation and offset growing criticism of Government, stated: 'Lord Lytton is very far from

²⁸ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898 (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1898)

²⁹ Report of Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p59

³⁰ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1901 (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1901) p8

³¹ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1901 (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1901) p73

³² Arnold, *Famine* p80

³³ Douglas E. Haynes, 'From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western City' *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (2) 1987

³⁴ For a discussion see Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State*, pp171-192

³⁵ *Report on the Operations of the Central Committee Famine Relief Fund, North West Provinces* (Allahabad, Government Press, 1870) p40

³⁶ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880 Part I p11

³⁷ Col R. Baird Smith, *Report on the Famine of 1860-1* Vol I (IOR/v/27/860/18)

³⁸ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880 Part III p39

desiring to impede the flow of private charity'.³⁹ The Gazette also announced Lytton's personal donation of 10,000 rupees (£1000) to the Fund, a gesture which Lytton admitted privately he made with 'an ill will'.⁴⁰ The fund eventually totalled £700,000, a sum five times greater than any previous appeal. However until December 1877 Lytton continued to describe the Fund as 'a complete nuisance' and to issue dire warnings that all the money would be wasted because 'the Committee...is quite irresponsible'.⁴¹ In appealing for public subscriptions the 1877 Madras Relief Fund constituted a threat to the colonial state's legitimacy by demonstrating the inadequacy of relief measures and questioning government commitment to preventing mass mortality. Lytton believed that having accepted responsibility for saving life the Government should be left to pursue relief, safe from the 'humanitarian humbugs' who might be jeopardise the cost saving approach.⁴² In January 1877 he had written to Sir Louis Mallet of the India Office, 'I anxiously hope that you will not encourage any humanitarian hysterics in England about this famine'.⁴³ Over the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century the Government had accepted increasing responsibility for famine relief and by 1877 the state could not be seen to rely on voluntary agency or charitable donations. Lytton would never admit that voluntary aid might have helped save lives. In a speech in the Legislative council in December 1877 he argued that the 'generous charity of the British nation' had contributed simply to the mitigation of suffering in 1877 and not to the preservation of life, since 'for that object it was not applied and for that object it could not have been legitimately invoked'.⁴⁴ Such views were countered by the organisers of the relief funds. Sir William Robinson, Chair of the Madras Relief Committee, commented in a response to the Famine Commission that 'a very considerable portion' had been spent on saving life in 1877.⁴⁵

A series of official letters between Lytton and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Cranbrook, in 1877-8, laid down the new Government policy on voluntary famine relief.⁴⁶ In future famines an international appeal could be made only with the approval of the Viceroy in Council and the Viceroy would be responsible for defining the legitimate objects of charitable relief and for controlling the voluntary agency which administered the relief. The Famine Commissioners in 1880 endorsed the view of charitable relief as solely supplementary to Government relief programme and the necessity for measures to control charity. The report confirmed the prevailing British view of indigenous charity, which 'may become a serious evil unless it can be brought under systematic control'.⁴⁷ The Commissioners argued that once the Government programme was in place the 'public distribution of alms to unknown applicants should be discouraged and if possibly entirely stopped'.⁴⁸ In the next severe famine in 1896, these new rules allowed the administration to delay the opening of an international appeal for four months from October 1896, when Viceroy received the first requests, until January 1897, when public feeling could no longer be ignored.⁴⁹ In 1897 the Government defined the legitimate objects of charitable relief as: (1) supplementing Government rations for the aged, infirm and children; (2) supporting orphans; (3) 'relieving the numerous poor but respectable persons who will endure almost any privation rather than apply for Government relief'; (4) 'in restoring to their original position those who have lost their all in the famine, and in giving them a fresh start in life'.⁵⁰

³⁹ *Gazette of India Extraordinary*, Calcutta, September 1877

⁴⁰ Lytton to Queen Victoria, Simla, October 11 1877 (Lytton Collection)

⁴¹ Lytton to Lord George Hamilton, Simla, October 11 1877; Lytton to Earl of Beaconsfield, Calcutta, December 20 1877 (Lytton Collection)

⁴² Lytton to Sir Fitzjames Stephen, March 7th 1877 (Lytton Collection)

⁴³ Lytton to Mallet, Benares, January 11th 1877 (Lytton Collection)

⁴⁴ 'Speech by His Excellency Lord Lytton on 27 December 1877' in *The Indian Famine of 1877* (London, C. Kegan Paul and Co, 1878) p72

⁴⁵ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880 Part II p354

⁴⁶ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898 p306

⁴⁷ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880 Part I

⁴⁸ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880 Part I p60

⁴⁹ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I pp3-4; See also Elgin Collection Telegrams 1897 [IOR/MSS/EUR/F84/20]

⁵⁰ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 pp6-7

Volunteer agency

The second part of this paper will concentrate on voluntary famine relief in the 1890s. Indian famine funds from 1877 to 1900 collected record sums of money in Britain and throughout the British world. Donations were sent to the Mansion House in London and forwarded to a central committee in Calcutta. The 1897 appeal was the 'largest amount that had ever been collected anywhere' according to the then Lord Mayor, and totalled £1.7 million.⁵¹ In 1900, despite poor expectations because of the South African War, the total collected was still more than one million.⁵² Famine relief funds were causes with which the rich and famous of the day wished to have their names associated, via the *Times* subscription lists and fundraising events both in India and Britain. For example, best-selling author Arthur Conan Doyle read from his latest work at an event in aid of the 1897 fund. Funds also prompted new forms of corporate philanthropy. In 1897 and 1900 several large firms sent gifts-in-kind including Mellin's Food, Meaby's biscuits and First Swiss Alpine Milk Exporting Co⁵³. Money was also raised within India from the non-official classes such as army regiments, factories, railways, tea-gardens, colleges, Masonic institutions and churches⁵⁴. Not surprisingly the largest contributions came from Britain but money was donated all over the British world, particularly in Australia, New Zealand and Canada⁵⁵. American contributions to Indian famine relief tended to be channelled through missionary societies rather than the Mansion House funds. In 1900 upwards of £250,000 was sent directly to missionary groups in India.⁵⁶ A celebrated incident of 1897 was a ship of American grain and beans sent to India by readers of the New York based *Christian Herald*.⁵⁷

Thousands of volunteers came forward to serve on hundreds of committees in India for distributing money raised through the international appeals.⁵⁸ The Vice-President of the 1897 central committee believed that the Fund's strength consisted in enlisting 'a vast amount of voluntary agency, which Government could not command.'⁵⁹ In 1897 and 1900 relief funds were organised hierarchically with 11 provincial committees co-ordinated by a central committee in Calcutta. Each provincial committee had between 17 and 36 district committees, which in turn had several local committees. Membership of a famine relief committee was also a badge of status in the colonial world and a way to earn the honours and titles of the imperial chivalric orders⁶⁰. It was important that all communities and religious groups be represented to maximise fundraising potential. The general committees of the relief funds of 1897 and 1900 included over 300 names although in reality these committees never met and were simply a device to recognise large donors and to associate the great and the good with the fund. In both years executive committees did all the work, meeting several times a month.⁶¹ In 1897 the executive committee was chaired by the Chief Justice of Bengal and included high ranking British civil servants, eight Indian representatives and six representatives of the European non-official class, including the master of the Calcutta Trades Association, the Archdeacon of Calcutta; the manager of the Eastern Bengal State Railway and the chair of the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce. The actual investigation and distribution of relief was done by the district and local committees. The report of the 1897 fund gives a picture of typical district committees:

⁵¹ *The Times*, Tuesday May 18 1897 p11; Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 p87

⁵² Mike Davis is mistaken when he says in 1900 the money raised for the famine in India amounted to only 7% of the sum raised by the Mansion House for the Boer War.

⁵³ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p7

⁵⁴ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p7

⁵⁵ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 pp73-74

⁵⁶ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p14

⁵⁷ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p116

⁵⁸ See William Digby, *Famine Campaign* Vol II p87; Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897

⁵⁹ James, *Notes on Tour* p33

⁶⁰ See David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London, Penguin, 2002) for a discussion of the imperial system of honours.

⁶¹ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p116

*On these various committees most of the influential men of the neighbourhood found a seat: a large majority were non-officials, and, besides officials they included European planters, lawyers and doctors, native gentlemen and zamindars, pleaders, bankers, school masters and in short all who could assist in what was universally recognised as a work of real benevolence.*⁶²

The careful composition of relief committees highlights underlying tensions not just between the British and Indians, but among the European population resident in India. The 1877 relief fund was criticised for having too many Europeans on committees. Conscious of this, at the first meeting of the Madras Provincial Committee in 1897 it was decided to create a 'model committee' with a good mix of Indian and European, official and non-official. To achieve this balance six more Indians were voted on.⁶³ Only rarely were provincial or district committees chaired by Indians - although Indians were better represented in the bodies of committees and at local level. B. K. Bose a Government Advocate was the Secretary of the Central Provinces Provincial Committee and later rewarded for this service with membership of the 1898 Famine Commission.⁶⁴ The majority of committee members were non-officials, although officials tended to take on leadership roles. The place of missionaries on famine relief committees was, according to the President of the North West Provinces Provincial Committee, Sir John Edge, 'very delicate'⁶⁵. Most provincial and district committees had at least one missionary member. In some rural areas where there were few well-off Indians or other Europeans, missionaries virtually ran relief provision. In 1877, most of the LMS European missionaries working in famine affected areas of South India served on local or district committees as did Indian pastors and, more controversially, other Indians loosely connected with missions⁶⁶. In November 1877 the Madras Executive Committee were forced to issue a confidential circular requesting that, to avoid sectarian tension, individuals connected with missions other than Europeans or Indian clergy should not serve on committees nor have anything to do with distributing funds⁶⁷.

Missionaries and British civil servants were sometimes suspicious of the Hindu and Muslim members of the committees on which they served. The main complaint voiced by missionaries was that they were not allowed a greater part in distributing what they saw as money donated by Christian people⁶⁸. Most committees had a majority membership of non-Christians and in some cases, especially in North India, missionaries felt they were deliberately prevented from joining committees⁶⁹. The Rev J. P. Haythornthwaite suggested missionaries in the North West Provinces in 1897 had been 'entirely ignored' and described it as an 'injustice' that the committees were mostly composed of wealthy natives and officials.⁷⁰ Although some missionaries enjoyed serving along-side Hindus and Muslims, citing the 'pleasant relationships' that were formed, many suspected they were more likely to vote aid to co-religionists than to poor Christians.⁷¹ Missionaries also hinted that money would be misappropriated. As Rebecca Parker wrote from Benares in 1897:

'Friends who give money to the [London Missionary Society] Relief Fund may have the comfort of feeling that it all reaches the people for whom it is intended. Unfortunately

⁶² Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol II p258

⁶³ Report of Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897, Vol II p389

⁶⁴ Sir C. J. Lyall to Elgin, Nagpur, November 20, 1897 [Elgin Collection]

⁶⁵ James, *Notes on Tour* p4

⁶⁶ T. E Slater to Foreign Secretary, 3 November 1877, [CWM/LMS Incoming Letters South India - Tamil Box 16 1875-1880]

⁶⁷ Circular from Secretary of Madras Famine Relief Fund, 27 November 1877

⁶⁸ Cambridge Mission to Delhi, *The 20th Annual Report with Letters from the Missionaries 1898* (Cambridge, University Press, 1898) p34

⁶⁹ Appendix to the report of the Indian Famine Commission 1898 Minutes of Evidence, etc (v/4/session1899vol32) p177

⁷⁰ J.P. Haythornthwaite, 'A brief account of the famine of 1897 in the North West Provinces of India' in *Indian Evangelical Review*, 26, October 1899 pp206-8

⁷¹ Cambridge Mission to Delhi, *The 20th Annual Report* p34

*this is not the case with a good deal of money that has been sent through other channels to famine relief.*⁷²

Missionaries also found the committee structure frustrating and slow: relief funds were generally not started until the height of a famine, by which point they might have been engaged in relief work for many months. Therefore, even in the age of large famine funds, missionaries continued to appeal to Home Committees and directly to the Christian public in Britain or America for money to fund their relief work independently of the relief committees – actions not appreciated by the Government of India. As Lord George Hamilton wrote to Elgin in 1897:

*'I am getting thoroughly out of temper with the Missionaries and their misleading reports to their friends at home. They lose no opportunity of decrying the efforts of the Government, and insinuate that the funds of the Famine Relief are misused, squandered, and, in some cases, appropriated by those supervising them.'*⁷³

Volunteers on relief committees were overwhelmingly male and references to women's involvement in voluntary famine relief are rare in both non-governmental and official sources. Reports include several references to women working in association with famine relief committees but do not suggest that female missionaries were formal committee members. I have only found one reference to a woman serving on a famine relief committee. Miss Harvey was a missionary with the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission (ZBMM) in Nasik, Western India, who was asked to join the Nasik Famine Relief Committee in 1897 because the male members were not able to visit zenana women⁷⁴. That Miss Harvey was asked to serve on a committee reflects her position in a woman-only mission; spaces on committees offered to missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Church Missionary Society (CMS), for instance, were usually filled by male colleagues. Lack of opportunities to take up formal committee roles does not mean that women did not become involved in famine relief work. In at least one district, Broach, in the Bombay Presidency, women formed their own relief organisation in 1900, independent of the local famine relief fund. A meeting was attended by 250 'respectable ladies' and an association started to relieve the women and children of the district. The committee was run entirely by Hindu, Parsi and European women and about 8500 women and children received help.⁷⁵

Participation in voluntary famine relief in the 1890s marks a transition from traditional religious philanthropy to organised social service. Although many of those involved in famine relief continued to justify their activities by appealing to religious traditions and imagery - both Christian and Hindu - the nature and scale of famine relief in the 1890s is evidence of a shift to organised social service. As in other areas of the world, the late nineteenth century India was marked by the growth of an associational culture, fuelled by the expansion of the press, the adoption of the British model of voluntary organisation, and the emergence of national political organisations.⁷⁶ In the late nineteenth century a wide range of voluntary associations flourished in Indian towns and cities 'in which men were bound together by choice and the perception of shared interests rather than ascribed status.'⁷⁷ New types of voluntary association which emerged in India include caste *sabhas*, student clubs, cow protection societies and chambers of commerce. Secular organisations like the Indian Association (in Bengal) and the Bombay Association emerged to represent the privileged, educated elite. Membership of such

⁷² Rebecca Parker to Acting Foreign Secretary, March 25 1897 [CWM/LMS Incoming Letters North India – United Provinces Box15b 1895-1897]

⁷³ George Hamilton to Elgin, London, April 9 1897 [Elgin Collection]

⁷⁴ 46th Annual Report of the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission or Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society for the year ending 1897 p35

⁷⁵ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p113

⁷⁶ Nicholas Owen 'British Progressives and Civil Society in India, 1905-1914' in Jose Harris (ed.) *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, OUP, 2003); Barbara and Thomas Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002)

⁷⁷ Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of the Asian Democracy* (Oxford, OUP, 1985) p164

associations was largely restricted an urban, educated, male elite. Nevertheless in Indian towns and cities Nicholas Owen describes a 'flowering of civil society on a very significant scale...an intense, localized mix of professional association, civic debate and political instruction.'⁷⁸ As Kenneth Jones has written of the Punjab, 'the voluntary association with its annual gatherings, officers, executive committees, reports, proceedings and budgets was adapted directly'.⁷⁹ This growth of voluntary associations was also a feature of other countries such as the USA, Russia, Germany, France and the UK and was followed by the establishment of national conferences of charities: for example in the USA in 1874 and in Germany in 1880. The level of interest in 'modern' forms of charity and social service stimulated a desire for international exchange of theory and practice through international conferences and meetings. International exchange was facilitated by improvements in communication and transport, particularly the improvements in the telegraph and postal service and the international press. The first international congress of public and private charity met in Paris in 1889 with delegates from all European countries and was held subsequently in Geneva, in Paris again in 1900 and in Milan in 1905.⁸⁰ The 1900 Paris congress was attended by over a thousand delegates, including representatives from Britain, Italy, Russia, Germany, the USA, Japan, Peru, Siam, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Paraguay.⁸¹

There is ongoing debate about the extent to which the emergence of modern social service in India was due to Western and specifically Christian influence. Contemporary British writers were quick to draw attention to the growth of social service in India and to ascribe this enthusiasm to the developing ideas of Indian nationhood. C. F. Andrews described young men 'eager to take their share in acts of sacrifice and service'.⁸² The enthusiasm for social service was also commented upon by travellers such as Samuel and Henrietta Barnett (who spent three months in India in 1890) and by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (who did the Barnett's journey in reverse in 1911).⁸³ Many Western commentators noted Western influence. In his book on *Modern Religious Movements*, J. N. Farquhar described social service movements as imitative of Christian missionary methods and terminology, especially those of the YMCA and the Salvation Army. For example, he cited the use of the word 'mission' and the formation of Young Men's Associations, whether Hindu or Jain or Buddhist.⁸⁴ Many of these comments relate to the early twentieth century, after the formation of new social service organisations in India and following what I see as the crucial decade of the 1890s. The famine and plague crises of the late 1890s may be viewed as catalysts for practical social service. Activities such as feeding the hungry, understood as charitable within Hindu *dharma*, were transformed into 'social service' activities that required organisation, fundraising and co-operation with other agencies.⁸⁵ For some Indians this service (*seva*) was channelled through famine relief committees while for others it took place in indigenous organisations such as the Ayya Samaj or Ramakrishna Mission - in both organisations organised service dates from the 1896-7 famine. However, participation in famine relief, even on Western-style committees, was one way to show continuity with older Hindu charitable traditions, in which a gift of food to the poor and hungry was especially meaningful

⁷⁸ Owen, 'British Progressives' p152

⁷⁹ Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976) pp318-9

⁸⁰ *Recueil des Travaux du Congrès International d'assistance Publique et de Bienfaisance Privée*, 30 July - 5 August 1900 p9, p15 (Paris, 1900); Henderson, *Modern Methods*, p529 suggests that an international conference met first in 1855 with delegates from European countries although this is not mentioned in the Paris report.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Vol 1 pLXXXVII;

⁸² See C.F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India: Its missionary aspect* (London, CMS, 1912)

⁸³ See George Feaver (ed.), *The Webbs in Asia: The 1911-1912 Travel Diary* (London, LSE, 1992); 'Our journey round the world' LMA F/BAR/559. The Barnetts' travel diary took the form of letters written by Samuel to his brother in Bristol, with additional comments by Henrietta. The collection was compiled by Henrietta who seems to have thought of publication; Some of Henrietta's secretary and companion Marian Patterson's typescript diaries are also preserved LMA/4063/005.

⁸⁴ J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1915) p444

⁸⁵ Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service* p177

and meritorious.⁸⁶ Moreover, famine relief activities in the 1890s provided explicit opportunities for Christian missionaries to care for bodies as well as souls: work in feeding, nursing and clothing the hungry was welcomed by missionaries as a demonstration of 'practical Christianity'. The high level of involvement famine relief contributed to a redefining of missionary service that was noted at the Ecumenical Missionary Conference which met in New York in April 1900 and devoted two days to questions on the 'General Philanthropy of Missions'⁸⁷.

Voluntary agency evolved a range of responses to famine hunger in India which I will briefly discuss under four headings.

1. Feeding

Dealing with famine hunger through provision of cooked and uncooked food was common to all voluntary relief efforts. In contrast to indigenous practices of charitable food distribution, relief committees after 1837 experimented with new ways of governing hunger; systems which privileged discipline and strict tests of need and drew heavily on the English poor laws for their theoretical underpinning. The first recorded mention of a 'poor-house' was in 1837 when the Farrukabad committee built a feeding centre with a wall around it. The Morabad Relief Committee in the famine of 1860-1 developed a poor house system which was subsequently implemented by relief committees throughout India. Characteristic of the system was careful selection of recipients, discipline, routine, compulsory residence, provision only of cooked food and compulsory work for those who were able. Guards were posted by the latrines to prevent paupers escaping. Such strict discipline and compulsory residence were tests of need designed to exclude the 'professional beggar' but were also social control measures aimed at restricting the tendency of the poor to wander in search of food. The rituals of the Jhansie Poor House in the North West Provinces in 1869 are described here. The poor were fed once a day at 5pm:

*'All the inmates were collected, counted and arranged in long rows of 100 each, marked off and divided by stakes and ropes. Between these lines passed the mates carrying freshly cooked chupatees and dal, which were distributed under the surveillance of a member of the Committee; none were allowed to rise until all had been served. At night all were again told off to their proper quarters, where they were required to stay...until dawn.'*⁸⁸

Volunteers' reports show that the intended recipients of this relief were sometimes deeply suspicious of poor houses and reluctant to attend. For example B. N. Singh reported that rumours were spreading that those fed in the Azimgarh poor-house 'were being maintained for the purpose of extracting oil from their bodies by pressing them in an oil machine.'⁸⁹ When a children's feeding centre at Garwi in Bundelkhand was fenced and roofed to prevent children running away to the works the rumour spread that all children would be transported to Mauritius where Government wanted colonists⁹⁰.

In the famines of 1897 and 1900 voluntary relief committees were restricted by the government rules to providing food of a supplementary nature only. However other voluntary agencies were able to continue providing food to the hungry. Wealthy grain merchants in Bhiwani, Punjab opened a private poor house which was feeding 100 residents a day in March 1897.⁹¹ In 1897 feeding the hungry formed the first expression of organised *seva* by the Ramakrishna Mission

⁸⁶ On religious giving and duty in South Asia see Leona Anderson, 'Generosity of Householders, Generosity of Kings: Situating Philanthropy in South Asia' in Soma Hewa and Philo Hove (eds.) *Philanthropy and Cultural Context: Western Philanthropy in South, East, and Southeast Asia in the 20th Century* (Lanham, MA, University Press of America, 1997) pp185-202 p190

⁸⁷ *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York 1900* (London and New York, Religious Tract Society, 1900)

⁸⁸ Frederick Henvey, *A Narrative of the Drought and Famine which Prevailed in the North West Provinces during the years 1868, 1869 and 1870* (Allahabad, Government Press NWP 1871) plxiv

⁸⁹ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p31

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol II p515

Association at Murshidabad under the direction of Swami Vivekananda.⁹² To justify famine relief work, missionaries appealed to powerful images of Christ feeding the hungry and caring for the bodies of the poor. As the Benares committee noted when appealing to the LMS home committee for funds in 1896:

*'Our saviour did not disdain to relieve the hunger of those who grew faint in following Him, and to feed the hungry and clothe the naked has been and always will be the first impulse of the Christlike heart'*⁹³.

However missionary responses to famine hunger in India moved beyond traditional Christian charity in the scale and nature of their organisation. By the 1890s missionary famine relief entailed large scale independent fundraising as well as co-operation with famine relief committees and Government. Special missionary funds were used to establish feeding stations in mission compounds for both Christians and non-Christians. For example, Rev. and Mrs Ellwood based at Gorakhpur in the North West Provinces opened a Children's Kitchen where they feed 300 children twice a day in the famine of 1897.⁹⁴ Quaker missionaries working in Hoshangabad in 1897 reported:

*'Our duty was to stay and help the famine stricken people brought to our doors, and in one month of relief we have given food or money to some thousands of people who are aimlessly wandering.'*⁹⁵

Missionaries had to evolve responses to many different forms of famine hardship, for example in remitting school-fees to middle-class parents unable to pay and in providing free school meals for their children.⁹⁶

In general the administrators of charitable famine relief required that work was given in exchange for food where recipients were able-bodied. Some missions, for example, became involved in extensive works programmes which both provided work for the famine-affected and offered the opportunity for improving and extending mission properties and surrounding villages. In 1897 the LMS mission at Cuddapah, one of the worst hit districts of the Madras Presidency, had an ambitious works programme: building or repairing 68 churches and school houses and 39 teachers' houses, building 11 village latrines, digging 14 new wells and repairing 40 old wells.⁹⁷ Miss Clark of the ZBMM station at Malegaon, Western India opened a relief work for women and children remaking paths and drives in the mission compound. Later in the year she rented a hill and employed the poor in grass-cutting⁹⁸. As one LMS missionary noted candidly:

*'In several cases this work was useless or waste of labour from no fault of the Missionary in charge; but the end was gained, those relieved had had to give something in return for their daily food.'*⁹⁹

2. Protecting entitlements

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have argued that effective famine relief is concerned with the protection of 'entitlements', but in colonial famine policy strict tests ensured the recipient of state aid was destitute, having used or sold all assets.¹⁰⁰ Voluntary agency therefore developed ways of helping those affected by famine to preserve entitlements and reduce subsequent vulnerability. This aid was targeted at those just above the class of landless peasants or day

⁹² Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service* p173

⁹³ Benares District Committee to LMS Foreign Secretary, November 12 1896 [CWM/LMS North India - United Provinces Incoming Correspondence Box15b 1895-1897]

⁹⁴ CMS Annual Letters for 1897 p344

⁹⁵ C. W. Pumphrey, *Samuel Baker of Hoshangabad: a sketch of Friends' Missions in India* (London, Headley Brothers, 1900) p167

⁹⁶ London Mission Society Bangalore Mission Report for 1877 p11

⁹⁷ Report of the London Mission, Cuddapah, for the year 1897

⁹⁸ Zenana Bible and Medical Mission Annual Report 1897 p39

⁹⁹ Report of the London Mission, Cuddapah, for the year 1878

¹⁰⁰ Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989)

labourers: 'respectable' classes who would not in ordinary times require charity and were not viewed as fit objects for government aid. The group included artisans, teachers, weavers, goldsmiths, army pensioners, peasant-landowners or tenant farmers, and women living in *pardah*. Yet these classes experienced severe hardship during famines. For peasant-proprietors labouring on public works meant abandoning their land and even if the famine wage kept them from starvation, it would not enable purchase of new seed, bullocks and ploughs. Moreover, the Government would only grant *taccavi* (agricultural loans) on security. Artisans' incomes depended on general prosperity and suffered greatly during times of scarcity. Without private charity, Digby estimated that in 1877, 'many thousands of respectable, though unfortunate, people who might otherwise be helped to regain their position in life would remain permanently ruined and degraded.'¹⁰¹

Over time, an increasing proportion of charitable funds were dedicated to supporting artisans and peasants both through money or food doles during the famine and in grants or gifts towards the end of the famine. In 1897 and 1900 71% of the money raised by the international appeals was spent in this way.¹⁰² Both famine relief committees and missions started schemes to give relief to artisans in their own trades. In Sholapur in 1900 the local relief committee ran a weaver relief scheme which employed 8000 weavers in the city. They constructed 3 weaving sheds for destitute artisans and supplied materials to others in their own homes.¹⁰³ In 1897 Miss Fox, a ZBMM missionary in Lahore, co-ordinated the work of 500 women in their homes¹⁰⁴. Mrs Ellwood, wife of a CMS missionary in Gorakhpur in the North West Provinces, taught Christian women to support themselves by 'open thread work'¹⁰⁵. In many missions similar types of emergency relief developed in the context of famine evolved into ongoing poverty reduction programmes for native Christians. Missionaries recognised as 'one of the blessings of the famine' that such new industries had been started.¹⁰⁶ Managing cheap grain shops was another way to support the 'respectable' classes. For example Virchand Deepchand, a Bombay mill owner, ran a cheap-grain shop in Sholapur for six months in 1897 selling grain at under the market price to almost the whole population of the town.¹⁰⁷ The local relief committee in the city of Bombay created a 'Cheap Fodder Scheme' to subsidise the price of fodder and thus keep cattle alive.¹⁰⁸ Other schemes provided seed, tools, and livestock to peasant farmers at the end of the famine. The 1898 Indian Famine Commissioners considered such aid to be significant, estimating 1.5 million cultivators had been helped by the 1897 Fund. Charitable grants exceeded government *taccavi* by 1,900,000 rupees.¹⁰⁹ H. E. M. James, the vice-president of the 1897 famine fund, suggested 'it is these small *ryots*, men with patches of ancestral land, or even tenants on the same property from time immemorial, whom it is such real charity to raise up again.'¹¹⁰ However this allocation of money was not without controversy, the grants cultivators received increased their ability to pay the land revenue the following year, often an increased sum where land revenues were suspended not remitted.

In Indian famine relief a discourse of respectability that differentiated those in need along class and racial grounds influenced distribution of aid at the local level and reflected the prejudices of committee members. The 'respectable' classes were deemed the most deserving of charity and in addition to special relief schemes, sometimes received higher doles of food or money. In one district in the North West Provinces in 1897 the committee drew up confidential lists of 'highly respectable persons' who received 'a more liberal allowance' than the ordinary labouring

¹⁰¹ Digby, *Famine Campaign* p133

¹⁰² Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p21

¹⁰³ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p97

¹⁰⁴ Zenana Bible and Medical Mission Annual Report 1897 p65

¹⁰⁵ CMS Annual Letter for 1897 p345

¹⁰⁶ CMS Annual Letters for 1897 p345

¹⁰⁷ Lord Sandhurst to Elgin, Poona, October 2nd 1897 [Elgin Collection IOR/MSS/EUR/F84/69 Correspondence with persons in India 1897 Vol II July - Dec 1897]

¹⁰⁸ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p91

¹⁰⁹ Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898 p314

¹¹⁰ James, *Notes on Tour* p10

classes¹¹¹. Observers even claimed physical differences distinguished the respectable: ‘one family of five sat apart, mute and despairing, ashamed to beg...their faces of the type which shewed the respectable if not high caste poor.’¹¹² Volunteers’ reports attest to the unwillingness of members of the respectable classes – Hindu and Muslim – to be seen accepting charity and requesting help only in the last instance. Presenting recipients as deserving was integral to the voluntary relief programme. Special relief was also provided for the European and Eurasian poor, who could not be expected to go to the poor-houses with natives. Some relief to these groups was provided by the relief committees but was more often channelled through already existing ‘Friend-in-Need societies’.

3. Supplementary Relief

Voluntary agencies also carved out a role for themselves in supplementing Government famine relief. The food rations allowed in government run poor-houses, kitchens or village relief, even in 1897 and 1900, were sometimes so small as to endanger life, especially for those already weakened by famine hunger. Although accepting in theory that one meal a day given in government poor houses was ‘sufficient to support life’, charitable relief committees in practice supplemented this ration with additional food such as gruel, rice or vegetables.¹¹³ They also supplied additional nutrition to the most vulnerable through small rations of milk or lime-juice and food supplements like Mellin’s Food, Triticine Food or Bovril. Committees also opened special children’s feeding centres, known as ‘day nurseries’ to feed the most vulnerable, a measure pioneered in the 1877 famine.¹¹⁴ Volunteers reported some prejudice against the use of these supplements; in one case children deserted a feeding centre after rumours spread that they were being poisoned by Mellin’s food.¹¹⁵ The distribution of clothes and blankets was another necessary and symbolic act of charity. The reports of both missions and relief committees show deep concern with the apparent ‘nakedness’ of the famine-affected population¹¹⁶. Elaborate systems were developed to prevent the poor claiming more than one set of new clothes; in some cases new clothes were dyed red or marked while the recipients’ old clothes would be burned in front of those distributing the relief. According to reports of the volunteers, the receipt of clothes was more welcome and was treated with less suspicion by the people than cooked food given in poor houses or money for seed, tools and livestock given to agriculturalists. As Mr Cruickshank reported from Khajua, in the Allahabad division, ‘Their joy and gratitude were worth coming many miles to see, and shouts of “Jai Maharaniji” [victory to the Queen] filled the air’.¹¹⁷

Voluntary agencies also stepped in before government relief programmes began, especially where they were slow to start due to inadequate preparation or misdiagnosed need. In nearly all districts relief committees opened kitchens, poor houses and orphanages before government relief programmes were under way and took charge again when government aid ended. In Ajmer in November 1900 the famine relief committee took over the management of a poorhouse, whose only remaining inmates were the sick and orphans that Government no longer wanted to support.¹¹⁸ Government relief was only started in areas officially declared to be famine tracts, yet there could be great need in other areas. For example in Madras in 1900 Government provided no gratuitous relief and so relief committees opened free kitchens and travellers rest houses in seven districts that were suffering from scarcity.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ James, *Notes on Tour* p15

¹¹² G[eorge] S[mith], *A Fortnight in the Famine Country of Bengal*, March 1874, (Serampore Press, 1874) p17

¹¹³ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 p30

¹¹⁴ Digby, *Famine Campaign* Vol II p442

¹¹⁵ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p33

¹¹⁶ See Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I pp33-6

¹¹⁷ See Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1897 Vol I p34

¹¹⁸ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p270

¹¹⁹ Report of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, 1900 p263

4. Orphanages

Provision for the long-term care of orphans was the responsibility of voluntary agencies. During the famines abandoned or orphaned children were cared for in orphanages attached to the Government poor houses or in private orphanages run by local relief committees, local charity or Christian missions. Care of abandoned or orphaned children was one form of relief that nearly all missionaries in affected districts became involved in to some degree. Around 30,000 orphans were left in the care of missions in 1900 and provided an opportunity for missionaries to diversify into new forms of educational provision, such as industrial training schools. Many of these orphanages were small scale, local activities. Not all mission societies pursued a policy of opening orphanages because of the long-term commitment and cost such work entailed. The South Indian missionaries of the LMS, for instance, had appeals to start permanent orphanages rejected by the Home Committee on the grounds that such work would inevitably prove a disappointment and be a distraction from evangelism.¹²⁰ The famine of 1897 also provided new opportunities for Christian convert Pandita Ramabai, who began taking famine victims into her recently established school for widows in Poona. Plague restrictions forced her to relocate to Kedgoan, 30 miles outside Poona. By 1900 she was housing 2000 women and children on the 100 acre site called 'Mukti' which was to become world-famous as a centre of Christian social service.¹²¹

Inevitably missionary adoption of non-Christian children was highly controversial.¹²² The Arya Samaj ran a successful campaign against such missionary practices in North India in 1896-7 and 1899-1900, appealing to the wider Hindu community for money and support.¹²³ The Arya Samaj Hindu Orphan Relief Association, which began work in February 1897, opened 13 orphanages for 1600 children in the Punjab during the 1899-1900 famine, and provided an industrial education¹²⁴. Famine relief thus provided a route into welfare provision for the Arya Samaj and a practical training in social service for its student members at the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic college in Lahore. The Arya Samaj built on these foundations in the early twentieth century as social service work came to form a more important aspect of its work, especially after the Kangra earthquake in 1905. Likewise the Ramakrishna Mission Association became involved in the longer term care and support of orphans they had rescued during the famines of 1896-7 and 1899-1900¹²⁵.

Voluntary Agency as critic of Government

Volunteers involved in the administration of famine relief contributed to a critique of the famine relief policy of the Government of India. Although officially committed to co-operating with government agents, the administrators of the charitable funds sought to distinguish their relief from that of the Government. On his tour of the famine districts in 1897 H.E.M. James was dismayed that many recipients assumed the relief distributed was from government. Such assumptions undermined what charitable administrators saw as the special nature of the famine relief funds, the expression of sympathy of the British people with India's plight. Members of relief committees continued to assert that their relief was not solely supplementary to government. James stated in 1897:

'However efficient the Government system of gratuitous relief may be, I deliberately believe that, if we had trusted to that alone for the purdanishins, the respectable class,

¹²⁰ Minutes of the Eastern Committee March 14 1878, [CWM/LMS Home India Committee Minutes Box 3 1871-1885]

¹²¹ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, CUP, 1996) p47-8

¹²² Geddes, *Administrative Experience*

¹²³ Jones, *Arya Dharm* pp235-9

¹²⁴ Singh p155-7

¹²⁵ Gwilym Beckerlegge, 'Swami Vivekananda and *Seva*: Taking "Social Service" Seriously' in William Radice (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism* (Delhi, OUP, 1998)

*and the orphans, we should have had, in some places cases of death by actual starvation.'*¹²⁶

While generally supportive of government famine administration, missionaries proved highly critical of some of the details of relief programmes of 1897 and 1900. The Rev Whiteside of the CMS in Western India argued that too few public works were opened. To create more opportunities he employed 300 labourers daily out of CMS funds¹²⁷. The Rev J. P. Haythornthwaite opened private relief work in Agra because those flocking to the city found government relief works and poor houses full.¹²⁸ In an article written at the end of the famine Haythornthwaite questioned government mortality figures and definitions of starvation deaths. Other missionaries were critical of the harsh treatment and exhausting labour on the government relief works and provided alternatives to prevent people resorting to this. Rev W. H. Campbell, working among the Santals in Bengal, deplored the low wages, inadequate tools and the lack of payment on Sundays common to Government works.¹²⁹ J. P. Ellwood described villagers he met as 'too weak to go to the government relief works' and put them to work on the mission's estate doing easier road and building repairs¹³⁰. Missionaries often proved effective lobbyists for the famine-affected, for example writing to Government officers to provide information about the scarcity in their districts and to request relief works were started¹³¹.

Some of those intimately involved in the distribution of voluntary relief offered critiques of government famine relief policy that not only pointed to mistakes made but questioned the fundamental basis on which relief was provided. In 1866 the Secretary of the Madras famine relief fund had questioned the soundness of the principles of political economy driving relief policy and argued that much more should be spent by Government on irrigation works and land improvement¹³². The extension of irrigation schemes on the lines proposed by Sir Arthur Cotton were championed by such figures as William Digby and Florence Nightingale as well as by some missionaries. Fifty missionaries and many non-officials involved in famine relief committees offered their criticisms and suggestions of Government policy in the form of responses to the 1898 Famine Commission.¹³³ Swami Vivekananda drew attention to the inadequacies of the Government's famine relief programmes in his writings and in his public speeches in Chicago in 1893.¹³⁴

Conclusion

One of the effects of the succession of Indian famine funds was to imprint on British minds the image of India as a 'land of famine'. Official reports began to describe India as chronically famine stricken, which relieved the colonial state of any responsibility and turned relief work into a heroic battle with forces beyond their control. Indian nationalists and sympathisers began to blame the increased incidence of famine on British misrule. William Digby, former secretary of the 1877 relief fund, argued in 1901:

¹²⁶ James, *Notes on Tour* p33

¹²⁷ CMS Annual Letters for 1897 p187

¹²⁸ J.P. Haythornthwaite, 'A brief account of the famine of 1897 in the North West Provinces of India' in *Indian Evangelical Review*, 26, October 1899 pp201

¹²⁹ Appendix to the report of the Indian Famine Commission 1898 Minutes of Evidence, etc Vol I Bengal p112-4 [IOR/v/4/session1899vol32]

¹³⁰ CMS Annual Letters for 1897 p334

¹³¹ Appendix to the report of the Indian Famine Commission 1898 Minutes of Evidence, etc Vol II Madras p88

¹³² R. A. Dalzell, *Memorandum on the Madras Famine of 1866* (Madras, Madras Famine Relief Committee, 1867) pp132-148

¹³³ Appendix to the report of the Indian Famine Commission 1898 Minutes of Evidence, etc

¹³⁴ Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service* pp170-180

*'An Indian Famine Relief Fund is now looked upon as always in existence or needing to be in existence', so much so that philanthropic ladies leave money regardless of whether there is declared famine*¹³⁵.

The relief funds cast the British in the perpetual role of benefactor and Indians as permanently holding the begging bowl¹³⁶. The *Daily Mail* urged its readership to contribute to famine funds in terms reflecting this dichotomy: 'If it falls to us to defend our Empire from the spectral armies of hunger...our weapon is good honest British money.'¹³⁷ This contrasting of White agency with Indian passivity helped reinforce the idea of India as the White Man's Burden, as a sphere for the service and sacrifice of British civil servants, philanthropists and missionaries. Such images however jar with the true extent of Indian participation in both official and voluntary relief administration discussed in this paper. Famines presented opportunities as well as challenges for voluntary agency. Participation in voluntary famine relief provided training in organised social service for thousands of Indian and British volunteers in the 1890s and acted as a catalyst in the formation of indigenous social service groups. Likewise many missionaries welcomed the shift in their work from 'enlightening men's minds' to cherishing 'starving and emaciated bodies'.¹³⁸ New mission activities arose directly from famine relief work, including industries to help reduce the poverty of native Christians. Famine relief also engaged students in missionary schools and colleges, as in Government or Ayra Samaj colleges, with fundraising and practical service opportunities.

Often the immediate motivation behind participation in voluntary famine relief was for action in the face of hardship and high mortality: a more or less direct criticism of government responses to famine that contributed to official unease about the voluntary organisation of relief. From the late 1870s the Government of India took on responsibility for defining the 'legitimate' objectives of charity, for sanctioning international appeals, and for overseeing the organisation of volunteers. These control measures suggest the government perceived the voluntary agency, in its varied forms, as potentially seditious and as effective in drawing public attention to the darker side of colonial rule.

¹³⁵ Digby, *'Prosperous' British India* p121

¹³⁶ Arnold, *Famine* p74

¹³⁷ Cited in Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India 1880-1922* (Manchester, MUP, 1922) p75

¹³⁸ T. E. Slater, Report of the work among the educated class of Madras in connection with the LMS 1877 p2

Chapter 3

Modulating a Theoreticist ‘Momentum’¹

Jorge Camacho

Introduction

In a few words, my research project entails a theoretical intervention against recent conceptualisations of historical change emerging from contemporary European philosophy, dominated as they are by the category of ‘event’ as *incorporeal* and *miraculous* transformation, utterly disinterested in the problems of ‘material civilization’ and the long-term horizon of its modifications. Following this perspective, it moves towards an investigation of the challenges posed by the ‘ecological complex’ (specifically urban infrastructures) of our contemporary ‘society of control’ for the prospects of proper and enduring socio-political change. Finally, it explores the fields of urban activism and alternative urbanism looking for instances of political and technological experimentation.

This paper is divided in two parts: In the first one, I attempt to address some issues related to the framework of these seminars—sociological meta-reflection, roughly speaking—perhaps indirectly, and via a somehow odd detour through the problems associated with social constructivism in the study of technology and scientific knowledge. Along with some philosophical issues related to my project, I consider the difficulties that theoretically or philosophically oriented work (like my own research) presents for an exercise in sociological reflexivity. In the second part, I expound precisely the theoretical problems and tensions that animate my project and present a general overview of the direction I have taken following them.

Constructivism and Socio-Theoretical Reflexivity

Recent debates emerging from the field of historical and sociological studies of technology have pointed out to the limitations inherent to the perspective commonly known as ‘social constructivism’.² The specific trait of this perspective is the postulation of a variety of sociological vectors—e.g. relevant social groups, interpretative flexibility, closure mechanisms—that would explain the evolution and final form acquired by a particular technological artefact. From this point of view, the ultimate explanation for the identity or design of such product, or even its technical success, is to be found in the dynamic field of social forces and interests in which it is produced.

Certainly without disregarding the powerful and necessary insights stemming from this perspective, recent commentators have recognized the lacunae left in the path towards this form of sociological reduction. It would be necessary, it seems, to recognize at least two more dimensions for the production of a complete analysis: on the one hand, the obduracy of nature

¹ This is a modified version of a paper presented at the UEL PhD Seminars in January 2007.

² See, for example, Winner, L. (1993); Schulz-Schaeffer, S. *et al.* (2006); Wehling, P. (2006); Bijker, W., T. P. Hughes, *et al.* (1987) and Bijker, W. (1995).

itself as a factor determining the success of technological artefacts, and, on the other, an internal logic of technological evolution, by no means predetermined, linear or teleological, to which new artefacts would also be responding. To take the example of airplanes: it is possible to imagine numerous different designs that would have served the interests of relevant social groups, nevertheless, as one commentator puts it, “due to the laws of aerodynamics, only a few of these designs might actually fly.”³ Thus, from this perspective, the development of technological artefacts would have to be seen as a process that simultaneously responds to social interests and the prerogatives of nature. Moreover, it could be added, the research and development leading to the production of technological artefacts, like airplanes, never starts anew, from scratch, or operates *ex nihilo*. Thus, from this perspective it would be possible to appreciate how the final design of a technological artefact is as much a response to previous designs in an evolutionary line as it is to contemporaneous social forces or natural constraints. This is the dimension widely explored by so-called ‘internalist’ studies of technological history and also found in the more sophisticated morphological analyses of technology developed by Gilbert Simondon. This French philosopher spoke of an evolutionary process of ‘concretisation’ whereby the different parts composing a technological device, in its subsequent instantiations, progressively ‘fall into place’ producing “a convergence of functions within a structural unity.”⁴ Such internal logic of development also plays a central role in the important theory of *technological ‘momentum’* proposed by historian of technology Thomas P. Hughes. Situated in a middle ground between technological determinism and social constructivism, Hughes historical analyses of socio-technical systems (particularly, service utilities) highlight the process by which large and mature systems acquire an inertia that not only allows them to evolve almost autonomously from wider social constraints—that is, according to their internal technical-economic requirements—but also to become more deterministic in relation to the social contexts in which they are embedded.⁵

An analysis of technology that, along all these lines, is equally sensitive to social, natural and intra-technical or ‘morphological’ factors, would be in the position to grasp a veritable ‘machinic phylum’, to borrow a concept from Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical arsenal.⁶ Without a doubt, the most *concretised* version of such perspective, within the sociological field, is the one developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law, among others, under the label of ‘actor-network theory’ (ANT). In a broad sense, two main conceptual innovations can be highlighted from the ANT approach: first, the category of ‘the social’ itself is redefined along the lines of ‘an heterogeneous association of human and nonhuman actors’; and second, following from this, the role of nonhuman ‘natural’ and technical actors—including anything from wind currents to transistors—are explicitly accepted as *explanans* within sociological explanations.⁷ Following these theoretical innovations, it is possible to move from a sociological explanation of technology to an exploration of the technological (or, more precisely, technological) dimension of ‘the social’ itself.

As it will become clear below, the development of such heterogeneous and ‘machinic’ ontology for social and political theory is central within my research project. This is not, however, the only reason why those theoretical problems are being explored in this paper. In a double articulation of sorts, they impinge simultaneously on the actual content of my research *and* the meta-theoretical reflections undertaken upon it (or any other research project) as an intellectual

³ Vincenti, W. (2000).

⁴ Simondon, G. (1989); Schmigden, H. (2005).

⁵ Hughes, T.P. (1994)

⁶ See Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1988), pp. 409-410. Their concept of ‘machinic assemblages’ cuts across the social constructivist/technological determinist divide. For Deleuze, “machines are social before being technical” because technical machines are selected within particular machinic assemblages. See Deleuze, G. (2006), p. 34; also Deleuze, G. (1992).

⁷ See Latour, B. (2005) and Law, J. (1987). Manuel De Landa’s work, drawing from technological and environmental history, as well as from Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, has managed as well to transcend the impasse between determinist and constructivist perspectives and reaching a truly ‘flat’, heterogeneous and machinic ontology for history and the social sciences. See De Landa, M. (1997) and De Landa, M. (2006).

product. The latter means that they seem potentially useful for the exploration of the problems raised during this series of seminars: namely, those related to our position as researchers in a given set of social and institutional conditions.

The somehow unseemingly relationship—which is not simply metaphorical—between the conceptual framework for a study of technology and that used for such exercise in sociological reflexivity might be clarified by recalling that the ‘social construction of technology’ approach (SCOT) was in fact a further extension of the principles behind the so-called ‘strong programme’ in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK): “a perspective which attempts to show that technology, as well as science, can be understood as a social construct.”⁸ Two entailed aspects of this approach are important for the ongoing discussion. First, the aim of such unified social constructivism was to produce a causal explanation of the actual *content* of scientific theories (or technological artefacts) and not simply of the social conditions of their production—thus, it is a sociology of *knowledge* and not simply a sociology of scientists (or engineers) and their research practices. In this sense, the objective was thoroughly of the order of a sociological reduction: “explanations for the genesis, acceptance and rejection of knowledge-claims are sought in the domain of the Social World rather than in the Natural World.”⁹ This aim was to be achieved by means of an ‘empirical programme of relativism’ (EPOR) founded on the principles of *impartiality*—it would study both successful and unsuccessful products or true and false beliefs—and *symmetry*—it would make no distinctions between these two kinds of products regarding the type of explanations deployed to elucidate them.

While it certainly seems possible and necessary to separate the *epistemological* questions regarding the ‘truth’ of a scientific theory from the *sociological* ones regarding its production or acceptance, it is also quite obvious that a radical or naïve application of a programme that attempts to reduce the former to the latter was bound to leave precisely the lacunae already mentioned above—regarding the obduracy of nature and the internal logic of development—and generate a concomitant amount of critical appraisals. For, indeed, is it not obvious or rational to think that, as with technological artefacts, many scientific theories can be compatible with social interests but, according to the actual mechanisms of nature, only some (or, maybe even, just one) of them would actually *work* – that is, produce experimental results, predictions, and so on? Or that—also in a parallel fashion with technological development—scientific or philosophical theories follow each other in a process of *concretisation* and, in certain conditions that would be social and intellectual at once, acquire a certain thrust, a *theoretical ‘momentum’*, that allows them to evolve autonomously from external social determinations?

This kind of philosophical questions, in which I had been interested for a while, reappeared at the moment when the sociological question framing these seminars—the examination of personal, social, and institutional conditions of intellectual production— was presented¹⁰; for I assumed, however wrongly, that the objective of such examination (in its individual and collective dimensions) was the same as that of the particular constructivist framework presented above: to sociologically explain away the content and objective claims of our research projects. My initial reticence was certainly not due to a sort of individualist claim to authorship or a

⁸ Arguably, the seminal paper is Bijker, W. and T. J. Pinch (1984).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

¹⁰ For example, a short hand-out by Prof. Robbins titled “Research Objects and Cultures of Explanation” takes the position of a “non-positivist or, perhaps, constructivist approach to social science”, and raises some questions that would be important for an exercise in sociological reflexivity, grouped in three: 1) those regarding *the object of enquiry* (for example, if one has collected “specific data, in what sense are they objective and not simply objectifications of my subjective orientation?”); 2) my *subjective orientation* (for example, “Am I interested in this phenomenon as a result of dispositions acquired in childhood or in youth – whether defined in terms of class background, religious or moral attitudes, etc? Am I particularly interested in it as a result of my cultural, national, ethnic, gender or age situation? Before starting on my research, was my subjective orientation formed by my studies at school or in my undergraduate studies. Did this acquired objective knowledge in part constitute the self which now relates to the object of research?”); and 3) the *process of transmitting findings* (for example, “how far is my research affected by the structure of the projected field of reception of any findings?”).

positivist claim to unconditioned objectivity, for I indeed recognized that some of the issues regarding the social and institutional context impinged quite directly on the characteristics of my research project. The reservations stemmed more from two specific concerns related to the lacunae mentioned above: in the first place, a general philosophical concern about the epistemological and/or ontological *relativism* obtained by some forms of sociological explanation *vis-à-vis* the concerns of philosophical or scientific *realism*; and, in the second place, a concern (immediately related to my research project) about the problems regarding the explanation of the content of intellectual productions by means of ‘external’ social variables and not in terms of ‘internal’ ones: scientific, philosophical, artistic, and so on.

The first concern—the old philosophical problem of realism—has recently been taken up again, after a long period of disrepute, in some works belonging to the immediate intellectual context influencing my research project. For example, a very recent and influential work by French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux has provided a strong critique of post-Kantian philosophy for its inability to provide an adequate conceptualization of the truth-claims of the natural sciences—particularly those involving statements about the state of the universe pre-dating the emergence of human life (as a transcendental subject)—or, more precisely, for providing a conceptualization which always relapses into one form or another of what he calls *correlationism*—where the object studied is considered a correlate of the knowing mind (or, perhaps we could add, a correlate of a socially determined scientific practice).¹¹ Even closer to and informing directly the framework of my research, the work of Mexican philosopher Manuel DeLanda has also provided a defence of realism in a reconstruction of Deleuze’s ontology informed by contemporary science and, more importantly, in the proposition of ‘assemblage theory’ as a novel—and realist, among other things—social ontology. He writes:

a realist approach to social ontology must assert the autonomy of social entities from the conceptions we have of them [...] that the theories, models and classifications we use to study them may be objectively wrong, that is, they may fail to capture the *real* history and internal dynamics of those entities.¹²

Given that my research is animated by a ‘materialist’ stance that grants full ontological status and causal efficacy not only to human social actors but also to nonhuman ‘natural’ and technical ones, the issue of realism is perhaps more important than it is for other forms of social and cultural research more concerned with problems of the lived experience or construction of meaning. Quite importantly, as I eventually recognized, the actual framework that in these seminars framed the examination of the social conditions of production of intellectual discourses is, unlike the aforementioned constructivist stance, perfectly compatible with a realist ontological and epistemological position. I am referring, of course, to Bourdieu’s framework for a sociological analysis of scientific knowledge that, as he pointed out, combines “a realistic vision of the scientific world with a realist theory of knowledge.”¹³ Stated in very broad terms, Bourdieu’s theory recognizes the possibility of the emergence of a Leibnizian point of “view from nowhere and from everywhere” (i.e. objectivity) that, of course, obtains only under the very specific and autonomous procedures of the scientific field—unique among other fields in that it needs and makes possible “the arbitration of *the real*.”¹⁴

The second concern—the problem of internal logic or momentum—is, as I mentioned before, more immediately relevant for a meta-reflection upon my own research project in the context of the examination proposed during these seminars. It stems from the intuition (which is not only mine and does not apply only to my work) that to really point out all the vectors shaping a

¹¹ See Brassier, R. (2007) and Meillassoux, Q. (2006).

¹² De Landa, 2006, p. 1., emphasis added. See also De Landa, M. (2002).

¹³ Bourdieu, P. (2004), p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70, emphasis added. For ‘Leibnizian point of view’ see p.116.

research project it is necessary to appeal not only to sociologically relevant forces—regarding personal trajectories or the structure and dynamics of the social and institutional context of production and reception—or to the prerogatives that ‘the real’, as object of research, must exert on the development of theories and research practices, but *also* to problems ‘internal’ to the theoretical debate (philosophical or scientific) in which such project is engaged and that may not be reducible to the social context in which it is sustained. In this sense, a research project may be produced as a response to intra-philosophical problems—e.g. problems of conceptualisation, relations and tensions between and within concepts or theories, etc.—, that is, a response to other philosophical positions which may have been put forward under very different socio-historical conditions and yet are situated close enough in a theoretical space of potentials to produce the tensions that warrant their encounter.

This is not only a metaphorical extrapolation of the aforementioned ‘internalist’ framework for the study of technological development. It is, to certain extent, the same problem discussed, for example, by philosopher Imre Lakatos in the context of a discussion of what he called ‘internal’ and ‘external’ histories of science. Taking its cue from Kant’s phrase, Lakatos accepts that philosophy of science would be empty without history (or, we could add, sociology) of science, but these latter, he contends, would be blind without the analysis proper of philosophy of science.¹⁵ According to him, what philosophy provides are not one but many methodologies or criteria for the rational reconstruction of scientific history. The point of Lakatos’ approach, as Reuben Hersh argued, “is to lay bare the inner workings of [scientific] growth and change as a historical process, as a process with its own laws and its own ‘logic’, one which is best understood in its rational reconstruction, of which the actual history is perhaps only a parody.”¹⁶ The question here could be, of course, if other forms of intellectual production are endowed with such internal logic even if, as is the case in the natural sciences not to speak of the social ones or philosophy, they are not formal and formalised as mathematics, one of Lakatos’ main examples. And being this so, one would have to ask also if it is really the case that ‘external’ history, as Lakatos argues, is irrelevant for the understanding of science or, extending his claims, of any form of theoretical production.

This is precisely the position deemed ‘idealist’ by Bourdieu in the context of his theory of intellectual fields of production, formulated as an alternative not only to relativist sociologies, as we saw above, but also to ‘internalist’ analyses in the form of both rationalist history and philosophy of science, and the particular form of structuralist analysis of discourses developed by Foucault. In opposition to the former, Bourdieu rejects any ‘absolutist’ interpretation that posits science developing “according to its own immanent logic.”¹⁷ In relation to Foucault, Bourdieu rejects his insistence to identify the ‘field of strategic possibilities of conceptual games’ only with the ‘discursive field’ itself, thus failing to recognize the relation between the structure of possibilities of the intellectual space and the social conditions of production. “One must assert that,” Bourdieu writes

if the direction of scientific movement (or elsewhere, the literary or artistic movement) is inscribed as a potential state within the field of actual or potential stances—in a space of possibles that the field, at every moment, presents to the researcher—the driving force of this movement resides in the space of objective positions, or more precisely, in the structural homology that obtains between the space of possible stances and the space of social positions.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lakatos, I. (1970).

¹⁶ Hersh, R. (1978). The original reference talks about mathematical growth.

¹⁷ Bourdieu, P. (1991), p. 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 11.

Thus, Bourdieu modifies the opposition between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ analyses. First he asserts, as we saw before, the autonomy and specificity of the scientific field managing to rescue more-or-less trans-historical scientific truths from ‘external’ socio-historical conditions. He then redefines the ‘internal’ dimension of the scientific field—and other fields of cultural production in general—as social and intellectual at once.¹⁹ This concept of field denotes a sort of socio-theoretical system that, in analogy with Hughes’ socio-technical systems, acquires a certain thrust that allows it to develop according to its own ‘tensions’, which are social and theoretical at once (as in Hughes’ case they are social and technical), autonomously from external socio-historical ‘pressures’.²⁰ Finally, however, Bourdieu seems to grant more weight to the social dimension of this socio-theoretical system by saying that even if the movement of development is intellectually guided (“inscribed as a potential state within the field of actual or potential stances”) it is socially driven (“the driving force of this movement resides in the space of objective positions”) or postulating a direct homology between the space of theoretical stances and the field of social positions for which the latter, of course, is ultimately the *explanans*.²¹ Therefore, in the framework of Bourdieu’s sociology of knowledge (which is roughly the one proposed for these seminars), my own research project, animated as it is by the current debate and formulated as a philosophical stance-taking, would be in the last instance explainable in terms of the homologous dynamics of positioning within the academic field.

Whether or not it is possible to perform this homologation in the case of my research (as in any other) remains, I believe, an open question and it is one to which I will not attempt to contribute any answer if not for other reason because of the lack of empirical sociological research taking as its object the immediate academic field framing my own project. In any case, and precisely for the scepticism towards the possibility of finding anything in my personal trajectory or current position within a social and academic field that would provide the elements for such direct homology, it seems necessary to refrain from any *a priori* decision regarding the weight or ultimate determinative role of the factors that would be necessary to include in a possible exercise in socio-theoretical reflexive analysis of my research project. To sum up, those factors I consider relevant according to the ongoing discussion, are: 1) questions regarding the trajectory of the researcher (in this case, me) taken not in terms of a self-grounded subject or author (undermined by all the perspectives just explored) but in terms of the production of a subjectivity or *habitus*, in Bourdieu’s framework, as a bundle of dispositions shaped by vectors belonging to a specific intellectual field and the social field at large; 2) questions regarding the social structure of possible positions, dynamics and procedures specific to a scientific or, in general, intellectual *field* (also in Bourdieu’s sense); 3) strictly *epistemic* questions regarding the structure of the space of potential theoretical stances along with its internal tensions and logic (or, alternatively, taken as an homology of the field); and, 4) questions regarding the obduracy, prerogatives or arbitration of the *ontic* real as the object of research.²²

¹⁹ See, for example, Bourdieu, P. (1989).

²⁰ Bourdieu, P. (2004), p. 47.

²¹ In a rather strange sleight of hand it could be possible to produce a comparison between Bourdieu’s model and the one provided by Deleuze and Guattari. Bourdieu writes, “the present analysis in effect intends to apply the structural (or relational) mode of thinking not only to symbolic systems, as in the so-called structuralist tradition, but also to the social relationships of which the differential uses of these symbolic systems are an *expression*.”, Bourdieu, P. (1991), p. 11, emphasis added. Deleuze and Guattari take from Hjelmslev, the structuralist linguist, the couple *content* and *expression*, which plays a similar role to their couple *machinic assemblage* and *collective assemblage of enunciation*, to account, among many other things, for the production of discourses. In their model, the relationship between the social assemblage (or content) and the assemblage of enunciation (or expression) is conceptualised not as a homology but as an *abstract machine*. Deleuze (2001) proposes the concept of abstract machine as an alternative to Marxist (downward reductionist) and structuralist (homologies) approaches. In *Foucault*, he applies the couple content/expression and the concept of abstract machine/diagram to comment on the *later* work of Foucault, characterised for being more attentive to both non-discursive and discursive practices (another couple isomorphic to those just mentioned). What seems to unite, despite their diverging character, these approaches is a form of, perhaps Spinozian, parallelism, even if for Bourdieu the driving force is always on the side of the social.

²² The couple *epistemic-ontic* is a reference to Roy Bhaskar’s critical realism. See Collier, A. (1994).

It is not worth, in the context of this paper, to produce details about my personal trajectory (class background, etc.) beyond the most relevant ones like my condition of international student or researcher. An important factor that has intensified the characteristics of such condition is my lack of any significant or proper relationship with any academic field in México; this is due to the fact that my entrance into any academic field whatsoever coincided with my geographical displacement into the UK. In the first instance, this may be relevant because in such conjunction of factors I may have failed, unlike other international researchers, to acquire and bring along (for better or worse) a certain dose of scientific or intellectual *habitus* specific to the traditions predominant in my original national setting. Moreover, the condition of international student (certainly in conjunction with the intensifier just mentioned and some other dispositions related to my individual social trajectory) has produced an effect of ‘double-detachment’—also for better or worse. On the one hand, from a set of objective problems arising in the contemporary and critical conjuncture of my home country—social, political, economic, ecological, etc., but also theoretical or philosophical—that I could have approached as possible and necessary objects of research if my postgraduate formation and research would have continued there. On the other hand, from an equivalent set of problems particular to the UK, as my current setting, which are more immediate and thus readily available as possible research objects for those originally or permanently settled here. This effect of ‘double-detachment’ may have situated me in a position that is intellectually prone to follow the theoretical, or maybe *theoreticist* (see below), ‘momentum’ characteristic of the most immediate academic field.

Regarding this field, as I said before, it is not possible to provide here any empirical data to develop properly the first dimension of a socio-theoretical analysis, but a few words could be said, particularly about the second dimension. Institutionally, like all the projects in this collection, my project is situated at the crossroads between cultural studies and social sciences, a situation that in itself constituted one of the concerns framing these seminars: specifically, the alternative between negotiating the differences of these two intellectual practices (specially the methodological ones) philosophically or, in accordance with the Bourdieusian approach, in terms of a socio-analytic encounter between disciplines. Methodologically, my project is situated closer to the cultural studies pole of my institutional setting—or, in fact, cultural theory, which may be seen as a sub-space within the field commonly known as ‘continental’ philosophy—a fact that goes a long way towards explaining the theoretical or, again, *theoreticist* character of my project. For there may be no other field that, more than cultural studies in its diversity of focus and theoretical orientations, has done more to perpetuate that particular *modus operandi* decried by Bourdieu as ‘theoreticist theory’. His definition of “a sort of prophetic or programmatic discourse which originates by dissection and amalgamation of other theories for the sole purpose of confronting other such pure ‘theoreticist theories’ ”²³, captures adequately the implicit methodological premises of that strand of cultural and social theory situated closer to philosophy, in its ‘continental’ mode, than to sociology.

Certainly, an issue of contention with such depreciative characterisation will always be if only those forms of thought firmly grounded on empirical research are the ones truly worth pursuing, or the only capable, in relation to the concerns explored before, of constituting themselves as sciences and, thus, transcending the socio-historical determinations that would render them as *doxa*.²⁴ Regarding this second concern, the question would entail the possibility or not of constructing a consistent and objective form of intellectual or conceptual production that transcends *doxa* without necessarily being subjected to the requirements of the empirical sciences (at least directly) and lacking the purely self-referential consistency of the formal sciences (like mathematics, logic, and some branches of analytical philosophy like ontology). The reference to *doxa* here does not stem only from Bourdieu’s framework but also from

²³ Bourdieu, P. and L. Wacquant (1992), p. 161.

²⁴ Or, in the same vein, if it is in fact possible to produce data to support all the conceptual or theoretical productions that, according to other criteria, are worth pursuing.

Deleuze and Guattari for whom the humanities constituted “a vast doxology.”²⁵ Indeed, for these latter, philosophy is precisely a mode of thought capable of standing firmly in its domain *vis-à-vis* the altogether different distributions of science, logic and *doxa*. However, a different point of tension may be found in their work—whose reception has marked the immediate intellectual field in which my project is situated—regarding the relationship between philosophy and art as different modes of thought. For it is in the wake of their influence—in the boundaries between artistic practice/theory and philosophy—that a specific form of *theoreticism* may acquire ‘momentum’ as a tendency towards a philosophico-aesthetic modernism in which philosophy is explicitly de-coupled from the criteria of scientificity to constitute itself, perhaps implicitly, not according to its own criteria but to those of art, specifically conceptual innovation *per se*—according to a particular, and not the best, interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of philosophy as the ‘*art of creation of concepts*’.

Theoretically, however, my project belongs only minimally to the institutional and theoretical fields just described: it stems as a reaction *against* some of the excesses of contemporary ‘continental’ thought, and is only peripherally connected to the social sciences (although it is this last pole that it aims to approach). It is closer to the fields of history (particularly those ‘materialist’ strands like environmental and technological historical studies, as well as urban history), urban geography, and the kind of works—e.g. Hughes’ LTS, ANT, DeLanda’s assemblage theory and also Deleuze and Guattari’s—that within sociology and philosophy have articulated some of the concerns that are central to this research.

This inter-disciplinary character only complicates even more the task of finding, at least in the scope of this paper, a social field of positions that would be determining the directions the project has taken. Thus, it is at this point that any meta-reflection must give way to a proper ‘internal’ description of the tensions and issues at stake in this research.

Philosophy of Events and the *Longue Durée*

The argument that, in the first instance, animates my research project will appear obvious to almost everyone. That is, to everyone except those acquainted with contemporary European, specifically French, philosophy. It could be summarised as follows: contrary to what recent philosophy of events seems to sustain *not everything can become anything in any moment*—here lies the main intra-philosophical tension. This sentence attempts to encapsulate a number of simple contentions: Events do not irrupt *ex-nihilo*. Events are not all-powerful; they do not create the world anew. Miracles do not exist. History does. Historical conditions *do matter*.

Following this set of obvious contentions comes another argument that may not be so: from all the historical conditions that influence social *and political* becoming, those belonging to what could be called ‘the ecological complex’ may be the ones that *matter* the most, at least in the long term. They present the world in its most *sedimented, long enduring* form. Thus, they provide a limit to what history can produce at any moment: a structure to the virtual field of becoming. They irremediably plunge us into a horizon of long-term transformations.

The perspective thus presented may be economically and adequately rendered, with an old and common term, as a ‘historical materialism’.

What is meant here by ‘philosophy of events’? Contrary to what is generally thought, philosophy *of history* as an attempt to conceptualise the form of change over time is not in and of itself an exercise of the past. What seems to have fallen into disrepute in some of the most advanced philosophical debates in ‘continental’ philosophy is the attempt to conceptualise history as a

²⁵ Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1994), p. 155.

continuous, long-term and not unconditioned *process*. Contemporary conceptualisations have opted, instead, to install in the centre of their models the category of ‘event’, as a radical and unconditioned rupture, sometimes even at the expense of history itself or, at least, at the expense of history in all its dimensions. They circulate exclusively between a universal eternal and the radical singularity that punches a hole in history for the advent of it.²⁶ They locate in the political, and exclusively in the political event, the true gauge of historical change. They reinstate a subject, individual or collective, at the centre of historical movement. I am referring to the recent conceptualisation of history, dominated by the figure of radical events of political subjectivation, influenced mainly by the later works of Antonio Negri, *Empire* and *Multitude*, and the recently translated *Being and Event* of Alain Badiou—this latter being the closest contemporary philosophy has got to a full and radical anti-historicism.²⁷ Although, in view of their many divergences, it may seem strange to couple these two authors together, they will appear much closer from the standpoint developed below: they both interpret modern history as essentially driven by a series of political sequences (the Jacobin revolt, the Paris Commune, the Bolshevik revolution, May ’68 in Paris, etc.), they both attempt to provide a renewed concept of the political subject and the political event.

Negri is not only the well-known Marxist analyst of the recent transformations of capitalism, he is, perhaps more than anything, a revolutionary humanist—in the line of those Renaissance thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa or Pico della Mirandola which affirmed the ontological power of humanity.²⁸ Indeed, these two dimensions are inseparable within his theory of capitalist development. In his most recent work, co-authored with Michael Hardt, Negri provides a singular theory of modernity, “the project of the multitude”, as a long and revolutionary historical movement that has progressively opened up the *possibility* for the *realization* of democracy. This tendency has produced, in the current historical conjuncture, what they call a ‘materialist teleology’—this is their diagnosis of the present. “The possibility of democracy on a global scale is emerging today for the very first time.”²⁹ The contemporary forms of capitalist production (communicative and immaterial labour, cooperation in networks, etc.) and the new sociological composition of the proletariat constitute the infrastructure from which an historical *telos* has been released. Such materialist teleology is conceptualised as a presently actualised but eternal possibility. The *multitude*, as the figure of an ‘autopoietic’ political organization, is simultaneously seen as eternal and universal, as *sub specie aeternitatis*, according to Spinoza’s category, and as a historically determined possibility.³⁰ Given that the present conditions are already pregnant with democratic forms of political and economic production, what is needed, Hardt and Negri seem to argue, is only an event, *kairós*, the singular point or magical stroke that transforms the possible into the real.³¹ There is no talk here about a long-term process and the arduous work of construction that such transformation would require. And thus, they write:

Certainly, there must be a moment when reappropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event. ... This is the founding moment of an earthly city that is strong and distinct from any divine city. ... The only event that we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather the insurgence, of a powerful organization. We do not have any models to offer for this event. ... Only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and

²⁶ To be fair, such characterisation only applies fully to the most radical pole in contemporary philosophy that, nevertheless, many recent works have the tendency to get dangerously close to. And although an analysis of this tendency needs to make justice to the many nuances that these different positions have provided, it must also constantly point to, and perhaps even overstate—as a critical manoeuvre—the problematic features just described. This is so because it is precisely in these features that the generalised appeal of these works resides.

²⁷ Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000), Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2005), Badiou, A. (2006).

²⁸ Hardt and Negri, (2000), p. 71-72.

²⁹ Hardt and Negri, (2005), p. xi.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³¹ See Negri, A. (2004).

determine when and how the possible becomes real.

Badiou, through a very different, in fact, opposite route has equally come to affirm the figure of the 'event'. Following an early period of Maoist-oriented theoretical production in which Badiou's thought still pursued the logic of a necessary historical tendency—roughly, the becoming-thought, -science, and -political subject of the proletariat via the party—what has succeeded is the articulation of a 'subtractive' ontology and conception of politics: subtracted, that is, from history, and subtracted *tout court*.³² Thoroughly disappointed with the meagre possibilities offered by historical movement, his philosophy has become an exploration, an ontological investigation, of the form of radical innovation: the possibility of the historically impossible. Along this route, his thought has driven a wedge between two, and only two, radically disconnected dimensions, utterly foreign to one another: being and non-being, knowledge and truth, objects and subjects, radical stasis (the state of the situation) and abrupt change (the event). The key figure is that of the 'truth procedure', a sequence that entails the irruption of an aleatory and unpredictable event followed by a process in which a subject or subjects declare their fidelity to the truth disclosed: such procedures take the form, in science, of an epistemological break, and, in politics, of a revolution. A truth thus upheld is 'generic', by which Badiou means that it articulates what is available to everyone, what is universal, and thus, we should say, what is eternal.

Let us make no mistake about the important differences between these thinkers. The event in Badiou is not all-powerful but it is radically unconditioned: it irrupts *ex-nihilo*, it is a hole in history. In Hardt and Negri we do find the postulation of a historical tendency, punctuated by political events, that has today created the conditions for a radical event. This event itself, while conditioned by the historical movement, is so powerful and efficient that it constitutes a real break with history: the realization of an eternal possibility. Badiou, on the other hand, knows no belief in such absolute event: according to him, the era of revolutions is over.³³ He writes: "What I call politics is something that can be discerned only in a few, fairly brief, sequences, often quickly overturned, crushed, or diluted by the return of business as usual."³⁴ He knows only 'the situation', which is essentially static, and then the event that, as a radical rupture, changes everything (as Badiou sometimes seems to suggest) or it changes nothing ("the return of business as usual"): in both cases, history is absent.

In this way, a contemporary 'philosophy of events' may be characterised as a tendency to conceptualise historical change in terms of a series of closely related philosophical choices and categories. In the first place, an obvious choice regarding the primacy of politics—of political events and political subjectivation—in the wider stage of historical development. Consequently, the concept of *subject*, as currently developed in the wake of these influences, has come to be constructed as a purely self-grounded act: a break and new start in a line of historical causality. In its turn, the concept of *event* has not only provided this philosophical tendency with its only figure of historical change, but it has also been redefined along the lines of a *miraculous* and *incorporeal* transformation. Miraculous, that is, according to Spinoza's treatment of those instances in which Divine providence is postulated when the natural causes of things are not known: the event understood as a violation of the laws of nature.³⁵ The event as an incorporeal transformation was a theme developed by Deleuze building upon the Stoicist ontological division between corporeals and incorporeals.³⁶ The model here is that of an instantaneous and superficial effect: the event is a temporal 'point', it has no 'extension' in time, it is a discrete 'switch' that transforms something without modifying it. Deleuze and Guattari provide an

³² See Hallward, P. (2003). p. 31-41.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁵ See Spinoza, B. (1997) and Bensaid, D. (2004), p. 98. Interestingly enough, Quentin Meillassoux, a disciple of Badiou, has attempted to go farther than the latter in the line of a rigorous and thoroughly atheist conceptualization of miracles and '*surgissement ex-nihilo*'. See Meillassoux, Q. (2007), also: Meillassoux, Q. (2006).

³⁶ See Deleuze, G. (2004), p. 64. Also: Deleuze G. and F. Guattari (1988), p. 80-87.

example referring to a figure dear to the strand of political thought that we have been exploring. They explain: “Lenin invented or decreed [an] incorporeal transformation that extracted from the proletarian class a vanguard...”³⁷ While in Deleuze the concept of incorporeal transformations mainly refers to the problem of statements and enunciation, it throws a light upon the category of event as constructed by this tendency of thought. We can use the example of another political sequence that figures prominently in these discussions, the French revolution. It can certainly be conceptualised as a radical and unforeseeable rupture with previously unthinkable consequences. As Pierre Goubert writes: “Despite several attempts after 1815, the ‘feudalism’ that was abolished in 1789 was never revived: the age of lords and tithes died that year. This was a significant event.”³⁸ Of course, this singular event, this ‘incorporeal transformation’ that occurred on the night of August 4, expresses only the most salient point and it is intelligible only in reference to many previous and posterior years, even decades, and to a complex set of properly ‘corporeal’ modifications, that is, social, economic, and even ecological, processes which subtended it. As Goubert points out: “What the deputies abandoned had already been lost.”³⁹

Certainly, the contemporary ‘philosophy of events’ hasn’t failed to produce a good deal of critiques along many lines.⁴⁰ In response to some of these critiques, and acknowledging the limitations of his initial model, Badiou writes: “When dealing with issues relating to our collective existence, can we really concern ourselves with exclusively political sequences? Are there not slow evolutions in which the role of institutions, customs, generations—in brief, of the state—is of crucial significance?”⁴¹ It is precisely at this point that, as a critical manoeuvre and in order to construct a path away from the limitations of the conceptualisations just presented, I propose to revisit the debates that gave rise to the historiography or, indeed, philosophy of history, that characterised the so-called *Annales* school.

Already in 1903, the sociologist and economist Francois Simiand wrote an article in which he decried the approach of traditional history by referring to three idols worshiped by historians: “the political idol”, or their concern with political history, the “individual idol”, or their obsession with the deeds of individuals, and, the “chronological idol”, their obsession with origins.⁴² Have not these idols powerfully reappeared—in the forms of political events and subjects—in the ‘philosophy of events’ just explored? Following developments stemming from the social sciences, geography and from within history, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre responded to Simiand’s challenge and initiated a transition that would take history as a discipline away from surface and singularities and into the deep currents of historical development. As Francois Dosse explains:

The *Annales* proposed a wider field for history that, by deserting the political arena, would carry historians’ gaze to other horizons: physical nature, the countryside, population, demographics, exchanges, manners. ‘Thus a material anthropology was formed and the concept of historical materialism was defined.’... Beneath the rejection of politics lay the decision to diminish events to the advantage of long duration, which matched the evolutionary rhythm of historical materialism better.⁴³

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁸ Goubert, P. (1991), p. 190.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁰ See, for example, the articles in Hallward, P. ed. (2004), also Bull, M. (2005) and Callincos, A. (2006).

⁴¹ Badiou, A. (2004), p. 232. In his very recent work *Logiques des Mondes*, which constitutes the second part of *Being and Event*, he now recognizes four figures of transformation: modification, fact, singularity and event. It may be argued, however, that even those four figures, according to the brief definitions offered in this article (*op. cit.* p. 236), still fail to grasp the dimension of historical development that concerns us here.

⁴² Dosse, F. (1994), p. 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Fernand Braudel, a central figure in the *Annales* tradition, took farther than anyone the quarrel against the dominance of the category of *event*—and, for that matter, of political history and individual actors—within the field of historiography. Braudel’s entire historiographical project should be read as a reaction against what he used to call (following Simiand and Paul Lacombe): *l’histoire événementielle* or ‘history of events’. Unsatisfied with this framework, not suitable for grasping the complexities of historical explanation, Braudel went on to develop a *stratigraphic* conception of historical development decomposed in three levels or timeframes: on the surface, a history of events or of the short time span, appropriate for political history; below, the history of conjunctures, extending for decades, for the study of social and economic developments; and, on the bottom, the history of structures, a narrative extending over the *longue durée* particularly suited for *geohistory*, the articulation of demographic, ecological and technological variables (material civilization) in socio-historical explanation. This last level was particularly important for Braudel because it allowed him to discover, within each historical period, what he called: ‘the limits of the possible.’⁴⁴ The structures of the Braudelian world, one could argue, are like geological sedimentations that appear almost permanent for its changes occur over long expanses of time. He could not have chosen a better term, long duration or *durée* (etymologically, from the latin *durus*: hard) to encapsulate such concept: *geohistorical* structures are phenomena of ‘hardening’. This linguistic subtlety only serves to better capture the objectively closer relationship between material civilization and the long duration: the primacy of these deep currents in relation to the surface effect of events. It is precisely this dimension what contemporary philosophy, in the tendency explored before, has simply not cared to consider when conceptualising history (for the past and for the future) and postulating the possibility of radical democratising ruptures.

Braudel has not been, of course, the first or the last one to consider the importance of these conditions—the ‘ecological complex’ to borrow a term from the Chicago school of sociology—for the study of social formations. Of great importance for this research project is the field dedicated to the study of large-scale technical systems (LTS), initiated by Thomas P. Hughes—mentioned above. As one commentator argues, this field

revived the sense of enormous societal importance of infrastructures originally touched upon by the *Annales* school in socio-economic history. With Valéry, Bloch and Braudel, Hughes sees electricity supply systems and other ‘large technical systems’ as new, human-made ‘deep structures’ in society. Strongly influencing where and how people live, work, play, and make war, they may have surpassed politics and natural geography in prominence.⁴⁵

Following this set of concerns, the philosopher of technology Langdon Winner has argued for the need to develop a theory of political technology that accounts for the ‘momentum’ of large-scale sociotechnical systems. “At issue”, he argues, “is the claim that the machines, structures, and systems of modern material culture can be accurately judged ... for the ways in which they can embody specific forms of power and authority.”⁴⁶ The idea at stake here is that power—social, political, economic—is truly sedimented or congealed in the large-scale techno-ecological systems that conform the material civilization of the contemporary world. Accordingly, the focus of this research will move into an investigation of the political challenges posed by the state and development of contemporary urban infrastructures, understood in a broad sense. As the urban geographers Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin explain: “Infrastructure networks are involved in sustaining what we might call ‘sociotechnical geometries of power’ in very real—but often

⁴⁴ See Braudel, F. (1981).

⁴⁵ van der Vleuten, E. (2004), p. 399. Also: Hughes, T. P. (1983).

⁴⁶ Winner, L. (1986). pp. 19-39.

very complex—ways.”⁴⁷ The analysis provided by them and other researchers within the field of urban geography allows us to recognize, at the level of material infrastructures, a contemporary logic and mode of power characterised by a sophisticated network of inclusions and exclusions, connections and disconnections, which was adequately conceptualised by Deleuze in terms of a ‘society of control’.⁴⁸

As seen from this perspective, the prospects of true and long-enduring socio-political change certainly cannot be mapped onto the possibility of a radical and ‘incorporeal’ (that is, instantaneous and superficial) political event. This set of concerns not only irremediably plunge us into the horizon of long-term transformations but also force us to look for the appropriate forms of experimentation. In the last section of my research, I will engage with the fields of urban activism and alternative urbanism, specifically with certain organizations like INURA (International Network of Urban Research and Action) or the Camp for Oppositional Architecture, in order to investigate the ways in which they are responding to these challenges which are at once political and technological.

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⁴⁷ Graham, S. and S. Marvin (2001), p. 11.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, G. (1992).

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Chapter 4

Watching disclosures on lifestyle television: the family and shame

Galit Ferguson

An earlier version of this paper was presented in one of the PhD seminars run by Professor Derek Robbins (April 2007). Later versions (closer to this one) were presented at the Big Reveal – First International Conference of Lifestyle Television at the University of Salford (April 2007), and the ‘To Think is to Experiment’ event at the University of East London (May 2007). The paper explores the theme of shame in family-help shows on lifestyle television, suggesting links between these programmes and governmentality, shame and class and also gesturing towards the role of Government in this relationship. A brief analysis of *Honey We’re Killing the Kids* (BBC3) explores the performance of shame in the context of the public visualising of abject families.

In trying to think about ‘ways of watching/witnessing’ so-called help for the family in order to fit in with my PhD’s imagined chapter structure, I kept returning to the issue of shame, which has now become the focal point of this piece. I’ve concentrated here on issues of shame in the context of the public visualising of abject families, and hope to focus on this via a psychosocial perspective.

Internalising Distinctions

Lately there have been a host of television programmes which purport to help the family: *Supernanny*, *House of Tiny Tearaways*, *Honey We’re Killing the Kids*, *Family Brat Camp*, *Brat Camp*, and *Driving Mum and Dad Mad* ... The glut of these family-help shows which fall into the category of lifestyle television points towards a broader cultural phenomenon. This may include governmental efforts to ‘enable’ a governable populace, as well as the workings of ‘governmentality’, alongside often contradictory discourses of help, good parenting, and shame. This paper will think about shame and these shows from a psychosocial perspective, drawing upon sources from psychoanalytic as well as cultural theory. It will also gesture towards the concept of governmentality, taken from Foucault (1991) and developed by others (Rose, 1990; Palmer 2003), as something which depends upon an emphatic internalising of elements which, in the words of Andrew Tolson, “serve[s] to bind the subject ever more tightly into the social order.” (2001,22)

In Samuel Smiles’ 1859 book entitled *Self-Help*, Smiles quotes a so-called ‘old rhyme’: “If everyone would see/ To his own reformation/ How very easily/ You might reform a nation” (1996,178). It seems worth bearing in mind here that the aims of so-called ‘technologies’ of governmentality are not always realised socially or psychically. These family-help programmes, along with the watching of them, can be regarded as sites where these tensions of reformation are played out.

The driving discourse of these programmes seems to be that of self-transformation. The links between a trope of betterment and social class have been illuminated by Gareth Palmer (2003/6) and Beverley Skeggs (2004/7), with regard to various forms of lifestyle TV. In an online article discovered after the bulk of this paper was written, Palmer develops an argument that is largely similar to mine in the linkage of shame to governmentality, though

his is placed in the context of 'surveillance-TV', where he states that "shaming is used to pull us into line with the authorities."¹

I would like to explore how far *Honey We're Killing the Kids* and other family-help shows might work "in the service of power" (Thompson, 1990), but also their more self-contradictory aspects. It may be that these programmes show that apparently 'psychological' exposures, or psychologised closures, work ideologically, as Janice Peck has argued with reference to *Oprah* (1994). But it may also be that an examination of watching disclosures unearths psychic and cultural faultlines that aren't all that neat.

There is a sense in which family-help shows invite a cynical, production-centred response. Families, at least of the kind sourced by production company Ricochet and by the BBC for these programmes, are guaranteed to provide 'naturally' the battles and outbreaks which have to be narratively encouraged in the talk shows of *Trisha* or *Jerry Springer*. But family-help shows don't just provide cheap and satisfying punch-ups: they tie together discourses of parenting, help, class, expertise, race, gender, the nation, worth and shame. The shows represent a sort of distillation of these discourses in ways which fully implicate the viewer. As John Berger wrote, "We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves." (1972,9). This would suggest that looking is itself relational - familial, even.

In these shows, there seems to be a textual focus on

- the inward-turning incitements of so-called "psy-discourses" (Rose, 1998),
- the family's "tactical withdrawal into itself" (Donzelot, 1977),
- and the self-governing of overtly classified citizens along governmentality-friendly lines.

Shame, according to Jacqueline Rose, is an affect that links the individual and the social - Rose says shame "relies on the art of exposure" presumably of the former to the latter (2003,1). Amal Treacher suggests, "shame is that which binds people together" (2007,242) and psychoanalyst Phil Mollon writes, "The signal of shame serves to maintain group cohesion." (2002,51). So as well as shame signalling the necessity of 'civilised' social self-management, shame may also be a signal heralding the necessity of self-governance of our internal polity. Shame seems to be intertwined with governmentality: it is here figured as the affect that is most socially aware. A host of discourses, and the underbelly of so-called "common sense" invest our self-consciousness and consciousness of others with class-based shames and hierarchic pedagogies.

Shame discursively draws together class and disclosure. Interestingly Freud highlighted this (albeit totally uncritically) when he wrote about the clinic of Bernheim the hypnotist, that -

The ailments of each individual are discussed before a large crowd, which would not be suitable with patients of a higher social class. (SE1,107-8)

Disclosure for Freud (and maybe these programmes) is déclassé. There is no shame, however, in shaming a person who is constructed as already shameless. If the television programme is overtly defined as a social experiment (like *The Baby Borrowers* and *HoTT*) by the production companies, the shaming disclosures may be legitimised, particularly if these so-called 'experiments' are taking place on working class people.

As Beverly Skeggs writes,

Because the working poor were seen to be incapable of self-formation and governing themselves, they were subject to external controls. This... is reproduced in contemporary political rhetoric which suggests ... that the working classes need

¹ "Video Vigilantes and the work of shame" at <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc48.2006/shameTV/index.html> . Gareth Palmer also makes links between shame and governance, with particular reference to a 'surveillance' subgenre of reality TV. This paper attempts to approach these issues psychosocially, in the context of family-help programmes on television which perform other functions as well as 'disciplining'.

controlling, whilst the middle classes are producing forms of personhood in which self-governance is assumed. (2004,178)

These shows are congruent with this notion, in that the majority of the problematised families seem to be working class. However, they are also almost all white (and apparently heterosexual, mostly with two parents). The overt class dynamic may be a screen for other shame-inscribed differences.

Government, Governmentality, Class and Shame

In November 2006 the *Guardian* announced that there were due to be 77 “State supernannies to help struggling parents”². The aim in the concentration on ‘helping’ the family seems to be a movement towards a more governable populace. Margaret Thatcher famously said in a *Woman’s Own* interview in 1987:

As you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. ...no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first.

(Margaret Thatcher, in *Woman's Own* 31st October 1987)

Paradoxically what could be read as an attempt here to abdicate State responsibility for the care of the nation, is also another way of articulating the now hegemonically successful discourse of self-help, and the crucial role of the family in this paradigm, as a sort of individual.

Interestingly, a recent Government funded research project (partly based in Manchester) found that

Watching TV parenting programmes demonstrating ways to calm toddlers' tantrums can help parents and reduce children's behavioural problems.... The research provided ‘evidence that television as a vehicle for learning parenting skills is viable as well’.³

And so, television is appropriated, and the usual panics about the effects of TV on children’s psyches and general health forgotten. The spectre of this ‘help’-filled discourse is the shame which *must* ensue if parents fail their children, and hence society.

Television’s role here is overtly figured, not as an extension of governmental power, but as a potential technology of governmentality in terms described by Nikolas Rose (1989):

Rather than the state extending its sway throughout society by means of an extension of its control apparatus, we need to think in terms of the ‘governmentalization of the state’ – a transformation of the rationalities and technologies for the exercise of political rule (1989,5).

The question of how the power of governmentality might be introjected or work psychically is not addressed in this account, nor in Foucault, but Gareth Palmer moves towards dealing with this when he points out that:

Television's engagement with surveillance of all kinds is fashioning a productive shame, reproducing models of ever more restricted "outer-focused" identities....⁴

² ‘State supernannies to help struggling parents’, *Guardian*, Wednesday 22nd November 2006, <http://lifeandhealth.guardian.co.uk/family/story/0,,1954255,00.html>

³ <http://www.greatparentingexperiment.net>

⁴ Palmer, G., “On our best behaviour” in *Flow*, Vol. 5, Issue 5

Palmer's words suggest that we are encouraged by lifestyle television to watch ourselves, even, or especially, "in private". In the ideologies of family-help television, shame belongs in, or just outside the home. Parents on *Supernanny* are regularly shown holding their head in their hands (a signifier of shame in this instance), in their kitchens and living rooms, after having been implicitly 'exposed' by their children in the local supermarket, or on their way home from school.

Shame seems as liminal as the suburbia of *Supernanny*: psychoanalyst Kenneth Wright writes,

Shame... brings me back to the idea that the self is formed or constituted where inner and outer meet, at the interface between persons.(1991, 29)

It may be the affect appropriated by a system of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1991 & Palmer, 2003) to encourage incorporation of the *govern* into the *mentality*, since it is so clearly a socially entrenched but also viscerally felt reality. At the same time, shame is dynamic – while it may be fetishised on lifestyle television, it works dynamically socially, depending as it does upon relations of power.

Texts of Disclosure

There is much watching enacted *within* the family-help programmes – these texts foreground both the act and image of watching in various ways. A voiceover on *Supernanny* narrates, "Supernanny has witnessed that family's problems with her own eyes."⁵ The shows highlight the act of watching as 'texts of disclosure', and so looking at them can be regarded as a form of investment, or exchange. We are invited to consider our viewing behaviour by the shows themselves, as the camera crew's existence is performed. Computerized images provide examples of 'having been watched' with regularity, whether on *Supernanny*'s witnessing laptop, Tanya Byron's caring CCTV in *HoTT*, or Kris Murrin's spooky future-screen in *HWKTK*.

The family is figured as a unit to be revealed unto itself, which perhaps goes some way towards excusing the voyeurism involved in our waiting for the big reveal. The naturalisation of surveillance is also partly achieved through its linkage with an ethic of care: supposedly these families are here to be helped more than they are to be disclosed.

It is worth asking whether the 'reveal' in these shows is the family's shift (or shunting) towards some form of psychosocial 'functionality' at the end of the show, or if it comprises a succession of 'shaming points' throughout the narrative. Phil Mollon suggests that

Shame is a response to failure and to ensuing feelings of inadequacy... Such instances always involve a sense of failure in the eyes of others. (2002,25)

It is also possible that mediated shame can be regarded as a performance or masquerade, and this needs exploring (after this paper). Is a show of shame a socially binding or divisive force – or even both?

The sociality of shame is represented in the *mise en scenes* of family-help shows. In *Supernanny*, we watch families interact within the constraints of the 'real' domestic setting and the surrounding suburbia. *House of Tiny Tearaways* (BBC3) is filmed in a TV set of fetishised house-ness. The families are filmed watching each other's relative strife at the playroom-style dining table, as well as being watched by resident psychologist Dr Byron and the cameras. Biessi and Nunn note that *Big Brother*'s set on Channel 4 is "infantile, resembling a child's playroom". (2005,97) A remarkably similar infantilised *mise en scene* is to be found in *HoTT*, and there is a sense in which the parents are disempowered by their inclusion in this mass-juvenation. They are perhaps more likely to exhibit or perform their

⁵ [C4; 31.10.06; 16 minutes into show]

shame here, under the gaze of Dr Byron, purveyor of psychological as well as cultural capital. With our knowledge of *Big Brother* and *House of Tiny Tearaways* (and their similar studio settings), even the 'real' family begins to look like a ludic construct. In their own claustrophobic homes, the family becomes one whose function is to be witnessed in action, despite the assumed privacy of the domestic setting.

Honey We're Shaming the Parents

HWKTK arguably presents parenting as an activity fundamentally 'classed', in a way which is pronounced stylistically, in the planting of the families outside of their domestic setting. They are educated about food, telly-watching and so on by clinical psychologist and Cambridge graduate Dr Kris Murrin on a screen, as though enlarged visuals are the only appropriate pedagogic tool for those who are depicted as endlessly watching the TV.

There is a touch of *Dr Who* in the time travel towards two alternate futures that takes place in Dr Murrin's Tardis-cum-gymnasium-cum-prison-cum-cinema (a semiotically manic *mise en scene*). These two 'afters' to the family's 'before' are blatantly juxtaposed. There is a dichotomy of sinful poverty, dirt, unemployment, malaise, and laziness, contrasted with earned wealth, gainful employment, cleanliness, health and restraint (the fantasised kids of the future are always so slim).

Dr Kris Murrin is only ever filmed inside this set, and is further from the lived lives of the participants than both *Supernanny's* Jo Frost and *HoTT's* Dr Byron, adding to the character of her surveillance being unemotional, scientific and health-motivated. Ironically it is this show which is most wrapped up in the classedness of shame. There are Cinderella-style depictions of instant class mobility, and a sense in which there is a fantastical transformative plasticity of social class and the material body... As long as this body is white: race is also an issue here -through its resounding absence. Apart from possibly one girl on *HWKTK*, all the families in the series I recorded are white [I will explore this after this paper..]. If, as Palmer suggests, shame "reinforces a model of community that can only work by excluding outsiders"⁶, what happens when these 'outsiders' are *totally* excluded by the text? Shame works here not only as a suggestively governmentalised warning, but as a structuring condition of the text itself.

In the sealed cell (with the gleaming 'future' screened at one end), dependent on the parents' nutritional and behavioural conduct, the children will not fail, they will no longer shame their parents here.

Before any shame can be performatively renounced it must be enacted/experienced. In a section at *HWKTK* from the beginning of an October 2006 show (*HWKTK*, 26.10.06), Dr Kris Murrin watches the parents as they are made to 'face up' to the image of their imaginary children, aged 40, malnourished and poor. Murrin asks the mother and father of their children: "Are they married? Do they work?" The parents answer negatively - "they are just like us" they say. The children in this digitised horror are metaphors for the parents' discursively fanned fear and shame about their own classed identities.

The mother says she "can't look" at this vision of her children (and as Mollon suggests (along with Freud), "shame is intimately associated with looking and being looked at" (2002,50)). The girls look "like me" she says, and crumples. This is a melodramatic shaming-point. The camera will not leave the mother's tearstained face. Here is an emotive 'excess', and it is partly through this behavioural excess (as well as the excesses of weight and noise often present in the domestic sections of these family-help programmes) that shame is manufactured discursively. Biressi and Nunn note about Paul Watson's 1970s documentary, *The Family*,

⁶ <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc48.2006/shameTV/shameTV2.html>

The family's behaviour is excessive from the perspective of the bourgeois ideal. (2005,66)

Restraint is ideologically conjoined with notions of the middle class. Mediated excess, on which transformative TV seems to depend for its various psychic and social enactments, seems to be the job of the televised working class poor.

Freud, in *Mourning and Melancholia*, describes shame as if it is the opposite of melancholia. Mourning is privileged as the healthy way of dealing with loss; melancholia is pathologised as a reiterative, repetitive, quasi-fetishistic un-grieving. Crucially, it is also excessive. The melancholic lacks "feelings of shame in front of other people" (255) and "finds satisfaction in self-exposure"(ibid). It then turns out that the reason that melancholics aren't ashamed is that "everything derogatory they say about themselves is at bottom said about someone else." (257). If Freud's idea can be applied in the context of this paper, one might suggest that the performances of shame and self-loathing of these parents could be read as psychopolitical critique, or even as some kind of un-mourned class rage. Relatedly, there could be said to be a certain shamelessness in the exposure of the children by their parents. This might imply an intra-familial sadism, and perhaps a more societal masochism. Writer Daniel Dunne suggests that

the individual shamed in society brings the shame home to his children...The interpersonal transfer of shame is the cement of power.⁷

- or, one might call shame in *HWKTK* the cement of "systematically asymmetrical" relations of power (Thompson, 1990, 151). If this is the case, the disclosing (or enacting) of this 'hidden' domestic shame to the society that made its concealment necessary is also potentially sado-masochistic.

In the second meeting of the parents and Dr Kris, where the classedness of shame is underlined in its visualised removal via such signs as the digitised gliding of a tie onto one of the son's necks, and the magical morphing of both of their t-shirts into collared ones fit for the office. Here a form of 'reparation' is achieved, and the shameful exposure of the family paid for in hegemonic (and also quite moving) tears of relief. The children are projected onto the screen as a quasi-middle class fantasy, and maybe a projection of our nation's future state as a privileged white haven. The girls have grace (not disgrace) and the mum says her boys "look really posh, like businessmen". This could be the English (or American) Dream.

Keeping an Eye on the Family

John Ellis' image of the TV "holding our hands" (2000,74) as together we "work through" (ibid) different elements of our culture, provides a picture of television as family member-cum-therapist - Roger Silverstone too described TV as being "one of the family" (1994,40). It seems important to avoid hypostatizing TV as our family friend, outside of economic relations and social discrepancies. Biressi and Nunn shift the focus on television back to economies of worth:

The apparent omnipresence of media observation is internalised as a sort of self-scrutiny... In this 'new economy of attention' to appear on television is to assume cultural capital. (2005,100)

There is a clear link here between the ability to self-scrutinise (and self-govern) and the distinction gained in enacting this on television. Implicitly, 'watching yourself' is intrinsically linked with class. If Donzelot was right when he said that children have become "a kind of guilt-edged investment" (1977,224), the shame structured into that investment incurring no value may be easily mobilised to work in the service of governmentality. Shame is

⁷ Dunne, D., 'The cultural stereotype and the Other' at <http://www.danieldunne.com/ster.html>

unquestionably foregrounded in these programmes, as is the act of watching: both are 'relational'. Wherever the 'enactment of watching' appears in the shows, the issue of shame is also present.

This paper was intended to be about 'watching family disclosures', and ended up being about shame. It hoped to explore the workings of the discursive drive to 'better the family self' in terms of both ideology and the unconscious, and the recurring theme of shame seems to bridge these two approaches. I suspect that psychoanalytic theories of fantasy and the unconscious may be useful in a what Douglas Kellner calls a 'multiperspectival'⁸ cultural studies approach, because the programmes and their modes of reception contain themes that invite exploration of the feelings of shame (and even sadism) thrown up by the programmes' content. Web forums where reception of the programmes is enacted textually are a good place to explore these anxieties and discourses, and I plan to start that next.

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⁸ On his 'Illuminations' website, Douglas Kellner writes that cultural studies should function in a "multiperspectival" manner, and he proposes "that textual analysis and audience reception studies [should] utilize a multiplicity of perspectives, or critical methods, when engaging in textual analysis, and in delineating the multiplicity of subject positions, or perspectives, through which audiences appropriate culture." Kellner, D., "Communications Vs. Cultural Studies: Overcoming the Divide" in *Illuminations – The Critical Theory Website*, found at <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell4.htm> [downloaded 22.01.07]

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Chapter 5

A feminist materialist critique of 'trafficking' in Europe

Giulia Garofalo

Introduction: exclusions and inclusions

In November 2006, the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) organised a red-umbrellaⁱ demonstration to expose the fact that the Women's Library in London managed to organise a respectable exhibition and series of events on prostitution and 'trafficking' with the complete exclusion of a whole range of critiques produced by sex workers' rights organisations in the last thirty years (IUSW (2006))ⁱⁱⁱ.

This case has a special British meaning due to the fact that the IUSW has been officially affiliated to the GMB, the third general union in the UK, and since the WL is known to be a progressive institution. However, well beyond this London case, all over Europe the public debate on 'trafficking' appears to be heavily contested for producing the specific exclusion of analyses coming from sex workers' rights people.

But, if we take seriously the issue of exclusions in this debate, we will notice that actually also clients of the sex industry hardly ever get space to develop their analyses in public. The important distinction here is between who gets a voice to give a 'testimony' and who gets a voice to give an 'analysis': people involved in the selling and buying of sex appear as being highly desirable for their testimonies, but are normally excluded from the moment of active construction of knowledge and truth.

The important question to be asked is: vice versa, who is authorised to give their analysis of 'trafficking'? My feeling of this field, after six years of involvement in Italy, the Netherlands and the UK, as an activist and researcher in the politics of sex work and trafficking, is that one gets automatically much more analytical credit if one is a woman. Being a man seems to have a negative impact on one's legitimacy to analyse sex work and 'trafficking', unless one speaks *with* a woman or unless one is a priest. Being a gay man does not help at all. Being a trans person even less. As a woman, one gets immediately more analytical credibility if one is older than about 40, doesn't display femininity, and, strange to believe, if one is out as a lesbian. Of course these are preliminary observations and they would call for a serious research, but if my 'feeling of the game' (Bourdieu (1985)) is right enough, then one could plausibly suggest that someone, for instance you or me enjoys analytical legitimacy if people, *rightly or wrongly*, think that *we are not involved* in the selling or buying of sex.

If this is true, myself, and many of us here, as female intellectual workers, we have an important analytic privilege as women who are not under suspicion of being sex workers. The point I want to make is that we must urgently take a position on 'trafficking' which is responsible not only vis-à-vis the realities of 'trafficking' but also vis-à-vis the particular position we have in social space, and that gives us a specific authority. In that sense I am arguing in favour of a *situated* position (Haraway (1991)), a positioning in what looks almost like a battlefield in contemporary Europe.

Such a position, as I will show in this paper, is first of all one that recognises the difference, commonalities, but also potential conflicts between sex workers women and non-sex workers women. I hope to show in this paper how a materialist feminist approach can help us with that.

Before going into that, I will consider the most challenging critiques to the trafficking discourse and policies, which, not surprisingly, come in an organised form precisely from those who are normally excluded from the debate: sex workers rights' groups. This dissent is based on two main points.

The first is a point of evidence from the ground: the classic trafficking idea that migrant women working in the European sex industry have been forced against their will to leave home and to work with sex is just not true for the large majority of cases. Subsequently, the second point of dissent is that trafficking discourse and policies are based on a wrong distinction between 'voluntary sex workers' and 'trafficked victims', and this distinction supports policies that have negative consequences both on young migrant women, potentially or actually selling sex, including those who are in a situation of heavy exploitation and abuse, and on all workers of the sex industry, including transgender people and men selling sex, and including European citizens.

The second part of my paper introduces a materialist feminist analysis that was produced by an alliance of prostitutes and non-prostitutes feminists between the mid70s and the mid80s in different contexts in Europe. I will argue that this analysis can allow us to interrupt the crucial complicity supporting 'anti-trafficking' interventions, which is the condemnation of sex work per se, which it turns is reproduced by the exclusion of sex workers' analyses from the public debate.

Sex workers' organised dissent

In 2005 an important European Conference of 200 sex workers and activists from labour, migrant and human rights organisations was held in Brussels. Two documents come from that Conference, written on the basis of a year consultation process. In particular the Sex Workers' in Europe Manifesto is an extremely interesting moment of a process of collective knowledge production. Let me read a few lines that are central to our discussion:

*"The lack of possibilities to migrate put our integrity and health in danger",
"The trafficking discourse obscures the issues of migrants' rights. [It] reinforces the discrimination, violence and exploitation against migrants, sex workers and migrant sex workers in particular",
"We demand that sex work is recognised as gainful employment, enabling migrants to apply for work and residence permits and that both documented and undocumented migrants be entitled to full labour rights"*
(Sex Workers' in Europe Manifesto (2005)).

Behind these claims is the idea that stopping 'anti-trafficking' interventions and recognising sex work as gainful employment, also for migration purposes, would represent an improvement for all those working in the sex industry, whatever the conditions they work in, for a long or a short time, whether they identify as 'sex workers' or not. Let us try to see how this analysis may make sense when looking at the specificities of sex work and migration in Europe today. When talking of 'sex work' or 'the sex industry' I refer to the activities connected to prostitution, but some of my analysis could be extended to other forms of sex work, such as dancing, phoning, etc.

'Trafficking': migrants and the states

There is an increasing amount of research produced in Europe on 'trafficking' and prostitution in a participatory way, or through the mediation of projects working with sex workers, and in any way *not* in collaboration with authorities responsible for migrants' detention and deportation (see Agustín (2005a), Cabiria (2004), Carchedi (2000)).

These people all agree that realities of migrants working with sex in Europe are multiple, and fundamentally reflect the difficult situation of all migrants in general – crucially: great dependence on mediators and one particular employer for their visa, travel, work, accommodation, and so on.

However, the classic idea of trafficking is very gendered and very focused on the sex industry: it only looks at women in the sex industry, and it says that all migrant women working with sex are forced against their will to migrate and to work in prostitution. There is indeed a minority of women for whom this idea corresponds to reality, probably around 10% some of this research indicates (Carchedi (2000)), who experience very heavy coercion and abuse from those who organise their travel and their work. Unfortunately, this seems to be not unique to the sex industry, but also happens in agriculture, domestic service, building sites and other sectors.

The large majority of women instead want to come to Europe, and find themselves in the situation of deciding to work in the sex industry which, despite the difficult and often unexpected conditions, appears to be the fastest way to realise their projects, to pay their migration debt, and to send money home. Consider that the migration debt varies. For instance, according to Cabiria (2004), with reference to Italy, France, Austria and Spain, the migration debt was in average 10000 euros from Eastern Europe, and an average of 70000 euros from Africa. Think that at the bottom of the prostitution market, one normally earns 5000 euros a month. Also consider that women usually talk about ‘traffickers’ as helpers and facilitators, since these are men, women and trans people who have given to them the possibility to come to Europe that is not given to them by immigration laws.

For these reasons, clearly, to understand ‘trafficking’ it is crucial to think beyond sex work only, and to include migration processes, and it is on this ground that sex workers rights groups are looking for, and slowly finding, and, the alliance with migrants’ rights activists, as the Manifesto shows.

With their focus on criminal organisations and bad violent men, trafficking interventions actually serve to hide the responsibility of EU states in preventing people from legally migrating into Europe, and forcing them into situations on which they have little or no control. They give legitimacy to increasing deportations: “it is for their own good that we repatriate them”, the rhetoric goes, “since they did not want to come here in the first place”. These responsibilities must be looked at together with the effects that migration policies have on preventing migrants from working safely and organising for their rights. It is interesting in that sense to consider the work of feminist researcher Rutvica Andrijasevic along with a network of researchers and migrants’ rights activists called *Frassanito Network*, which look at migration not only as a reactive force but also as an autonomous force in a capitalist system. Their work show that what immigration policies produce is not, as they claim to be doing, a simple *restriction of access* for migrants into Europe, but rather it is a restriction of *access to citizenship* in Europe. They produce deportable, second-class citizens who are available for heavy exploitation in a variety of sectors, such as agriculture, building, caring, cleaning, and the sex industry.

‘Trafficking’: divide and rule

I find these migration critiques to ‘trafficking’ very convincing, and they also have the advantage of placing sex work in a broader political analysis, breaking with the conceptual and political isolation that constitutes its stigmatisation. However, there is something more specific to ‘trafficking’, and about how ‘trafficking’ works, sex workers rights groups say. ‘Anti-trafficking’ interventions do not address all migrants in the same way, and do not only address migrants. They appear to target specifically one group of migrants and one group of non- migrants: among migrants, they affect women, especially young migrant women, potentially or actually selling sex, and, more indirectly, they affect all workers of the

European sex industry, including men and transgender people, and including European citizens. How does this work?

Here comes the second point of the critique posed to 'trafficking' by sex workers' rights people, and disseminated in particular with 1998 Jo Doezema's article "Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary v. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy". The main mechanism through which trafficking discourse and policies operate is through establishing a distinction in the sex industry between those who have chosen to work as sex workers, and those who are forced into it against their will: the first are usually called 'sex workers' and the second 'trafficked women' or 'sex slaves' (let's keep in mind that these policies and discourse do not really take into consideration men and trans people who sell sex).

Now, the way this distinction works in practice has little to do with the personal experience of people who get classified as the one or the other, and even less with sophisticated concepts of agency and subjectification (see for instance McNay (2000)) researchers are working on in order to make sense of the variety of experiences. Really, policies and discourse work in such a way that the only ones who are granted the possibility of choosing to work in the sex industry, *if there are any at all*, are European citizens, preferably white and middle-class. Women who are not European citizens are automatically considered 'trafficked women', 'slaves'.

Then, what happens to these two groups? Let us keep in mind that in all European countries, even the ones who are more advanced in recognising the rights of sex workers, such as the Netherlands and Germany, there is no possibility for migrants from outside the EU to legally work in the sex industry (an exception is represented by some Austrian regions, Danna (2003)).

Two avenues then open up for the first group of workers, the so-called slaves. In a first scenario, which is mostly the case in Europe, 'anti-trafficking' laws are not well developed and applied, all migrants working with sex are potentially subject to detention and deportation – indeed sex work does not in any case give access to the residence rights that other jobs give to migrants; from a rights' perspective on the contrary it only represents a reason for which in most contexts one can lose the residence permit one may have as a student, tourist, or for another job (Danna (2003)).

If, on the contrary, 'anti-trafficking' laws are applied, those same illegal migrants working in the sex industry become 'trafficked women' and they get a different treatment. What they get under most European legal systems is a coordinated intervention of state and international agencies, police, immigration, and NGOs like the Poppy Project here in the UK, that provide them a shelter, and a rehabilitation programme, for a duration going from a few weeks to several months (Associazione On the Road (2002)). During this time they are not allowed to work, and they are encouraged, sometimes forced, to give evidence against their 'traffickers'. After that, they are offered a voluntary repatriation, which means that they are deported back home. In that sense, article 18 of Italian Immigration Law 40/1998 represents an exception because it includes the possibility of converting the temporary residence permit for victims of trafficking into a renewable work permit. Most repatriated women, whether they have been part of an 'anti-trafficking' programme or not, even if they have gone through heavy exploitation and abuse, will try to come back to Europe, looking for another facilitator and starting their migration process again – they will be, as authorities say, 're-trafficked'.

Their desire was clearly not to stay back home. A home that often does not offer the possibility of relational, economic, identity development that young women (and not only young men) aspire to (Agustín (2005b)). Often, however, as ex-trafficked women and as coming from a so-called country of origin of 'trafficking', they will find extra-restrictions to their visa procedures, making their travel even more difficult.

What about the second group of workers, the ones who are recognised the conscious decision to work with sex? Their rights obviously vary according to national and local contexts, and we can talk about that in the discussion.

Take for example a country like Sweden, that has criminalised the purchase of all prostitution services in 1999, thus creating a new model of prohibitionism; take a different example France that has criminalised street work in 2003 through the new criminal offence of 'passive soliciting'; or finally take the Netherlands (2000) and Germany (2002) where, at least in principle, prostitution is recognised as labour.

However, what can be said is that the process of distinguishing them from the 'trafficked victims' delineates similar consequences across Europe. Fundamentally, "the abuses sex workers may undergo in the course of their work are [in this framework] considered to be the natural consequences of their willingness to work as prostitutes, meaning it is their own fault" as the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) put it, "this reinforces the classic dichotomy between 'innocent', who deserve of protection, and 'guilty' women, who can be abused with impunity" (ICRSE (2004)).

Now, it seems to me that the failure in the movements of the left and for social inclusion to expose 'anti-trafficking' policies as damaging young migrant women as well as all workers of the European sex industry is mainly due today by the persistence of the condemnation of sex work per se, condemnation which, in turn, is reproduced by the exclusion of sex workers from the political debate.

That is where a feminist critique can play a crucial role. Indeed in this debate in Europe there is an increasing number of women who speak with authority as women, and many of the positions on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of sex work are supported by (different) feminist theories. But, what feminist theories can help us?

Materialist feminist directions

The most visible feminist positions on sex work are articulated in an Anglo-American feminist genealogy as the 'sex work' and the 'abolitionist' positions. This classification is not very convincing, for it creates the impression that the important differences are played on an ideal level, on a level of principles (anti- or pro- prostitution), while positions actually take shape on the different interventions that are promoted on the basis of a material reality. Anyway, it is very common to indicate as 'abolitionist feminists' those who see sex workers as victims - of men, poverty, sexual violence etc. - and want to help all of women to quit the sex industry (men and trans people are not really included in this analysis). Those who are called 'sex work feminists' instead see prostitution as labour, and want to change it in the interest of sex workers, women, men and trans people, through the improvement of the conditions in which it is practiced and thought of, without trying to eliminate it or to hide it.

Even though these two positions engage in some kind of civil war against each other, they often appear to be busy around the same thesis: the "sex work" one wants to demonstrate the agency, of women working with sex, and the "abolitionist" one wants to demonstrate their lack of agency. This debate on agency strikes me for its absurdity and resemblance to the legendary medieval disquisition on the existence of women's soul. Indeed, what is being discussed through the question "do women sex workers have agency?" seems to be the very recognition of a category of people as human beings. However, in an even vaguely democratic context, humanity is to be assumed for everybody, and what can (and should) be discussed instead is the political and moral value of particular forms of agency.

Besides that, what worries me most is how current feminist thinkers, by engaging with this disquisition, get easily used by the 'anti-trafficking' strategy. Indeed, the focus on the

individual capacity to choose charactering the agency debate is in continuity with the pillar of the rhetoric of 'trafficking' that is the individual choice to migrate and/or to sell sex which supports the division between women with the damaging consequences I have indicated.

There is however a different legacy of feminist thought we can base ourselves on, that was produced between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s, in France, the Netherlands and other European countries, at a time when many feminists groups supported prostitutes struggles. Notably in France 1975 when prostitutes started occupying churches, and in 1986 when prostitutes and non-prostitutes feminists organised the important Second World Whores' Congress in Brussels (Pheterson ed. (1989)).

On the basis of this political alliance, authors such as Gail Pheterson and Paola Tabet worked to a very lucid critique of both paid and unpaid sex (Pheterson (1996), Tabet (1991, 2004)). The theoretical approach inspiring them was a form of materialist feminist developed in particular around the French review *Questions Féministes* - in the review were involved Simone de Beauvoir, along with Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig and Colette Guillaumin (Leonard, Adkins (eds.) 1996). This kind of analysis uses the Marxist method but enlarges the concept of the 'material' beyond the priority given within Marxism to the capitalist mode of production. Marriage for instance becomes central to understand the way the labour typical of women is distributed and exploited.

Those prostitutes and non-prostitutes feminists passed on to us questions of crucial actuality, that I would re-articulate as following: how can women who are not sex workers elaborate a critique of sex work without reproducing their position of privilege vis-à-vis women who exchange sex for money? Or, the other way around: what does the rest of sex look like when we look at it from a sex work perspective? When, in a 'queer' methodological move (see Sedwick (1990)), we take the margins as the centre and from there we look at the norm?

Following these two questions, and starting from the last one, sex can be understood as a truly productive moment of subjects in relation, as a key moment of production and reproduction, but also of modification and subversion, of what I call *relational resources*, that is of individual and collectives' identities as productive. Now, in a hierarchical society the production and reproduction of subjects often, not necessarily but often, becomes work, whether it is paid or unpaid, whether it involves workers' pleasure or not.

Indeed sex as well becomes service, Paola Tabet says, and should then be seen as part of the labour women traditionally - but it is important to say also gay men, transgender people, migrants, people of colour - are expected to give to others in exchange for informal material advantages.

As other typically 'female' relational activities, think domestic and care work, sex work is a special kind of labour that needs an extra dose of feminist intellectual work to be understood. However, it is labour, and it can be employed in a variety of ways. Typically, if you are young, and you are a woman or you belong to other subordinate classes of people, in particular if you are in a social space where you lack capitals, maybe because you have migrated or you have transgressed in other ways, then sex becomes de facto one way for you to employ your relational resources against a variety of material advantages.

This might happen in monogamous marriage, or in modern dating, or it might happen in the paid labour market where one can employ her or his relational resources either in an informal way, as in a bar attendant or a secretarial job, or in a formal, transparent and contractual way, as it happens in the sex industry. Clearly, depending on a number of factors, one can be relatively more or less exploited and more or less happy in any of these different exchanges (see also Nelson, England (2002), van der Veen, M. (2001), Wijers, Lap-Chew (1997)).

However, there is an important difference, our materialist feminists say: prostitution gets a *unique stigma*, which they explain on the basis of the challenge it represents to the whole division of labour (Pheterson (1996), Tabet (1991, 2004)). For its potential contractual and

transparent form prostitution exposes the way in which women traditionally, but also other subordinate groups, are supposed to offer reproductive services as part of informal, private, naturalised, unpaid exchanges, whose value disappears in the public sphere. Moreover, the prostitution stigma seems to increase in 'trafficking' times, times when young women in big numbers migrate, transgressing boundaries of movement, sexuality, reproductive duties – they are single, independent women, they are lesbians, they are black. And a big number of these young women do find a way to live their lives through sex work.

With a better awareness of how the division of relational labour works, we can finally address the first question posed by a materialist feminist legacy: the one of non-sex workers women position. By taking a position on sex work as wrong per se, non-sex workers women appear in this analysis to reproduce the prostitution stigma, and de facto participate in a dynamic of competition among relational workers, which, in long run, damages all of them. In order to resist that competition, materialist feminists in the 1970s insisted that the struggle to improve the conditions *in the practice* of prostitution should be seen as part of the struggles to improve the conditions *in* marriage, and in secretarial jobs and in other market jobs. Together, these struggles complement those for the right *not* to get married, to divorce, *and* for the right to change work, *not* to stay with the same employer, without getting deported.

Conclusion

This materialist feminist theoretical directions constitute, I think, a chance for us to interrupt the mechanisms of exclusions of this debate, and the division trafficking interventions foster in the sex industry, with the effects I have shown.

Interrupting these exclusions would allow us to listen to the very meaningful critiques produced by sex workers' rights groups who expose 'anti-trafficking' interventions as hiding states' responsibilities in preventing people from legally migrating and in fostering divisions among migrant and non migrant workers in the sex industry.

¹ Presented at the UEL PhD seminar in February 2007. A previous version of this article titled "Is there another space for a feminist critique of trafficking?" has been online at www.sexworkereurope.org since February 2007.

² Red umbrellas have become the emergent symbol of sex workers' movement in Europe since the Brussels demonstration on the 17 of October 2005. They had been used for the first time in Venice in 2002 in a demonstration organised by the Italian group Committee for Civil Rights of Prostitutes.

³ Despite these exclusions, the exhibition "*Prostitution: What's Going On?*" (October 2006-) has been considered respectable enough to be short-listed for the art Price Gulbenkian. After the IUSW's protest, the Women's Library Direction has refused the IUSW's demands to include the Sex Workers' in Europe Manifesto and the Declaration of the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe in the exhibition.

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Chapter 6

The influence of indigenous culture on volunteering and communal self help: the case of Eastern Kenya.

Michael Munavu

Introduction

In the recent past, there has been increasing recognition that volunteering is a resource that has the potential to benefit individuals and communities (Home office, 2003). Volunteering has been linked for instance, to the growth of national economies. Contemporary research has endeavored to attach a “dollar value” to the practice. Penner and Finkelstein (1998), cite the US Independent Sector findings that the volunteer efforts of the 45-55% of Americans who participated in unpaid activities in 1993 were equivalent to US\$ 180 billion. The United Nations has also suggested that engaging in volunteering contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s), whose aim is to halve global poverty by the year 2015 (UNV, CIVICUS, IAVE, 2003).

Despite the perceived benefits of volunteering, the level of knowledge on the practice is relatively less than it is in other more established areas of inquiry (Ellis, 1985)¹. Further, Carson (2000) and Wilson (2000) argue that comparatively fewer studies have been carried out on this area in developing countries. Much of the literature is primarily contextualised on Euro-American and more recently Australian tradition (Onyx and Leonard, 2005; Lyons et al., 2006; Lyons and Nivison-Smith, 2006). The amount of research undertaken on the subject in developing countries and in Africa particularly is far less than it is in developed countries with some scholars linking this disparity to an insufficiently developed capacity amongst nonprofit researchers in developing countries. As a result, it may well be argued that the universal understandings of volunteering are predominantly influenced by definitions and descriptions developed on the basis of research on western practices. Consequently contemporary research neglects to sufficiently take into account cognate practices in less developed countries, including but not limited to informal volunteering.

Further, various aspects of volunteering have been insufficiently explored. For instance, the reasons for people’s participation in these types of activities require further investigation. The existing body of research generally suggests that there are varied reasons for an individual’s engagement in volunteering, all framed by cultural, socioeconomic and political factors. Other research has focused on individual –level determinants of volunteering such as age, race, previous family volunteering and religious orientation (Clary et. al, 1998; Penner, 2002; Yeung, 2004; Zwegeinhaft et al., 1996). Some researchers argue that there may be value in moving beyond a focus on these person-centered factors, by analysing the relationship between volunteering and external factors such as government legislation and cultural context. Wilson (2000:229), for example argues that “...the impact of context on individual volunteering is one of the least understood issues in the field [of volunteering]”.

In part, this paper (and my wider PhD research project) seeks to make a contribution to understanding how a particular socio-cultural context defines how its members understand and practise communal self help and volunteering.

¹ Although this article seems out-dated, many of the gaps she identifies in researching volunteering still stand

The problem of defining and measuring volunteering

This project considers how indigenous socio-cultural organisation frames pro-social behavior. Pro-social behavior here is used as a broad reference to a bundle of helping activities including communal self help and volunteering. This position is in line with Penner (1998) and Wilson's (2000) definitions which suggest that volunteering is one of several types of helping behaviors that constitute pro-social practice. Despite the understanding that there is no single, agreed-upon definition of volunteering, common elements within individual definitions suggest broad parameters through which the practice may be understood. For instance, Wilson (2000) advances a definition of volunteering which presents it as an activity that involves the contribution of an individual's time in order to benefit other people or organisations. His definition indicates that such time is given "freely", implying the importance of the absence of reward (or the expectation of such reward) as useful to a framework for conceptualising the activity. Penner's (2002:448) definition of volunteering as "...a long term, planned and discretionary pro-social behavior that benefits strangers and occurs within an organizational setting", is not dissimilar to Wilson's (2000) but like many others, places emphasis on the beneficiary as a stranger, one not known or related to the giver. Noteworthy is the notion that Wilson's (2000) definition does not explicitly address the relationship between the giver and the receiver, leaving space for practices that benefit one known to the giver. Further, Penner (2002) mentions the context in which the activity is undertaken, stating that it is operationalised within an organisational framework. However, recent research suggests that pro-social activities undertaken outside of an organisational context may also be described as volunteering, often referred to as 'informal volunteering'.

Rather than being an idle linguistic exercise or simply an issue of 'the politics of naming', unpacking these often interchangeably-used terms has implications on the measurement of pro-social practice. Previous research reveals such problems in the measurement of informal volunteering, for instance. Green and Joshi (2005) and others describe how Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME) groups in the UK and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups in Australia perceived their pro-social practice not as volunteering, rather as simply helping. As such, a study that rigidly adheres to restrictive definitions of volunteering encounters the potential of leaving undocumented practices that fall outside of such conceptualizations but which are nonetheless parts of this family of activities.

There are no simple solutions to resolving these terminological and measurement challenges. The United Nations (UNDP, 2003) has argued that presenting broad pillars that define volunteering may leave space for the inclusion of less-mainstream practices. While this is a less prescriptive approach, it allows for the 'wholesale' inclusion of too wide a range of activities. What may be more useful is to present different cognate practices and provide an in-depth examination of their characteristics. Such an approach would articulate how these practices are similar or dissimilar to the current hegemonic concepts and provide a sound basis for an argument to expand the universal definitions to incorporate these marginalised practices. This study therefore uses the different conceptualisations of volunteering as a starting point, but suggests the use of the term 'communal self help' to refer to the practices in the target community, assuming that there may be differences between these practices and the universal understandings of volunteering. In order to address both volunteering and communal self help, the term pro-social behaviour is used to refer to both groups of activities.

A brief review of the literature

Past research on volunteering has focused primarily on formal volunteering and only recently has there been increased recognition and study of informal volunteering. Existing research on the subject suggests that these types of activities are prevalent within minority ethnic groups in western societies, and that members of these groups often consider what they are doing as helping rather than volunteering. Further, a review of the literature reveals a number of grey areas, including the interplay between indigenous ethnic culture and volunteering, the further

study of traditionally marginalised forms of volunteering and the methods applied to the study of volunteering, as discussed below.

The interplay between indigenous ethnic culture and volunteering: It is commonly accepted that there is a relationship between ethnic culture and volunteering, yet the nature of this relationship remains largely unclear. Existing literature refers to volunteering as being embedded in culture and to cultural traditions spawning volunteering. Scholars also indicate variously that on the basis of this relationship, different forms of volunteering, with sometimes widely varying characteristics exist throughout the world (see Carson, 2000; Volunteering Australia, 2005). However, this body of research has largely focused on descriptions of these practices rather than on analysing the link between indigenous culture and how individuals within them engage in these behaviors. At best, they do confirm that different forms of volunteering or communal self help exist in different cultural milieu (Volunteer Development Scotland, 2004). These studies however, short fall of establishing how the cultural aspect interrelates with the act of volunteering.

The further study of traditionally marginalised forms of volunteering: As indicated in foregoing sections, much of the literature available on volunteering is based on western constructs of the practice. The current definitions are based on largely if not exclusively western volunteering research traditions and lay emphasis on the formal organisational aspect of the practice. More recent studies recognise that other forms of volunteering, particularly prevalent amongst minority ethnic groups in the west, exist alongside formal practices (Carson, 2000). Various researchers contend that as they do not fall neatly into the existing definitions of volunteering, these forms are likely to be largely unrecorded (Onyx and Leonard, 2005; Green and Joshi, 2003). O'Neill (2001) suggests that ignoring other forms of volunteering may lead to an incomplete understanding of the subject. He cites discrepancies in research findings of the Independent Sector for the whole of the US and of research on one state are attributable to the Independent Sector's insufficient exploration of the levels of informal volunteering. Similarly, it may be argued that focusing research on volunteering on western societies is likely to leave unrecorded communal self help activities in non-western societies.

The methods applied to the study of volunteering: The methods traditionally used in researching volunteering are, for the most part, quantitative forms of inquiry (O'Neill, 2001). O'Neill (2001) argues that there is need for periodic evaluation of the methodologies used in the study of charitable giving. He observes discrepancies between the findings of a national survey conducted by the Independent Sector (US) and similar research in one State California. These discrepancies, he argues, are primarily a result of the different methods that were used in that study. Rooney et al. (2001:552) share this concern, stating that: "...the research community rightly remains vigilant about the validity of findings generated by survey research and how to improve it." Scholars are now encouraging more in-depth analysis of the practice, using approaches such as the more qualitative, in-depth and ethnographic studies (Wilson, 2000). As will be made clear below, this study seeks to address these method-related concerns by deploying qualitative methods such as community group interviews and key informant interviews. Further participatory approaches such as participant photography are tested out with a view to exploring their potential for generating alternative understandings of volunteering and communal self help.

Research aims and objectives

The general aim of the research programme is to establish how indigenous socio-cultural organisation of the Akamba shapes their pro-social behavior patterns, including their communal self-help and volunteering practices.

Specifically, the research project aims to:

- ♣ Document the forms of communal self help and volunteering practices in Eastern Kenya;

- ♣ Analyse how the socio-cultural organisation of the community shapes the conceptualisation and operationalisation of these practices;
- ♣ From the findings, distill recommendations relevant to the community, local government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) on how to increase participation in these activities.

The study design

The Akamba of Eastern Kenya

The Akamba are part of the wider Bantu linguistic group and are settled in Ukamba, a region in the South East of Kenya, comprised of four Districts namely Kitui, Machakos, Makueni and Mwingi. The Akamba are one of the 42 documented ethnic groups in Kenya and constitute approximately 10% of the country's 30 million population (Kenya Government Census, 1999). The Akamba are commonly believed to have originally migrated to their current location from Unyamwezi in Western Tanzania, via the Usambara Mountains. Accounts suggest that the Akamba had relatively early contact with diverse foreign cultures. They traveled from the inland into coastal regions, often walking long distances in order to trade with Arabs and the Mijikenda tribes of the Coastal region of Kenya (Parsons, 1999, Lindblom, 1920). The Christian missions arrived in wider Ukamba in the 19th century, establishing schools and churches, with a view to spreading the Christian message. As was the case in other communities, the emergence of a Christian world-view led to a situation in which the community straddled two identifies, adhering to some traditions, and shunning others in favour of the western Christian values and belief systems.

As a case study, the Akamba were selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, I myself hail from Ukambani and have previously worked amongst the Akamba. These considerations, together with my knowledge of the language (Kikamba), facilitated quicker and easier access into the research site. Some literature suggests that more similarities between the interviewer and the interviewee improve the interview-session. In the penultimate chapter in Bourdieu et al. (1993:611), Bourdieu argues that these similarities reduce the symbolic violence inherent in the contrived nature of the interview setting. He notes that:

When a young physicist questions another young physicist (or an actor another actor, an unemployed worker another unemployed worker etc.), as someone sharing virtually all the characteristics capable of operating as major explanatory factors of that person's practices and representations, and lined to them by close familiarity, their questions spring from their dispositions, objectively attuned to those of the respondent. Even the most brutally objectifying questions have no reason to appear threatening or offensive because the interviewee is perfectly well aware of sharing with the interviewer the core of that the questions induce the other to divulge and sharing, by the same token, the risks of that exposure (Bourdieu, 1993: 611).

Further, part of the respondent-group was Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) volunteers from Machakos District Branch (my study site). Following their interviews, two of these respondents were invited to carry out interviews amongst other KRCS volunteers, which presented another opportunity to reduce the social distance between interviewers and interviewees, and enabled the transparent discussion of issues that may have been less accessible to an 'outsider'. A case in point is the openness with which the respondents discussed the sensitive issues of the allowances they receive from the branch, as well as their perceived exploitation by the branch management.

Undertaking the field work

The project's field research was undertaken over a period of six (6) months, between June and December of 2006. Various methods were used to collect the data including key informant, community group, semi-structured interviews and participant photography and observation.

- Key informant interviews: A total of five (5) key informant interviews were held. The Key informants included village elders and other community gatekeepers. Such informants were selected on the basis of their specific knowledge of the issues under analysis. The informants ranged from older, semi-literate male leaders from the villages, to a Professor of Sociology who has undertaken a substantial amount of research on the Akamba.
- Community group interviews: Five (5) community group interviews were undertaken for this study. Majority of the community group interviewees were older people from the sampled villages. Many of them are farmers but also engage in selling of commodities, usually surplus agricultural produce, in the village markets. For the most part the both male and female respondents were born and raised in their villages and had seldom traveled beyond Ukambani.
- Semi-structured interviews: A total of fifteen (15) semi-structured interviews were held with volunteers from the local branch of the KRCS. While it had initially been planned that the semi-structured interviews would focus on individual community members, the realisation that interviewing Red Cross volunteers would allow for a comparative analysis of how members of the community (such as they are) self-understand volunteering against communal self help led to their inclusion in the respondent group. The Red Cross interviews also provided a useful opportunity to further explore the possible problematic in their practice of western (formal, organisational) volunteering within a non-western context. The KRCS volunteers were aged 25-38 years old, and at the time of the interviews were either also working in full-time employment, part-time jobs or were pursuing studies. All the respondents were fluent in English, Kiswahili² and Kikamba, having all at least completed high school with a good number having gained a post-secondary school qualification. Both male and female respondents participated in the study.
- Participatory photography: In order to deepen the analysis of the respondent's self-understanding of volunteering and communal self help, this approach is being tested in the field. Cameras have been availed to selected respondents, with directions on how to use them to photograph daily activities that they consider as *utethyo*, or pro-social practice. In addition to supporting the existing interview data, this approach is being tested as an alternative method of researching volunteering and communal self help.
- Participant observation: Various events of significance were observed including a funeral, a funeral committee meeting and a work-party (*mwethya*) farming activity. Notes from these events were taken and form part of the data corpus.

Progress to date

An initial thematic analysis of the interview transcripts has been undertaken. The transcripts have been coded and themes developed from these codes. The data analysis is a continuous process which will require the transcripts to be revisited regularly, with a view to applying to them different "arguments" and considering new, emerging themes that may arise from the data. The analysis to date has been done manually, but qualitative data analysis software Atlas.Ti is currently being used, as it allows for a more transparent representation of the data.

² Kiswahili is the national language in Kenya while English is the official language. Kikamba is one of approximately 42 local languages spoken in the country.

For example, the software is able to undertake word-counts which allow reporting of the findings to be supported by stating the number of times a key-word, code or theme appears in the data. To date, the transcripts have been uploaded into the software.

Some initial findings

The topics under which I discuss these findings are a reflection of the themes developed during the process of analysing the data. As such, they may change as I progress with the analysis. The main themes I discuss here are the drivers of participation, the structure of participation and the constraints to participation.

Drivers of participation: This refers to the factors that facilitate people's participation in pro-social activities, be they volunteering, or communal self help. Under this, I will highlight some key factors that shape participation in these activities, namely, the notion of the collective, reciprocity and instrumentality.

Collectivity

The responses suggest that there are certain factors which describe how the respondents frame their engagement in pro-social activities. One of these is the importance of the collectivity including the village group (such as in work-party system or *myethya*³) and the clan. These collectives are defined by strong bonds and values of togetherness and unity amongst the different groups' members. Moreover, some of the responses suggest that this sense of togetherness is not simply important in its achievement of immediate task-related goals, but holds further value in its demonstrative form. A key informant in Kangundo noted, for instance:

“When people come together to do something in a *mwethya*, they get to know each other better in the community. The goal is not only to get things done, but to show each other that the community can work together, that it is a united village.” (Key informant, Kangundo).

Another response highlights the demonstrative value of the collective work

“...and also that the person does not feel like he is hated by the others. This demonstrates love and caring. This is the basic meaning of *ikundo* (a knot) or togetherness.” (Community Group Interview, Mwala)

These same sentiments are expressed in common proverbs or sayings, which are used as a tool of socialisation in oral traditions, alongside story-telling and other media. Two proverbs were regularly repeated during the interviews, namely;

Kalula katune katunivaa ni kunengeleaniwa (a red guard is reddened by being passed from one person to another) and;

Kyaa kimwe kiuwaa ndaa (one finger alone doesn't kill all the lice on ones body)

The first proverb is used to encourage members of the village or the community to share what they have with their fellow villagers. The second proverb may be loosely likened to the saying, “no man is an island”, and encourages members of the community to work together and in unity.

³ *Mweytha* (singular) or *myethya* (plural) refers to the work-party system, documented in different settings and communities. A group of people from the same village come together to work on each others farms, by turn. On one day, they would work on individual X's farm and on the next, on individual Y's farm, until all their farms have been tilled.

Reciprocity

Another factor that appears to characterise the practice of pro-social behaviour, particularly communal self help, is the concept of reciprocity. The respondent's discussions suggest that engagement in these activities is based on the expectation that the giver will also receive some form of "return-help" in the future. On being asked about what would happen if someone did not participate in communal self help activities, one respondent said:

"There is nothing that is going to be done. But if you do this continuously, the other people will start saying that you have not been part of the village, part of our community. What happens is that, if you keep on refusing to contribute like the rest of the community, when you fall into a similar situation, then they will not be there for you." (Community group interview, Kivani, Kangundo)

This reciprocity appears to be characterised by two considerations namely, it may be perceived as **generalised reciprocity**, so that if an individual does something for you, your return -help does not have to assume the same form and/or value of the initial act.

A second character of this reciprocity, the interview responses suggest, is that it is not **time-bound**: it can be returned after an unspecified duration of time. One key informant suggested that this was also possible across generations, so that if an individual's grandfather helped my grandfather in some way, I would feel the obligation to return the favour by helping his grandchildren, if they requested it.

Instrumentality and equalisation

In discussing their pro-social practices, the respondents made reference to situations in which they help other villagers in need in order to prevent them or their children, from stealing from other people's farms. In essence, they refer to engaging in communal self help activities in order to prevent the emergence of social misfits in their village. This can be conceived as an instrumental approach for engaging in pro-social behaviour. Related to this point are the respondent's references to helping each other with a view to "pulling up" their neighbours who are lagging behind socio-economically.

This 'equalising' character of pro-social behaviour is evident in some of the quotations from the respondents' transcripts for example:

"Like he has said, this person, the one we are helping, he is 'ours' and he is in the village. And we can see that he is old or otherwise unable to help himself. It would be wrong for us to advance ourselves only and leave him out of the development, so we support him; we 'carry them with us'...." (Community Group Interview, Mwala)

The reduction of disparities between well-off and less well-off members of the community therefore presents itself as a factor in participating in pro-social activities.

Structures of participation: This refers to how these activities are operationalised, the platform through which they are acted-out.

Here I discuss the clan, although in my wider analysis I also explore marriage and funerals which represent important parts of the daily life of the community as well as platforms for the operationalising of communal self help. It should therefore be noted that these structures are not exclusively pro-social platforms, but have other functions within the community life.

It is estimated that there are 25 clans amongst the Akamba. Clan membership is patrilineal, as the children belong to their father's clan rather than to their mother's. The clan fulfills various

functions, including the important one of social control. Where an individual-level irreconcilable dispute involves persons belonging to different clans, elders from both clans deliberate and pass joint judgment (Ndeti 1972). The clan may be viewed as a larger form of the extended family, evidenced by some of its rules, notably those concerning marriage. Members of the same clan are prohibited from marrying each other, as they were considered to be related. Marriage to an individual from one's mother's clan is also not condoned, as women from the mother's clan are all considered an individual's mother (Mutisya, 2004). The rules and prescriptions of the clan have been diluted over time, as evidenced by the acceptance of intra-clan marriage today.

As a structure of participation, the clan supports its poorer members through raising contributions from amongst the wider membership. The *mbae* also requires its members to pay a regular fee in order to develop stocks that would be deployed in the event of unforeseen large disasters or *mbanga*. The specific purposes for which the clan makes contributions have changed over time. Today for instance, the clan members contribute money toward a reserve, used in the event that the members' children require support with the payment of school fees.

Another important characteristic of the clan is its accepted authority. The clan is a mandatory institution in the sense that breaching its rules and regulations is a punishable offense. A key informant said:

"Yes, like the clans. You see, each clan is unique in that they have different rules and regulations, but in all the clans, people have to contribute when they are told to" (Key informant interview, 3)

Another respondent observed that:

"Then they are punished through *maambo* (clan-administered punishment) or fined. But very few people go against what the clan says." (Community Group Interview, Matuu)

As such, it may be argued that even the clan's pro-social functions are regulated by compulsion rather than by individual altruistic concerns. Refusal to participate in such activities, to make contributions for instance, would invite punishment from the clan elders.

Constraints to participation: This refers to the factors that may limit people's participation in pro-social activities.

What are the factors that hinder or reduce participation in communal self help or volunteering within the respondent-group? Possible answers to these questions, particularly concerning communal self help, are better understood through the KRCS respondents, given that they reveal a more irregular engagement in these activities. The responses indicate that their participation in communal self help is shaped partly by their perceptions of the practice. The interviewees associate these types of activities with being located in rural areas, the villages. Being based in the peri-urban Machakos Central as they are, they do not see the necessity of self-organising in the way that rural respondents do. Further, they conceive of these activities as being predominantly undertaken by older people and in particular, older women. Given that they themselves range in age from 25-38 years old, this view may hinder their participation in such activities. One respondent observed, for example:

"I think it has to do with age and environment, where you have grown up. Most of us view those types of things as for our mothers, not for us. I can't tell Joanne**, 'lets start a *mwethya*', she would just look at me strangely. Being in town, we look at those things as for villages. And it's mostly done by older people. I mean, I may have an idea about

something, to initiate a *mwethya*, but if I approach people, they will just think I'm mad!" (KRCS, Interview 7, Female)

Further and related to the respondents' association of these activities with the rural areas, the regularity of their visits to their villages of origin may regulate the extent to which they engage in these activities. Secondly, the duration of their stay in the rural areas when they do visit, may also regulate their participation in the same way. Majority of the respondents indicate that they rarely visit the rural areas (perhaps once or twice a month) and when they do, do not stay for extended periods of time (a few days to a week), which does not allow them the opportunity to participate in these activities. Another KRCS respondent said:

"[I haven't participated]...not directly. I have just witnessed them, observed them. I have not been in a position to initiate or plan any, simply because I am not always physically "at home". It's only now that you have asked that the memories are coming back, I had forgotten about it, but I have witnessed dowry payments for my father and a friend of mine. My clan has not called for any participation lately, so I haven't contributed to it." (KRCS, Interview 1, Male)

The issue of knowledge of practice also arises in discussions on willingness to participate in another community's self-help activities. For instance, some respondents point out that different communities have different cultural practices and that they would not be willing to participate in them because they are not familiar with these practices. For instance, this respondent discusses the Luo of Nyanza Province (a big part of whose economic activity is fishing) and inhabitants of the coastal region, who harvest coconuts.

"Yes, depending on what it is. I mean, if it's fishing in Kisumu, I don't know the first thing about that, so I would not be able to. If it is harvesting coconuts in the Coast, again, I would not know what to do. If it is farming, I know how to do that, so I may be able to participate." (KRCS, Interview 5, Female)

Another respondent speaks about the same issue:

"It is not possible, especially if it is like clan activities. My clan is unique and there is no other clan that has the same regulations. I mean the Kikuyu do not have a clan which has the same regulations as mine, so I would definitely not participate in their activities." (KRCS, Interview 10, Male)

These sentiments and other direct quotes from this respondent group may not only explain the factors that constrain their participation in communal self help within their own communities, but also in other communities. Indeed, it does appear that there is less willingness to participate in other communities' self help activities, compared to their own.

Potential areas of further discussion

While this paper aimed to describe the overall research project and present some preliminary findings from an initial analysis of the data, it may be useful to reflect on the possible significance of some of these findings and in particular, the applicability (or inapplicability) of hegemonic concepts to context-specific practices and the significance of reciprocity.

As indicated above, the conceptualisations of volunteering vary widely, but certain key features of the current universal definitional framework are useful to this discussion. Firstly, volunteering is predicated largely upon notions of altruism. This is evident in characterisations of volunteering that suggest that individuals engage in these types of activities without the expectation of reward. In the findings above, it is evident that pro-social activities amongst the Akamba are framed on a range of factors, most of them non-altruistic. As indicated in the findings above, such activities are defined by obligation and compulsion (such as clan-based

activities), reciprocity and instrumentality. A further characteristic of the pro-social practice is its collective nature: helping is therefore not conceptualised as one person contributing their time, services or resources to help another person or group of people. Rather, it is a cooperative action which serves to achieve specific tasks, and more than that, to demonstrate to the participants and the wider community that should there be need for a marshalling of larger resources in the future, the community is capable of self-organising in this manner.

Again, reciprocity presents itself as a key principle behind the operation of pro-social practice in the community. Such reciprocity as indicated above, may be viewed as generalised and open (not time-bound) reciprocity. This reciprocity may have implications for understanding the relationship between the receiver and the giver. Where this reciprocity is in operation, the relationship between the giver and the receiver may be less hierarchical and more equalised. It may serve the function of maintaining the dignity of the person receiving help and reducing the "higher status" of the person giving help. In essence, it neutralises the inherent hierarchical relationship which is characteristic of a handout or charity.

Two other practices may serve to explain this point. In Ethiopia, a person helping a needy neighbour would only do so under cover of darkness, so that other members of the neighbourhood or village would not see the recipient's need, or the givers actions⁴. Such a practice would serve to prevent the receiver experiencing shame, and the giver being arrogant. A common practice in Kenya is for someone to fold a note in their palms and squeeze it into your hand, rather than make it obvious that they are giving or lending you money. Again, this example may serve the purpose of explaining the role of reciprocity in pro-social behaviour amongst the Akamba.

Conclusion

This paper has presented my research design and through a brief review of the literature, has provided a rationale for the investigation. The paper has also presented some preliminary findings arising out of recent fieldwork. I am still in the process of conducting the data analysis and other issues of interest may therefore present themselves as I conclude this phase. While I have indicated possible shapes my arguments may take under the preceding section, I will need to further link my findings to contemporary literature and theories on volunteering and pro-social behaviour as a step towards developing a more in-depth discussion and/or argumentation.

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⁴ This point was related by a former colleague, during a discussion on some of what I had observed in the field. Although not part of the investigation, this example is merely presented to further clarify the point.

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Chapter 7

Religion, Feminism and Freethought, 1830-1889

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This paper was first presented to the University of East London postgraduate research seminar in January 2006. It was later expanded to its current form and presented to the 'Themes in Modern Religious History' Seminar at Oxford University in June 2006.

When the leading freethinker Annie Besant was nursing her mother through her final illness, the dying woman lamented that her only daughter had 'always been too religious'. Besant agreed with her mother's analysis, affirming that she was indeed 'of the stuff from which fanatics are made'. What is striking about this exchange, recalled in Besant's autobiography, is that it took place when Annie Besant was a self-proclaimed Freethinker and enemy of Christianity. Besant did not believe these apparently contradictory identities to be in conflict for,

the heart of me was religious in its very fervour of repudiation of religion, and in its rebellious uprising against dogmas that crushed the reason and did not satisfy the soul...¹

This paper will introduce my research into 'Religion, Feminism and Freethought in Britain, 1830-1889'. Women's role within nineteenth-century Freethought has never been studied in depth, and those historians who *have* commented on the feminist current within the movement have done so only in passing.² However, my research does not aim to simply fill in the gaps left by the existing historiography- to describe what the women were doing alongside the men. The role of women in Freethought and the feminism they espoused *is* an important story which needs to be told, but there are also wider questions raised by this topic regarding the nature of religion, unbelief, secularisation and liberation which I want to address. I want to explore the process by which a feminist discourse emerged out of a conflict between religious and anti-religious world-views. Before the feminist arguments made by Freethinking women can be properly understood however, it is necessary to address some of the questions relating to the intellectual, religious and ideological currents which went into formulating their feminism. This paper offers a discussion of these preliminary questions rather than a detailed study of the content of Freethought feminism. Still in the early stages of doctoral study I will not try to draw

¹ A. Besant, *An Autobiography* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p.24

² E. Royle, 'Freethought: The Religion of Irreligion', in D.G. Paz (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions. Retrospect and Prospect* (London, 1995), pp.170-196, p.192

any too definite conclusions. Instead I hope to present for general discussion some of the conceptual challenges thrown up by research in this area.

Only a few months before her mother's death in 1873, Annie Besant had very publicly rejected her former Anglican faith by leaving her clergyman husband and taking up with a set of Secularists and Freethinkers in London.³ Besant was following in the steps of a number of nineteenth-century female Freethinkers, who had 'converted' from devout Christianity to an impassioned and vocal opposition to religion. Yet as Besant's account of her mother's dying words suggests, the boundary between the 'religious' world from which these women came, and the 'secularist' world into which they entered could sometimes become blurred. This paper will ask whether it is possible for the historian to posit such a clear cut distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular' when studying Freethinking women?

Freethinking women continued to contribute to contemporary theological discussion, to appropriate Christian language, and to debate with their Christian opponents- in short to operate within a 'religious' intellectual framework- whilst simultaneously espousing a militant secularism. It is my contention that the arguments for women's rights put forward by these women did not flow directly from a rejection of the patriarchal values of the Christian church, but emerged out of the contest between religious and anti-religious ideas in which both Freethinkers and Christians were engaged. It is therefore necessary to inquire into whether existing historical categories and conceptions of the 'religious' and the 'secular' are adequate to explain the lives and thought of Freethinking women? Our historical vocabulary needs to be expanded in order to express how, as Besant claimed, it was possible to be made of the stuff of religious fanatics and yet to identify religion as one's main enemy. It is in exploring possible answers to this question that I will appeal to this seminar to contribute.

First I'm going to talk about the rise of Freethought and the organised Secularist movement during the nineteenth century and the role of women within it. I will go onto introduce the group of female Freethinkers who form the focus of this study and provide some examples of the ways in which their thought continued to be influenced by Christian modes. The main body of this paper will consist of a discussion of the conceptual challenges outlined above, which will ask how we might develop a broader definition of religion and what implications this might have for *our* understanding of secularism- not to mention that of the Secularists themselves.

³ Ibid. and A. Besant, *Autobiographical Sketches* (London: Freethought Publishing Company, 1885). Besant's first contact with the freethinking world was in 1872 with the unorthodox Anglican minister Charles Vosey. She was soon a frequent visitor at the house of the freethinking publisher Thomas Scott. She became acquainted with the Ethical preacher and minister of the radical Unitarian South Place Chapel Moncure Daniel Conway. In 1874 her meeting with Charles Bradlaugh led her towards the more militantly atheist end of the Freethinking movement.

The period 1830-1880 witnessed a significant rise in the number and outspokenness of 'Freethinkers'- the term applied to those who questioned religious assumptions about the ordering of the world and who, as a result, tended to reject all forms of organised religion. It was also during this period that such Freethought sentiment was organised into the Secularist movement, a national organisation which argued that political, cultural and moral life should be separated entirely from religion, on the grounds that it was impossible to prove the existence of the latter. Secularism did not simply denote support for the separation of Church and State based upon a neutral regard for religious faith and the various belief-systems. The Secularist movement had its roots in a far more partisan and embattled debate, which was concerned not only with the role of religion in politics, but also with whether religion- specifically Christianity- could be considered both true and morally just.

Nineteenth-century Freethinkers saw themselves as the intellectual descendents of the enlightenment *philosophes* on the basis that their arguments against the existence of God or the possibility of supernatural occurrences were firmly rooted in an empirical and rational analysis of the workings of the natural world.⁴ Miracles were scoffed at along with virgin-births and the physical resurrection of Christ. Freethinkers deliberately set about constructing an opposition between the claims of science and those of religion, and they refused to accept that any aspect of religion could be justified in 'rational' terms. Freethinkers also critiqued Christian doctrine through the application of rational moral standards. The vicarious suffering of Christ implied by the Atonement was a particular target of Freethinkers preaching a moral code based on autonomy and individual responsibility. Developments in biblical criticism and comparative religion were utilised by Freethinkers to reduce scripture to nothing more than a collection of inaccurate historical documents and to show how religion was merely an expression of man's psychological needs and desires.

But Freethought was not simply an intellectual movement, and its development during this period cannot be separated from the political struggles out of which it emerged. Nineteenth-century Freethinkers consciously identified with a tradition of rebellion against state religion and arbitrary authority which they traced back through the French Revolution to the Enlightenment. The most prominent and infamous early nineteenth-century Freethinker, Richard Carlile, was imprisoned three times between 1817 and 1831 for writing, publishing, and selling blasphemous works, and on the second occasion his wife and sister (and his children with them) were sent to join him for a similar offence. The next wave of Freethought came as part of the

⁴ E. Royle, *Victorian Infidels. The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), p.107

Utopian-Socialist Owenite movement, which was active within popular radical politics throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Robert Owen rejected organised religion as part of the 'old immoral world', and between 1835 and 1845 this critique of religion became the most vocal, widely printed and publicly prominent aspect of Owenite doctrine.⁵ The more militant of the Owenite Freethinkers held public debates with their Christian opponents, which could attract audiences of up to five-thousand. Emma Martin (one of the best-known female Freethinkers and Owenites, to whom I will return later) specialised in invading churches and religious meetings, and denouncing ministers in the middle of their sermons.⁶ She often had to be forcibly removed by the police, or hounded out of town by angry, stone-throwing crowds.⁷ By the 1840s the mainstream of the movement had sought to disassociate itself from such militant advocates of Freethought. Martin's comrades, Charles Southwell and George Jacob Holyoake founded their own journal, the *Oracle of Reason*, whose intransigent tone and hard-line atheist attacks on all forms of religion led to the imprisonment of both men on charges of blasphemy. It should so far be clear, then, that by the 1840s, Freethought had become inseparable from the struggle for free-speech and freedom of the press.

With the disintegration of the Owenite movement after 1845, many of those who had been involved in the freethought and free-speech side of Owenism concluded that capitalist society would not be transformed until religion had been eradicated, and they set about building an organised movement which would achieve this. George Jacob Holyoake led the way, and in 1851 he decided on the term 'Secularist' to describe this new direction, which was summed up in the statement of the Central Secular Society as a commitment to science and reason and a rejection of the arbitrary authority of religion. Over the next ten years, some 60 local Secular societies began to grow up around the country, and in 1866 most were incorporated into the structure of the National Secular Society. [I should probably point out here that in this paper I use the term Freethought to denote the wider and more diffuse movement, and Secularist to describe people and projects that were part of the more structured organisation under Holyoake and Bradlaugh's auspices in the second half of the century.]

Secularism was by no means a rigidly defined ideology. It encompassed deists, pantheists and atheists, and included two rival factions, led by Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh respectively, which differed over whether direct attacks on religion were necessary and whether atheism had to be defined as a positive refusal of the possibility of the existence of God. Charles Bradlaugh

⁵ By 1839, lectures on 'theological and ethical' issues formed up to one third of the menu in the national diet of Socialist propaganda, see B. Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), p.136

⁶ See, E. Martin, *The Missionary Jubilee Panic and the Hypocrites Prayer. Addressed to the Supporters of Christian Mission* (London, 1844)

⁷ *New Moral World* (25 January 1845), p.246

was president of the National Secular Society, but in 1877 the British Secular Union was founded by Holyoake and his followers, as an alternative organisation for those who supported the more moderate position and/ or resisted Bradlaugh's authoritarian style of leadership. However, what did unite all Freethinkers in the Secularist movement was a political adherence to free-speech and freedom of the press, which was founded upon a fundamental commitment to the supremacy of individual private judgement in all matters of faith and government.

Freethought was thus a highly politicised and contested discourse, dealing with questions of freedom and authority, and it is therefore not surprising that it should have intersected with the women's rights movement which was also emerging during this period. Support for women's rights was an important current within Freethought throughout the century. Richard Carlile had published *Every Woman's Book, Or What is Love?* in 1826, which provided information about birth control and painted a positive picture of female sexuality.⁸ Owenite Freethought went hand in hand with condemnation of the institution of marriage and the oppression of women under the capitalist system. These pro-woman arguments continued in the organised Secularist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s all but one of the Secularist leaders supported the enfranchisement of women and the pages of the main Freethought journals, such as *The Reasoner*, *The National Reformer* and the *Secular Chronicle*, were often used to call for an end to women's oppression. Unsurprisingly, Freethinkers pointed to religion as the root of such oppression. They argued that the Bible was guilty of burdening all women with the sins of Eve, and that Eve herself had been unfairly blamed for the sins of her husband. Later in the century, some Freethinkers continued the earlier support for birth control on the grounds that it could protect women from the ill-health and possible death that accompanied both pregnancy and abortion during this period. In 1877 Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant deliberately engineered their own prosecution for the publication of a birth control pamphlet, in order to highlight the need for free access to such information.

Women remained a minority within the Secularist organisations, making up only about 12 per cent of their formal membership. Yet the Freethought movement as a whole did foster a small but prominent number of women who were strongly committed to and vocally supportive of female emancipation. Emma Martin, who had left her husband to become a nationally renowned lecturer and author of controversial Freethought pamphlets, was not the first female Owenite Freethinker to gain notoriety. Eliza Macauley (1785-1837) had been a struggling actress who began to lecture in a 'Jacobinical Chapel' in Grub Street in the late 1820s and at one point she

⁸ P.W. Martin, 'Carlile, Richard (1790-1843) Radical Publisher and Writer', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4685>

performed alongside Richard Carlile's partner, the feminist Freethinker Eliza Sharples.⁹ From there Eliza Macauley moved onto Owenite platforms, where she lectured on religion, women's rights and co-operation. Margaret Chappellsmith (1806-1883) was also employed as an Owenite Social Missionary who travelled the country to lecture against the evils of religion and in support of women's rights before she emigrated to the United States in 1850.¹⁰

The Freethinking Sophia Dobson Collet and Sara Hennell came from more middle-class families, and they moved in what Kathryn Gleadle has termed the 'radical unitarian' circles centred around W.J. Fox's South Place Chapel. From the 1840s onwards, Sophia Dobson Collet (1822-1894) wrote frequently for George Jacob Holyoake's Freethought journals *The Movement* and *The Reasoner*, often under the pseudonym 'Panthea'. She also attempted to act as Holyoake's mentor in his role as leader of the movement; though it is not yet clear to what extent he heeded her somewhat over-zealous advice! Sara Hennell (1812-1899) also wrote for *The Reasoner* and was the author of a number of works discussing religion, atheism and Freethought. She also supported her brother, Charles Hennell, in research for his book *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1836) – the writing of which ultimately led both of them to break with Unitarianism.¹¹ Hennell and Collet also represent a less overtly atheistic brand of Freethought. Sara Hennell is described by her biographer as a 'pantheist' or 'natural religionist' who rejected a too negative focus on the non-existence of God in favour of developing an alternative spirituality free from supernaturalism.¹² Sophia Dobson Collet always maintained that she did not share Holyoake's views despite her devotion to him. Although she did not believe in the Christian God, she maintained that it was possible for the world to have been created by an intelligent and benevolent- though not an organised or personal- Creator.¹³ As she grew older her religious views became increasingly conventional: she was drawn to the Christian Socialism of F.D. Maurice and it appears that she was baptised in 1870, probably under pressure from her sister.¹⁴

With the establishment of an organised Secularist movement in the second half of the century, Harriet Law (1831-1897) and Annie Besant (1847-1933) carried on the tradition of female lecturer- a role which was still novel enough to attract far larger audiences than many of their

⁹ B. Taylor, 'Macauley, Elizabeth Wright (1785?-1837)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); see also H. Rogers, 'Facing Her Public: The Actress, Eliza Macauley (1785-1837) Draft chapter for H. Rogers, *Working Women, Writing Women: Self-Representation in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (forthcoming)

¹⁰ K. Gleadle, 'Chappellsmith, Margaret (1806-1883)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004)

¹¹ S. Hennell, *A Memoir of Charles Hennell* (for private circulation, 1899).

¹² S. Hennell, *Christianity and Infidelity: An Exposition of the Arguments on Both Sides. Arranged According to a Plan Proposed by George Baillie Esq.* (London, 1857), p. 163, p.142

¹³ S.D. Collet, *George Jacob Holyoake and Modern Atheism. A Biographical and Critical Essay* (London, Trubner and Co., 1855), pp.27-29.

¹⁴ K. Gleadle, 'Collet, Sophia Dobson (1822-1894), writer and campaigner for women's rights', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004-5)

male counterparts. Harriet Law also edited the weekly Freethought journal, the *Secular Chronicle*, into which she introduced a 'ladies page', dedicated to discussing 'those political, social and domestic matters that especially affect women...'¹⁵ She was also the only woman to sit on the First International Working Men's Association.¹⁶ Annie Besant is perhaps the best known of all the female Freethinkers. After leaving her clergyman husband and moving to London at the age of twenty-six, she entered into an intense and possibly romantic relationship with Charles Bradlaugh, with whom she edited the *National Reformer*. She was also famous on the lecturing circuit and wrote numerous pamphlets attacking Christianity and supporting feminist causes such as the right for married women to own property, the reform of the marriage laws, and sex education for women.¹⁷

As I mentioned before, what is most striking about the careers of all these women is that each one was a committed and active Christian before their 'conversion' to feminism and Freethought. Emma Martin, Margaret Chappellsmith and Harriet Law were all Baptists. Annie Besant had been first an extremely Evangelical Anglican, before gaining a taste in her teens for High Church ritual. Sophia Dobson Collet and Sara Hennell had both been brought up as liberal Unitarians. Christianity remained an important in their intellectual life, long after they had broken with their former faiths, and it is this that I shall now go onto to discuss.

After their rejection of religion these women articulated their Freethought arguments in terms of a critical dialogue with Christianity. Both Emma Martin and Sara Hennell actually produced works in the form of a dialogue between a 'Theist' or 'Christian' and 'Inquirer' or 'Infidel', in which, of course, the latter triumphed by proving the impossibility of a universe governed by supernatural forces.¹⁸ Freethinkers also appropriated the language of Christian morality and imbued it with their own meaning in order to develop an alternative system of values. Emma Martin claimed that 'CHASTITY' did not mean the abstinence advocated by the Church, but a partnership based on true love. She argued that marriages not based upon a tie of true affection, whether sanctified by the Church or not, were nothing more than 'fornication'.¹⁹ Emma Martin, Harriet Law and Annie Besant used public platform debates with male clergymen or missionaries as a way of gaining publicity for their Freethought message. When it was not

¹⁵ *The Secular Chronicle* (2 Jan 1876), p.1

¹⁶ See H. Collins and C. Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International* (London, 1965)

¹⁷ See for example A. Besant, *Marriage; as it was, as it is and as it should be* (London, 1879) and A. Besant, *The law of population: its consequences and its bearing upon human conduct and morals* (London, 1877)

¹⁸ E. Martin, *A Conversation on the Being of God* (London, 187?); E. Martin, *Second Conversation on the Being of God* (London, 187?); S. Hennell, *Christianity and Infidelity: An Exposition of the Arguments on Both Sides. Arranged According to a Plan Proposed by George Baillie Esq.* (London, 1857)

¹⁹ E. Martin, *Religion Superseded or the Moral Code of Nature Sufficient for the Guidance of Man*, (London, ?1844), p.3, pp.6-7

possible to set up formal debates, Emma Martin and Harriet Law would write directly to Churchmen in order to dispute a particular theological point. On other occasions they simply attended Christian lectures and then argued against the speaker from the audience.²⁰ Much of the Freethinking feminist discourse to which these women contributed took the form of a rebuttal of the widespread Christian argument that Christianity had liberated women from the 'slavery' they had endured in 'savage' times, and continued to suffer in the present day in the non-Christian world. Annie Besant's pamphlet *Marriage; as it was, as it is and as it should be* argued to the contrary that it was the Judeo-Christian tradition which had established the notion of the wife as the man's property.²¹

Because their Freethought was so frequently expressed as part of a dialogue with their Christian opponents it is not possible to understand the ideas of Freethinking women without placing them within the context of contemporary Protestant culture and theological debate. Does this therefore prevent the historian from applying distinct categories of the 'religious' and the 'secular' in an analysis of the life and work of Freethinking feminists? Recently historians have begun to develop broader conceptualisations of religion, which could be used to understand how religious concepts might continue to structure the thought even of those who consciously rejected them. I will now go onto to discuss the possible implications that recent historiographical debates on questions of religion and secularisation might have for the study of Freethinking feminism.

Jeremy Morris described the recent 'shift in what historians are prepared to accept as "religion"' as a rejection of inflexible ecclesiastical criteria by which to measure religiosity (such as church membership, attendance and doctrinal authenticity), in favour of a discussion of religion beyond the institutional parameters.²² For example, Sarah Williams' study of popular religion in Southwark concentrated on *belief* and religious *mentalities* rather than on institutional Christianity. A focus on the language of religious belief provided her with an insight into the ways in which 'individuals could engage in a formative process of reinterpretation whereby received meanings are used and revised.'²³ Williams argued that these 'interpretive processes allowed redefinition of received Christian doctrines, whereby 'the inhabitants of

²⁰ E. Martin, *God's Gifts and Man's Duties. Being the substance of a lecture delivered by Emma Martin at the Hall of Science in Manchester, October 1, 1843, to which is added an address to the Minster, members and congregation of that chapel; and a letter acknowledging the receipt of "The Sinner's Friend" which had been presented to her by that gentleman* (London, 1843); E. Martin, *The Missionary Jubilee Panic and the Hypocrites Prayer. Addressed to the Supporters of Christian Mission* (London, 1844); H. Law, 'Letter to Rev. Dr. Guthrie', *Secular Chronicle* (13 Feb. 1876), p.69; 'The Rev. J.H. Gordon and Mrs Law', *Secular Chronicle* (18 June 1876), pp.288-289

²¹ A. Besant, *Marriage; as it was, as it is and as it should be* (London, 1879), pp.5-7

²² J. Morris, 'The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularisation Debate' *The Historical Journal* Vol. 46:4 (December 2003), pp.963-976, p.968

²³ S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture: A Study of the South London Borough of Southwark c.1880-1939* (D.Phil. Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1993), p.52

Southwark...saw the world through a combination of theoretically competing discourses.²⁴ Several different and apparently oppositional belief-systems could operate at the same time within the individual's world-view. Orthodox Christianity was intertwined with folk customs and traditions, so that

individuals could insist on the regular attendance of their children at Sunday school and still cut a lock of hair of that same child, place it between two slices of bread and give it to a passing dog as a cure for whooping cough.²⁵

Now I do not wish to argue that Freethinking women simultaneously believed in Christian doctrine and in Secularist teachings, but Williams' model is helpful in attempting to understand the ways in which a Christian discourse might have been reinterpreted and imbued with a new meaning, whilst retaining its influence as an intellectual structure or framework within Freethought.

The move towards a reconceptualisation of religion is also useful to my research for the way in which it has encouraged historians to reject a dichotomy between church goers and non-church goers and between believers and non-believers.²⁶ Callum Brown's concept of 'discursive Christianity' defined religion not as an institution, or even a set of beliefs, but as a 'dominant discourse' which 'infused public culture and was adopted by individuals, whether churchgoers or not, in forming their own identities.'²⁷ The diffuse and pervasive nature of Christianity as conceived in this way necessitates a complete rejection of distinct notions of the religious and the secular. For example, Brown argues that

'From the 1830s, the massive popular press of weekly and monthly magazines absorbed the evangelical narrative structure into a "secular" context. The connection was so close that it is almost inappropriate to speak of separate "religious" and "secular" popular magazines until at least the last decade of the century.'²⁸

The merits of an entirely discursive approach to analysing religious belief are debateable, and I do not wish here to endorse any particular analysis. However, such an approach can offer a way of understanding how vehemently secular and anti-religious women might have continued to be influenced by Christian norms and concepts. Gender historians have also begun to suggest ways in which a broader definition of religion can contribute to an understanding of the relationship between religion and feminism. Sue Morgan has recognised the potential for religion to permeate the lives and thought of women beyond its denomination boundaries. In arguing for greater attention to be paid to religion in the emergence of feminism, she also asserted that historians

²⁴ Ibid., p.iii, p. 40

²⁵ S. Williams, 'The Language of Belief: An Alternative Agenda for the Study of Victorian Working-Class Religion', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1:2 (Autumn, 1996), pp.303-317, p.311

²⁶ C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London, 2001), p.11

²⁷ Ibid., p.2

²⁸ Ibid., pp.79-80

should not assume that the social and emotional effects of faith were restricted to the devoted adherents of religious orthodoxy. For even the mental horizons of feminists who rejected the constraints of conventional forms of religion were shaped by its residual influence when they embraced heterodox spiritual alternatives or rationalist forms of atheism.²⁹

It is therefore apparent that recent attempts to develop 'a wider and deeper' conception of religion *can* begin to solve some of the conceptual challenges presented by a study of religion, feminism and Freethought. A reconceptualisation of religion necessarily implies a reconfiguration of the secular. However, the recent work focusing on religious belief as a discursive construct has tended to obscure the notion of the secular, rather than attempt to redefine it in a more meaningful way. If religion is conceived as discursive, as an all encompassing intellectual and linguistic framework which structures the thoughts of both believers and non-believers, the 'secular' sphere effectively disappears and 'secularism' becomes meaningless as a descriptive term. Some historians might argue that this is because secularisation and secularism have become useless historical categories. However, a study which focuses on self-proclaimed *Secularists* actively engaged in constructing a *secular* public sphere, does not allow for the category of the secular to be left unexamined. How might it be possible to conceive of religion as existing beyond the confines of ecclesiastical structures yet also to recognise and understand the significance of an explicitly secular movement? The final section of this paper will outline the terms of this question within the context of nineteenth-century Freethought, and open it up to the rest of the seminar for discussion.

The classical 'secularisation thesis' which posited the steady and inevitable decline of religion from the enlightenment onwards, in conjunction with urbanisation, industrialisation and the rise of rationalism, has been a popular target amongst religious historians since the early 1980s.³⁰ The inevitable decline of religion within an urban industrialised context has been questioned by, among others, Jeffrey Cox, who's book on Lambeth points to the flourishing of church life in the nineteenth century, and Simon Green, who has identified church growth and extension as a key feature of the period.³¹ Rosemary Chadwick and Mark Smith have produced studies which challenge the traditional portrayal of the nineteenth-century working classes as irreligious or 'unconsciously secular'.³² A too easy equation between irreligion and enlightenment has also been

²⁹ S. Morgan, *A Passion for Purity: Ellice Hopkins and the Politics of Gender in the Later Victorian Church* (Bristol, 1999), p.26.

³⁰ The classic historical examples of the 'secularisation' thesis were put forward by E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London, 1957) and K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (1964)

³¹ J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the age of decline. Organisation and experience in industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

³² R. Chadwick, 'Church and People in Bradford and District 1880-1914' (D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1986); M. Smith, *Religion and Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)

called into question. In the words of Jonathan Sheehan, 'in the last ten years religion has returned to the Enlightenment', and the idea that hostility to religion formed one its defining characteristics, has been challenged.³³ Neil Aston, for example, has suggested that the anti-clerical nature of the French Enlightenment was an anomaly within a European-wide context where 'the Enlightenment originated in reformist minded Christianity'.³⁴ The idea that the 'secularisation of the European mind' was brought about by the rise of a rational and scientific understanding of the world has been virtually dismissed out of hand. In the millennium Bampton lectures John Habgood laughed at the idea that atheists 'suddenly argue themselves into disbelieving'.³⁵

Alongside these critiques of the broader notion of secularisation, historians of nineteenth-century Freethought have begun to identify some of the ways in which this avowedly 'secular' movement displayed distinctly religious influences. Susan Budd noted that 'It was mainly those who had been actively and sincerely religious who had converted to Secularism'³⁶, and F.B. Smith showed how the organisational and propaganda techniques used by Freethinkers closely resembled those of the Evangelical Revival.³⁷ Edward Royle compared the psychological process by which an individual became a freethinker with that by which he might become a Christian, arguing that in both cases the individual was prompted by an emotional response which was only subsequently justified intellectually.³⁸ Shirley Mullen went even further, suggesting that many leading Secularists turned to Freethought because of the failure of orthodox religion to provide the degree of truth and certainty promised to them as children in Sunday school.³⁹ The prevailing interpretation has therefore been to characterise the Freethought movement during this period as an inverted religious sect.⁴⁰ In particular, Besant's trajectory from an intense Christian faith, to Freethought, to socialism and finally to Theosophy has been interpreted in this way by both historians and her contemporaries. They have assumed that her various political and religious positions were aspects of the same (slightly cranky) desire to find a universalised system for understanding the world.⁴¹

³³ J. Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, Religion and the Enigma of Secularisation: A Review Essay', *The American Historical Review*, 108:4 (2004), p.2

³⁴ N. Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe, 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

³⁵ John Habgood, *Varieties of Unbelief* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), p.6

³⁶ S. Budd, 'The Loss of Faith: Reasons for Unbelief Among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850-1950', *Past and Present*, 36 (1967), p.122.

³⁷ F.B. Smith, 'The Atheist Mission, 1840-1900', in R. Robson (ed.) *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain: Essays in Honour of George Kitson Clark* (London, 1967), pp.205-235, p.229.

³⁸ Royle (1974), p.108.

³⁹ S.A. Mullen, *Organised Freethought: the Religion of Unbelief in Victorian England* (New York, 1987), pp.27-33.

⁴⁰ Royle (1974), p.108; Royle (1995); C.W. Krantz, 'The British Secularist Movement: A Study in Militant Dissent' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Rochester, 1964); S.A. Mullen, *Organised Freethought: the Religion of Unbelief in Victorian England* (New York, 1987), pp.27-33.

⁴¹ See Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography. Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway* vols. I-II (London, Paris, New York and Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd., (1904), pp.264-5; M. Bevir, 'Annie Besant's quest for truth: Christianity, secularism and new age thought'. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50:1 (1999), pp.62-73. Bevir credits Besant with a rationalist approach, but still implies that her changing positions were interchangeable within her 'quest for truth in the context of the Victorian crisis of faith.', p.62

I believe that to view Freethought simply as another version of religious belief is too reductive an approach. Firstly, it separates Freethought off from the broader political context of nineteenth-century radicalism of which it was very much a part, and thus threatens to entrench artificial distinctions between the religious and the secular sphere, which place politics in the latter. Secondly, it denies those women who sacrificed respectability, financial stability and, in some cases, their marriages and their children, any rational motivation for rejecting one belief-system in favour of another. It also prevents us from taking seriously their actions once they had become part of the Freethought community. By focusing on the intellectual content of Freethought arguments as well as on the movement's cultural and organisational characteristics, I aim for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the previous religious commitments of Freethinkers and their subsequent anti-religious outlook. In order to ensure that a recognition of the religious influences on Freethought does not render its rejection of religion meaningless, it is necessary to develop a new understanding of 'secularism' with reference to the broader conceptualisation of what it means to be religious.

Nineteenth-century Freethinkers envisaged the process of secularisation not simply as a separation of the church and state, but as a moral revolution which would transform both the individual and society. The Secularists wanted to cleanse both the public and the private sphere from the stain of superstition, and this entailed not just an exclusion of religion from the public sphere, but the re-construction of all moral, cultural and intellectual life so that it was defined by its very opposition to religion.

Nineteenth-century Secularists drew on the work of freethinkers such as Shaftesbury, Hume and Paine to argue that morality could and should exist independently from religion.⁴² Older arguments against the immorality of a cruel and unjust God were given a populist twist, by illustrating them with quotes from the most lascivious and sensationalist passages from scripture.⁴³ Emma Martin challenged the idea that Christianity 'alone possesses a true standard of morality', reminding her audience of the many ways in which the churches failed to meet even their own standards.⁴⁴ Christian doctrines were often shown to be morally indefensible, and the most popular targets were the doctrines of Original Sin and the Atonement. One of the first questions Sara Hennell's fictional 'Infidel' advocate put to his 'Christian' opponent was to

⁴² D. Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain. From Hobbes to Russell* (London, 1988) p.154-167

⁴³ Robert Cooper's *Infidel Text Book* noted that of the four women named in Christ's genealogy, 'Tamar, who seduced the father of her late husband; Rachel, a common prostitute; Ruth, who, instead of marrying one of her cousins, went to bed with another of them; and Bethseba, an adultress, who espoused David, the murderer of her first husband.' Quoted in Royle (1974), pp.109-110.

⁴⁴ E. Martin, *Religion Superseded or the Moral Code of Nature sufficient for the Guidance of Man* (London, ?1840-1850), p.3.

ask why God designed man to sin and then punished him for it?⁴⁵ Freethinking women argued for an independent, alternative and superior Secularist moral framework. Eliza Macauley confounded challenged who argued that without the threat of future reward or punishment there would be no preventative to crime, with a superior moral argument which claimed that

They who act right in the hope of reward are *selfish*- they who act right from fear of punishment are *cowardly*...⁴⁶

Sophia Dobson Collet took it upon herself to prove to a Theistical audience that Atheists, particularly her beloved Holyoake, could nevertheless be moral individuals;

[that] the Moral Obligation is inherently sacred, and that the sense of obligation does not necessarily imply belief in a Person who claims our obedience...is a truth which needs to be clearly recognised.

Freethinkers constructed an opposition between reason and religion. Harriet Law claimed that 'Religion is the mental faculty which, independent of, nay, *in spite of sense and reason*, enables man to apprehend the Infinite.'⁴⁷ Sara Hennell also rejected the idea that it was possible to be both 'Christian and common-sense'.⁴⁸ Her critique of *Butler's Analogy* sought to prove that 'rational religion' was a contradiction in terms, and that once the principle of applying reason to religious faith had been accepted, scepticism was inevitable.⁴⁹ Biblical criticism was also utilised in order to emphasise the opposition between reason and religion. Freethinking critiques of Scripture were often less concerned with approaching the Bible as a historical document, than with simply pointing out that it didn't make sense. Emma Martin used her extensive and detailed knowledge of the Bible to identify instances in which God's power appears to have been limited. She pointed out, for example, that after liberating the Jews from Egypt, God was not able to provide His chosen people with the land he had promised them. How was it possible then, asked Martin, to believe in an omnipotent God, if Scripture plainly illustrated the limits of his power?⁵⁰ Harriet Law enjoyed exposing similar inconsistencies of logic found in Christian doctrine. On the matter of Original Sin, she was 'completely puzzled to know,' she told her readers, 'how you can reconcile the statements that children are innocent, and that death is the result of sin, yet children subject to it'.⁵¹ Freethinking women were often accused by their Christian opponents of an overly simplistic and literalist approach to Scripture and doctrine.⁵² However, such an a approach did not result from a lack of theological or scriptural learning, as

⁴⁵ Hennell (1857), p.1.

⁴⁶ *The Crisis* (16 June 1832) p.49

⁴⁷ *SC* (5 May 1878) p.212

⁴⁸ *SC* (30 April 1876), p.201

⁴⁹ S.S. Hennell, *Essay on the Sceptical Tendency of Butler's 'Analogy'* (London, 1859)

⁵⁰ E. Martin, *A Few Reasons for Renouncing Christianity and Professing and Disseminating Infidel Opinions* (London, 1840-1850?), p.7

⁵¹ *Secular Chronicle* (13 Feb 1876) p.69.

⁵² E. Martin, *The Bible No Revelation. Or the Inadequacy of Language to Convey A Message from God to Man. To Doctor Conquest. The Reputed Editor of the New Edition of the Bible with Twenty Thousand Emendations, This Second Edition is Most Respectfully Dedicated.* (London, 1850?), p.v. Martin dedicated this tract as a reply to the Rev. J. Burder of Bristol who accused Martin of having an inadequate understanding of Scripture.

their opponents claimed, but was deliberately chosen in order to drive home in the plainest possible fashion what Freethinkers believed to be an inherent opposition between reason and religion.

At the heart of the Secularist project was an attempt to separate all knowledge from religion, and it was particularly important that Secularism should win influence in the newly contested sphere of professional science. Public debates surrounding new scientific discoveries were therefore appropriated by Freethinkers as vehicles for their 'Science vs Superstition' agenda. In 1876 in the Old Street Hall of Science, Harriet Law lectured on 'The History of the Conflict between Science and Religion' which conjured up an eternal battle between the two opposing forces.⁵³ Harriet Law favoured the more fundamentalist, conservative elements of the Church for they fitted into this picture more conveniently. She dismissed as deluded those Christians who *did* welcome scientific developments such as Darwin's work on evolution. In a review of a work by Dr. White, president of Cornell University, which argued that 'there is no need to divorce religion from science', Harriet Law firmly stated that

From this view we entirely dissent. It is impossible to make allies of science and religion as their teachings, aims, and objects, are widely divergent; the material upon which they operate distinct; their premises wholly opposed, and their conclusion thoroughly antagonistic.⁵⁴

The more controversial scientists were appropriated to the Secularist cause. The *Secular Chronicle* included John Tyndall in its serialised biographies of 'Famous Freethinkers' and printed his portrait on their front page.⁵⁵ The journal also 'set forth, for the benefit of those who have neither means to purchase expensive works, nor time to peruse long and intricate ones...what Darwin's theory really is, and upon what evidence it is founded'.⁵⁶

Freethinkers distinguished the secular sphere from the religious realm not just by the *kinds* of knowledge it produced, but also by the *way* in which that knowledge was produced. Central to their outlook was the idea that individuals should come to their own conclusions about the workings of the world, rather than look to a higher authority for explanation. Christianity was condemned as an enemy to intellectual freedom and rational enquiry. Hennell argued that 'Revealed truth requires a child-like mind for its reception' and rather than refute this point, she made her fictional 'Christian' agree that 'To remain in a child-like frame towards the heavenly Father, is the best possible condition'.⁵⁷ Harriet Law likewise asked her readers, 'What is more prohibitory [sic] in the gaining of knowledge than [God's command] "But of the tree of the

⁵³ *Secular Chronicle* (6 Feb. 1876), p.66

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (20 Aug. 1876), p.85

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* (14 Oct 1877), pp.181-183

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* (24 Mar 1878), pp.133-135

⁵⁷ Hennell (1857), pp.8-9.

knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it...".⁵⁸ According to Freethinkers, it was inevitable that the exercise of intellectual independence should lead to a rejection of religious belief. Eliza Macauley announced that

it is indeed time we began to reflect upon these delusive doctrines to which we have so long submitted- not merely to listen to arguments for or against, but to exercise our own judgement

and she thus went on to condemn the doctrines of the Atonement and Original Sin.⁵⁹ Emma Martin, whilst exhorting 'Christians!...dare to think for yourselves...Read the Bible with the eye of Criticism, not faith'⁶⁰, took care to warn them that 'The province of the free-enquirer after truth, is to proceed with his investigation even though they should lead him to conclusions very different from those he expected to arrive.'⁶¹

The female Freethinkers described their own conversions away from religion in this way, claiming that they had come about as a result of inquiries previously accepted religious truths and attempts to understand the world for themselves. During her time as a Particular Baptist, Emma Martin had read the Bible daily, but it was only when she approached it with a spirit of inquiry, rather than the blind faith of the 'prayer spirit' which the Church required, that she was able to discover the truth about the world.⁶² Sara Hennell and her brother Charles similarly came to reject Unitarianism after a process of inquiry into its origins and a resolution to 'get to the bottom of the matter', which had arisen out of an initial desire to defend their religion against an unbeliever.⁶³ Annie Besant set out on the 'path to atheism' the moment she resolved that

whatever might be the result, I would take each dogma of the Christian religion, and carefully and thoroughly examine it, so that I should never again say "I believe" where I had not proved.⁶⁴

By recognising the importance of the supremacy of private judgement and independent inquiry to nineteenth-century Freethinkers we are given greater insight into their own particular understanding of the process of secularisation. By attributing secularisation to purely intellectual factors, the Freethinkers allowed the individual a degree of autonomous control over the belief-system which was to structure their entire world-view. The 'de-conversion' narratives of the Freethinking women testified to this. By proving that even the most devout Christians could free themselves from religion simply through 'serious consideration' and rational inquiry, Freethinkers were asserting a belief in the possibility of individualised democratic control over dominant ideologies.

⁵⁸ *The Secular Chronicle*, 28 May 1836, p.249.

⁵⁹ *The Crisis* (7 July 1832) p.66.

⁶⁰ E. Martin, *Prayer. The Food of Priestcraft and the Bane of Common Sense*, p.8.

⁶¹ E. Martin, *Baptism, A Pagan Rite* (London, 1844), p.3.

⁶² Martin, *A Few Reasons for Renouncing...*, pp.5-6

⁶³ Hennell (1899), p.32

⁶⁴ Besant (1885), p.55.

It could be argued that the origins of the classical secularisation thesis can be traced back to the Freethought of this period. Freethinkers celebrated the Enlightenment as the dawn of the modern age, in which science and reason would inevitably triumph over religion and eradicate superstition once and for all.⁶⁵ Eliza Macauley was among those who enthusiastically welcomed in the new age. In her 'Essay on Religious Responsibility' she described how

Hitherto we have been trained in a certain routine of ideas, to which we have submitted from custom, rather than convictions...but this period of intellectual imbecility is now passing away- we are beginning to think- we have boldly embarked upon the ocean of reflection...⁶⁶

Freethinkers maintained that the rejection of religion would occur within the individual as an entirely intellectual process resulting from a realisation that religion simply wasn't true. It was the task of all Freethinkers to clear away the cobwebs of superstition to reveal the truth about the workings of the universe which religion had obscured. By taking this knowledge to the rest of the world they would soon convince every member of society of the false nature of religion. Nineteenth-century Freethinkers, therefore, certainly *did* believe in what John Habgood had dismissed, the idea that atheists simply argued themselves into unbelief. It is not necessary to accept a wholesale *rejection* of the classical secularisation thesis to recognise that the Freethinkers' account of secularisation does not reveal the whole story. Their desire to establish a clear opposition between the religious world and the secular world sits in tension with the historian's realisation that Secularist activities must be studied within the context of nineteenth-century Christian thought and culture in order to gain a proper understanding of them. And yet, if it is no longer possible to take at face value the Freethinkers' own analysis of their project, the question remains, how should historians conceptualise their 'secularism'?

I've aimed, in this paper, to introduce you to the world of nineteenth-century Freethought and to show how it can be used as a lens through which to view recent debates on the nature of religious belief and secularisation. The small but influential group of Freethought women who form the object of my study defined themselves and their work wholly in terms of their rejection of religion. Despite this, their Freethought depended upon the knowledge they had acquired as devout Christians and continued to be shaped by Christian modes of thought. Their arguments were articulated as part of a dialogue with their Christian opponents and the audience to which they preached their message was a predominantly Christian one. It is possible, then, that their support for women's rights also arose out of this conflict of religious and anti-religious ideas, rather than from a straight forward rejection of patriarchal Christian values. Central to the

⁶⁵ Royle (1974), p.119). See also the series of biographies published on the front page of the *Secular Chronicle* in 1877 under the editorship of Harriet Law which developed a Freethought genealogy that claimed a wide range of 'enlightened' thinkers for the Freethought cause.

⁶⁶ 'Miss Macauley's Essay on Religious Responsibility' *The Crisis*, Vol. 1, No.13 (16 June 1832), p.49

female Freethinkers' vision of female emancipation was their commitment to the supreme authority of private judgement. A concept which can be traced back to Protestantism but which, once channelled via their personal experience of 'de-conversion', took on a wider meaning whereby intellectual liberation from state sponsored superstition became a template for female freedom.

It is therefore necessary to study the Freethought and feminism of this group of women within the context of contemporary religious culture and theological debate. Recent attempts to develop a broader conception of religiosity and a more flexible understanding of the cultural impact of religion offer a solution to this problem. By conceiving religion as an over-arching intellectual and discursive framework it becomes possible to trace the religious influences of Freethought, whilst recognising that these could have existed alongside a conscious hostility to and rejection of religious values and authority. Crucial to my approach is the desire to take seriously the reasons women became Freethinkers and the arguments they used in their battle against religion. This requires an examination of the concept of the 'secular' as employed by Freethinkers which does not merely dismiss it as a delusion. Revisionist critique of the classical secularisation thesis has questioned a too easy equation between the rise of a 'modern' society characterised by rationalism, science, industrialisation and urbanisation. It has therefore challenged many of the arguments used by the Freethinkers themselves in seeking to define their Secularist project. A new way of understanding secularism needs to be developed which acknowledges the problems of classical conceptions of secularism yet which also enables us to understand and account for the intellectual leap which I believe these women *did* undertake in rejecting religion for Freethought.

As a research topic, nineteenth-century feminism and Freethought focuses our attention on a point at which religion, radicalism and feminism all converged. It is impossible to untangle all the different elements which went into Freethinking feminism, and part of the point of my research is to argue that we should not try to. Instead we need to develop conceptions of both religion and secularism which emphasise the ways in which these competing discourses interconnected and impacted upon each other, rather than the ways in which they were separate and oppositional.

Appendix I

List of 2005/6 entrants to the School and their research topics

Akorede, M O	The use of local knowledge for participatory development
Baker, S	Domestic retro style, 1964-2006 : a democratic revolution of taste, or the perpetuation of class distinctions?
Branch, A	Boys will be Boys: an investigation into the influence of Glam Rock on gender development in working class adolescent males during the period 1971-1974
Brewis, G	The Ideal Service: Christian Missionaries and Social Services in India 1880-1930
Camacho Rojas, J	Towards a biopolitical urbanism : experimental politics and interventions in the urban megamachine
Cetti, F	Seeking asylum in the shadow of Europe's war on terror: the role of the refugee in the politics of fear
Chakraborty, A	Crossover cultures: Interrogating the 'Transnationalisation of Multiculturalism' in South-Asian Diasporic Cinema/Fiction
Chopra, S	Location/dislocation: the ethics of being nowhere and somewhere
De Ledesma, C	Navigating the trance party: music's role in a participatory experience
Ferguson, G	The psychopolitics of help: the family on lifestyle television
Goett, S	Linking Threads of Experience and Lines of Thought: Everyday Textiles in the Narration of the Self
Junka, L	Post colonial theory, representation, Palestinian agency
Leadbitter, H	Meeting the health care and support needs of refugee and asylum seeking families with particular reference to the impact of illness and disability on the young people within the family unit
Lim Bee Yin, J	Fantasizing the real: A postcolonial Malaysian perspective on the media and cultural impact of reality television
Lodato, M	Institutional abuse in Ireland: survival, redress and recovery
Loehrer, G	"Ubiquitous Structures of Control in Everyday Life" - fighting epidemics through conduct : the campaign against tuberculosis and polio in US-American public health films from 1938 to 1957.
Macdonald, J	Testing archaeoastronomical models of some late Neolithic monuments by 3-D computer simulation
McKenzie-Smith, S	The role of psychotherapy with older adults: mental adjustments in later life

Meldrum, B	Social enterprise in the voluntary and community sector: an investigation into balancing social and financial aims in the Salvation Army.
Metcalfe, C	For God's sake : an exploration of the life and work of women living the religious life in Ireland in the latter part of the 20th century.
Munavu, M	The cultural determinants of volunteering in Kenya
O-Chukwuma, K	Public-private partnership initiatives and community involvement:an effective strategy for sustainable development and poverty reduction in Crossriver State, Nigeria
Panahi, E	Inclusive citizenship
Papadima, M	Debates around child sexual abuse and trauma: Examining the meaning of 'victim'.
Pettit, K	'Not as bad as he had been led to expect'. The culture of East London's majority 1875-1914.
Pogoda, S	Virtual Avebury: A methodology for inclusion of sound in modelling embodiment to support phenomenological interpretations in virtual archaeological reconstructions.
Roles, J	Sonic branding, affect and the memory
Sandino, L	Life history narratives in the applied arts.
Sefre, D	Refugee experiences in education: A comparative study of Iranian and Afghani pupils in London's secondary schools.
Schwartz, L	Religion and Owenite feminism in Britain, 1830-1855
Sharif, M	The social construction of Jihad in Islamist publications of Pakistan 2001-2006
Stephens, S	Gender and power in the Wessex Neolithic and Early Bronze Age
Wilegoda-Wickramage, A	The socio-economic impacts of extreme and rapid climate events over London: vulnerability and resilience
Williams, B	Psycho-social implication of live-related or cadavaric pre-emptive kidney transplantation carried out during adolescence

Concluding discussion

Derek Robbins (DR), Sarah Baker (SB), Georgina Brewis (GB), Jorge Camacho (JC), Galit Ferguson (GF), Michael Munavu (MM)

DR:

As you know, I try to hold rigorously to a *materialist* view of social science production. That is to say that I think social scientific findings are the products of the particular social, economic, and political conditions within which they are generated. They do not automatically possess ideal or transcendental validity. They do not have any universal relevance that can be said to be intrinsic. They have the capacity to become universalized, but universalization is dependent on the field of reception of findings which may bestow relevance to new situations beyond the specific conditions of production. This process of bestowing relevance is also material and it therefore implies an encounter between the socio-economic conditions of production and reception of research. My materialist view of social science knowledge production emphasizes *subjectivity* in as much as the selves which generate research problems and findings are themselves the products of specific socio-economic, political or cultural conditions. My view also emphasizes *objectivity* because it acknowledges that the definitions of situations by selves takes place by reference to previously objectivated subjectivities, embodied in institutions and instituted intellectual discourses.

It follows from this statement that the intention of Yearbook I is to explore the subjective dimension of research production, and of Yearbook II to explore the objective dimension. These are not, however, distinct or separate. They are complementary and are in a continuously dialectical relationship.

In relation to Yearbook II, this leads me to pose the following introductory question:

Some of you are undertaking research which could be labelled History or Cultural studies research. Others of you are doing work which cannot so readily be identified with existing academic disciplines. How far do you find the rules and prescriptions of instituted disciplines help you to focus your research, or do they constrain you to such an extent that they impinge adversely on the questions you want to ask or the problems you want to solve. Do you experience as tension between the logic of your research enquiry and the required rhetoric of communication in the language of instituted disciplines?

MM:

In response to the question, I find that as my research develops, it fits less and less readily into a particular discipline. Previous research on volunteering has been undertaken from a diverse number of broad, traditional disciplinary 'tribes', including *inter alia* economics, anthropology and social psychology. However, my readings of the related literature suggest to me that the larger proportion of recent work on the subject has been undertaken from a multi-disciplinary perspective, often evidenced by co-authorship of recent journal papers by researchers from varied disciplinary backgrounds. Such 'multi-disciplinarity', to my mind, encourages the development of wider and alternative conceptualisations of volunteering.

My formative disciplinary orientation is 'community development', which I first studied at Daystar University in Kenya. At the time (1996-2000), Daystar was the one of the few

institutions offering a degree-level programme in this subject¹. Given that Daystar was a private university, I suspect it had relatively more autonomy (in comparison to public institutions) in designing curricula that were relevant to the contemporary context, in terms of marketability of its graduates within the local job market. By comparison public universities, some argue, more or less maintained the curricula that had been developed in the early years following their recognition as full universities in the 1970's² and therefore did not reflect 'modern' and more relevant trends. Again, the perceived bureaucracy of public institutions (arising from their ties with the state) prevented the easy 'upgrading' of programmes to render them better tuned to the contemporary setting.

The programme therefore incorporated a wide range of courses, including social psychology, social policy, community health, participatory research – all geared to reflect the skills needed or wanted by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's). Consequently, I think that the graduates from this programme were characterised by a superficial engagement with a relatively wide number of disciplines, rather than a deeper identification with a particular one, with the exception of the overall 'development' course. I should add that at the time of my undergraduate study there was an increasing dissatisfaction with the notion of development and the implications of its discourse were increasingly being contested. This growing movement is labelled post-developmentalism. This I only came to find out recently, which to my mind is a further demonstration that even what in I considered progressive development studies, contemporary debates lacked sufficient representation.

For my MA programme, I engaged with a particular academic discipline more than I had at the undergraduate level. The sociology that I chose to study was rural sociology and still denominated by a strong emphasis on the development of new and practical social policies and programmes. My conscious selection of rural sociology over other sociology courses on offer (and which had stronger theoretical prescriptions) reinforces my thinking that I was more comfortable with a disciplinary orientation that was more practical than theoretical. This position was further compounded by fact that I chose a combined study of rural sociology *and* community development. Although I have not studied sociology in the west, I get the impression that western universities focus more on theoretical aspects of the disciplines. This observation has sometimes led me to harbour an apprehension that my project somehow does not neatly fit into this perceived frame, given its heavily practical and policy related commitment.

Nonetheless, I feel that the underlying philosophy of development discourse is consonant with my personal commitment to "making a difference at the grassroots level", playing a part in reducing poverty, inequality and access to services, for the vulnerable. My feeling is that development studies, although not a traditional discipline, offers me the "rules and prescriptions" or a stance, that I am at ease with and that allows me to reflect my personal characteristics and commitments, in my work.

My attraction to the aims of development studies and the "rhetoric of communication" that it deploys compared to sociology for instance, is further evidenced by my planned move from the Department of Sociology (University of Nairobi) where I was based during my Masters programme, to an initial PhD application which I submitted to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the same institution. Many of the lecturers and researchers at the IDS were also consultants to local NGO's, International Development Organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations, and consequently, spoke the jargon social transformation that I had become accustomed to in my previous studies I felt that same language would allow me to articulate properly the rationale and aims of my PhD project.

¹ Daystar University attained full university status in 1994, but had been offering programmes as a University College since...

² The Royal Technical College of East Africa admitted its first students in 1956 and gained full autonomy after independence (1964). As the University College of Nairobi the institution was one of the three constituent colleges of the University of East Africa. Each of these three institutions attained full national university status in 1970, following the dissolution of the University of East Africa.

Development studies is in tune not so much with the mechanics of my research project, in terms of the methods I use, or my research questions (although it does frame these), or in the theoretical considerations that I may ultimately find useful. Of more significance is the underlying logic of development (or now for me, post-development) whose stated intention is to communicate a policy-oriented agenda. In sum, it allows me to do this, but also constrains me to fulfilling this goal. I want my study to inform policy, but I also believe that if it does not, it will be considered inconsequential particularly so amongst African or Kenyan audiences.

At UEL, I am housed within the School of Social Sciences and cannot claim affinity to a specific discipline; my supervisory team reflects a range of influences, including international sociology and anthropology. In addition, one of my supervisors is based within the Centre for Institutional Studies (CIS), which adopts a Popperian³ approach in its research. Because I do not strictly find myself moving in any of these one directions, and because of the multi-disciplinary orientation of the development studies discourse I still identify with, I feel that engaging with certain aspects of these disciplines, but not necessarily leaning in any one direction, continues to prevent a tension between my research and the prescriptions of instituted disciplines.

In re-reading this response, I notice what may be considered a privileging of the theoretical to the empirical, to the academic over the practical. But I would like to make my position clear: while I think these opposites carry with them both different implications on research, I more readily identify with the practical and the empirical, because it allows me to move beyond the confines of the prescribed theoretical requirements of the traditional disciplines. Moreover, it allows me to more closely link my research with my personal agenda of undertaking research that is not only 'worthy of a PhD award', but presents conclusions that are grounds for positive social change.

GF:

In response to Derek Robbins' questions above I would like to contextualise the paper I've included in this collection, and then to look at how my academic/educational "upbringing" has informed/ focussed/ constrained the theoretical/methodological positions in which I now find myself.

My paper refers to itself as 'psychosocial' because in varying forms, it was written to be delivered in three different contexts which each comprised of academics from a variety of different backgrounds, and with a host of theoretical affiliations. I felt bound to define myself in a way which I would not usually bother with: I was aware of my need to assure people from different disciplines that it was all right for me to cite psychoanalytic sources alongside ideological/cultural theory because I was taking a 'psychosocial' perspective. Ultimately, I do not want to solely define my research in this way, because I would like to maintain the useful tensions between my critical plundering of different (and often opposed) theoretical approaches without making them vanish by squashing all into a somewhat mysterious word.

My PhD is not solely concerned with 'shame', though I became obsessed with this issue while writing the presentation included here, and it will form a sort of thematic case study in Chapter 4 of my thesis. It is currently entitled "The Psycho-politics of Help: the Family on Lifestyle Television", and its thematically arranged chapters (will) explore notions of governance as they are connected with mediated 'help'; the importance of the audience for media, cultural, psychosocial and other studies, in the context of lifestyle television; and the problematised family and how to 'stage' and 'help' it, among other issues.

So my PhD and my theoretical/disciplinary position are perhaps less defined than the word 'psychosocial' might imply. From the age of 16 to 18 I studied for my A' levels in a North

³ Karl Popper

London Comprehensive school – in English, Latin and Biology. I couldn't decide whether to 'be' a scientist or to move in the direction of 'arts/humanities/languages'. I recall resenting – with huge adolescent passion – having to make that decision. Nevertheless, (or because of this) I decided to attend Sussex University, to study English Literature in the School of Cultural and Community Studies (1989-1992). I then did a Masters in Twentieth Century English Literature in the School of English and American Studies at Sussex, and went on to do a mixture of research and teaching in different educational (and less educational) establishments. I worked in the areas of media education, Media, English, Film and Cultural Studies, until I came to UEL in September 2006 to study for this PhD. Since my dominantly 'cultural materialist' education at Sussex, I have not assumed that there is such a thing as the objectivity of a researcher, or research which is not politically motivated/informed, or culturally and historically positioned. I was academically encouraged to consider the simultaneous use of varied disciplinary sources acceptable, without worries about validity or disciplinary boundaries.⁴

I recognise that my overall academic approach could be regarded as a Cultural Studies one, and my research *is* driven by concerns with the materiality of culture, informed by the ideas of Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and Alan Sinfield, among others. It is simultaneously informed by the writings of Jacqueline Rose, Rosalind Minsky, Ian Craib, and others who place the psyche more centrally in an analysis of cultural production/reception/experience. These two sets of often falsely dichotomised interests can be held together conceptually, contradictions and all, as a way of critically analysing the relationships between culture and the psyche, the group and the individual, the supposedly psychological and the supposedly political. A similarity between the more psychoanalytic and socio-cultural approaches is, to borrow from Derek Robbins, their "reference to previously objectivated subjectivities" in an effort to illuminate their contingency and thus their dependence upon culture as lived and as theorised.

In addition to all of this, what I have found myself having the confidence to engage with at UEL (largely because of the encouragement of my supervisors, Candida Yates and Corinne Squire) is the simultaneously psychic and social/ cultural positioning of researcher and object of research and academic/social contexts. The context of research, for me, is one which incorporates psychic and social elements, and recognises the material and symbolic politics of each. My PhD is an exercise in practising what I have just preached.

JC:

Some of the comments that I will put forward here were actually intended to be a concluding paragraph to my own contribution to this collection. Reading Prof. Robbins' opening question made me realize that they fit just as well here and may be more meaningful in relation to everyone else's intervention.

The opening question seems to me particularly relevant because the issues of inter-disciplinary relations and the logic and dynamics of academic fields (as social or sociological conditions) have increasingly been playing a central role in my project. Certainly, I have no doubt that, for good and bad, it is perhaps only because of the specific intellectual, disciplinary and institutional conditions where I have developed my research (Cultural Studies, in general, UEL, in particular, etc.) that it has been possible to propose such project and such theoretical problems which are, I believe, intrinsically trans-disciplinary. Perhaps in other academic context with more rigid boundaries and more focused methodologies and research objects it would have been impossible. So, in that sense, the social (and sociologically relevant) conditions already go a long way towards explaining certain features of my project. In turn, the internal or purely theoretical tensions and dynamics animating it have themselves driven certain inter-disciplinary encounters that have been not only intellectual but also thoroughly social.

⁴ To miss out the massive influence of my familial upbringing seems odd in the context of my theoretical approach, though it does not seem relevant to the overarching concerns of Yearbook II.

The question about the distinction and relationship between philosophy, science and other forms of intellectual production has been raised again recently in the immediate philosophical context influencing my research. It is perhaps for this reason that I have been more aware of the way in which my project is necessarily interstitial. In recent French philosophy, for example, Deleuze and Guattari have distinguished between philosophy, science and art as different modes of thought with their own specific product (concepts, functions and affects, respectively); Alain Badiou, on the other hand, has proposed a model in which philosophy is subtended by four 'conditions' which are also spaces for the development of what he calls 'truth procedures': science, politics, art and love. While I do still believe that such philosophical or abstract (perhaps idealist) forms of distinction between modes of thought is important, it is also clear that, from the point of view taken in this collection, these accounts (and other similar ones) fail to articulate the (perhaps materialist) recognition that such three or four modes of thought are also (perhaps first and foremost) social *fields* of intellectual production in Bourdieu's sense.

My own research project is immediately 'conditioned' by three of these wider fields or modes of thought: philosophy, science (urban geography, ecology, sociology) and politics (or, more precisely, activism). Most importantly—and this is the argument that could serve as conclusion to my paper—it is precisely this inter-field or inter-disciplinary position that has positively forced me to 'modulate' that to which I referred to as a 'theoreticist momentum' driving my project.

Moreover, this inter-disciplinary encounter has been thoroughly socio-theoretical. This means that it has involved not only the most common and straightforward aspect, that is, the properly intellectual or theoretical encounter (engaging with literature and research stemming from other fields: urban geography, environmental and technological history, etc.) but also a more challenging aspect: the encounter with the criteria and dynamics of other disciplines or fields in its social and institutional dimension. I could mention here my encounter with the group INURA, an organization that, working simultaneously in *research* and *action*, is installed in the interstices of *science* and *politics* (or activism) as fields and modes of thought. The main challenge in this encounter has been to try out the more philosophically oriented (and assessed) arguments of my project in a context where scientific and practical-political considerations constitute the measure of value.

Of course, this relates immediately to Prof. Robbins' concern about the social and institutional dimension of inter-disciplinary work. In this sense, my own answer to his initial question is both affirmative and positive. Affirmative because the 'rules and prescriptions' of different disciplines have been definitely shaping certain aspects of my research project; and positive in the sense that, at least so far, I consider that such constraints have shaped my approach in ways that are beneficial for the outcome of the project itself.

GB:

My PhD research I describe to others as historical research. I attend 'history' seminars at the Institute for Historical Research. I run a network of academics and postgraduates called the Voluntary Action History Society. I am organising a 'history' conference at the University of Liverpool in 2008. When I am then asked about the history department in which I am based or the other UEL 'historians', it is sometimes difficult to describe the School of Social Sciences, Cultural and Media Studies. History is not even in the title. Only one of my supervisors is an historian.

In producing work which I consider to be historical research it is useful to have access to appropriate forums in which to present and discuss this work: seminars, conferences and journals. At such events the focus of discussion is on the content of papers and methodological and theoretical questions occur in the context of a shared understanding of the historical academy. I do think history is a fairly flexible discipline able to absorb the insights of work produced across many disciplinary boundaries (including but not limited to

anthropology, social sciences, economics, cultural studies, post-colonial theory) without losing its own identity. This is particularly so in the work of the past twenty-five years after the linguistic and cultural turns. In fact it could be said that historians are more able to take inspiration from other disciplines than to engage with new fields of work within historical studies. Hence my own work tries to bridge the gaps between British colonial history, missionary studies and the history of voluntary organisations and charities in the UK and India.

Yet my PhD research arose not solely from an engagement with the historiography of these fields of work but also from the three years I spent as a researcher of volunteering and voluntary organisations. The study may be said to have been structured by the environment of social policy research in which I was working (which often seemed rather a-historical) and my academic background in history, which provided crucial references points to my professional work. My degree in history and politics at Oxford University provided a clear introduction to the world of sometimes rigid academic boundaries: 1999 was the first year the University provided this joint honours course and books were kept in separate faculty libraries on different sides of the city. At Masters level I studied social research methods, as a practical preparation for my then chosen career in public policy research. My PhD research has been inevitably shaped by the institutional context of UEL: almost in the negative sense of needing to find alternative forums for discussion, such as the IHR seminars and the history seminars and conferences I organise. This I feel is vital to my development as a researcher/historian. However, studying at UEL has also had the incredibly positive benefits of allowing me to see the possibilities of producing high quality research at a 'new' University and to understand that this quality may stem not from ordering disciplines in separate buildings but – to stretch the metaphor – in adjacent rooms with connecting doors.

SB:

As a PhD student one of the most difficult questions for me to answer is "What area is your research in?" or "What is your research about?" When asked this type of question I am never sure whether to detail my whole argument and its contexts with the potential of the listener wishing they had never asked, or to say 'it's cultural studies' or 'consumer cultural theory' aligning myself with a particular field, which the listener may or may not have any knowledge of. Usually I seem to end up with a combination of both depending on the audience. This everyday dilemma demonstrates my ambivalence towards aligning myself with an academic discipline. I will explore this ambivalence in more detail below, whilst addressing some of the questions posed by Derek Robbins.

Until recently I had tended to view education as a 'means to an end'. Although I enjoyed learning, I considered it a way of entering the profession or field that I found the most interesting.⁵ This was reflected in my choice of degree, (BA Marketing and Advertising at The London College of Printing), which was one of the first vocational courses to be given degree status at the college. With the exception of one lecturer, the course taught students how to be 'effective' marketers and advertisers with little reflection on consumer society in general, or the role of marketers and advertisers in that process. As my course prescribed I went on to work in design and marketing, as did many of my fellow students. Whilst working my interest in more critical texts grew and I started to consider returning to education. In 2004 I began an MA at UEL in 'Consumer and Promotional Culture'⁶ and went on to begin my PhD.

This journey highlighted the difference between vocational marketing and advertising courses and more theoretically based ones. It was also representative of the difference between business studies and cultural studies more generally. For example the importance of 'politics' in the latter was the reason for the renewed enthusiasm that I found for

⁵ This was no doubt shaped by my education in a fairly ordinary comprehensive school and the influence of my parents who learnt most of their skills 'on the job' rather than in the classroom.

⁶ This MA was basically a Cultural Studies programme, but the very specific title originally attracted me to the course.

education and I relished this difference in the 'disciplines'. The more difficult part of the transition was the contrast in values and social conditions found in an academic environment in relation to those found in a business one. For example the isolation of academia was difficult in relation to the relative 'team spirit' and feelings of community that existed in my previous job.

The legacy of my education and the institutional environments in which I have been taught continue to influence my PhD topic. For instance I still feel more comfortable focusing on research objects, rather than abstract theory. Focusing on an object, such as retro style, also enables me to select theories according to their relevance, rather than adhering to a particular discipline. My work uses theorists that would usually be positioned in design history, material culture, sociology, consumer cultural theory and cultural studies.

However, although I enjoy some freedom from 'instituted' disciplines, I am obviously shaped by my institutional environment. At UEL I have become gradually more engaged with the field of cultural studies. The interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies at UEL has allowed me to carry out my research⁷, which I feel I would be unable to do in another context. Thus the ambivalence that I outlined towards defining my PhD project is also found in the definition of cultural studies as a discipline itself. Cultural studies is continually questioning its position and relevance⁸. Although this may make cultural studies seem precarious, its emphasis on interdisciplinarity, reflexivity, and redefinition are also its strengths.

⁷ I received funding for my MA and continue to receive funding for my PhD from UEL.

⁸ A point that became obvious at the Cultural Studies Now 2007 conference at UEL, with which I was involved.