Policing the Crisis: A Particular Mode of Analysis, Re-Constructed and Emulated

Jürgen Kramer

TU Dortmund University, Germany

I.

One thinks as one can. (Hall 1997: 27)

(1) Somewhat uneasily, *Policing the Crisis* begins with a reservation: "This book started out with 'mugging', but it has ended in a different place – as the discerning reader who notes the transition from the sub-title to the main title will already have noticed" (Hall et al. 1978: vii). But while it may well be that the protracted transitions from the first object of research to the next, to the third etc. have prevented the book from becoming the Cultural Studies classic it undoubtedly is, the apologetic tone seems out of place. *Policing the Crisis* has been cited and discussed in many fields: in media studies, youth studies, criminology and politics (e.g. in debates on state formations). Its contributions to studies of race, racism and racialization, its examinations of moral panics and its analyses of policing have been (albeit at times only grudgingly) acknowledged. Most people, however, who have referred to the book or have taken up certain aspects of it, have hardly commented on the way in which these aspects were analysed and then combined to construct a sustained argument. In my view, the characteristically complex move from a minor social incident (such as 'mugging') to the wider social formation, i.e. trying to answer the intricate question of what the former had 'to do with everything else' (as Stuart Hall was wont to insist), constitutes the particular mode of Cultural Studies analysis. In what follows I should like, first, to re-read and re-construct its central arguments in order to demonstrate the pivotal methodological role of *Policing the Crisis* for Cultural Studies and, secondly, to apply this particular mode of analysis to the cultural ritual of 'taking tea'.

(2) When in August 1972 an elderly widower was stabbed to death by three young men whose primary motive had been robbery, the incident was characterised by the police as "a mugging gone wrong" and by the press as "a frightening new strain of crime" (Hall et al. 1978: 3). Chapter 1, entitled "The Social History of a 'Moral Panic'", carefully contextualises both statements. While the use of the term 'mugging' to describe a British

crime was new, the term itself was not: it had been used in British press reports about the US signifying a widespread feeling of "general social crisis and rising crime" (ibid.: 23). Moreover, the crime to which the term referred was not new either; its history (traditionally called 'robbery' or 'larceny from a person') was as old as the world. Moreover, a check of the available crime statistics did not permit to speak of either "a frightening new strain of crime" or a dramatic worsening of the situation. Thus, a term which already signified something more than an ordinary crime elsewhere was, first, "appropriated and applied to the British situation" (ibid.: 27) and, then, progressively naturalised in this new context. But what struck the authors of *Policing the Crisis* most was the 'concerted action' with which the courts, the media and, more invisibly, the police reacted to the 'mugging' phenomenon. Their meticulous study (in Chapter 2, "The Origins of Social Control") revealed that, far from being "passive reactors", these "agencies of public signification and control" had to be understood as "actively and continuously part of the whole process" (ibid.: 52). In Chapter 3 ("The Social Production of News"), a number of central aspects concerning media professionalism are critically analysed and evaluated. The chapter persuasively demonstrates "how and why the intimate connection between the sources of crime news" – i.e. the courts as well as the police – and "the means of public dissemination (the media) served powerfully to structure and mould public knowledge about crime, and [...] to inflect that understanding with 'dominant interpretations'" (ibid.: 136).

To sum up, Part I provides the initial problem and its scrupulous interdisciplinary contextualisation. This stage of *exemplary analysis* I should like to call the 'Micro-Level' of analysis. In this particular case it requires empirical evidence from ordinary disciplines such as law, criminology, media studies, statistics etc., but is also fuelled by questions which are out of the ordinary: "'What, other than what has been said about this topic, *could* be said?' 'What questions are omitted?' 'Why do the questions – which always presuppose answers of a particular kind – so often recur in this form?' 'Why do certain other questions never appear?'" (Hall et al. 1978: 65)

(3) Part II moves to a different level of analysis. The exemplary incidents, economic and political problems as well as their constitutive and resultant ideological concerns are treated in a more systematic manner. Chapter 4 ("Balancing Accounts: Cashing in on Handsworth") deals in depth with the 'Handsworth case', in which three boys (aged 16) were given heavy jail sentences: two of them ten years each and their (so-called) ringleader twenty years. The authors assess and evaluate the primary news of the verdict and the subsequent editorials in the national (quality and tabloid) press as well as in the regional and local papers. Three results of this analysis stand out: with few exceptions, "editorials on Handsworth supported the sentences" (Hall et al. 1978: 89), more generally speaking, there was no liberal voice to be heard at this (high) point of the mugging panic, and the issue of 'race' at once dominated the accounts and served as an

index of allegedly imminent social disintegration (cf. ibid.: 90, 100). While the problem of "the relationship between physical environment and social conduct" (ibid.: 115) was occasionally raised, it was not followed through but, rather, absorbed in seemingly well-known, meaningful and conclusive public images such as the 'ghetto' or the 'new slum' (cf. ibid.: 118).

Chapter 5 ("Orchestrating Public Opinion") stays with the Handsworth case in order to analyse letters to the editors of national and local papers and abusive letters to, for example, the mother of the main offender. Both genres – public and personal letters – differ with regard to the measure of censure, hatred and abuse they allow themselves to vent, but converge with regard to their contents: in them "certain fundamental 'root-concepts' or images" recur which revolve around ideas of the family, sexuality and race and which represent "certain bed-rock sentiments and certainties about the world" (Hall et al. 1978: 134) in which the letter writers believe to be living. What was so striking about this latter perspective ('from below') was that, although it was by no means uniform, it appeared to be generated from a limited set of ideas (cf. ibid.: 138).

Chapter 6 ("Explanations and Ideologies of Crime") tries to provide a sample of these ideas and paradigms related to the book's problematic. Its first section ("Images of Society") lists elements of what the authors call "traditionalist ideology" (Hall et al. 1978: 140): 'respectability', 'work', 'discipline' (and 'self-discipline'), 'hierarchy', 'authority', 'the family', 'the city' (as criterion of civilisation), 'England' and, finally, 'the law'. While these elements must not be thought of as forming one unified 'master ideology', some of them can aggregate in clusters. For example, "the hierarchical nature of society, the importance of authority and the acclimatisation of the people through self-discipline" (ibid.: 143) form such a cluster – as do the terms 'respectability', 'work' and 'discipline' (and 'self-discipline') in their connection with 'the family'. In this context, crime, as the anti-thesis of 'the law', becomes "the reverse of the 'normality' of 'Englishness', [...] which if left unchecked can rot away the stable order of normality" (ibid.: 150). In the second section, the roots of the traditionalist world view are laid bare: common sense. On the one hand, common sense – here the authors lean on Marx – consists of "certain seminal ideas and ways of thinking" which have become "so sedimented in social practice" that they are "'taken for granted' because they are so massively present in our experience" (ibid.: 151). On the other hand, common-sense thought – here Gramsci and, to a certain extent, Althusser contribute – is also contradictory, contested, the object of competing hegemonic forces and, therefore, in any one moment 'structured in dominance'. In this way, the 'ruling ideas' can come "to be equated with 'how things are'" (ibid.: 156) so that this universalised form of common sense can successfully mask different experiences (of class, gender and ethnicity) and, thereby, help cement a moment of temporary closure. In times of 'bliss' (when the economy is running smoothly, unemployment figures are low, consumers can spend

without thinking about tomorrow), this may work. But once contradictions appear to question or threaten what seem to be established living standards, "ideological work" (ibid.: 162) becomes necessary to maintain the established hegemony. One particularly successful strategy (sketched in the third section) is to warn of a loss of something (property, power, happiness) and diagnose potential 'causes' of such a loss (criminals, opponents/competitors, killjoys). Quickly, the latter will be recognised as 'folk devils', the "bearer[s] of all our social anxieties" so that people will feel justified to turn against them "the full wrath of our indignation" (ibid.: 161). It was in this way that the 'mugger' was constructed as a 'folk devil' – at once the cause and the product of a social panic. The judiciary, the press and the police – each playing their own score – performed like an experienced trio. What may sound like a conspiracy was nothing of the kind: at the beginning of the 1970s, particular economic, political and ideological factors overdetermined each other; social dominance and resistance were exercised through cultural forms and practices in such a way that the crisis of hegemony became one of authority: a general crisis of the state (cf. ibid.: 177).

With this result the second, *intermediate* or 'Mezo-Level', of analysis is exhausted: the different aspects of a particular problematic – 'Handsworth' and its paradigmatic context – are drawn together and constructed as the interdependent elements of a *configuration*. At this stage theories (or elements of them) from different fields (philosophy, sociology, semiotics etc.), which have contributed to thinking about or thinking through, say, the emergence of folk devils, the rise of social panics, as well as the form and function of common sense, can help shape such a configuration, if they are adequately selected and tested. In this context, psychoanalysis may also be helpful, as it offers explanations of individual and collective defence mechanisms.

(4) Part III – which, to me, is the core of the book – once again moves to a different level of analysis: the social formation as a whole. Its lucid and subtly differentiating chapters possess the stature of a classic. It was not only the best analysis of the post-war social democratic settlement and its collapse to date, but also virtually predicted the rise of Margaret Thatcher. Chapter 7 theorises the relationship between "Crime, Law and the State" with particular emphasis on (i) "crime control" as "an aspect of that larger and wider exercise of 'social authority'" (Hall et al. 1978: 190), (ii) "the law" as "one of the principal public 'educators'" (ibid.: 192), and, finally, (iii) the state as "the organiser" (ibid.: 205): the organiser of consent (as long as possible), but also the organiser by means of coercion (as soon as necessary). Chapters 8 and 9 describe and analyse the emergence of a law-and-order society. First, "the formation of a certain hegemonic equilibrium in the immediate post-war period" (ibid.: 218) is traced (the creation of the welfare state, the politics of affluence, the state as manager of class relations). This is followed by a depiction of the slow but distinct process of "its erosion and break-up" (ibid.) caused by a succession of 'moral panics' ('mods and rockers', permissiveness, the

two faces of '1968': the student revolt and Powellism). Piecemeal attempts to "secure 'consent' by a more coercive, non-hegemonic use of 'legitimate force'" (ibid.) were of no avail: obviously, "the dominant culture […] felt itself out of control" (ibid.: 258). In 1970, when the conflicts between capital and labour intensified and the Heath government tried to bring the trade unions to their knees, the long-smouldering crisis of authority (of the 1960s) was transformed into a crisis of the state – and the state mobilised the law on its side to discipline labour and society as a whole: it *then* was on its way of becoming an 'Exceptional State'. What enabled the government to make this move was the fact that "the thrust of restraint and control from above" was propped up by "popular moral pressure from below" (ibid.: 278). In 1972, a number of crises converged: not only was the Heath government stopped dead in its tracks, Northern Ireland had its 'Bloody Sunday', national and international terrorism were on the advance (Munich et al.), and Idi Amin announced that he would expel 40,000 British Asians from Uganda. This then was the scene set for the ensuing 'mugging' panic. Its effect depended on

> at least five essential conditions: a state of anticipatory mobilisation and 'preparedness' in the control apparatuses; a sensitising of official circles and of the public through the mass media; a 'perceived danger' to social stability – such as when the crime rate is read as indexing a general break-down in social authority and control; the identification of a vulnerable 'target group' (e.g. black youth) involved in dramatic incidents ('muggings') which trigger public alarm; the setting in motion of the mechanisms by which conspiratorial demons and criminal folk-devils are projected on to the public stage (Hall et al. 1978: 305).

Thus, in the following years, large sections of British society appeared to be fixated on "the idea of a conspiracy against 'the British way of life'" because for those who are "mesmerised by *consensus*" (Hall et al. 1978: 309), "conflict must arise because an evil minority of subversive and politically motivated [people] enter into a conspiracy to destroy by force what they cannot dismantle in any other way. How else can 'the crisis' be explained?" (ibid.: 310) Put simply, when something adverse (loss, uncertainty, anxiety) becomes a dominant force in public consciousness, it may develop into a moral panic which, in turn, may converge with other moral panics. These then may nourish paranoid ideas about a general conspiracy whose bearers, in turn, will expect the powers that be to do everything – legitimate or not – to uphold the status quo and punish those who – truly or not – put it at risk.

(5) With its comprehensive historical sweep, theoretical depth and ardour of discovery, Part III associates, links and combines the configurations of Part II in such a way that they form a provisional template against which Part IV can finally examine "'mugging' from the perspective of the society in which it occurs" (Hall et al. 1978: 327). In this structuring effort, the authors directly rely on Gramsci's concepts of 'hegemony' and 'conjuncture', on Althusser's reflections on ideology and 'ideological state apparatuses' as well as on 'contradiction' and 'overdetermination' and, indirectly, Freud's concepts

(as seen through the eyes of Lacan and Althusser) of 'condensation' and 'displacement'. In their highly complex and subtly differentiating analysis the authors discover "a set of interlocking structures which *work through race*" (ibid.: 389). They define racism as

> the specific mechanism which 'reproduces' the black labour force, from one generation to another, in places and positions which are race-specific. [...] [B]lacks are ascribed to a position within the class relations of contemporary capitalism which is, at one and the same time, roughly coterminous with the position of the white working class (of which black labour is a fraction), and yet segmentally differentiated from it. In these terms, ethnic relations are continually overdetermined by class relations. (ibid.: 389)

And where does black crime fit into this set of interrelated issues?

> It provides the separation of the class into black and white with a material basis, since, in much black crime (as in much white working-class crime), one part of the class materially 'rips off' another. It provides this separation with its ideological figure, for it transforms the deprivation of the class, out of which crime arises, into the all too intelligible syntax of race, and fixes a false enemy: the black mugger. (Hall et al. 1978: 395)

(6) *Policing the Crisis*, I should like to argue, is an ideal case study in Cultural Studies. Its particular mode of analysis moves on three levels of ascending order (cf. Table 1). The *first* stage of analysis ('Micro-Level') works by 'example': a particular problem (a fact, event or sign) attracts attention, is closely looked at and contextualised. Here, empirical evidence and multiperspectivity matter. Moreover, questions 'out of the ordinary' need to be thought of and asked which go against the grain of the dominant discourse and, thereby, allow alternative interpretations. The *second*, intermediate stage of analysis ('Mezo-Level') approaches as many of the different aspects of the problematic as possible in a more systematic way; it draws them together and constructs them as interdependent elements of a socio-cultural configuration. The consistency of such a configuration may benefit from the introduction and application of theories (or elements of them) geared to the particular problem under discussion. Here, a sure grasp of the range and capacity of relevant theories – eclecticism may have the edge over rigour – and an aptitude for employing some kind of 'thick description' is vital. The *third*, systematic stage of analysis ('Macro-Level') is characterised by its holistic attempts at associating and combining the preceding partial configurations into an overall – again, theoretically informed – picture or template: a 'soft' version of totality (cf. Jay 2010: 97), if you like, which allows locating the elements of the problematic in relation to the social formation as a whole (or, at least, to relevant parts of it). It goes without saying that the concepts and/or theories employed do not operate at the same level of abstraction (cf. Hall 1988: 153), but at the specific level at which they are employed. Once the third (or final) level of analysis is exhausted, the analysis should have reached its provisional

result. Ideally, we should be able to tell what the problem that attracted our attention at the beginning has 'to do with everything else'.

MACRO-LEVEL (**systematic**)	(PARTS OF) THE SOCIAL FORMATION AS A WHOLE	**(10) THE POLITICS OF 'MUGGING'** (9) The exceptional state (8) The exhaustion of consent (7) Crime/law/state
MEZO-LEVEL (**configurative**)	THE HANDSWORTH CASE	(6) Traditionalist ideology / Common sense (5) Public/publicised opinion (letters) (4) The case itself
MICRO-LEVEL (**exemplary**)	'MUGGING' INCIDENTS	(3) The police (2) The judiciary (1) The press

Table 1. The argumentative structure of *Policing the Crisis*

The following case study of the British passion for 'a nice cup of tea' tries to emulate this model.

II.

> There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (Benjamin 1973: 258)

(1) Taking tea, usually several times of the day, has not just been a habit of most Britons, but a part of their way of life for about three and a half centuries.[1] In the second half of the seventeenth century and, with increasing rapidity, in the eighteenth century most European societies embraced "a new lifestyle in which tea, coffee, chocolate and tobacco together with sugar, the fruits of overseas expansion and commercial capitalism, played

---

[1] The following ideas are based on an earlier attempt to come to grips with this problematic (cf. Kramer 2013).

a critical cultural role" (Goodman 2007: 121). But why did Europeans come to consume these colonial goods in their various combinations in greater quantities than ever before? Stuart Hall pointed to a particularly intricate facet of the problem:

> People like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries; symbolically, we have been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolization of English identity – I mean, what does anybody in the world know about an English person except that they can't get through the day without a cup of tea? (Hall 1991: 48f)

Clearly, English (or, rather, British and, to a certain extent, European) identity rests on cultural practices whose elements or ingredients are anything but home-grown. They were imported, perhaps adapted and became established step by step. While in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the use of *sugar* "to enhance the taste of ingestibles and to decorate foods had become a regular, fashionable practice" (Smith 1992: 264) of the social elites of north-western Europe, by the seventeenth century these practices had spread "beyond the wealthy classes, presumably through emulation by people anxious to enhance their social standing" (ibid.: 264). The hot beverages *tea*, *coffee* and *chocolate*, were introduced to Europe in the mid-seventeenth century to substitute for less attractive and enjoyable "indigenous commodities" (Goodman 2007: 122, 128-130).[2] "Tea, a drink made from the leaves and buds of the shrub *Camellia sinensis*, [was] the most culturally and economically significant nonalcoholic beverage in the world" (Weisburger/Comer 2000: 712). Its dietary advantages were immediately clear to seventeenth-century Europeans: tea could plausibly serve as a substitute for beer (which had been the main drink at all meals since time immemorial), it was made with boiling water (whose heat killed off water-borne diseases) and – with its "mild amount of caffeine" – it was a "tasty, healthy source of quick energy" (Neumann 2007: 172). In the course of time, the "taking of sugar by itself and with exotic beverages" (ibid.: 192), which had started as an elite custom, 'trickled down', first to the 'rising' bourgeoisie and, later, to the industrial working classes. When later import soared and prices fell, the former elite cultural practice was adopted by the majority of the population.

What needs to be emphasised here is that, first and foremost, *alcoholic beverages* were replaced by tea, coffee and cocoa because they "dulled mental faculties" while "tea

---

[2] Whether these somewhat 'bitter' substitutes became more palatable when sugar was added to them, or whether the consumption of 'unhealthy' sugar (which rotted its consumers' teeth) became socio-culturally more 'acceptable' when it was tempered by the bitter ('healthy') beverages is difficult to decide. Most probably, both factors contributed to the major expansion of tea-drinking around 1700 in Britain.

and coffee increased mental acuity" (Goodman 2007: 148), a prerequisite not only for Puritan self-restraint and Pietistic sobriety but also for rational, balanced discourse and a corresponding culture, in which mutually assumed "honesty, reliability and moderation" (ibid.) enabled good business and stimulated an inspiring exchange of ideas. The *locus classicus* for the latter – predominantly economic and political – activities was the *coffeehouse* (cf. Smith 2007: 145-151), frequented by bourgeois men. The coffeehouse as the 'place' of respectable male public association had its counterpart in the *domestic parlour*, where women were "the central actors in the ritual of tea itself" and, by pouring the tea, "symbolically providing sustenance and health", "acted out roles as 'civilizers'" (ibid.: 153) of the family and society in general. More generally, the ritual of taking tea, in public or in private, became a central part of the cultural self-construction (or self-fashioning) of the rising *bourgeoisie*. The performance of taking tea signalled *respectability and sociability* – not least through the lavish display of contemporary tableware (cf. Walvin 1999: 26; Goodman 2007: 130). While this symbolic dimension was not lost on the *working classes*, who wanted to emulate their 'betters', the primarily important influence of sugar and tea was on their "calorically and nutritively inadequate and monotonous" diet (Mintz 1985: 183). Sweet tea, like the alcohol which it was meant to replace,[3] provided "respite from reality", readily deadened "hunger pangs" and, most importantly, stimulated "greater [work] efforts" (ibid.: 186).

Ultimately, what has made taking tea so attractive and such a permanent feature of British society is its practice across classes (and 'ethnicities'). Eventually, all of them – aristocracy, bourgeoisie and the working classes, be they English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish – took tea. They may have chosen different types of tea, they may have taken more or less sugar, they may have used utensils of different worth or sophistication, but they shared a certain symbolic overlap: the claim to be respectable and sociable which rested on the individual's moral standing and behaviour, not on birth – "in principle, anyone could be respectable" (Smith 2007: 144). From this perspective it has been argued that the ritual of taking tea culinarily prepared, practically accompanied and culturally reflected the development of political ideas which, in the course of the nineteenth century, informed and inspired many reform movements: tea had become "Britain's democratic drink par excellence" (Matthee 1995: 43).

But how did all this come about? More specifically, how did sugar and tea gain a foothold and, then, acceptance in Britain? Where and under what conditions were they produced, traded and consumed? Why (when and, again, under what conditions) did imports 'soar' and prices 'fall'?

---

[3] Tea consumption was encouraged by teetotal propaganda, and tea-meetings played a vital role in the temperance movement.

(2) The production of *crystal sugar* was first mentioned in Sanskrit texts (around 500 BC), which indicates that it may have taken place in northern India. From there the technique spread eastward to the south of China and westward to Persia and reached the Mediterranean roughly one thousand years later. While in the Chinese cuisine, sugar became just one of a whole range of sweeteners, in the West it quickly dominated and eventually replaced its competitors. As the sugarcane plant was "notoriously delicate, disease prone, and resource hungry during cultivation" (Mar 2007: 1064), its establishment as an industry on the southern coast of the Mediterranean (promoted by the Arabs) and its further migration westward to the Canary and Cape Verde islands took another 800 years. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient water (for irrigation but also as a physical power for the mills) and of suitable labour power allowed the production of small quantities only, so that sugar remained a medicinal and, for the wealthy, a luxury product until early modern times.

The great change came after Europe's westward expansion with "the transfer of the industry" (Galloway 2000: 443) to the Caribbean islands and Brazil, where the necessary conditions for the growth of sugarcane could be created by harnessing natural resources to technical inventions and a particular employment of labour power. The sugar plantations of the Caribbean islands were "both farms and factories": "ripe canes had to be cut and crushed and the cane-juice boiled within twenty-four to forty-eight hours to prevent fermentation and spoilage" (Sheridan 1998: 395). The resulting "sludge [was] centrifuged to separate the brown sugar crystals from the liquid molasses" (Inglis 2007: 1068). While the sugar mills had to be near the fields where the cane was grown in order to prevent spoilage, further refining processes, in which transparent or white sugar was produced through an additional round of melting, filtering, boiling and drying (cf. ibid.), were located closer to the markets where the sugar was to be consumed or re-exported, for example in Britain.

The growth of European consumption of sugar occurred in distinct stages: initially regarded as one of the "drugs of the 'Orient'" (Stols 2004: 275) it became a luxury item of the aristocracies and merchant princes of the Renaissance. Sugar sculptures were constructed for sumptuous court and wedding banquets in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts sugar banquets turned into "standard element[s] in court entertainment" (ibid.: 239). In the course of the seventeenth century, sugar gradually became "an entirely separate and important foodstuff, a veritable colonial commodity" (ibid.: 240), not least because of its "use in the conserving of fruits and jam making" (ibid.). The greatest influence, however, was exercised by the introduction of three hot beverages: coffee, tea and cacao. In 1700, 22,017 tons of sugar were exported from the British West Indies to England and Wales. By 1748 the figure had risen to 41,425 tons (cf. Sheridan 1998: 400) and by 1815 to 164,859 tons (cf. Ward

1998: 429). There is no doubt that this development was either cause or effect or both of a great change in European eating and drinking habits.

(3) When the Europeans 'discovered' their taste for tea, it had to be imported from China. But the Chinese were not easy to deal with. When the Europeans had discovered the use and usefulness of *coffee* and *cocoa* for themselves, they had quickly taken over not just their distribution (trade), but also their production by transferring the plants to suitably larger and more fertile lands under their rule or influence: for example, the coffee plants from the Near East to Central and South America, South East Asia and, later, Africa and the cocoa trees from Central America to the West Indies and the Philippines. The Chinese, however, "kept the secrets of tea growing and processing to themselves", to such an extent that it was not before the nineteenth century that their European customers learnt that "black and green tea came from the same plant" (Weisburger/Comer 2000: 714). And not only did the Chinese closely guard their highly coveted export, they also proved to be difficult to trade with because there were not many goods they would accept in exchange. While the British (as well as the other Europeans and the Americans) demanded silk, tea and – as a cultural supplement to 'handle' the latter – porcelain ('china'!), the Chinese were less taken with British (or other European) products because they regarded them as inferior to their own. Thus, when British demand for tea rose, a serious balance-of-payment problem developed. And indeed, tea exports from Canton to Britain soared: from a few hundred pounds in the 1690s, to 200,000 lbs. in 1717, 3 million lbs. in 1757 and 12 million lbs. in 1772 (cf. Connors 1998: 259). In the 1790s, British tea imports averaged close to 20 million lbs. per year (Bowen 1998: 534f).[4] While these figures include re-exports, the following reflect imports retained for home consumption: roughly, 23 million lbs. in 1801, 53 million lbs. in 1851 (cf. Forrest 1973: 285). It has been reckoned that – because of this growing European demand for tea – between "1752 and 1800, a net 105 million silver dollars (approximately £26.25 million) flowed into China" (Lovell 2011: 2). However, "between 1808 and 1856, 384 million travelled in the opposite direction" (ibid.). The reason for this reversal was that the British had finally hit on a commodity which could be sold to the Chinese: *opium*. Its import to China had been illegal since 1729, but it had always been produced in the country itself. When the British offered opium of a better quality from the Indian subcontinent (Bengal, Bihar, Orissa) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many Chinese – somewhere between one and ten per cent of the population (cf. Wakeman 1978: 178) – took up opium-smoking (just as many British had become tea-drinkers). And although the Chinese government, in an attempt to curb the abuse, made the smoking of opium a crime in 1796, many of its subjects regarded it as "a chic post-prandial; an essential lubricant of the sing-song (prostitute) trade, a

---

[4] The East India Company markedly dominated the tea export from China: between 1778 and 1784 it carried 36% of it; between 1785 and 1791, 63%; and between 1814 and 1820, 76%.

must-have hospitality item for all self-respecting hosts; a favourite distraction from the pressures of court life for the emperor and his household" (Lovell 2011: 23). Many Chinese "smoked for as many reasons as Europeans consumed alcohol and tobacco: for show; for companionship; to relieve boredom and pain. Some smoked their lives and estates away; others never got past their first puff; others again limited their doses to a daily past-prandial" (ibid.: 35). There can be no doubt: "the eighteenth-century British addiction to tea matched that of opium users" (Connors 1998: 259) in China:

> From 1800 to 1818, the average annual [import] traffic held steady at around 4,000 chests (each chest containing around 140 pounds of opium); by 1831, it was nearing 20,000. After 1833, when the Free Trade lobby terminated the East India Company's monopoly on the tea trade, the market was flooded by private merchants hungry for tea and profits. Opium – in ever greater quantities – was the barter. By the close of the decade, sales had more than doubled again. (Lovell 2011: 2f)

In the mid-eighteen-fifties, the figure had risen to 70,000 chests; by the 1880s it was 90,000 chests (cf. Balfour 1968: III, 34).

(4) As the indigenous Carib, Taino and Arawak people had been decimated by 90 per cent in the first century after the arrival of the Europeans (cf. Reynolds 1985: 59), the Caribbean sugar cane was grown, cut and processed by African slaves, who were forced to replace them and to complement the small number of poor European whites who had migrated to the 'new world' as indentured servants, 'redemptioners' or convicts.[5] As such, the *slave trade* quickly became an indispensable part of the Atlantic trading system of the colonial powers. Their economic goals were initially determined by the mercantilist idea that the world's resources were limited and every nation did well if it tried to obtain as much of them as possible. They aimed at exploiting their colonies by extracting precious minerals (gold, silver and, later, diamonds), growing raw materials (sugar, tobacco, cotton, coffee, cocoa etc.) which could be refined in the mother country and re-exported, and excluding other nations from trading with these colonies. Because of this dependence of the colony on the mother country, the latter could be sure to acquire the colony's raw materials at a cheap price and to sell goods produced at home at a favourable price in the colony. The main axis on which this expansion turned was the so-called *triangular trade*, which rested on a triangle of trading relations which in the course of time grew more and more complex and intensive. From Europe, manufactured goods (such as cloth, iron, rum and guns) were exported to Africa in order to be profitably exchanged against slaves who were sold in the Americas. The empty ships were then loaded with raw materials (such as sugar, cotton and tobacco) which

---

[5] When slavery was abolished in the British colonies, indentured servants from India (c. 500,000) and China (c. 15,000) complemented the labour force.

were processed and consumed in Britain or re-exported to the European continent. On all three voyages, profits were made which flowed into the European commercial centres.

In the east, *another triangular trade* was set up: finished products, such as Lancashire cotton after the destruction of the Bengal cotton industry, were exported from Britain to India; there, opium was produced and exported to China which, in turn, exported tea to Britain. On each of its three legs, profits were made: by the entrepreneurs, the merchants and the government(s), including the Chinese which demanded tribute from the European traders. The British Indian income from the *opium* monopoly (secured by the East India Company in 1773) was obtained "by two principal means, namely, by a system of allowing the cultivation of the poppy by the natives of British India on account of the Government,[6] and by the impost of a heavy duty on opium grown and manufactured in foreign states, but brought in transit to a British port for exportation" (Balfour 1968: III, 38). Opium, which, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century could be produced for 200 rupees a chest, achieved gross profits of 200 to 400 per cent (cf. Connors 1998: 256). Opium revenues accounted for "5.2 per cent in 1792, 7 per cent in 1812, 10 per cent in 1822 and as much as 20 per cent in 1842" (ibid.: 259; cf. Lovell 2011: 251) of British India's total revenue. When the Chinese government eventually privileged moral concern over economic interest and tried to stop the trade by confiscating and destroying 20,000 chests worth £2 million or $9 million (cf. Wakeman 1978: 188) in May 1839, this led to the first (of two) Anglo-Chinese wars, also called Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60). Both ended in defeats for the Chinese who had to pay high indemnities and sign 'unequal treaties', which opened up the country to international trade.

To add insult to injury, in 1848, after the first serious military encounter between Britain and China and the latter's defeat, Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist, entered the country disguised as a Chinese merchant and stole the secrets of tea horticulture and manufacturing. Shortly afterwards, Chinese tea was planted in India and, somewhat later, in Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka). From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, when tea imports continued to grow – 259 million lbs. in 1901, 450 million lbs. in 1951 (cf. Forrest 1973: 285) – Britain increasingly acquired them from producers in their colonies (India, Ceylon). While the East India Company made relatively little money

---

[6] "The East India Company did not publicly dirty its hands by bringing the drug to China. It commissioned and managed plantations of opium poppies across hundreds of thousands of Indian acres. It took care of the processing [...]. Finally, it oversaw the packing of the drug into mango-wood chests, its shipping to Calcutta, and auctioning off. At that moment, the Company washed its hands of it, letting private merchants sail for the Chinese coast, where they anchored off the island of Lintin, at the mouth of the Pearl River. Eager Chinese wholesalers would then use silver to buy certificates from private trading offices in Canton and exchange them for opium; this silver would in turn secure teas and silks for the English market." (Lovell 2011: 3)

from the *tea* trade itself, "by the 1830s the British government was obtaining 10 per cent of its revenue from the tea taxes" (Wakeman 1978: 166).

The only people who did not profit were those who cultivated tea and opium in the fields and processed them in the factories. Theirs was – as in sugarcane cultivation and production – hard, predominantly manual (i.e. labour intensive) work. Both crops also grew on (mostly mono-cultural) plantations, worked by men and women whose formal status, perhaps, was not that of a slave but whose actual way of working closely resembled forced labour. In tea cultivation, 'coolies' – migrant workers hired with dubious contracts and for minimal wages – worked segregated by gender lines: while the women did the plucking of the tea leaves, the men were responsible for the trimming and weeding of the tea bushes as well as the further processing of the leaves (Rothermund 2001: 175). In opium cultivation, smallholders and their entire families were set to work. More often than not, they had to be forced by the entrepreneurs to cultivate poppies because, for the peasants, it would have been more profitable to produce crops for the local markets (Tanner 2001: 232).

III.

In my case study, I tried to emulate the particular mode of analysis of *Policing the Crisis* by similarly ascending three levels of understanding and interpretation. At the "Micro-Level" stage of analysis, the cultural practice of the proverbial English cup of tea was thematised and its general ('proverbial') context provided. Here, the collection of empirical evidence and the provision of various potential nexuses primarily mattered. At the intermediate 'Mezo-Level' stage of analysis, the cultural practice of taking tea was approached in greater detail and the histories of the sugar and tea 'economies' were scrutinised as rigorously systematic as possible. At this level, the different factors were drawn together and constructed as interdependent elements of a socio-cultural configuration. At the 'Macro-Level' stage of analysis, the preceding partial configurations have been associated and combined into an overall picture or template. This 'soft' version of totality (cf. Jay 2010: 97) allows (i) locating the problematic of taking tea in relation to the social formation as a whole (or, at least, to relevant parts of it) and (ii) relating the 'civilised' taking of tea to its barbaric reverse side: the two triangular trades.

MACRO-LEVEL (**systematic**)	(PARTS OF) THE SOCIAL FORMATION AS A WHOLE	**(4) The historical roots of taking tea:** **two triangular trades**
MEZO-LEVEL (**configurative**)	CONTEXTS: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, CULTURAL	(3) The sugar & tea economies (2) The European desire for tea and sugar
MICRO-LEVEL (**exemplary**)	TAKING TEA	(1) Taking tea: a cultural practice

Table 2. The argumentative structure of the case study "Taking tea"

What is the use of such a complex mode of analysis? The more Cultural Studies scholars focus on piecemeal specialist problems and neglect their wider – formative – contexts, the more they are prone to lose sight of the complexity and political nature, the "grubby worldliness" (Hall in MacCabe 2008: 28) of their objects of study. And when these overlooked, forgotten or repressed aspects re-surface – like "fucking religion" (Hall in ibid.: 38) or nationalism the other day – they may return with a vengeance, creating havoc in the mind as well as in the social. We all know that culture is always more than the cultural and we should therefore courageously resist any temptation of letting the "tension to hold, to think culture and society together" (Hall in ibid.: 29) disintegrate.

Works Cited

Balfour, Edward (1968). *The Cyclopedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia*. 1st ed., Quaritch, 1885. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, [Reprint].

Benjamin, Walter (1973). *Illuminations*. London and Glasgow: Collins/Fontana.

Bowen, H.V. (1998). "British India, 1765-1813: The Metropolitan Context." *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, *Vol. 2: The Eighteenth Century*. Ed. P.J. Marshall. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 530-51.

Connors, Richard (1998). "Opium and Imperial Expansion: The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Asia." *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson*. Eds. Stephen Taylor, Richard Connors, Clyve Jones, and Philip Lawson. Woodbrigde: Boydell Press, 248-66.

Forrest, Dennys. (1973). *Tea for the British: The Social and Economic History of a Famous Trade*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Galloway, J.H. (2000). "Sugar." *The Cambridge World History of Food*, vol. 1. Eds. Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelass. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 437-49.

Goodman, Jordan (2007). "Exitantia: Or, how Enlightenment Europe Took to Soft Drugs." *Consuming Habits: Global and Historical Perspectives on How Cultures Define Drugs*, 2nd ed. Eds. Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt. London and New York: Routledge, 121-41.

Hall, Stuart (1997). "Culture and Power." (Interview), *Radical Philosophy* 86: 24-41.

— (1991). "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*. Ed Anthony D. King. Binghamton: Department of Art and Art History, 41-68.

— (1988). *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. London and New York: Verso.

Hall, Stuart et al. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Inglis, G. Douglas (2007). "Sugar Cultivation and Trade." *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*. Ed. Thomas Benjamin. Detroit et al.: Thomson-Gale, Vol. 3, 1067-70.

Jay, Martin (2010). "History, Experience, and Politics." (Interview), *Krisis, Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 1: 91-101.

Kramer, Jürgen. (2013). "Tea &Sugar: On the Origins and Effects of a Consuming British Passion." *Cases of Intervention: The Great Variety of British Cultural Studies*. Eds. Marie Hologa, Christian Lenz, Cyprian Piskurek, Stefan Schlensag. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 13-31.

Lovell, Julia. (2011). *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*. Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador.

MacCabe, Colin (2008). "An Interview with Stuart Hall." *Critical Quarterly* 50.1-2: 12-42.

Mar, Tracey Banivanua (2007). "Sugar and Labor: Tracking Empires." *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*. Ed. Thomas Benjamin. Detroit et al.: Thomson-Gale, Vol. 3, 2007, 1064-67.

Matthee, Rudi (1995). "Exotic Substances: The Introduction and Global Spread of Tobacco, Coffee, Cocoa, Tea, and Distilled Liquor, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries." *Drugs and Narcotics in History*. Eds. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 24-51.

Mintz, Sidney (1985). *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking.

Neumann, Caryn E. (2007) "Tea." *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*. Ed. Thomas Benjamin. Detroit et al.: Thomson-Gale, Vol. 3, 1072-74.

Reynolds, Edward (1985). *Stand the Storm: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. London and New York: Allison & Busby.

Rothermund, Dietmar (2001). "Tee." *Genussmittel: Eine Kulturgeschichte*. Eds. T. Hengartner and C.M. Merki. Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel, 161-90.

Sheridan, Richard B. (1998). "The Formation of Caribbean Plantation Society, 1689-1748." *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, *Vol. 2: The Eighteenth Century*. Ed. P.J. Marshall. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 394-414.

Smith, Woodruff D. (1992). "Complications of the Commonplace: Tea, Sugar, and Imperialism." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23.2: 259-78.

— (2007). "From Coffeehouse to Parlour: The Consumption of Coffee, Tea and Sugar in North-Western Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *Consuming Habits: Global and Historical Perspectives on How Cultures Define Drugs*, 2nd ed. Eds. Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt. London and New York: Routledge, 142-57.

Stols, Eddy (2004). "The Expansion of the Sugar Market in Western Europe." *Tropical Babylon: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*. Ed. Stuart B. Schwartz. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 237-88.

Tanner, Jakob (2001). "Cannabis und Opium." *Genussmittel: Eine kulturgeschichtliches Handbuch*. Eds. Thomas Hengartner and Christoph Maria Merki. Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel, 221-58.

Wakeman, Frederic (1978). "The Canton Trade and the Opium War." *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 10: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911*, *Part I.* Ed. John K. Fairbank. London, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 163-212.

Walvin, James (1999). "Sugar and the Shaping of Western Culture." *White and Deadly: Sugar and Colonialism*. Eds. Pal Ahluwalia, Bill Ashcroft and Roger Knight, Nova Science Publishers, 21-31.

Ward, J.R. (1998). "The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition, 1748-1815." *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, *Vol. 2: The Eighteenth Century*. Ed. P.J. Marshall. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 415-39.

Weisburger, John H. & Comer, James. (2000). "Tea." *The Cambridge World History of Food*, *Vol. 1*. Eds. Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelass. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 712-20.