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## **Editorial: Pluralism and Normativity in Interdisciplinary Research**

The label of 'interdisciplinarity' is often accused of grouping a variety of different (and often incompatible) approaches and methodologies – in fact, almost as many as there are scholars and research communities pursuing interdisciplinary inquiries. Far from being a sign of disunity and weakness, however, this very fragmentation exemplifies the common concerns underlying interdisciplinary research: a willingness to express a plurality of viewpoints, to mediate between different perspectives in a context-sensitive and overtly goal-directed way, and to use a combination of representational tools without necessarily reducing them all to a single, unifying perspective on the issues and/or phenomena to be researched.

It is in this spirit that the papers and commentaries to be found within this issue of the GJSS attempt to diversify and enrich the toolbox of models, perspectives and terms available in order to set up and interpret the experience of fieldwork (whether the latter be an anthropologically, sociologically, politically or gender-defined space of inquiry). They provide case studies and arguments against the usefulness of research based on a

linear, univocal, one-sided or 'one-sided'<sup>1</sup> methodology. In fact, they read social scientific research as intrinsically pluralistic: in its goals (overtly political – such as Lamers' concern with the normative impact of the imagery of poverty created by pro-Africa fundraising, or more analytically oriented – like Hamner's study of queer television discourse); in the settings and time-scales that are employed (as exemplified by Cons' analysis of the symbolic and political significance of constructing and using maps); and in the representational tools that are selected to depict the objects of inquiry (ranging from Jentzkowitz's and Brunzel's 'tracks' to the various ways of using core variables, as illustrated by Takei in the case of race and ethnic relations).

Implicit to the recognition of intrinsic pluralism is the perception of 'disciplined' research<sup>2</sup> as risking to be trapped within its own vision of the world, rather than using that vision as a starting position to explore other types of understanding. The main trap of disciplinary thinking is the uncritical acceptance of specific methods and analytic tools, irrespectively of the specific features of the objects under investigation, the interests of the

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Ethnography through Thick and Thin' (Marcus, 1998) as example of the decades-long advocacy of the need for multi-sited research by anthropologists.

<sup>2</sup> I here define disciplinary research broadly as any area of study that is rooted in a single type of literature and perspective on the world, to which a research community is committed.

researcher and of the intended audience. Of course, training within a specific discipline is necessary to provide an in-depth understanding of the history of a method and of its possible uses. First-hand experience in applying that method is also a crucial phase in the education of a researcher. Yet, knowledge and experience of a method or model should be accompanied by a critical assessment of what that method or model actually does and does not yield. This is sometimes difficult to achieve, since research students tend to be shielded, institutionally as well as intellectually, from contact with approaches to social reality differing from the ones that they are trained to use.

The authors of the papers within this issue challenge this situation. They explore different ways to make sense of complex social realities without uncritically subsuming them under a unique description or a single theoretical perspective. They do not take for granted at least some of the ways in which specific features of reality are selected for in-depth analysis. Representation necessarily involves simplification and abstraction, whether carefully planned or hastily improvised as a response to unforeseeable fieldwork experiences. The challenge to interdisciplinary research is not to reify such simplifications and abstraction from the real. All representation and analysis elucidate some aspects of the social world relative to a specific perspective: it is thus important to reflect critically on the reasons for choosing a specific representation and the way in which it is relevant to the

arguments and topics under investigation. Thus, the representation and analysis of social realities require a normative choice among several available tools, which has to be justified according to the interests and objectives of the researchers (whether epistemological, ethical or else).

Here is, then, the point where I would like to draw reflection by the readers of this issue. This is the idea that the recognition of pluralism in research tools and methods, which is arguably a core virtue of interdisciplinary approaches, calls for a heightened awareness of the normative consequences of choosing specific tools and perspectives for inquiry. Within each of those papers, the author opens up the black box of her or his methodological struggle with the choice of representational tools and of epistemic and political goals that are most adequate to his or her competences and interests, as well as to the skills and interests of his or her audience. They solve the struggle in very different and perhaps incommensurable ways: Cons rounds up his discussion of maps with a suggestion for 'counter-mapping'; Lamers indicates the unavoidable ambiguity of using images of poverty that both encourage and hinder political responses to it (by making it visible but also, at the same time, too familiar and thus entrenched to our understanding of Africa); Hamner illustrates some ways to 'be adventurous' with one's fieldwork, by avoiding binary distinctions between quantitative and qualitative methods; and Takei condemns the homologous treatment of race and ethnic issues in the United

States and Japan by pointing out ways to gear methodological strategies to cultural differences. These are certainly highly fragmented results, highly discontinuous in methods and normative positions. Yet, I hope readers will find inspiration and insight precisely by comparing the ways in which each of these analyses establishes its own norms for what an adequate understanding of a phenomenon may be.

Let me add a few notes about the recent developments within the GJSS, which is in the process of tracing its own institutional and research spaces and making choices geared to our interest in intellectual freedom and exchange. We are happy to announce that, starting from the next issue, GJSS will initiate an official collaboration with Amsterdam University Press as our official publisher. Thanks both to AUP's genuine interest in our project and to the generous sponsorship of the increasing number of institutions affiliated to our research network ([http://www.gjss.org/aboutus\\_ack.shtml](http://www.gjss.org/aboutus_ack.shtml)), the journal will remain available for free to all interested readers. Starting in 2006, we shall also host a series of special thematic issues, edited by postgraduate guest editors, alongside our general publications. This will allow us to maintain our characteristic openness in accepting quality submissions from all kinds of areas in social science, while at the same time issuing more systematic reflections around specific issues (either at an abstract level, as for instance when reflecting on the question of pluralism or gender in social science, or by tackling emerging areas of interdisciplinary interest, such as

research on sound and time-scales). If interested in suggesting a topic or project, or simply to communicate your thoughts and comments on our work, please write to [editor@gjss.org](mailto:editor@gjss.org).

## References

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## What's the Good of Mercators?: Cartography and the Political Ecology of Place

### Abstract

This paper offers a methodological argument for analyzing maps in studies attentive to the politics of place and the representations of space. Recent literature on maps has focused on cartography as central to either state or national projects, but has rarely used maps as a lens to study sub-national conflicts over resources and space. I bring this literature into dialogue with analyses of the politics of place within political ecology. Drawing on Timothy Mitchell, I argue for a critique of cartography within such studies that 1) recognizes maps as both representations of landscape and attempts to reformat that landscape through representation and 2) understands maps as not simply failed attempts at social control but rather as documents that are part of complex material and symbolic struggles over space. Reading several key studies of the political ecology of place, I suggest that while these authors are attentive to nuanced struggles over space, they often overlook maps as ways of understanding particular, often state, views of landscape and geography. Analyzing maps as a means of understand views of landscape can offer new perspectives on competing agendas, epistemologies, and understandings of space in local conflicts over borders and resources. I conclude with an analysis that begins to suggest strategies, as well as pitfalls, of using maps in political ecology as well as an exploration of 'counter-mapping', which argues for local and community maps as means of contesting state views of landscape.

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'What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,  
Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?'  
So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply  
'They are merely conventional signs!'  
—Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark*

It is de rigeur in the growing body of literature analyzing maps as instruments of power to quote Borges's famous anecdote concerning an empire so obsessed with cartography that it creates a map at a 1:1 scale. In this anecdote, future generations within the empire, finding such a map cumbersome, allow it to deteriorate into scraps on the margins of society. This story is most often invoked as either a comment on the processes of representation and replacement (Baudrillard, 1983) or a parable about colonial attempts at cartographic precision (Edney, 1997). Another and possibly more suggestive reading of this anecdote is offered by Gregory Nobles. 'Maps are more than pictures.... They represent an attempt not just to depict or define the land but to claim and control it, to impose a human and, most important, political order over it.... As an extension of imperialist policy, the map covers and threatens to smother both the land and the people on it' (1993, 9-10). Viewed in this light, Borges' allegory takes on new meaning. Mapping is a political process, a reification of particular kinds of contingent relationships into representations of land and borders. The desire to produce a map at a 1:1 scale can best be read as the simultaneously powerful and futile attempt to physically superimpose the ordered map onto an unruly landscape, thereby cementing the map's 'conventional signs,' to create more totalizing, legible political geographies.

A growing body of critical literature on cartography attempts to understand the paradoxes inherent in Borges' tale, viewing maps, as Raymond Craib describes them, as 'replete with power and with potential that is both emancipator and repressive' and, as such, as, 'useful items for historical analysis' (Craib, 2000, 8). Authors within this literature have used maps as critical texts in understanding both nation-formation and state-formation, convincingly showing the centrality of maps and mapping in visualizing 'the nation' (c.f., Thongchai, 1994, Trivedi, 2003,



Ramaswamy, 2000), processes of territorialization and border formation (c.f. Scott, 1998, Biggs, 1999, Harley, 2001), and colonial and imperial expansion (Edney, 1997, Carter, 1987, Burnett, 2000). Collectively, this emerging literature constitutes one dynamic of the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences (Brenner, 1999), a critical reassertion space and place that has accompanied academic interest in globalization. Explorations of cartography have helped to lend a historical dimension to such analyses, demonstrating both the contingent nature of state borders, territories, and colonies, and the particular views of space and geography central to the production of what we now think of as the modern state system.

Yet the potential for maps as tools for understanding local conflicts remains largely untapped within this literature. Mapping literature tends to focus its attention primarily at the national—and sometimes global (Cosgrove, 2001)—level and rarely examines the relationship between maps and borders within the nation-state. By focusing on broad-scale projects of state and nation formation, literature on cartography has by-in-large failed to explore the role of maps in the everyday production of space and in the micropolitics of making place. This paper brings this literature into dialogue with recent writings emerging from the broad fields of environmental history and political ecology interested in the politics of place in struggles over the creation of park, forest, and village borders. This perspective, what I will call 'the political ecology of place', is, in Roderick Neumann's words, characterized by '(1) a focus on the land users and the social relations in which they are entwined; (2) tracing the linkages of these local relations to wider geographical and social settings; and (3) historical analysis to understand the contemporary situation' (Neuman quoted in Moore, 1993, 381). Analyses of the political ecology of place have helped to sharpen our understanding of conservation schemes in both the North and the South as well as highlighted their human impact and frequent conflict with more local understandings of geography, property, and conservation. In short, the political ecology of place has shown that the demarcation of land in conservation and park schemes is contingent, contested, and historically specific.

Despite this attention to the politics of place, maps have largely been overlooked as tools of analysis within this literature<sup>2</sup>. As such, the political ecology of place ignores central means of representing, and thus asserting control over, space. While other literature, notably work on urban planning, regularly explores maps as claims to space, the subject of struggle in contested areas such as park borders presents a particularly compelling place to explore links between state and nation formation in the context of struggles over land. Maps offer critical ways to interpret such spatial histories (Carter 1987).<sup>3</sup> As such, I suggest that the theoretical lessons of political ecology studies of place and new literature on critical cartography can be productively brought together to offer a powerful methodological approach to understanding processes of political representations of space. Exploring these processes of representation<sup>4</sup> helps to clarify spatial politics in zones where these politics determine access, extraction rights, social control, and individual and community livelihoods.

In short, these two literatures, that share some of the same political and theoretical precepts, might be used in concert as a powerful way to understand the different terrains of struggle always present in the attempt to map cartography's 'conventional signs' onto contested landscapes. I argue for a methodological use of maps that appreciates both the epistemological contributions of mapping literature and the emphasis on everyday forms of state, nation, and place making adopted in

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<sup>2</sup> Though not as tools of resistance. See Peluso, 1995 and discussion below.

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to an anonymous reviewer at for the Graduate Journal of Social Sciences for pointing this out.

<sup>4</sup> While this paper is largely concerned with maps as means of representing [state] visions of landscape, I wish to recognize that there are many, and various, other forms of representing space. As Thongchai observers, "Modern geography was not simply new data added to existing conceptions. It was another kind of knowledge of space with its own classificatory systems, concepts, and mediating signs" (1993, 36). As such, the conception of mapping and what a map is needs to be expanded to include alternative views of space represented, for example, in cosmological charts, codexes, or maps that don't rely on notions of scientific demarcation and measurement. Indeed, these representations are important precisely because they tend to be overwritten and erased by visions of landscape represented through the 'scientific' discourse of cartography (see below). Such documents are particularly helpful in approaches to cartography that understand maps as particular visions of landscape rather than as positivist documents of spatial truth.

literature on the political ecology of place. Such an approach moves beyond the bifurcation between state and nation formation in mapping literatures and focuses instead the intertwining of these processes in the micropolitics of struggles over place. This approach, I suggest, can help in understanding the specific practices of reformatting place and social relations through representation (Mitchell 2002), as well as begin to provide a window on ways such representations or contested and changed by those who are either drawn into or out of the map.

I will begin with a brief survey of the growing body of literature on maps and critical cartography. This literature tends to be somewhat limiting in its centralization and valorisation of maps as signifiers, often at the expense of more careful analysis of the social relationships they eclipse. I follow this discussion by exploring two different political ecologies of place that focus on park borders: Roderick Neumann's analysis of the formation of Serengeti National Park in colonial Tanganyika and Donald Moore's ethnographies of resistance in Zimbabwe's eastern highlands. Both of these authors offer compelling critiques of border conflicts that are attentive to the politics of space. In each case, however, I suggest that more careful attention to maps might serve to simultaneously clarify and problematize the analyses, highlighting the ways that conflicting geographic claims animate each of these struggles. I will conclude with a critical reading of several studies that move towards an incorporation of maps into analyses of people/park conflicts and discuss both their possibilities and limitations.

## **Maps, National Identity, Control**

Over the past fifteen years, there have been an increasing number of analyses of the relationship between cartography, discourse, and power. This mapping literature might be broadly thought of as falling into two different categories. The first, drawing mainly on the work of Benedict Anderson and Thongchai Winnichakul, understands national geography as a collision of discourses about nation-ness (c.f., Anderson, 1991 [1983], Thongchai, 1994, Bassett 1994, Craib, 2002, Trivedi, 2003). This literature approaches cartography as a space

where these contesting discourses are resolved, folding multiple identities and real and imagined pasts into a unified map representing what Thongchai has called the nation's 'geo-body.'

In terms of most communication theories and common sense, a map is a scientific abstraction of reality. A map merely represents something which already exists objectively 'there.' In the history I have described, this relationship was reversed. A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent...(Thongchai quoted in Anderson, 1991 [1983], 173-4).

Maps, then, become one of the tools through which the nation is discursively constructed: a visual language 'locating places within and outside the nation' (Trivedi, 2003, 15). As such, careful analyses of the history of maps and cartography, especially projects that attempt to map the nation as a whole rather than as a loose grouping of 'constituent' parts, reveal them to be 'powerful stories about the past and the present, replete with their own ideological presuppositions' (Craib, 2002, 66).

The second strand of mapping literature draws from J.B. Harley's rebellion against cartographic positivism through a 'deconstruction' of the map (Harley, 1992) and Edward Said's analysis of the connection between geography and imperialism (Said, 1979 and 1994). It also intersects with the growing number of analyses of empire as a system of rule through particular kinds of empirical knowledge (c.f. Cohn, 1987 and 1996, Stoler, 2001, various essays in Cooper and Stoler, 1997). This approach views maps as part of what James Scott calls projects of 'legibility,' or processes of simplification through which populations, landscapes, etc. become intelligible to the state (Scott, 1998). Cartography, especially cartography as a 'state' project or project of empire, is seen as a process of control through representation. 'Knowledge of the territory,' in Mathew Edney's words, 'is determined by geographic representations and most especially by the map. Geography and empire are thus intimately and thoroughly interwoven' (Edney,

1997, 1). Maps are approached as documents that attempt to make both landscapes and the people within them legible.<sup>5</sup>

Mathew Edney's history of cartography in colonial South Asia is a prime example of this second strand of writing. In it, Edney argues that totalizing attempts to control space through maps are part and parcel of an Enlightenment epistemology which valorises empirical and scientific data as the centrepiece of knowledge. In Edney's view, which perhaps privileges cartography at the expense of the vast numbers of other methods employed by the Raj to 'know the country' (c.f. Bayly, 1993 and 1999), British colonial administrators understood maps as panoptic tools that facilitated bureaucratic power. As Edney observes, however, this power was always both incomplete and negotiated. 'Like all instruments of state power, the surveys were exercises in negotiation, mediation, and contestation between the surveyors and their native contacts, so that the knowledge which they generated was a representation more of the power relations between the conquerors and conquered than of some topographical reality' (Edney, 1997, 25, see also Andrews, 1975). Maps as tools of rule are silencing representations of multiple, negotiated relations of power. In their attempt to ossify such relations through representation, maps are also always already inaccurate and out of date.

A reading of cartography that transcends critical cartography's nation/state divide is offered in Timothy Mitchell's analysis of the role of cadastral mapping in the creation of 'the' modern economy. Mitchell argues that this 'Economy' is a process of systematizing and quantifying particular kinds of local relationships such that they can be measured at a national level and, thus, facilitate the internal and external legibility of the nation. Maps—in Mitchell's analysis the 'great land map of Egypt'—were, 'intended not just as an instrument of administrative control or geographical knowledge, but as a means of recording complex statistical

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<sup>5</sup> For a similar analysis, see Hannah 2000 which focuses less on the panoptic power of cartography and, instead, engages with Foucault's notion of governmentality in production of territory in 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

information in a centralized, miniaturized, and visual form' (2002, 9). This analysis, then, offers a way to see beyond maps as either part of the nationalist imagination or as tools of social control through a reconceptualization of nation and state building as linked projects. For Mitchell, mapping, surveys, and censuses are processes of nationalization, not so much in that they 'imagine' coherent boundaries and histories for the nation-state, but in that they re-organize it from a system of local economies into an internally and externally coherent, comparable, and legible national economy.

The nation was emerging as this space, this material/structural extension, within which villages, persons, liabilities, and exchanges could be organized and contained. The connections, linkages, commands, and flows of information that made up this political order no longer seemed to pass through particular persons and communities. They appeared to arise in the space of separation between the land and the map, the social community and the state, the revenue and its statistical representation (90).

This growing 'space' of the national economy represents, for Mitchell, a bifurcation of the social world and its statistical representations. The economy is a space which claims accuracy through technical skill and empirical knowledge.

Mitchell's critique can be productively read with Lefebvre's (1991) notion of the 'production of space.' Lefebvre's notion hinges on an ongoing, dynamic, and historically produced relationship between physical space, mental space (the abstractions and representations of physical space), and social space itself (the space of lived social relations). Lefebvre usefully adopts an understanding of social space as a network of social relationships. Rather than reifying notions of 'state' or 'space' (Cons, Feldman, and Geisler, 2004), Lefebvre posits a notion of social space that is always historically contingent. 'It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object' (1991, 73). Adopting a staunchly Marxian critique, Lefebvre argues that the social space under modern capitalism is linked to the eclipse of use-value by exchange-value. As such, the abstract space of modern capitalism moves towards the destruction of 'the qualitative realm in which use values are ultimately consumed' (Brenner, 1997,

142). The production of this capitalist 'abstract' social space becomes a scaffolding for a totalizing global space of capital. Yet at the same time, Lefebvre argues that this totalizing scale is composed of overlapping, competing, and adjoining social spaces: 'overlapping sociospatial networks articulated on divergent geographical scales, a "hierarchical stratified morphology"' (Brenner, 1997, 144). Mitchell's critique of cadastral mapping might be read as a historical critique of this process, the formation of 'the economy' as a totalizing, yet always partial and incomplete, abstract space of modern capitalism. Mitchell's critique, much more the Lefebvre's, however, is concerned with both the colonial historical specificities of this project and with its lived social implications.

Mitchell draws four key insights from his critique of the production of space that are central for reading maps in the context of understanding conflict over space. First, he argues that while this process always makes claims to accuracy, it is more correctly understood as 'reformatted' knowledge that signifies a transfer in power from the 'field' to the surveyor's office. 'What is new is the site, and the forms of calculation and decision that can take place at this new site' (116). Mapping should thus be understood as a means of translating the site of struggle over space from a particular place to the bureaucratic, legal space of state administration (c.f. Sparke, 1998). Second, Mitchell emphasizes that movement to this 'new site' constitutes an act of removal. The move from the 'real world' to the map is a move that erases contested, political relations in sanitized statistical representations at the same time that it 'denies its own (shrinking) physicality' (117). The space that is 'produced' through the map is smooth and uncontested. Maps, to modify Ann Stoler's suggestive phrase, can help us understand the constitution of territory from the bottom up, if one is willing to read them upside down (Stoler, 1995). In other words, to use maps as critical tools, one must read them for the silences. Third, this move should not be understood as a simple process of representation. Rather, 'Expert knowledge works to format social relations, never simply to report or picture them' (118). Drawing on the epistemic critique put forward by Harley and others, maps must be understood as projects—

or at least part of projects—of social formatting and control. However, fourth and most importantly, this process, in its attempt to freeze and control social relations, is always and by definition, partial and contested. Drawing on these key insights, I suggest, one can begin to see maps as deeply implicated in conflicts centring on the regulation, classification, demarcation, and policing of space.

### **Contested Borders and the Political Ecology of Place**

Most of the mapping literature has employed a macrostructural framework that remains either explicitly focused on the nation, its borders, and its historical imagination or attempted to understand mapping within the context of state projects of territorialization. As such, it echoes Donald Moore's criticism of the field of political ecology for eliding '(1) the micropolitics of peasant struggles over access to productive resources, and (2) the symbolic contestations that constitute these struggles' (Moore, 1993: 381).

While largely true for the field of critical cartography, Moore's comment may appear somewhat dated in the context of political ecology and environmental history studies of the politics of place. Since 1993, there has been a marked increase in studies sensitive to such struggles (Moore's writing itself represents one such powerful contribution)<sup>6</sup>. In what follows, I offer a reading of two such accounts: Roderick Neumann's history of the formation of Serengeti national park and Donald Moore's pioneering ethnographies of territory in upland regions of Zimbabwe. These two accounts provide spatial understandings of conflict and attention to what I will call multiple competing geographies—or concepts of what the landscape is and/or should be—present in each site of struggle. Despite this focus, maps are surprisingly absent as subjects of analysis for both authors. Drawing on Mitchell, I argue for a critique that leverages the explanatory power of maps, understanding

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<sup>6</sup> Others include Rangarajan, 1996, Sivaramakrishnan, 1997, 1999 and Ranger, 1989 to name only a few.



first, that maps are not only simplistic representations of the landscape but that they are also attempts to reformat that landscape through representation, and second, that maps are not simply failed attempts at social control. Rather, they are documents that are part of the complex contestations over space. Such an analysis would help develop a nuanced understanding of struggles over borders, access, and control central in political ecological conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

### **Neumann and the Creation of Serengeti National Park**

Roderick Neumann's writing has largely viewed the creation of parks in colonial and post-colonial Tanzania as both a framing of landscape within a particular (European) gaze and as a series of projects of social control. In his article, 'Ways of Seeing Africa,' Neumann traces the translation of colonial views of an 'Edenic' African landscape in the creation of Serengeti National Park. Neumann argues that this Edenic view, concomitant with the emergence of an industrialized England, was a reflection of colonial ideologies of landscape as either productive or consumptive (aesthetic); a view that simultaneously implied both 'a sense of ownership and control' (1995a, 152). Neumann charts the contested process of establishing zones for 'preserving Eden' in the 1920s that involved pressure from outside the colony and internal debate within the different branches of colonial administration (see also Neumann, 1998). Central to this struggle was the question of what to do with the large numbers of Maasai living within the proposed park boundaries. As Neumann observes, this question was, at least initially, mediated by colonial discourse around race that parcelled residents of Tanzania into Africans that would be developed and those who were 'primitive,' and thus should be 'protected as part of the fauna' (1995a, 155). As such, the debate around the

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<sup>7</sup> Though I have chosen to focus on political ecology studies of place for reasons discussed above, I argue that the methodological argument presented here is relevant for other emerging spaces, such as the expansion in the use of maps as documents demonstrating claims, counterclaims, and various competing views of land with the rise of spatial statistics associated with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. Indeed, I suggest that the methodological approach I suggest here might be one strategy that could be productively employed in the growing literature seeking to critique the social and political construction of GIS technology (c.f., Piper, 2002, Harvey, 2001, Schuurman 2002).

proposed park and its inhabitants in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, was carried out exclusively, in Neumann's analysis, by Europeans, and was centred on how to view the 'landscape's people', their relationship to nature, and their customary rights.

Neumann traces this debate through the establishment, in 1948 of the National Park Ordinance, which regulated movement of those within the park and served to establish a park boundary which was immediately disputed by Africans living within and around it. The Ordinance also nominally preserved the legal rights of park inhabitants while providing a legal basis for park officials to regulate these rights. As Neumann demonstrates, the Ordinance served as the basis for an ongoing series of disputes over park boundaries and legal rights of park 'residents.' What is clear from Neumann's analysis, is that these disputes constituted a distinctly spatial politics focused on how space would be apportioned for people and wildlife as well as who would regulate that space.

Critical to understanding these politics are three points. First, the connection between differing ideologies and varied understandings of landscape is central to the development of Serengeti National Park. The very concept of the park itself rises out of the North American discourse on national parks and a Victorian view that segregated landscape based on production values and aesthetics, as opposed to understandings based around local practices and use of land and resources. Second, these ideologies of landscape were bound up with ideologies of race, creating a viewpoint which understood Africans as belonging within particular spaces. As Neumann observes, 'Fulfilment of the European vision of primitive Africans living 'amicably amongst the game' meant freezing economic development and cultural change within resident communities' (1995a, 160). Third, these ideologies, in the contestation over the park, were mapped back onto the land in a variety of conflicting and changing ways.

It is unfortunate that Neumann's analysis, then, doesn't pay more attention to spatial manifestations of these different social geographies. It seems clear that

the establishment of national parks is part of a national, or at least, imperial view of Tanzania as a coherent whole. Neumann argues that preservation of Edenic landscapes was and is part of the colonial (and postcolonial (see Neumann, 1995b, 1997, and 1998)) imagination of Africa and Tangyanika. However, he doesn't seem to explore documents (maps) produced by various parties in the debate over the Serengeti that lay claim to particular boundaries and views of spaces. Conflicting visions of the Serengeti were produced by numerous different parties: the colonial administration, national and international preservationist groups, pressure groups interested in balancing aesthetic views of the land with productive needs, and the Maasai themselves. I suggest that an understanding of how these different parties represented landscape might help to clarify the struggles to reformat space. An analysis of maps, and other representations of landscape, would help to show these visions of the Serengeti, conflicting spatial understandings of social relations, and the specific grounds on which these different views contested, conflicted, and agreed with one another<sup>8</sup>. As such, exploring maps is one important way to clarify and analyze spatial disputes over land and resources.

### **Moore and Ethnographies of Resistance in the Zimbabwean Uplands**

Donald Moore's work has largely focused on capturing 'the cultural politics of environmental struggles in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands' (Moore, 1998, 382). He has explored differing, changing, and conflicting concepts of geography in struggles over land access and resource control in the lush mountainous district of Kaerezi on the border of Mozambique. In a series of recent articles, Moore traces the postcolonial struggles around geography in Kaerezi, always grounded in the memory of particular kinds of colonial expropriations and resistances, through three separate, yet intimately linked sites of conflict: government resettlement schemes

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<sup>8</sup>Neuman's later work (1997 and 2000) has focused on the ways that state visions of landscape, imposed through borders and buffer zones, are sites that produce violence through their inflexible apportioning of space.

in the Kaerezi river valley, conflicts around expansion of the abutting Nyanga National Park, and struggles over management of the Kaerezi river.

The first 'site' of resistance for Moore is a postcolonial villagization scheme that serves as a resettlement zone for Kaerezians displaced in the colonial period. The scheme's goal was to compartmentalize landscape into residential, arable, and grazing land and to order the 'residential' zones into spatially even, gridded households. As Moore observes, this spatialization of land, and the gridding process in particular, echoed the very colonial practices that Kaerezians had fought against:

The cordoned-off residential sites were a cornerstone of state resettlement policy, designed to promote 'development' and environmental 'conservation.' The administrator used the English term villages to describe the linear grids, as if to suggest that the unpeopled landscape—marked by rusted metal stakes on barren terrain—constituted a vibrant community in waiting. Most Kaerezians called these empty spaces simply the lines, the same term used for colonial land use plans that had forced Africans into linear settlement grids separated from fields and pastures. (2000, 654)

Reminiscent of James Scott's observation that 'Rather than trying... to bring the map into line with reality, the historical resolution has generally been for the state to impose a property system in line with its fiscal grid' (Scott, 1998, 39), the resettlement plan favoured a rigidly determined, easily legible view of land as opposed to a more 'socially' logical one. As Moore observes, 'Moving into the concentrated linear grids, where the government promised to dig boreholes at a future, unspecified date, represented moving away from reliable waterpoints and toward uncertainty and a greater dependence on the government' (Moore, 1997, 98). Moore's analysis documents the overt resistance to this plan as well as internal differentiation and disagreement within the Kaerezi community.

Linked to this conflict are debates around the 1987 expansion of Nyanga National Park into land that had previously served as a buffer zone between the park and the resettlement scheme. Concomitant with this expansion was a proposal

by the Parks service to annex a protected river corridor to promote ecotourism and fishing. Suspicion of this plan which, like the resettlement scheme, was associated with colonial expropriations, along with a debate over a new cattle dip, located within the 500 yard protected corridor around the river, led to widespread resistance and debate over the Park Service's remapping of protected territory. Recounting the minutes at a meeting to discuss this plan, Moore writes,

The local chief provoked applause from his constituents when he invoked the memory of forced evictions from the same land in the 1970s, 'The National Park wants to burn huts in my area. We thought the whites had returned.' The MP [member of parliament] responded by stressing that a 'farm and a chieftainship are not the same thing.' Today, he continued, the government recognizes property boundaries as they are written in title deeds and demarcated with beacons placed by a state official from the office of the surveyor general, not as they are remembered in oral traditions (1993, 390).

The MP's reliance on the legalism of the rational state is an interesting one, given that boundaries, deeds, and demarcations he referenced were almost all manufactured by the 'state' without input or cooperation of the Kaerezi residents.

The discourse of precise legal boundaries, as Moore argues, however, is central to understanding the construction of the conflict as 'legal' state interests against more 'irrational' peasants.

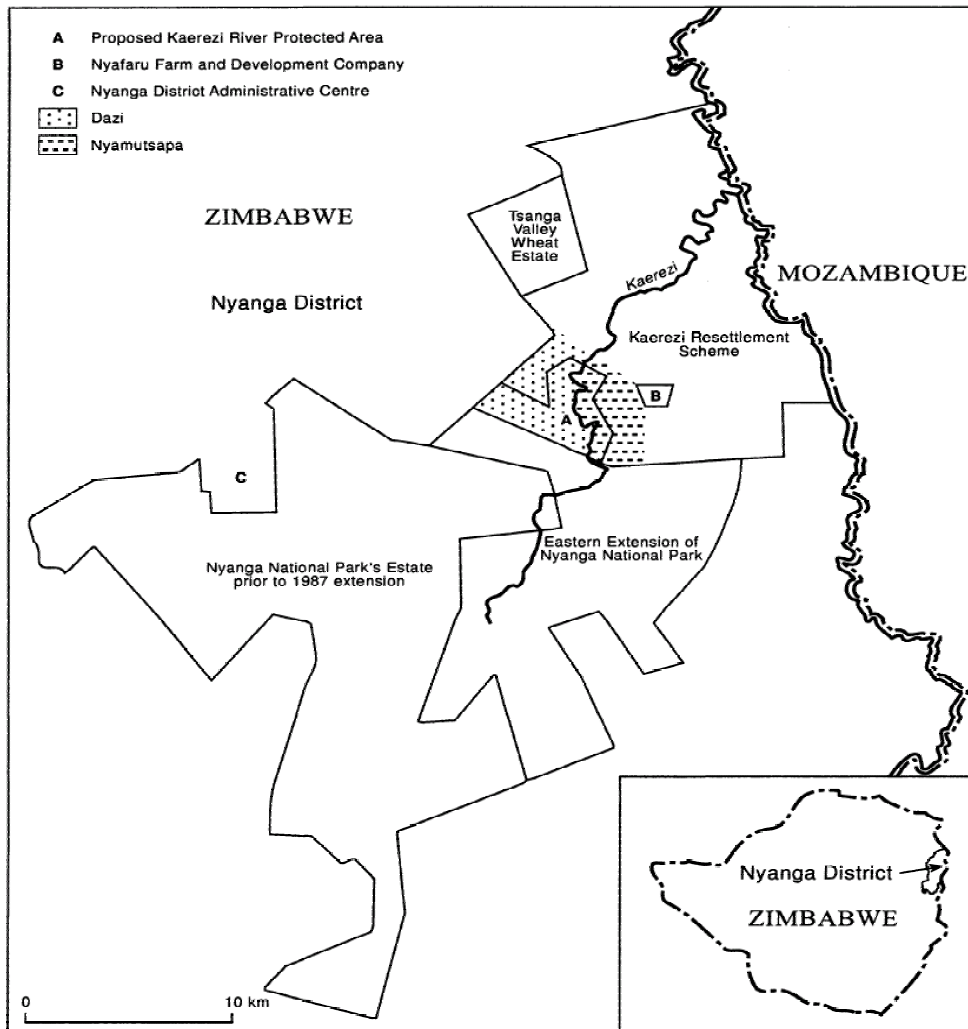
Invoking the colonial separation of functionally discrete cordoned spaces sanctioned by property deeds, the MP scolded his constituents for not having a map to reveal the 'true boundary.' His actions accord with Harley's (1988, 284) observation that 'the map may be regarded as a means by which the state... could more effectively control a tenant or peasant population.' The MP's faith in the map's ability to speak the truth hinged on his viewing Kaerezi as an alienable commodity transferred from one owner to another by virtue of title deeds.... The particular cultural practice of dutifully recording property boundaries on a map underpinned this entrenched belief in Kaerezi's status as a commodity owned and administered by its present owner, the state. The chief, in contrast, invoked an alternate cultural vision of Kaerezi as his chieftainship by virtue of ancestral inheritance (1993, 390-1).

Reminiscent of Mitchell's analysis of maps as part of a system of representation that allowed for the imagination of a 'national' economy, Moore again highlights local contestations as a struggle over whose map will be superimposed over the landscapes. The conflicting representations lie between the geography of a map legitimized by bureaucratic authority or one which draws both on specifically localized cultural practices and memory of injustices and promises of reparations unfulfilled in the postcolonial era. The conflict between these geographies is a struggle over the social formatting, in Mitchell's terms, of space.

The analysis of cartography in the exchange between the MP and his angry constituents is an apt demonstration that maps are central to struggles over land and resources, both in their material forms (state produced maps that are part of the production of state power) and in their symbolic forms (calling on history, tradition, struggle, etc.) that are no less real or contested for their failure to be committed to paper. Despite this, I argue that Moore's analysis might benefit from a closer exploration of representations of landscape (official and otherwise) at play in conflicts over space in Kaerezi. In analyses so focused on the imposition of particular geographies on space, one wonders, for example, what the state visions for 'the lines,' as opposed to other views of the resettlement project, looked like. It would further be interesting both to understand what kind of oppositions were raised, symbolic or otherwise, to the MP's legalistic deployment of maps as 'official' documents and to explore the history of border demarcation around the park expansion and protected area.

More importantly, one might observe that in the four articles reviewed for this paper, Moore only includes two maps, the first a slightly less detailed version of Figure 1, both, presumably, produced for explanatory purposes. Moore provides neither a source for the maps or a discussion of what they were based upon. This presentation of academically sanitized maps is common practice in studies focused on a specific area or case. Rather than presenting existing maps of the 'field' (and analyses thereof) authors frequently offer redrawn, authorless maps that both

make the area under study legible to the reader, but also, in their very authorlessness, present themselves as closer to 'the truth.' Moore's unreflexive deployment of these maps is



disappointing considering both his careful analysis of the multiple and multifaceted meanings of space. One might suggest that in an analysis so attentive to discursive appropriations of space, the 'objective' or at the very least, unself-conscious cartographic portrayal of landscape deserves its own deconstruction. This map, in and of itself, displays a largely peopleless landscape without demonstrating the

'spatial distributions' within the resettlement scheme that are the subject of struggle. Further, and most problematically, borders on Moore's map are drawn as cleanly and crisply as any cadastral survey and appear not as sites of contestation, but rather as pre-ordained facts.

This said, even a map as 'unproblematically' presented as Moore's raises interesting questions about his analysis. One might wonder why only particular borders on this map present problems for Kaerezians. It is surprising, for example, that despite the fact that the resettlement project shares a frontier with Mozambique; it is only internal borders that appear, in Moore, to be at play in the contested geographies of Kaerezi. Further, the politics of park expansion and the control of the Kaerezi river appears more critical when one sees that part of the river ran through the original park while the headwaters originated a mere 6-7 kilometres away in private farmland. Perhaps most significantly, the Kaerezi River is the only body of water pictured on the map. While Moore never mentions other streams or rivers, one presumes that in a lush upland region such as Kaerezi, they exist. Moore's map, then, either radically simplifies landscapes and resources (in the same ways that 'official' cartographies might) or the struggle—over first, the headwaters and second, the protected area—take on new importance if they are indeed, struggles over a single water supply. Either way, Moore's map can be said to centralize and highlight his primary object of analysis in the article in which it is presented: the river.

### **Bringing the Map Back In**

Throughout this paper I have been arguing for a political ecology that includes maps and mapping as both a tool and object of analysis. I would like to conclude with a reading of two pieces that suggest paths towards this model. Benjamin Orlove's analysis of conflicts around the regulation of protected reed beds in Peruvian Lake Titicaca is based around a close reading both of maps created by Peru's National Forestry Centre (CENFOR) establishing jurisdiction over reed beds along Titicaca's Western shore and peasant maps designed to establish counter



claims based on the traditional use of particular beds as raw materials for a number of important subsistence activities. Dividing his analysis into state maps and peasant maps, in Matthew Sparke's suggestive terms 'contrapuntal cartographies' (1998), Orlove tells a story of peasant opposition to state control that revolves around two fundamentally different views of geography.

Orlove's argument points out some basic different 'ways of seeing' evident in the two different 'types' of maps. On the one hand, peasant maps feature a marked absence of 'towns' or more state controlled, administrative spaces. On the other hand, the state maps fail to represent peasant villages, suggesting that these less-legible communities play no part in the designation of protected reed beds. Similarly, the peasant maps' representation (or lack there of) of roads suggests a rural, self-contained space while the state maps seem to present a more ordered, urban view of the reed bed areas. In other words, each set of maps are idealized geographies representing different views of power and autonomy. Orlove also argues that the peasant maps' failure to produce a picture that is 'to scale' suggests a different set of relationships to features

such as mountains (important in local ritual practices) and views of independent communities (equally spaced on the maps as they are equally important in peasant cosmology, as opposed to demarcated by scientific spatial measurement). In this sense, the peasant maps are what Gould and White would call 'Mental Maps,' (1986 [1974]) or maps that project particular perceptions of space and place shaped by cultural, social, and environmental orders, as opposed to views governed by modern cartography. Yet the term mental maps itself, in its suggestion of the difference between perception and reality, already privileges state views of landscape as truth in opposition to peasant views. Though the mental maps of the peasants in Orlove's analysis may represent particular idealized views of landscape, it should be noted that the state maps are also idealized, yet in different ways. The state maps represent a series of spatial divisions corresponding to the mandates of laws designating the reed beds as reserves. Specifically, Orlove reads the maps as representative of an evolving administrative process. The first map separates the

reserve from the rest of the lake, the second map divides the reserve up into different types of conservation zones, and the third map, responding to village claims, allocates particular parts of the reserve to village users under year long contracts. As such, while the state maps lay claim to geographic 'accuracy' they reflect a shifting and unstable administrative groundwork that constantly needs revision.

Further, Orlove argues that the maps are documents of larger narratives at play in the struggle over reed beds in Lake Titicaca. The state maps represent a series of compromises and decline in CENFOR's power, for example, through persistent exclusion of an adjacent contested zone, which appears without demarcations on the fringes of the peasant maps. More importantly, the third state map, made four years after the first two, signifies a 'cessation of power' in its demarcation of plots for local cultivation. As Orlove suggestively argues, 'The proleptic narrative of the state, by requiring compromises by the state to be presented as prefigured in laws, makes them not real compromises at all' (1991, 23). Maps, as such, become a liminal form of legal authority that have the power to represent conflict and compromise as naturalized, projecting reformatted views of space backwards onto history. While Orlove's third state map does indeed show this compromise, it can only be understood as such through Orlove's comparative analysis of maps over time, thus rescuing conflict over reed access from what Harley (2001) calls the silence of maps.

More suggestive is Orlove's analysis of state consideration, valuing, and incorporation of peasant maps as subsets of a larger legal project.

CENFOR officials reserved the term *mapa* (map) for the state maps, employing for the peasant maps the term *croquis*, a word that is often translated as 'sketch' but also includes the sense of 'rough draft.' This conceptualization allowed them to present any difference between peasant maps and state maps as the result of peasant errors, errors so numerous and severe as to place the peasant maps in another category altogether. The term *croquis* also has a narrative implication: it suggests that the peasant

maps will serve as the basis for a later corrected map, drawn by state officials. (25)

Orlove's description suggests that peasant maps represent a liminal form of legal authority. Their status is indefinite and it may (or may not) serve as a basis for future maps, drawn at a more precise scale. The term *croquis*, in its rough draft nature, also suggests that it is not only

inaccuracies on the peasant maps that may be corrected in the government redrawing; it could also be the claims themselves. Most importantly, perhaps, this observation suggests strategies for hegemonic incorporation of peasant claims by state authorities. Peasant maps lack scientific legitimacy. They are, in the context of cartographic precision, indeed sketches. Yet it is the very relationship of accuracy and precision that structures their illegitimacy in the eyes of CENFOR. As such, the 'mental' maps of the peasants are posed against the official maps of the state. The state maps, in their claim to legitimacy within the frame of cartographic precision, represent 'true,' or at least legal, visions of landscape, which supersede and replace the peasant *croquis*. As such, the incorporation of peasant maps into state maps represents a simultaneous assimilation and correction: the transforming, editing, and redrawing of the peasant maps as truth. The continual redrawing of state maps that project themselves back into history as 'natural' effectively supersedes the peasant maps at the same time that it does or does not give legal recognition to their claims.

Orlove's analysis offers a model, of sorts, for incorporating maps into analyses of territory conflicts in park-reserve/people conflicts. Yet the model, in many ways is incomplete. It presents a homogenized binary picture of conflict that may oversimplify the struggle over reed beds in Lake Titicaca. Both state and peasants remain fundamentally undifferentiated in this model. While CENFOR appears as a direct conduit of state authority, peasant communities seem to uniformly share a perspective on space. It would be interesting to compare the CENFOR maps to representations of space made by other local representatives of

state power (politicians, community leaders, etc.). It might also be observed that the peasant maps reproduced in Orlove's article represent radically different epistemic and cosmological views of community, geography, and daily life.

A more theoretical contribution to the political ecology of place and maps is presented in Nancy Peluso's analysis of counter-mapping in East Kalimantan. Peluso's analysis recounts how forest communities, in cooperation with NGOs, have used sketch maps of local and traditional land holdings, combined with more 'accurate' GPS data, to produce maps that make claims to land that has been indiscriminately folded into forest reserves. While counter-mapping as a technique has been explored elsewhere (see Aberley, 1993 and Fox, 1990) what I find particularly interesting about Peluso's analysis is her critique of what mapping means for communities. Peluso argues that counter-maps can be used to undermine monolithic state mapping projects. 'One effect of having multiple maps of a single forest, for example, could be to challenge the accuracy of a 'standard' map used for planning' (1995, 386). As such, in the case of counter-mapping, challenges to larger bureaucratic mapping projects come as much from adding detail as representing alternate geographies.

Peluso, however, does not posit counter-mapping as a new means of resistance for forest communities, but rather sees it more relationally. Counter-maps do allow communities to communicate in 'the elite language of the powerful' (387). Thus 'vernacularizing' maps—producing them at the community, rather than state, level—might be thought to represent a form of empowerment. The picture, however, is somewhat more complicated, especially in remote upland forest regions in Eastern Kalimantan. Peluso poses the relative benefits of being 'on the map' as related to the actual levels of state presence.

Whereas abstract space on a map represents merely state claims to power rather than a state capacity to enforce its claims, local people's actual control may be enhanced by exclusion from the map. When the degree of state surveillance increases, e.g., because of an increased value of resources or

because of a reduction in resources located elsewhere, local people's inclusion on the map is more desirable (388).

Yet Peluso also notes, similar to Mitchell, that maps serve to reformat social relations. To be 'on the map' also implies a transition from local to more state recognized/cadastral forms of property rights. Mapping is a question of legibility and the benefits of such legibility must be viewed relationally. If these areas can be understood as non-state spaces, in Scott's (1998) sense of the term, then counter-mapping is more than a simple process of re-presentation. Going beyond Orlove's analysis of the absorption of peasant maps by state maps, the process of counter-mapping incorporates particular kinds of relationships into official knowledge. Further, to a greater or lesser extent, it locks social relations into what Mitchell would call 'the language of calculability' (2002), relationships intelligible within the context of the economy. In other words, the appropriation of the government's official language (here mapping methods) also means intelligibility within that language.

An interesting counter-strategy that Peluso proposes is bare-minimum representation. 'By purposely making maps 'empty' or 'homogenous space,' counter-mappers can reduce the potentially negative effects of such a territorialization. In other words, communities can retain the most internal flexibility in interpreting and changing land uses if individual rights within the village are not mapped' (402). Peluso posits this strategy as a means of minimizing conflict, both between communities and the state and inside and amongst different communities. But a more interesting suggestion is implicit in her observation. In the expansion of park and reserve borders, it seems largely impossible to avoid having particular state geographies mapped onto local space. The goal of counter-mapping is, on the one hand, to stem the erasure of other spatial relationships by government maps, but, on the other, to also to carve out as much non-legible space within these maps as is possible. As Peluso writes, 'local notions of territoriality have had to change as extensive land-based projects have threatened them; they will change further with

mapping. Yet, given the alternate futures—of not being on the map, as it were, being obscured from view and having local claims obscured, there seems to be no choice' (403).

## Conclusion

J.H. Andrews begins his classic study of the Ordinance Survey in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland with an enigmatic quote from Lord Salisbury in 1883, who commented, 'The most disagreeable part of the three kingdoms is Ireland, and therefore Ireland has a splendid map' (Andrews, 1975, v). Lord Salisbury's observation is suggestive in its double meaning: not only is the landscape of Ireland disagreeable, but so, in the context of colonial rule, are the people in it. It is as much the contestation over landscape as the landscape itself that causes the creation of a 'splendid map.' Salisbury's quip also highlights the centrality of maps in the production of particular official visions of space. In such zones of conflict, maps, as key texts in the production of social space (Lefebvre, 1991), cannot help but be interesting, whether for what they show, or for what they do not. It has been a central argument of this paper that maps can and should be read by political ecologists—and social scientists more broadly—in much the same way Lord Salisbury seems to suggest.

Conflicts over park borders are only one of many 'sites' where scholars have begun to re-examine the relationship between states, people, and place (Brenner et al., 2003). Yet they are particularly interesting places to think through questions that have become more important within political ecology and critical literature on cartography as well as within the social sciences and humanities in general. The eco-political conflicts examined by political ecologists of place are productive sites for asking questions about state demarcations of space, the ways such demarcations structure people's lives, and the symbolic and material conflicts over resources that emerge at sites of state regulation. Parks, as sites of state spatial management are places where the logic of Borges's parable might be explored at length; where particular views of geography might be seen as competing with each other in an attempt to smother the landscape. By paying more attention to

the 'splendid maps' that emerge in such places, we can begin to understand the narratives of state, nation, and place formation coded in cartography's conventional signs.

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## **Representing Poverty, Impoverishing Representation? A Discursive Analysis of a NGOs Fundraising Posters**

### **Abstract**

*This article seeks to understand the production and maintenance of symbolic boundaries between the "self" and the "other" in fundraising posters by aid organisations and development NGOs. The central discussion will question why NGOs come up with such dichotomising images and will address their consequences. The article discusses the complete poster collection of 11.11.11, an annually organised, overarching Belgian NGO fundraising campaign for a whole range of development projects and aid agencies. As well as exploring the definition of the 'other' in the poster material, this paper will also reflect specifically upon the positioning of the NGO as opposed to other agencies and players in the field of development. It is argued that although particular dominant icons and narratives remain unchanged over the course of the years, symbolic boundaries between 'self' and 'other' indeed do change.*

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## **Introduction**

Every now and then citizens of the western world are confronted with images and stories of the poor in Africa, Asia and South America. Annoying confrontations may occur while strolling down the shopping street, where window shoppers are at constant risk of being hassled by volunteers of development organisations showing pictures, telling stories and asking all kinds of moral questions. In the evening, while watching television, one can also be caught by the horrifying images of hunger and starvation from a fundraising television commercial. Even at work people are regularly bombarded with email on national asylum policies or human rights issues.

Fundraising has become big business over the last decades (Smillie, 1995). Large international non-governmental organisations (NGO) are spending millions in public communication and by far the largest shares of these investments go to fundraising campaigns. In these campaigns, NGOs provide images and information statements about people in developing countries in order to convince audiences in the first world that something has to be done, that the undersigned organisation is the best candidate to do something about it, and that money is needed from the audiences to finance these endeavours. The spectacular financial results of the recent fundraising campaigns held for the victims of the Tsunami in Asia confirm this view.

An indirect result of these campaigns is, what Smillie calls, "the pornography of poverty", i.e. "the use of starving babies and other emotive imagery to coax, cajole and bludgeon donations from a guilt-ridden Northern

public” (Smillie, 1995: 136). According to Nederveen Pieterse (1992), both the western media and the established aid organisations produce and maintain a, so-called, 'aid assistance imagination' of the poor, southern, underdeveloped, or third world countries<sup>2</sup>. This imagination is interlarded with western ideas and images of war, hunger and turmoil (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992, 235). Dillon & Grieshaber (1996) state that, although the media and NGOs can be held responsible for continually publicising these one-sided and biased images, notions of supremacy over third world countries are deeply ingrained in first world societies. The problem is not that starving babies do not exist, but that such pictures, when continuously repeated year after year, outweighs reality and become realities of their own. Moreover, Simpson (1984) argues that NGOs deliberately focus their attention on *victims* of poverty because, by accusing the *culprits*, they risk displeasing powerful contributors, such as governments and corporations. In order to keep everybody happy it is necessary to communicate politically neutral messages in one's fundraising campaign (Simpson, 1984, 23-24).

A number of authors on critical discussions on development cooperation, aid assistance and the role of NGOs have touched upon the negative effects of image production (Nederveen Pieterse 1992, Smillie 1995, Dillon & Grieshaber 1996, Fischer 1997, Clark 2004). However, not many authors have thoroughly analysed the image production of NGOs in fundraising campaigns (except to a

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<sup>2</sup> All of these terms refer to the, so-called poor countries in especially Africa, Asia and Latin America as opposed to the countries and agencies in the rich world (predominantly Europe and North America). In order not to create confusion I will use the term 'third world' when I speak of the ones that are being assisted, and the 'first world' of the ones that are doing the assisting. These terms may not be really up to date but everybody understands the symbolic boundary that this distinction makes.

little extend Simpson 1985, Van der Gaag & Nash 1995). Many of these authors have focused solely on the portrayal of “the poor other” and left the “self-side” of the coin uncovered. An analysis over time has also been lacking in the available literature, reinforcing the idea that the imagery of the poor other remains unchanged.

In this paper, I analyse the content and nature of the messages and images that are being communicated by development organisations to the public in fund raising posters. Special attention will be devolved to the evolving representations of the ‘other’ and the ‘self’ in this material. Besides the poetics of imagery, I will also discuss the politics of imagery, or the issues of power that are associated with the institutionalised production of images and information on both the ‘other’ and the ‘self’. The central question that this article will try to answer is whether messages and images in fundraising campaigns have changed over time, or can one determine certain discourses and dogmatic images that continue to dominate the nature of these fundraising campaigns, as stated by the authors above.

In order to research this rather large topic, I have chosen to focus upon the complete collection of fundraising posters that were produced between 1966 and 2001 by a Belgian NGO named the National Centre for Development Cooperation (NCOS<sup>3</sup>). The NCOS was founded in the spring of 1966 as a joint venture of Belgian NGOs for the coordination of particular activities, such as political lobbying, public education and fundraising. The annual fundraising

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<sup>3</sup> In Dutch: *Nationaal Centrum voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*.



campaign, launched traditionally on the 11<sup>th</sup> November at 11 o'clock, is typically named "11.11.11 action". Together with about one hundred joined NGOs, the mission of the NCOS is to fight against inequality and injustice in the world. They believe that the roots of poverty are due to the unfair distribution of means and power between the third world and the first world. According to the NCOS, countries in the south receive too little for their products, while at the same time the income that they receive flows back to the north because of the high burden of debt. Furthermore, rich countries spend far too little on development cooperation and the quality of this cooperation is not satisfying. It is the NCOS' specific task to bundle the strengths of NGOs to fight against these unfair and unjust conditions by working on three aims: i.e. to sensitise, inform and mobilise the public opinion; to support and collaborate with partner organisations in the south and international networks; and to put pressure on the political and economic centres of power (Peeters & Cleymans, 1990). Although the NCOS started as a national organisation over the course of the years the Flemish and Walloon created their own overarching organisations for the third world movement. I will focus on the Flemish counterpart and refer to the fundraising campaign, as 11.11.11. The "11.11.11 action" campaign is a well-known event in Belgium as are the striking posters that are produced every year to publicise it.

The objective of this paper is certainly not to demonstrate that the fundraising work of 11.11.11 is wrong, but to critically examine the institutionalised production of images and ideas that may have significant consequences for the production and maintenance of boundaries between

notions of 'self' and 'other' in the public conception of the third world. This is important since the first aim of 11.11.11 is to sensitise the public opinion on the north-south debate.

In section two I will briefly introduce the methodology that will be followed, as well as a number of notions that will be used in this article. Section three will present the results of the analysis. I will show that when the poster production of 11.11.11 is analysed over the course of 35 years, particular icons and narratives continue to dominate the representation of both the 'other' and the 'self'. However, the poster material also highlights changes in the representation of the 'other' and the 'self', especially with regards to the emerging debates of the 1980s and 1990s on the role of governments, neo-liberalism and globalisation. This focus on power structures has included some additional actors in the poster material (especially the national government and multinational companies) and influenced the representation of the 'other' and the 'self'. Section four will close this paper with discussion and conclusions.

## **Methodology and Data Collection**

The poster material that functions as primary data in this research was collected on the 11.11.11 website, which can be accessed through the internet<sup>4</sup>. As I said earlier, I have focused the analysis on the complete poster record produced for the 11.11.11 campaigns between 1966 and 2001. On average

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<sup>4</sup> For additional information on 11.11.11 and the posters collection of 11.11.11 I would like to refer the reader to two websites: <http://www.11.be> and <http://www.meerskant.org/affiches/affstart.htm>

11.11.11 produced one or two posters each year. Sometimes, however, the same poster was used in the following year, and also no campaign was held in 1976. In total the poster database that is used in this investigation adds up to 39 posters. A comprehensive overview of the poster material can be found in appendix 1, in which different categories, such as the year of appearance, the financial result, the figures and the texts that are displayed, the general topic of the campaign and identity formations of 'self' and 'other', are specified for each poster.

### **Analysis of the Data**

For the analysis of the poster material I will follow the discursive approach to cultural representations as presented by Hall (1997). The discursive approach is largely based on the work of the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault and his understanding of the term discourse. For Foucault discourse consists of a group of statements, notions and ideas that provide the language for speaking about a particular subject. This way of formulating and constituting the subject responds to specific ruling statements and ideas. Foucault believes that knowledge does not limit itself to pure meaning or language because it always operates within a historically embedded social practice. Thereby, knowledge is a strategic tool, inseparably connected to relations of power. The truth is nothing more than a claim of a dominant group of people on a particular kind of knowledge (Foucault 1980, Hall 1997).

Hall claims that this approach focuses much more on the historical contexts in which representations, discourses and truths are constructed as

opposed to the a-historical tendency of the visual analyses common in semiotics (Hall 1997, 46). Since I am analysing a series of posters produced by a specific organisation in development cooperation, this discursive approach reveals a lot of information hidden in the posters. It will not only analyse representations of the 'other' but also show that these are the result of self-notions of the institute or organisation that produced these representations in a particular historical and societal context. In other words, the discursive approach provides us not only with insights on "how" the 'other' is represented but also "by whom" and for "what reasons".

In practice, this discursive approach provided an initial inventory of the commonalities and differences between the posters. Structuring elements in this inventory were the figures or symbols that were displayed (e.g. male, female, child, hands, food, etc.), the specific problems of underdevelopment that were presented as topics (e.g. hunger, ignorance, unemployment, war, etc.), and the explanations that were given for these problems (e.g. draught, exploitation, injustice, politics, debt, etc.). The same was done for the roles and positions of the poster's audience (the Belgian public), and the NGO itself. These structuring elements created the basic material for the discourses that the posters produce about "the poor", "the public", "the NGO", and other actors such as governments and multinationals. In addition secondary information sources on the work and history of this particular NGO were used to provide the poster material with a historical and organisational context.

## Development Discourse

In order to strengthen the presentation of this analysis I will link the results with critical anthropological accounts on development discourse.

Influenced by Foucault, the discourse of development co-operation has become a much-studied topic in contemporary anthropology (Grillo, 1997, 1). One of the case studies that Foucault used in his work has been the development of mental institutions and the way these institutions have come to define and control the boundaries between mentally sane and mentally insane people (Foucault, 1975). Similarly, critical anthropologists have started to research the demarcation between the people or communities that are supposed to be developed and the people and institutions that are *doing* the developing. Studies often include a critical questioning of the knowledge and ideas that lay at the basis for developing projects (Hobart 1993, Ferguson 1990, Escobar 1995, Fischer 1997). Escobar claims that the development institutions, including NGOs, exercise power over countries in the south by influencing the perception and knowledge about these countries. They define the terms in which one sees these countries and the indicators to support these views. To put it in Foucault 's terms, development institutions control the "regime of truth" about developing countries.

Economists, demographers, educators, and experts in agriculture, public health, and nutrition elaborated their theories, made their assessments and observations, and designed their programs from these institutional sites. Problems were continually defined, and client categories brought into existence. Development proceeded by creating 'abnormalities' (such as the 'illiterate', the 'underdeveloped', the 'malnourished', 'small farmers' or 'landless peasants'), which it would later treat and reform (Escobar, 1995, 41).

Being abnormal does not just mean being different, but is loaded with moral judgement, and has connotations of being illiterate, being malnourished, or being landless. Development discourse provides a moral justification to intervene and change these societies, but by misleadingly using tales that are made up in a different place and in a different context. As I will show, reflections of such popular political and academic discourses on underdevelopment are visible in the poster material.

### **Limitations**

I would like to note that because of the size of the dataset and the ambitious scope of this study the analysis presented here only contains a broad overview. It is not my aim to provide a thorough analysis of every single poster in the dataset, an elaborate description of the history of 11.11.11 and its changing relationship within Belgian society and politics, or a study into the communication strategies of fundraising posters. In the limited scope of this article, I only want to argue that in this specific dataset of posters evidence highlights a contrasting perspective on the identity politics of development NGOs, as was described in the introduction. In the following section I will present the results of the analysis. First, I will focus on the most dominant figures and persistent abnormalities that appear in the posters. Then I will demonstrate that despite these common and unchanging aspects of fundraising posters there has been a discernable shift from relatively neutral to politically loaded explanations of poverty. In the course of the analysis I will link our findings to relevant academic literature on development discourse and development imagery.

## **Ignorant, hungry children**

The image of a child is the most frequently appearing image in the posters. The figure that appears most frequently in the posters is the child. In about 50% of the poster material children are represented alone, in a group or with an adult<sup>5</sup>. In some cases it is only the children's eyes that are portrayed, the face or just a hand. As early as 1969, a British fundraising consultant provided a formula for persuading the public: "all the time show more and more babies" (Smillie, 1995,137). 11.11.11 has certainly adopted this strategy from the beginning. Using children in fundraising appears to be very effective. Everybody feels for children, has children of their own, or may even be a child himself or herself. This makes it very easy for people to identify with the child that is portrayed in the poster. Moreover, everybody understands that you need to protect a child and take care of a child because of its vulnerability and innocence.

Children do not only appear in most of the posters, they have been the most prominent figure used over the past 35 years. In their 1968 poster 11.11.11 portrayed their first image of a child (see box 2). In box 1 two similar posters are presented, both referring to famine in Ethiopia but the first one from 1985 and the second from 2000. In both posters two Ethiopian boys are the main figures, showing the innocence and vulnerability of children in crisis areas. The use of the same image in the poster illustrates the message that nothing has really changed in 15 years.



Figure 1: Posters of 1985 and 2000

Burman (1994) argues that images of children are also appealing for using in fundraising campaigns. This is due to its limited necessity for the poster to focus on the causes behind the circumstances of the child that it is showing. Using children allow NGO's to raise funds for politically loaded topics in a relatively neutral way. The posters of 1985 and 2000, as shown in box 1, sustain this argument. Despite the enormous amounts of money that were raised during these campaigns<sup>6</sup>, it can be argued that images like these could have negative consequences for the country to whom they are referring to. In this case for

<sup>5</sup> In 19 of the 39 different posters that I have analysed children are portrayed. Together with other symbols that refer to children, such as children's hand or toys, this makes the portrayal of children more than 50 %.

<sup>6</sup> Converted it amounted up to 2.5 million Euros in 1985 and more than double this amount in 1999.



Ethiopia, and more specifically for its citizens. Calvert & Calvert (2001) claim that worldwide it has mainly been starving children and Western aid activities that have been portrayed in the public media, while Ethiopian efforts to cope with the famine were underrepresented. Although local organisations were already working for months to cope with the famine, Ethiopians were stereotyped as helpless people forced to live in dry and unbearable circumstances. For example, the representativeness of the message in the 1985 poster, to that of the little boy that it pictures could well be false. The wording reads, "When I grow up I want to be a farmer". Yet one could question whether it really *is* the little boy who desires this or whether it is more likely to be the NGO that wants to show the public that with their means the boy is able to become an adult that is capable of surviving in the future. The poster assumes that the famine was caused by a lack of farmers. Given these considerations, the poster could be saying more about the way the western public would like to see the boy grow up, rather than the other way around.

Using children in fundraising campaigns symbolises the weak, vulnerable and dependent position that developing countries have in relation to the stronger, richer and more dominant developed countries. In both posters Ethiopia was portrayed as a fragile child, unable to survive without the help of its parents, the western world. One could even say that children are a pitiful subject and therefore worth a lot of money in the eyes of the NGO. Next to the abundance of children there are a few adult men and women that are portrayed in the posters, but as with the children these adults are also represented as subjects of misfortune, struggle, war, grief, and exploitation.

As we have seen in the example of the Ethiopian boy it is not without reason that particular figures are being used in the fundraising posters. The choice for a figure helps to get a message across or even amplifies the story you want to tell. In communication sciences the persuasive effects of personalised or vivid messages in different situations is contested (Nisbett & Ross 1980, Frey & Eagly 1993). Nevertheless, I assume that the use of vivid photographs and popular discourses in the 11.11.11 posters helps to get the message across. In almost every poster closed up figures are being used to draw the attention of the observer to a particular problem that third world people are facing. Often these problems correspond to popular discourses on poverty, such as drought, labour or politics, or to disaster situations, such as famines or floods that were covered extensively by the media.

The problem of famine, hunger or not having food or good food, is an ever-recurring problem in the poster material. Hunger and famine is presented in almost 45% of the posters<sup>7</sup>. The popularity of hunger as a narrative to represent poverty can be explained by the fact that everybody understands that hunger, or a lack of food, is a severe problem. The theme of 'hunger' and of the unequal distribution of food worldwide, have been very much at the forefront in the starting years of 11.11.11, most often by presenting confronting statistics or images. Hunger returns at odd intervals, mostly in years when the news of famine has had large media coverage. This was the case in 1973 when an extreme dry year caused harvest failures in many African Sahel countries and in

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<sup>7</sup> In 17 of the 39 posters images, symbols or statements refer to situations of famine and hunger.

1984 and 1999 when famines in Ethiopia caught the attention of the media<sup>8</sup> worldwide. In these years the producers of the posters cannot resist the persuasive powers of humanitarian emergency situations and deviate from the more structural themes that are presented.

The problem of hunger and famine is also represented with other figures, such as adult men and different explanations are given for the absence of food in different posters. Examples of these different associations and causes of hunger include: lack of knowledge, drought, labour, politics and exploitation<sup>9</sup>. Many of the posters only bring up one of the possible causes that may lay at the basis of famine, while in reality the causes may not be that easy to pinpoint. In reality, the causes for famine are a complex interplay of different factors. In fundraising it is easier to provide people with a simple and direct reason for “giving” instead of a complex story. A complex story may easily give people the feeling that their money will not directly contribute to improving the situation.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that in the posters of the last two cases in Ethiopia pictures of children suffering during the famine are used in the following year, when the famine (in many cases) is already over and when the children that are portrayed may not even be alive anymore.

<sup>9</sup> Examples can be found in illustration box 3, 4 and 6.



Figure 2: The posters of 1968 and 2001

The poster of 1968 in box 5 is a good example of the use of child figures as well as the theme of hunger and famine. The subtitle of the poster – “help the hungry to take care of themselves” - shows another implicit recurring theme in the poster material, i.e. the idea that people in developing countries do not have the right knowledge or enough technology to survive. Here hunger and poverty is explained by the extreme conditions in which people live and by the lack of knowledge and technology in order to cope with these circumstances.

Hobart speaks of two kinds of knowledge that are competing in the field of development. On the one hand you have the, so-called, local or indigenous knowledge's - knowledge shared by the people at the grassroots level. On the other hand there is knowledge, characterised by "an idealist theory of rationality and a naturalist epistemology", shared by the western agencies that are involved

in the field of development (Hobart, 1993, 3). Hobart claims that the latter constantly underestimates the value of *local* knowledge's. This undervaluation is inherent to the development industry because working in development always includes an element of intervention in which 'the developer' claims to know better than those who are to be developed (see for example the poster of 1985 (see box 1). The poster of 1968 (see box 2) is an early explicit version of this under estimation, or ignorance, of local knowledge. Although more recent posters do not explicitly raise the issue of ignorance towards the knowledge and technology of third world people, implicitly this issue is present in every poster where the recipients of aid-assistance are portrayed as helpless and passive. This is clearly visible in the different notions of 'self' and 'other' in the appendix. According to Hobart, ignorance is an unavoidable aspect of development discourse, which serves to justify how interventions are planned in third world societies.

The portrayal of the 'other' as helpless, ignorant and passive is amplified by the fact that the 'self' is represented in a rather active way (see appendix). One has to understand that fundraising posters have the purpose to convince the public that financial support is needed to solve a particular problem that cannot be solved by the people at stake. Therefore 11.11.11 constantly asks the public to become active, to make a choice and to support their work. The poster of 1968 asked the public to help the poor to become self-sufficient. The posters of 2000 and 2001 (in box 1 and 2) both proclaimed that "you give more than money" when you support 11.11.11, convincing the public to take an active stance against the inequalities suffered by the people that are portrayed in the

posters. In the same time they continue to portray the 'other' as helpless and passive, standing in line to be rescued by the NGO.

The portrayal of predominantly hungry children in crisis situations, as opposed to the active representation of 11.11.11 and the public, produces and maintains a dichotomy between the 'self' and the 'other'. Table 1 summarizes the prevailing dichotomy between the 'other' and the 'self' that can be derived from the inventory of the poster material in the appendix. As many authors claim, these representations contribute to and reinforce existing, patronising, colonial stereotypes (Coulter 1989, Broch-Due 2000.)

| The "other" | The "self"           |
|-------------|----------------------|
| -Child      | -Adult               |
| -Ignorant   | -Wise, knowledgeable |
| -Passive    | -Active              |
| -Helpless   | -Helpful             |

Table 1: Striking dichotomies from the posters

From 1996 until 2001 the subtitle of the posters has consistently been "Fight against injustice". However, giving money to buy off the feeling of guilt that is raised in the posters would seem a rather passive and minimal reaction that can certainly not be considered to "fighting" for their cause. Paradoxically, the ones who are doing most of the fighting and surviving are the ones who are being portrayed as passive. Given these considerations, although fundraising posters represent third world people as ignorant and passive, one could be more inclined to accuse audiences in the first world for being ignorant and passive

towards the realities of poverty and underdevelopment. The poster material acts as a catalyst for contributing to this situation.

We have seen that images of children and famine are ever-recurring themes in the poster material, providing a politically neutral strategy for raising money for aid and development projects. Another strategy is to “blame the victim” by passively portraying poor people in difficult climatic and geographical circumstances or crisis situations. Providing a clear perspective on the causes of poverty that lay largely outside of the political field has certain advantages. The solutions that are provided by the NGO can easily be justified to the public.

Examples of this politically neutral approach are the posters of 1970 and 1975 in box 3. An analyses of these posters suggests that it is almost as if they are telling one single story. In the poster of 1970 we see a poor hungry man that is not able to grow food in the dry circumstances in which he lives. Below the image the public is asked to help him to deal with these severe conditions. The poster of 1975 can be understood as the answer to the problem given in 1970. It indicates very clearly how the water wells and the outboard engines that were brought to the poor changed their capability to survive. Thus it communicates that this problem can be overcome by simply bringing them the knowledge and technology. Case solved. I have to note that this is one of the only posters that focus on the results of the projects executed by the NGO.

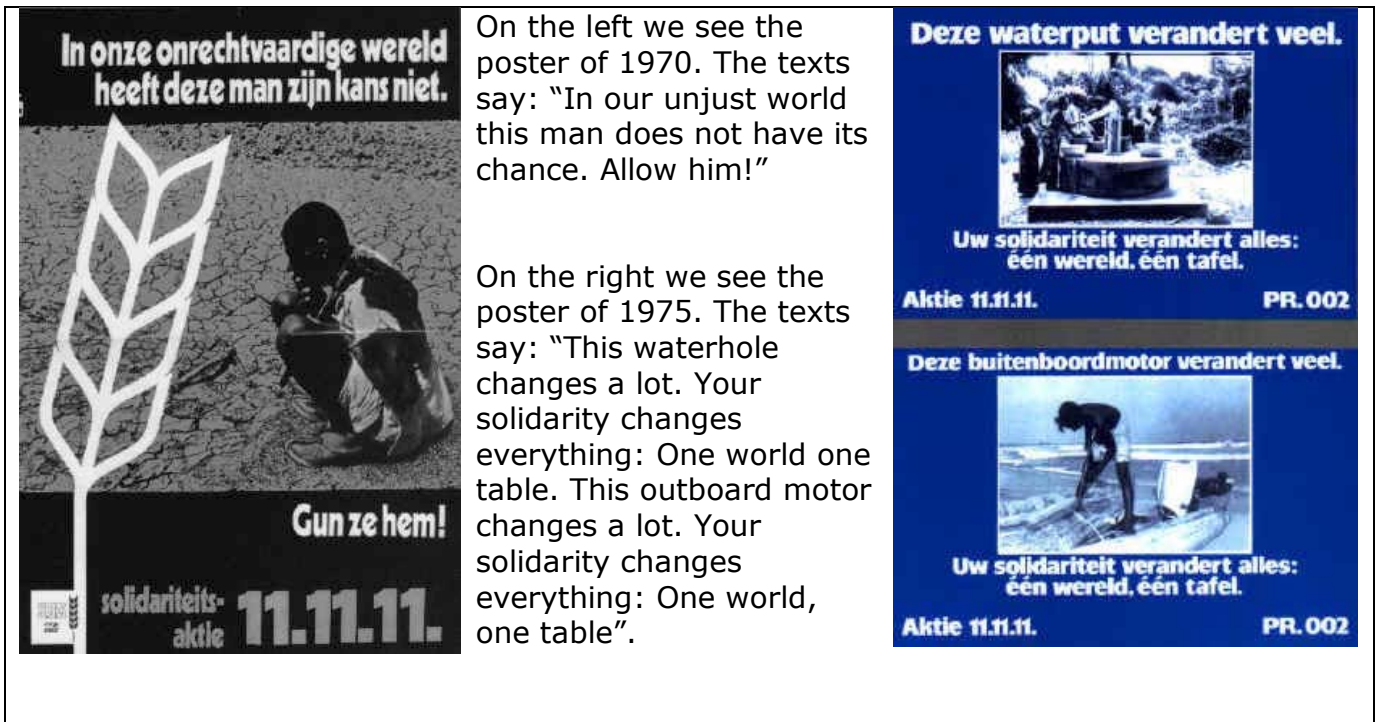


Figure 3: The posters of 1970 and 1975.

Swift (1996) comes up with a similar point of view when analysing, what he calls, the narrative of desertification or rapidly degrading dry lands. According to Swift, the problem of desertification is a western scientific construct that has been linked, to a very large extent to explaining famine and hunger, an explanation that is not as accurate as these scientific studies and reports suggest. He claims that the narrative of desertification provided a convenient point to suit the interests of aid agencies, national governments and scientists.

The famines of the early 1970 's (...) captured enormous attention in the media and in aid agency thinking (...). The trouble was that famine had inconvenient political ramifications, and was regarded as a political minefield by donors. (...) Desertification, on the other hand, was seen as related but politically safe, and a lot of the feelings of guilt, and the energy and resources, of donors, were channelled into desertification as a surrogate for doing something about famine (Swift, 1996, 89).



In the poster material there are several examples of the desertification narrative that Swift points to, particularly in the period till 1980. Afterwards, explanations for poverty and famine are much more sought for in the political field.

### **Political and corporate power**

In 1980 it was decided that more unity and coherence was needed between the theme of the 11.11.11 campaign and the political demand of the NCOS to the Belgian government (Peeters & Cleymans, 2000, 65). As the appendix shows this decision instigated a whole series of politically flavoured posters during the 1980s. The idea of poverty shifted from being without food, knowledge or means, to being without power to gain capital and means. The posters produced in this period often pointed at the political powers that were held responsible for these unequal relations, including the Belgian government. The most important strategy to influence the government was to convince the Belgian voters. This trend is in flat contradiction with earlier analyses of "aid assistance imagination" presented in the introduction.



Figure 4: The posters of 1984 and 1987

The poster of 1984 in box 4 is an example of these early political posters. 11.11.11 explicitly claims that it "(...) respects the people and not the power". It is, however, not clear whether 11.11.11 distances itself from these power struggles between north and south (represented by white and black), or that it takes on this arm wrestling bet with the power (represented by some African military leader) on behalf of the poor. In the 1980s the NCOS was very active with regard to the humanitarian situation of the Mobutu regime in Zaire, and the accomplice roles of the United States and former coloniser, Belgium (Peeters & Cleymans 2000, 81). In 1984, the accusations by the NCOS led to threats by the then Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs Leo Tindemans to cut down the subsidies that the NCOS was receiving from the Belgian government (Vervliet 1984). These threats would not stop the NCOS in their political lobby work and its reflection in the media as well as in the 11.11.11 fundraising campaigns.

The poster of 1987 in box 4 is another example of a political flavoured poster in the 1980s. Here, a father is portrayed with a dead child in his arms, for which the NGO holds the Belgian government responsible. This poster was produced in the light of the NCOS lobby for a 0.7% of GDP government spending on development cooperation<sup>10</sup> (Van Bilsen 1989). It refers to the low priority that the Belgian government gives to international development cooperation in contrast to various national "minor issues"<sup>11</sup>. The focus on the 0.7% of GDP for development cooperation was continued in 1988 and 1989 with striking posters stating: *"Are you almost debating, dear politicians?"* and *"Our government thanks the third world for its generosity"*. These political campaigns were a great financial success and created more awareness in the media and amongst the Belgian public. However, the official Belgian spending on development cooperation remained between 0.4 and 0.5% (Peeters & Cleymans 2000, 88).

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<sup>10</sup> International consensus in the 1970s agreed that donor countries should spend 0.7% of their GDP on developments cooperation. In reality only a few countries, including the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands complied to this agreement.

<sup>11</sup> Ironically, in 1987 the Belgian cabinet did fall because of problems in the "Voerstreek", a small part of Belgium near the city of Liege, under Flemish government, where the majority of the population is French speaking.



Figure 5: The posters of 1992 and 1994.

In the 1990s the political nature of the posters continued, now only shifting towards issues such as debt crisis and economic globalisation (see the posters of 1992 and 1994 in box 5). The message in these posters were that powerful donor countries (governments) and multilateral donors, such as the World Bank, are making life more difficult for developing countries because of the enormous debt they end up owing to these donors. Several of the posters ask the Belgian government and the multilateral donors to remit the debt of these countries and relieve the suffocating grip in which they are held. The poster of 1994 is another example of how power relations are related to poverty and, in this case, famine. Centres of power, both in the west and the third world, are generally represented in a negative way.

Other examples, in the poster material, in which this shift in political activism is illustrated are representations of labour and private sector bodies. As

I showed in earlier posters, in the 1980's labour consisted mainly of working and farming in rural areas where, due to difficult geographical and climatic circumstances, life is very difficult (see the poster of 1986). In latter years, however, the discourse of labour is represented more and more in an urban and industrial setting. This urbanisation and industrialisation can be explained by the settling of multinational companies in (certain) developing countries in the 1970's and 80's as a result of the oil crisis. Moreover, urbanisation and industrialisation have long been characteristics in the third world - as in the first world. From the middle of the 1990's the issues of power suddenly shifted from governments to multinationals and industries. The problems of third world people began to take place in urban settings, such as slums, rubbish dumps and factories. Issues such as child labour, the exploitation of cheap workers in multinational industries and the low prices on the world market for coffee, tea and cacao are raised in the posters. The problem of survival in agriculture portrayed mainly masculine figures (see the poster of 1970) whereas the issues of cheap labour and urban exploitation are mainly covered with the use of female and child figures (see the posters of 1996 and 1997 in box 6).

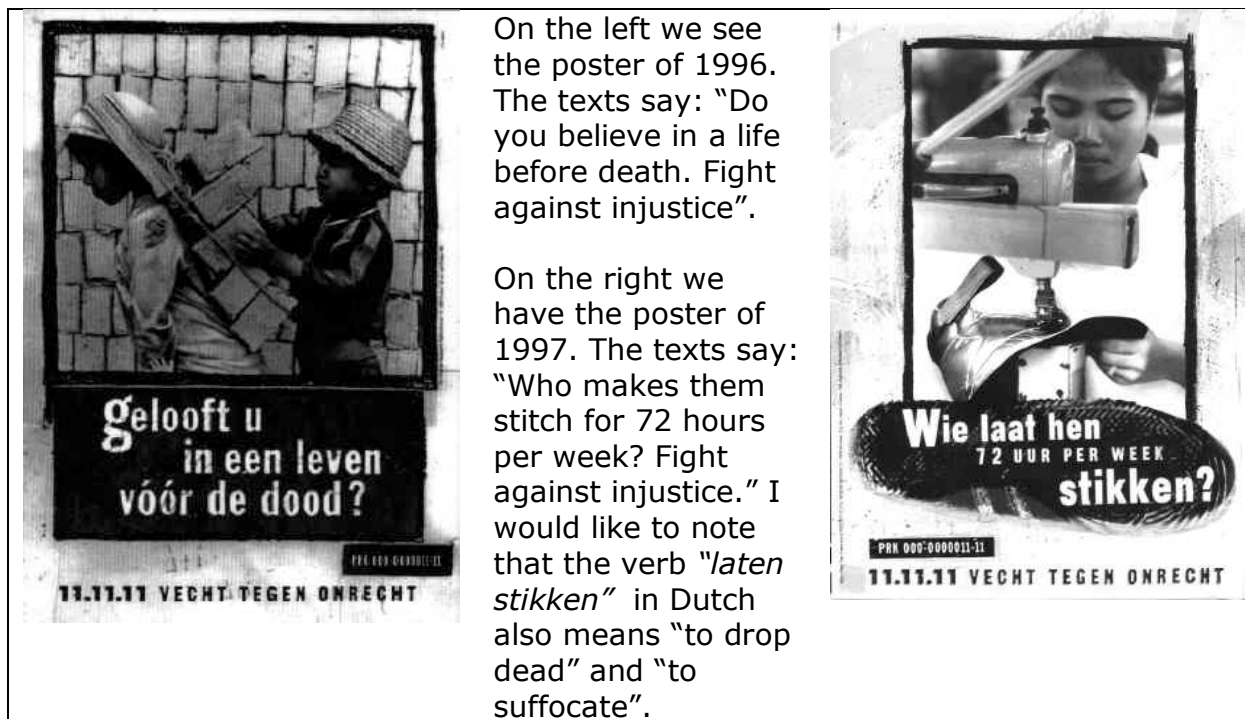


Figure 6: The posters of 1996 and 1997.

Many of the posters produced in the 1990s can be seen as critical reactions of the NGOs on the neo-liberal structural adjustment discourse of the bilateral and multilateral donors. The compulsory frame of reference of the free market creates a situation in which NGOs have to re-establish their role in the development world (Aertsen et al. 1994, 9). 11.11.11 chooses for a strategy of blaming passive governments and exploiting multinationals to justify their role in the development world as defenders of the poor.

### **Towards an 'other' notion of 'self'**

The focus on the role of powerful institutions on poverty and underdevelopment did not only change the nature of the problems that are presented, but also redefined the boundaries of 'self' and 'other' in the posters. As I said before, since the 1980s governments and multinationals were

introduced as actors in the posters against which 11.11.11 reacted furiously. They clearly distinguished themselves from these bad forms of power and presented themselves as the trade union of the poor and the suppressed. Many authors point at these definitional struggles by discussing the many different acronyms that exist for development organisations (Smillie 1995, Fischer 1997). Examples of these include NGO (non-governmental organisation), NPO (non-profit organisation), CSO (civil society organisation) and CBO (community based organisation). Many of these acronyms refer to the things that these organisations are not, namely 'governments' and 'companies'. Others are based on aspects that are *only* part of the work of these organisations, such as the fact that they are rooted within civil society, or that they work primarily with local communities. The posters make clear that the money that is raised by 11.11.11 is meant for the people that really need it and that do not serve any political or commercial purpose.

One of consequences of these endeavours such as distinguishing themselves from governments and industries is that the continually exposed poor figures in the posters have shifted more and more towards the self-side of the dichotomy. Earlier, posters represented the aid recipients as abnormal 'others' desperately in need of help, whereas in more recent times the focus has been much more on distinguishing humanity in general from the powers that suppress or exploit humanity. The posters in box 7 are two examples of this new definition of 'self' that can be derived from the poster material.

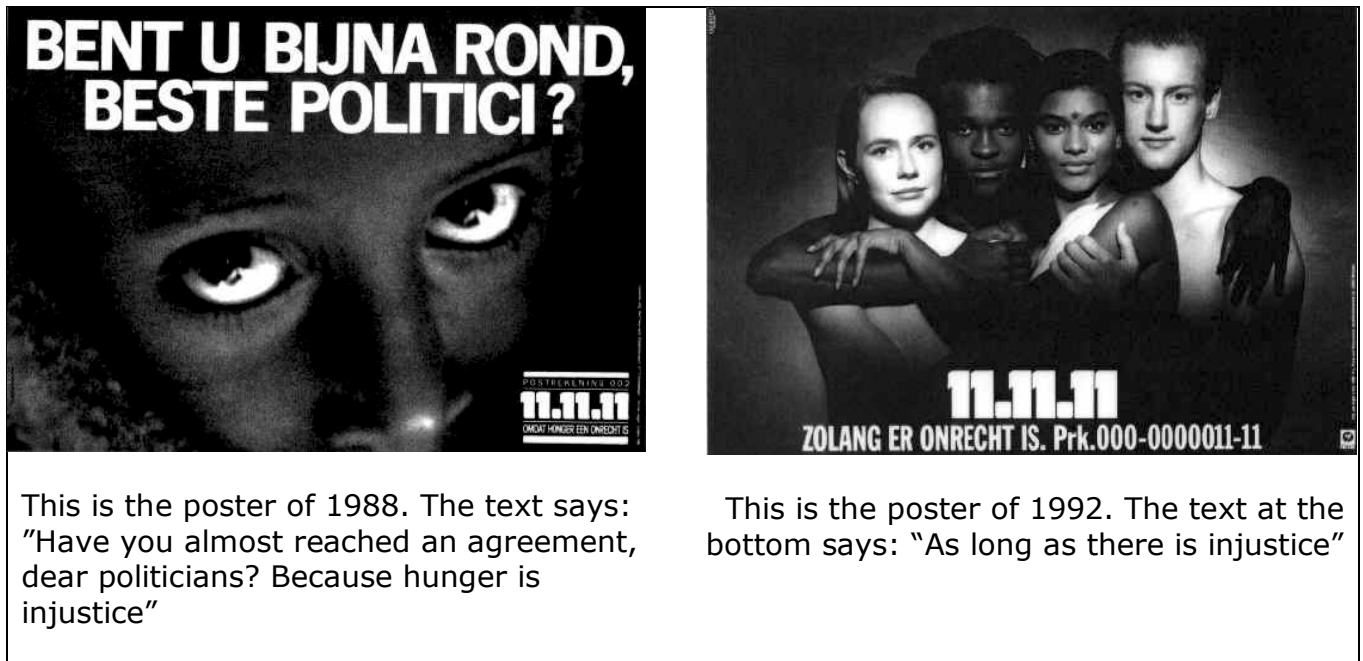


Figure 7: The posters of 1988 and 1992

The poster of 1988 distinguishes between 11.11.11 and the politicians. The politicians are depicted as representatives of the 'other' institution in the field of development, who are talking too much and not dealing with the problem of the child portrayed in between. The poor child is obviously looking despairingly up at the Belgian politicians and questioning their (lack of) action. In contrast to the posters that I presented in earlier paragraphs here the government is portrayed as passive and a slow moving agency. The poster of 1992 clearly points at the idea of a common humanity. The message that is presented can be formulated as '*different colours, one people*'. From 1992 onwards several posters appeared with images of a group of people, closely together, coming from different corners of the world. The poster seems to communicate the message that despite the differences between people in the world humans still stand as one and that one needs to take care of each other. In the 1992 poster the people are even naked, symbolising the 'naked truth' of both otherness and similarity. Their message



seems to say that despite our differences humanity forms one unity and should therefore care about the fate of our fellow men and women and fight against the powers that are inflicting injustice.

The poster is cleverly making a political statement and is forcing the reader to choose a political stance or form an opinion on the role of the politicians in this. In contrast to earlier posters these more recent posters appear to be making a much clearer statement as to who is responsible for the images that they are depicting. From the second half of 1990s 11.11.11 did not focus their posters specifically on 'other' powerful institutions, such as governments and multinationals. It seems as if they realise that their most powerful tool should be utilised to its fullest potential, namely the confronting images of poverty. The posters of 2000 and 2001 demonstrate that the images of crisis situations, refugee camps and helpless children return as well as the calls to the public to fight against injustice. At the same time however, they also keep presenting "united humanity" images, like the poster of 1992. Both identity formations, representing people in third world countries as 'other' and 'self', are present in the posters.

### **Discussion: NGO's discursive power**

In the last 35 years the NCOS and 11.11.11 has established itself as a well-known institution within the Belgian society. In fact, the revenues from their fundraising campaigns have risen from about €121,000 to more than €5 million. Various strategies are used in the poster material to get the right message across. But the most important factor is to set the stage very clearly for the

observer. Limiting the use of too many different human figures and raising too many themes and problems can do this. As a result, fundraising posters usually present simplified explanation or poor representations of poverty.

The first section of the analysis has proven that there are certain dominant icons and stories that are continually being told by the 11.11.11 posters. In all the posters a clear difference can be made between notions of the 'other', or client categories as Escobar terms it and notions of 'self'. In many cases there is a picture of a figure representing the 'other', mostly children, combined with a line of text referring to one of the problems that third world people are facing, for example hunger, child mortality, or war. We have seen that the 'other' is defined as innocent, vulnerable, ignorant, passive and helpless. The 'other' cannot be represented without simultaneously defining and positioning the self-side of the story. 11.11.11 unifies itself with the public to take action against the fate of the poor. The rather active definition of the 'self' only amplifies the boundaries between 'other' and 'self'. The creations of these abnormalities are necessary to justify the interventions by NGOs into third world communities to solve their problems (Escobar 1995, Swift 1997, Broch-Due 2000). In this way, they assert that there will at any time be a legitimate reason for this NGO to exist and to keep on working.

The representation of poverty is not as blunt and one-sided as many authors claim. When looking at the complete production of posters of 11.11.11 one has to acknowledge that a diversity of problems and themes have been communicated to the public over the past 35 years. Moreover, the notion of

'other' is not only defined in terms of the ones that need to be helped, but also in terms of the ones that are causing the problems of injustice and inequality in the third world. Politically sensitive topics have not been avoided. Three main culprits for the misery of third world citizens are illustrated in the posters, i.e. power structures in developing countries, multinational corporations, and (most frequent) the Belgian government.

Despite their public rejection and accusation of power structures, non-governmental organisations are themselves powerful institutions in both the first and the third world. One has to understand that NGOs like 11.11.11 have the power to make discursive knowledge claims about themselves, the people they want to reach in the third world, and of other powerful institutions. In other words, NGOs are institutions with considerable powers. We have seen that 11.11.11 deliberately portrays governments and multinationals as bad forms of power in order to represent themselves as the 'good guys' and the more humane player in the field. However, I have to note that because of their ambiguous position in the field of development cooperation NGOs have been subject to similar critiques during the 1990s (Aertsen et al.1994, Smillie 1995, Fischer 1997). According to Nederveen Pieterse (2001) NGOs suffer the same problems as any other organisation, such as bureaucratisation, dependency, corruption, and amateurism. Moreover, they may claim to be independent providers of "goods" but still "move within the orbit of their funders, state or private, and their cultural and discursive agendas" (Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 84). The NGO presents itself as the institution that brings equality and equivalence in the world by helping the helpless and empowering the powerless. But in this way NGOs

like 11.11.11, can be criticised for the creation of a 'development discourse' that is biased towards presenting their own needs.

One should not fall into the same trap, and leave the reader with the idea that developmental NGOs and 11.11.11 in particular are deliberately maintaining and even reinforcing stereotypes on the 'other' in developing countries. We are dealing with a particular kind of material that was designed for a particular purpose. These posters are designed to raise funds not to tell the truth about the projects that are being done or the living conditions that people are coping with. This paper has proven that NGOs find themselves in a difficult split between sensitising public opinion and simply raising money. If one looks at it from this perspective, it has to be admitted that striking images of poverty are probably the best means for achieving this end. It has to be acknowledged that these discursive practices are inevitably part of the work of NGOs. As we have seen, raising funds is a delicate exercise in which different stakes are carefully balanced out. It becomes clear that the successes and failures of the NGO work should not be emphasised too much<sup>12</sup>. Focusing on either the misfortunes of the poor and the failures of other actors in the field appears to be most effective. These means can be justified through education as well as through other efforts that are being done to sensitise public opinion.

In their efforts to raise vital funds development organisations may become blind to the indirect, and often unintended consequences of fundraising. The images and slogans we may see in the streets or in the popular media contribute

to a pre-existing dominant discourse of poverty that feeds 'structuring dichotomies' and maintain boundaries between the West and the Rest. Organisations like 11.11.11 have to be aware of these kinds of unintentional but negative spin-offs that are consequential to their campaigns. Ironically, most of the 11.11.11 posters are in black and white. In a global media society the representation of poverty and under-development may not necessarily lead to progress and improvement, but it does unavoidably seem to provide us with "black and white" representations.

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Appendix: Overview of the poster material.

| Year | Result<br>(In Euros) | Main figures        | Text and description   | Main themes           | Self/us           | Other/them                             |
|------|----------------------|---------------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1966 | 123.947              | No figures          | "Every year famine kills 35 million people. Famine must be killed"   | Famine/death          | The famine killer | The hungry/dead                        |
| 1967 | 793.259              | Bread               | "3 of every 5 people suffer from famine, 1 of every 3 die of famine. Do you approve with that?"  | Famine/death          | The approver      | The hungry/dead                        |
| 1968 | 1.289.046            | Child               | "She eats regularly... once every three days. Help the hungry learn to take care of themselves"  | Famine/hunger         | The helper        | The hungry/ignorant                    |
| 1969 | 1.189.889            | Child               | "November 11: a human life depends on you. The world hungers for bread and knowledge"  | Famine/hunger         | The helper        | The hungry/ignorant                    |
| 1970 | 1.041.153            | African man         | "In our unrighteous world this man has no chance. Give them a chance!"   | Famine/drought        | The helper        | The chanceless                         |
| 1971 | 1.487.361            | Mother and child    | "Their happiness, a question of right. I say yes"  | Happiness/rights      | The approver      | The future generation                  |
| 1972 | 793.259              | Young men           | "Sharing, dare to acknowledge"   | Awareness/solidarity  | The sharer        | The less fortunate                     |
| 1973 | 1.660.887            | Dead tree           | "S.O.S. Sahel"   | Famine/drought        | The rescuer       | The dry Sahel                          |
| 1974 | 1.834.412            | Child               | "Decide for the future. Your vote, your support"   | Future                | The decider       | The future generation                  |
| 1975 | 1.016.363            | Water well and boat | "This well changes a lot. Your solidarity changes everything: one world, one table. This onboard engine changes a lot. Your solidarity changes everything: one world, one table" | Technology/solidarity | The giver         | People that lack sufficient technology |
| 1977 | 1.140.310            | Hands               | "These hands also want to work. Give them a hand"  | Labour/rural          | The helper        | The chanceless                         |
| 1978 | 1.214.678            | Rural women         | "Confidence that grows there should  | Confidence/rural      | The changer       | The insecure                           |



|      |           |                       |   |                            |                               |                       |
|------|-----------|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1979 | 1.636.097 | Child                 | also grow elsewhere. Your will for improvement"   | Future                     | The decider                   | The future generation |
| 1980 | 2.131.884 | African farmer        | "Their future depends also on your choice. Your will for improvement"   | Future/rural               | The supporter                 | The brave workers     |
| 1981 | 2.578.093 | Children              | "They prepare themselves for their future. Support them. Your will for improvement"   | Econ. crisis/famine        | The giver                     | The survivor/grateful |
| 1982 | 2.627.671 | Mother and child      | "Those who are still alive thank you in advance. Because famine is injustice"   | War/peace                  | The actors                    | The victims/refugees  |
| 1983 | 2.850.776 | Boy                   | "Peace is no matter of words but of actions"  | Power/politics             | 11.11.11/people               | The powerful          |
| 1984 | 2.528.514 | Arm wrestling         | "11.11.11 respects the people - not the power"  | Power/politics             | 11.11.11/people               | The powerful          |
| 1985 | 2.553.303 | Child                 | "11.11.11 respects the people, not the power"   | Famine/labour/rural        | The aid givers                | The innocent/worker   |
| 1986 | 2.751.618 | Farmers               | "When I grow up I will become a farmer. Because famine is injustice"  | Famine/labour/rural        | The judges                    | The hungry/workers    |
| 1987 | 3.197.826 | Father and dead child | "Famine: They should have worked harder? Because famine is injustice"   | Politics/poorest countries | The Belgian government (gov.) | The unimportant       |
| 1988 | 3.693.614 | Child                 | "A government does not fall over such minor issues" (the verb to fall refers to: taking care and the falling of a government coalition) | Politics                   | The debating gov.             | The waiting poor      |
| 1989 | 3.966.296 | Hands                 | "Are you almost finished debating, dear politicians?"   | Politics/exploitation      | The grateful gov.             | The giving poor       |
| 1990 | 3.991.086 | Mother and child      | "Our government thanks the third world for its generosity. Because famine is injustice"   | Politics/exploitation      | The deciding gov.             | The unimportant       |
| 1991 | 4.189.401 | Dead man bones        | "Weighted by our ministers. But considered too light"   | Politics/debt relief       | The undertakers               | The buried            |
| 1992 | 4.486.873 | Hands                 | "Bury the debts, not the third world"   | Politics/debt relief       | The receiving                 | The giving            |
|      |           |                       | "Dear politicians, turn this poster   |                            |                               |                       |

|      |                      |                           | around. Remit the debts”   |                      | gov                         |                        |
|------|----------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
|      | United young people  |                           | “As long as there is injustice”  | Solidarity/humanity  | United humanity             | Injustice              |
| 1993 | 4.362.926            | No figures                | “Famine is an attack, not a drawback”  | Famine/hunger        | The guilty                  | The attacked           |
|      | United young people  |                           | “Straightforward against injustice”  | Solidarity/humanity  | United humanity             | Injustice              |
| 1994 | 4.486.873            | Skyscrapers               | “Many famines start here”  | Famine/power         | Power centres               | The hungry             |
| 1995 | 4.288.558            | Chocolate Africa          | “Africa tastes so good that it’s almost finished. All for Africa”                                      | Exploitation         | The helpers                 | Exploited resources    |
| 1996 | 4.452.168            | Child labour/construction | “Do you believe in a life before death. Fight against injustice”                                       | Child labour/urban   | The fighters                | Exploited children     |
|      | Child labour/garbage |                           | “Do you believe in a life before death. Fight against injustice”                                       | Child labour/urban   | The fighters                | Exploited children     |
| 1997 | 4.486.873            | Woman/sewing machine      | “Who makes them stitch/suffocate for 72 hours a week. Fight against injustice”                         | Labour exploit/urban | The fighters                | The exploited workers  |
| 1998 | 4.504.225            | Doll                      | “There is injustice from Asia again. Fight against injustice”  | Labour exploitation  | The fighters                | The exploited workers  |
| 1999 | 4.933.081            | Father and dead child     | “Died in the gap between rich and poor. Fight against injustice”                                       | Death/wealth         | The fighters                | The poor/dead          |
| 2000 | 5.205.764            | Small boy                 | “You give more than money. You fight against injustice”  | Famine/confidence    | The money givers            | Helpless children      |
| 2001 | Not mentioned        | Queue of hungry people    | “Belgium European chair. And what’s on the menu for them. You give more than money, you give a signal” | Politics/famine      | The money givers/ alarmists | Helpless hungry people |
|      | United young people  |                           | “You fight against injustice”  | Solidarity/humanity  | United humanity             | Injustice              |

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## Issues of Scope in Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations: An Analysis of U.S. American Concepts in the Japanese Context

### Abstract

In this article I examine problems with the application of the comparative method in cross-national studies of race and ethnic relations. I argue that the findings of different studies can be shaped in important ways by the way investigators specify the scope and scale of the core variable in the analysis – ‘race and ethnic relations’. Specifically, I argue that problems can arise when comparative analyses conceptualize race and ethnic relations in terms of a limited number of qualitatively distinct configurations rather than as a highly variable, multi-dimensional construct. The former approach often tempts investigators to ‘force’ cases to fit into an artificially limited set of categories. The latter approach not only admits the possibility that some dimensions of race and ethnic relations vary in qualitative ways while others vary quantitatively along a continuum, but it also entertains the possibility that these different dimensions can vary independently and do not necessarily occur in pre-determined configurations.

I argue that studies of race and ethnic relations in Japan have suffered from the problem of making a specific case fit into one of a limited number of

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qualitatively distinct types of 'race and ethnic relations'. One area where this can be seen is in the common practice of analyzing 'race and ethnic relations' in Japan primarily in terms of ethnic stratification and minority-majority relations. This approach is better suited for the United States than it is for Japan. Thus, comparative analysis of the two systems of race and ethnic relations would be better served by recognizing that the ethnic stratification dimension of race and ethnic relations may be less central to the overall configuration of ethnic relations in Japan compared to the United States and then analyzing ethnic relations in Japan accordingly.

Cross-national comparisons of race and ethnic relations are one of the most popular disciplines in contemporary sociology. Generally guided by U.S. American and Western concepts, a number of inquiries have been conducted for the sake of illustrating cross-national conformity and testing the applicability of U.S. American perspectives in cross-national settings (Zuberi 2001). However, there is an imbalance in the nature of explanation in comparative perspectives (Scherhorn 1978 [1970], McMichael 1990, Wong 1999). Specifically, Kiser and Hechter (1991, 9) point out that 'scope (generality) and analytic power have been minimized and descriptive accuracy has become the predominant criterion for constructing and judging explanations'. In this article, I argue that ignorance of the scope and scale of the variable 'race and ethnic relations' makes investigators unaware of the multi-dimensional aspects and complexities in their findings.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sociological Studies of Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations in Terms of the Comparative Method**

The basic premise of comparative race and ethnic relations is that one of the specific components in one nation (e.g., sociohistorical construction of race and ethnicity, existence of racial and ethnic conflict, and cultural influence on racial ideology) is compared with its analogue in another and then investigators explore the respective national contexts in order to uncover the sources of the similarities

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<sup>2</sup> Marger (1994, 12) notes that 'because most of research in race and ethnic relations has been the product of American sociologists dealing with the American experience, we are often led to assume that patterns evident in the United States are found in other societies as well'.

and differences that they have found (Fredrickson 1995). Namely, the unit of analysis is unconsciously regarded as representing nations in particular.

However, one can be skeptical of the results of discussing each of the cases in question in roughly equal depth and detail (Elder 1976, Lieberson 1980, Skocpol and Somers 1980, Stone 1985) for the following two intertwined reasons: (1) there emerge unclear scope and scale of the variable, and (2) racial and ethnic conflicts are a common issue observable all over the world (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Omi and Winant 1994, Mills 1997, Goldberg 2002). Therefore it is easy for investigators to be misled into unsatisfactory specifications and generalizations (Wong 1999). In the following section, I discuss problems with the application of the comparative method in comparative studies of race and ethnic relations (e.g., Reuter 1945, Berrenman 1960, Rokkan ed. 1968, Vallier 1971, Payne 1973, Elder 1976, Wiatr 1977, Berting et al. 1979, Bonnell 1980, Ragin 1987, Fredrickson 1998). Two central issues associated with the variable are discussed: the difficulty in specifying its scope and scale, and the extraction of the variable from its social and cultural contexts.

### **Scope and Scale of Race and Ethnic Relations**

The first important methodological issue is associated with the dimension and definition of the variable. Comparative researchers have fundamentally agreed that race and ethnic relations must be studied as a sufficiently 'large structure' (e.g.,

entire nations such as the U.S. and Japan), which is large enough to encompass the entire unit of analysis as the main explanatory focus of macro-social influences (Berting et al. 1979, Fredrickson 1987, Ragin 1995). Therefore, race and ethnic relations are defined as a sense of group position that involves more than one particular group in a society (Stone 2003). However, the complexities of substantiating the variable are seen in the way different racial and ethnic groups are contextualized in a large national discourse. In fact, there are both conflicting and interchangeable remarks regarding the concept of race and ethnic relations.

The first major argument is that group relations have to be analyzed in terms of relative power, or minority groups are not to be depicted in isolation from the majority group in a society (e.g., Barth 1969, Schermerhorn 1978 [1970], Stone and Dennis 1985, 2003, Hudson 1999). For example, Abrams (1982, 248) states:

The bringing to life of the possibility of Sambo as an actual typical identity was a work of collaboration between slaves and masters – the working-out of primitively human identities for both within the framework of the inhuman conditions created by the power of the latter.

It is suggested that unilateral interpretation through the experiences of a certain minority group does not constitute a macro-social variable 'race and ethnic relations' (Stone and Dennis 2003), because such a viewpoint does not necessarily shape a framework to describe a particular group's relations with the majority group and the affiliated functions of social institutions. Thus, analyzing the minority and majority groups simultaneously is indispensable, as investigators are able to

acknowledge the importance of 'power' in their relations. Thus, researchers such as Gelfand and Lee (1973) distinguish the definition of 'minority-majority' from that of 'subordination-domination'. Furthermore, it is suggested that studies of race and ethnic relations ideally encompass all minority groups in a society. Stone (1985, 47) makes an important argument:

A central issue in the comparative sociology of race relations is the manner in which power is distributed among the different groups in society. Few aspects of race relations can be understood without considering the way in which power is exercised throughout society, although it must be recognized that the nature and dynamics of power relationships is an exceedingly complex topic (emphasis added).

The second major argument is that to comprehensively examine race and ethnic relations, one must study the belief and behavior of the majority, rather than the minority (e.g., Hudson 1999). Bowser (1995, 286) argues the central motive for maintaining the race myth is common across nations: 'to use government and the economy to maintain and justify social stratification where racial identity has a history of being used to confer advantage and disadvantages'. However, there appears to be a shortcoming in this perspective, as the majority group is reluctant to show their privileged status to maintain racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2001, Stone and Dennis 2003).

A further issue associated with the dimension of the variable is that studying minority-majority relations would not be necessarily sufficient to constitute a macro-social pattern because the ideological aspects of race and ethnicity contain



cultural and historical influences as well. This is an important but difficult question because most people have multiple identities that are intertwined based on class, religion, region, and in complex interrelationships with race and ethnicity (Marger 1994, Ryang 1997, Wade 1997, Fredrickson 1998, Wong 1999, Gurr 2000). Moreover, Gurr (1973) argues that researchers must consider the scope of change; which groups in a society are affected by which changes, and to what extent.<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty specifying the scope and scale of the variable is also seen in determining a method (e.g., Smelser 1976), substantive focus (e.g., Ragin 1987),<sup>4</sup> and the unit of analysis. For example, by distinguishing cross-national comparisons from cross-cultural comparisons, Berting et al. (1979) argue that while nations constitute units in the former, ethnic groups within the nations are regarded as the unit in the latter. Bollen et al. (1993) argue that comparative researchers vary in how broadly or restrictively they define the topic.<sup>5</sup> Due to different arguments about the definitions of macroscopic viewpoints (see Gelfand and Lee 1973), Kohn (1987, 721) notes that 'finding a cross-national difference often requires that we curtail the scope of an interpretation'.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, after the end of slavery, former slave masters imported labourers such as Mexicans and Chinese to compete with black labor on the plantations. Although polarized racial identities between whites versus blacks previously existed, those who are oppressed are interchangeable over time.

<sup>4</sup> Ragin (1987) states that the goals of case-oriented or qualitative investigation (examining similarities and differences among a limited number of cases) are causal analysis and historical interpretation. On the other hand, the primary goal of the variable-oriented (or quantitative) strategy (looking at relations between or among variables) is the testing of abstract hypotheses drawn from general theories. Following his classification, we will note that conventional cross-national comparisons of race and ethnic relations do not necessarily compliment his analytical framework.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Przeworski and Teune (1970) take the narrowest approach when they limit comparative research to studies that compare micro-level relationships in two or more social systems.

I would suggest an appropriate conceptual race and ethnic relations should utilize a variable at a macro level sufficient enough to represent the power dimensions in the unit of cross-national comparison at large. The major issue appears to be associated with the difficulty in specifying the scope and scale of the core variable 'race and ethnic relations', rather than the principles and underlying premises of the comparative method.

### **Analytical Framework**

Reuter (1945, 458) notes that 'race relations are a confused complex, in varying degrees, of opposition and agreement, friction and harmony, conflict and co-operation'. It is extremely difficult to extract race and ethnic relations, which reflect various aspects of a society, from their original context in order to make cross-national comparisons. Among a number of arguments regarding analytical frameworks in the comparative method, two core factors are identified and discussed: (1) assumptions of comparative framework and (2) cultural influences.

Fredrickson (1995, 591) argues that an investigator has to 'begin with the assumption that each of her cases may be equally distinctive, equally likely to embody a transnational pattern'. However, several comparative researchers argue that cross-national comparisons of race and ethnic relations within a limited number of cases lead to unsatisfactory conclusions. For example, Elder's (1976) discussion of cross-national generalizations rejects the arguments of national uniqueness or

limited cross-national comparability. Stone (1985) claims that concluding race and ethnic relations as essentially similar can be the result of equating circumstances that are in other important respects quite different.

Nevertheless, the comparative method proposes several frameworks for comparing numerically limited number of cases (e.g., comparisons of Japan and the U.S.). It is suggested the identification of subsets of nations sufficiently similar (structurally or contextually) permits meaningful within-subset comparisons. In order to do so, investigators first need to establish cross-national subsets and from those subsets develop limited cross-national generalizations (Elder 1976). Finding constituents of equivalent concepts will solve discrepancies in meanings for valid comparisons because concepts of race and ethnic relations significantly differ across nations. The comparable variable is identifiable through comparative equivalent forms such as social structure and social process, on condition that functions and structural definitions are met (Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967).

Moreover, because the validity of abstracting specific traits from their structural-functional setting leaves room for a variety of interpretations (Dumont and Pocock 1957, Elder 1976), investigators would be able to make reliable assessments only by combining cross-national indicators (e.g., social system and structure) and nation-specific settings (e.g., social function) (Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967). The analysis of race and ethnic relations, therefore, could be either distinct from large macro-structural situations, or the variable could be a mutually

irreducible categorical principle (e.g., Abrams 1982, Mills 1997). Both distinctive and general features may appear by contrasting race and ethnic relations themselves cross-nationally, as macro-socially structured features.

On the other hand, establishing criteria of generic similarity and difference may be detrimental to the findings because the variable is context-bound and situational (Wade 1997). In addition, investigators have to bear in mind that comparisons are made to some extent by compromising the multiple forms of the variable by assuming that race and ethnic relations are telling limited features.

Another important factor for clarifying analytical frameworks is culture. Sowell (1994, 1) notes that 'the role of a particular people's cultural equipment or human capital is much clearer in an international perspective than in the history of one country'. However, the analytical framework loses its explanatory power unless investigators are aware of the cultural influence on social structures (Fredrickson 1995). Cultures unique to each nation, which contain proliferating meanings, privilege findings of race and ethnic relations (Smelser 1973, Lebra 1992) because culture frames important elements in race and ethnic relations, such as social systems, group formations, collective consciences, and ideologies (Berting et al., 1979, Gutierrez 1997, Wade 1997, Fredrickson 1998). Nevertheless, cultural influences are not perfectly transferable from one national context to another (Douglas 1978), which unavoidably make cross-national comparisons questionable.

Accordingly, definitions of the concepts are commonly provided in comparative studies, but their dimensions remain largely absent (Bollen et al. 1993).

As discussed, investigators face the extremely difficult task of specifying the scope and scale of the variable 'race and ethnic relations'. To accurately shape different modes of race and ethnic relations, it is suggested that the variable be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct to look for 'structural' differences, by paying attention to nation-specific settings and culturally established value orientations. Investigators should also be aware of the fact that complicated plural causations could be a significant problem since in each society, there exists a particular pattern of interdependent and intervening factors (Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967, Schermerhorn 1978 [1970]).

### **U.S. American Concepts of Race and Ethnic Relations in the Japanese Context<sup>6</sup>**

U.S. American concepts and perspectives of race and ethnic relations are often employed for the analysis of the Japanese context.<sup>7</sup> In its broadest definition of the comparative method, this type of study still constitutes a cross-national comparison (e.g., Frederickson 1995, Stone and Dennis 2003). According to their

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<sup>6</sup> Following Doak (1997), I regard minority groups in Japan as 'ethnic' groups. However, it has to be noted that ethnic minorities in Japan have other implications such as 'colonial subject' and 'overseas national'. Marger (1994) points out that ethnicity is further separable into traits such as unique culture, sense of community, ethnocentrism, ascribed membership, and territoriality. For other definitions and clarifications of race and ethnicity, see Cashmore (1994) and Wade (1997).

<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, most of the research by Japanese academia is concerned with relatively new foreign laborers rather than historical ethnic minorities (e.g., Komai and Watado eds. 2000, Komai ed. 2002, Komai and Kondo eds. 2002).

most important explanatory factors, the compound of the literature is broken down into three defined but overlapping categories: (1) social configurations of ethnic minority groups; (2) ideological interpretations of the Japanese; and (3) features of social institutions and structures in terms of assimilation practice.

### **Social Configurations of the Ethnic Minority Groups**

The first category of the literature lays out configurations of ethnic groups in Japan implicitly or explicitly by comparisons with the social experiences of minority groups in the U.S.: the Burakumin or Eta as outcaste (e.g., Hah and Lapp 1978, De Vos 1992, Howell 1996, Weiner 1997, Lie 2001), the Korean and Chinese (e.g., Conde 1947, Lee and De Vos 1981, Hicks 1997, Ryang 1997, 2000, Fukuoka 2000), Ainus (e.g., Batchelor 1971, Peng and Geiser 1977, Howell 1994, Walker 2001),<sup>8</sup> Okinawans or Ryukyans (e.g., Hicks 1997, Weiner 1997, Lie 2001), and relatively new Latin American workers of Japanese ancestry (e.g., Hicks 1997, Linger 2001, Roth 2002, Tsuda 2003). They are not only numerical minorities (for example, the total sum of Koreans and Chinese in Japan does not exceed one percent of Japan's total population), but are also all collectively regarded as 'non-Japanese' (Howell 1996).

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<sup>8</sup> The Ainu have resided in the upper north of Japan (Hokkaido). Due to their numerical under-representation and voluntary isolation from the modern economy, the Ainu's disadvantaged social status attributes to a stratifying element rather than class (Peng and Geiser 1977, Fitzhugh and Dubreuil 1999). Outdated literatures about the Ainu are not listed here.

Descriptions of these minority groups generally emphasize similarities to the U.S. cases. One classical example is seen in the way Western sociologists have observed the social configurations of the Burakumin. Their 'outcaste' status derives from the feudal system during the Edo period (1603-1867), in which the Edo shogunate created an outcaste class to satisfy the peasantry's low socioeconomic status. The Burakumin's minority status is therefore totally based on class stratification, not phenotypically determined type (e.g., Smythe 1951, Lie 2001).

However, Western researchers claim that the class discrimination against the Burakumin resembles the color discrimination of Western societies. Particularly, investigators such as Ogbu (1978) and DeVos (1992) argue that the best analogies for understanding the African American situation are not ethnic minorities of the usual sort but rather lower castes such as the Burakumin. Investigators have found functional parallels in the discrimination encountered by the Burakumin and African Americans, regardless of physical distinction.

These two groups' 'indistinguishable' minority status is based on the argument that racism has no essential relation to various visibly different physical characteristics (De Vos 1992). Fredrickson (2000, 84) argues that 'the essential element [of racism] is the belief, however justified or rationalized, in the critical importance of differing lines of descent and the use of that belief to establish or validate social inequality' (emphasis added). In a similar vein, De Vos (1992) claims that the bases for cross national generalization about caste or racism are the

psycho-cultural mechanisms involved; cultural differences would be suggested as sufficient criteria to constitute prejudice categories (emphasis added).

Although these statements emphasize contextual similarities by pointing out that racism is reducible to human psychology, these two groups' social disadvantages are not accounted for by the full dimension of race and ethnic relations. As discussed earlier, potential problems can arise when complicated factors such as culture (e.g., national consciousness) (Scheuch 1967, Elder 1976) are disaggregated to account for a particular form of discrimination. Furthermore, cross-national differences in the majority populations' motivations for racism are ignored. As a result, the Burakumin's social exclusion is much too generalized as if contemporary Japanese society has a 'caste-type' differentiation (see different arguments by Cornell 1970 and Howell 1996). This pattern is consistent with Schermerhorn's (1978 [1970]) argument that the theme of prejudice too often monopolizes attention to the neglect of social and structural conditions.

The lack of multilateral comparisons between Japan and the U.S. is apparent once we move our attention to Chinese and Koreans in Japan. With the exception of recent inflows of illegal workers, Japanese-born Chinese and Koreans in Japan have ancestors who were forced to migrate to Japan during World War II.<sup>9</sup> Researchers argue that Chinese in Japan do not really fit into the U.S. type of racial hierarchy

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<sup>9</sup> Regarding Koreans and Chinese in Japan, a number of researchers fail to distinguish recent immigrant workers from the long-term residents (see Lie 2001).



since they derive some degree of status by association with China, which is ranked relatively high because of its cultural legacy to Japan (Hicks 1997, Dikotter ed. 1999). Taguchi (1983-1984) claims that Koreans are simply regarded as 'foreigners' due to their different historical and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, Korean minority status is not simply a result of class exploitation, rather it is a reaction to deeply rooted fears of cultural contamination or alteration of the pure Japanese identity (Lee and De Vos 1981, Weiner 1994). However, their major issue has been shifted to their psychological complexities, or the internal dilemma of whether maintaining a separate ethnic identity for themselves or accepting identity as Japanese (Ryang 1997).<sup>10</sup>

Kashiwazaki (2000) claims that continuity in the principle of 'assimilation or exclusion' (e.g., Hicks 1997) does not fully account for a contemporary Japanese society in which nationality and ethnic identity are substantially weakened. Koreans are able to assimilate by becoming totally invisible with the acquisition of Japanese nationality (Lee and De Vos 1981), but it involves becoming a 'perfect' Japanese, willing to abandon one's own ethnic traits (Taguchi 1983-1984, Morris-Suzuki 2002).

Studies focusing on different minority groups have shown us the issue of ethnic identity conflict (see Takenaka 2000). However, these different findings have

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<sup>10</sup> As Schermerhorn (1978 [1970]) argues, primarily a problem of 'updating' obstructs a wider view of interpreting changes in ethnic relations in Japan.

resulted in inadequate specifications of ethnic stratification in Japan, in that social formation of minority-majority relation in Japan, particularly the difference between the U.S., has been scarcely discussed. In other words, the literature does not sufficiently meet a major premise of the comparative method: regarding 'race and ethnic relations' as a macro-dimensional construct, as particularly seen in Stone's (1985) argument (discussed earlier).

### **Ideological Interpretations of the Japanese**

The second group of literature focuses on Japanese ethnic identities. While Lee and De Vos (1981) claim racism exists regardless of obviously different physical components, others argue that there has been no intrinsic meaning to racism or a cultural barrier to social assimilation for the Japanese (Smythe 1951, Riesman and Riesman 1961, Taguchi 1983-1984, Lebra 1992, Hicks 1997, Fukuoka 2000, Lie 2001). Although Howell (1996) points to Japanese identity as a source of 'racism', it is almost invisible to most Japanese themselves.

Japan's denial of the historical existence of minority groups (De Vos 1993, Hicks 1997, Lie 2001) is marked by a 'mono-ethnic' society with a distinctive character such as the nation itself as an ethnic body (Taguchi 1983-1984, Doak 1997). Although Japanese ethnic homogeneity forces minorities to select either the abandonment of non-Japanese identity or the agony of institutionalized otherness, the majority does not use the racial categorization to block the access of ethnic

minorities. The establishment of a Japanese nation, which regards homogeneity as an essential element in its national ethos, obscures the disadvantaged situations of ethnic minorities (Beer 1981).

Creighton (1997) explains that the construction of Japanese ethnic and national identity is strongly tied to notions of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside), and De Vos and Wagatsuma (1966, 1972) point to the notions of 'visibility' and 'invisibleness'. From the minorities' point of view, therefore, the essence of racism could be virtually the same between phenotypically distinguishable African Americans and undistinguishable ethnic minorities (particularly the Burakumin) in Japan. Nevertheless, Creighton (1997) argues that the otherness of foreigners has multiple loci. According to him, 'definitions of these *soto* Others, or 'outside Others', is often differentiated along sociological categories of race, confirming to the white, yellow, black continuum' (Creighton 1997, 212). In fact, the notion of minority exclusion in Japan and the ideology of whiteness in the U.S. appear to differ in a power analysis of race and ethnic relations between these two nations.

Weiner (1994) postulates that ethnic stratification in Japan is embedded in objective economic realities. However, Reubens (1981) claims that the concept of 'low-level workers' in Japan is distinct from the Western status, and it is not commonly used, understood, or socially disdained. He further points out that in a broad comparison with the U.S., the persons occupying lower social positions i

Japan are mostly not ethnic minorities. It is suggested that there is lack of assessment of economic determinants of 'racism' (Kashiwazaki 2000).

Minority-majority relations are compared quite interchangeably between the U.S. and Japan with studies highlighting interchangeable micro-level similarities on behalf of system-level features. For instance, Lee and De Vos (1981, 356) argue:

Just as the so-called black problem in the United States is really a problem of developing an inclusive American identity, even so the Korean problem in Japan, of much smaller numerical proportions, is a Japanese problem related to a continuing myth of racial superiority.

Although the maintenance of Japanese identity boundaries is briefly discussed in the ideological dimension, the state of human motivation for the establishment of ethnic stratification in Japan seems to differ in tone from the arguments seen in the U.S.

Lie (2001) argues that the American accusation of Japanese racism seems misplaced, because Western researchers have been more likely to inflict derogatory comments on the Japanese, such as most Japanese people are 'passive racists'. It is very difficult to locate irrefutable evidence of Japanese 'racism' (Lie 2001) because the political context and particularly the role of emergent nationalism also explain social configurations of minority groups (Stone 1985).

## Japanese Social Institutions and Structures

The third category within the literature approaches Japanese ethnic relations in terms of institutional structure (Gelfand and Lee 1973, Schermerhorn 1978 [1970], Davis ed. 1979, Marger 1994, Bowser. ed. 1995, Mills 1997), following the idea that the reality of racism has to be accounted for in terms of variations in the economic, political and social balance of power (Cornell 1970, Stone 1985).

The literature focuses on the post-Second World War concepts of nationality and citizenship to account for Japanese ethnic relations (Lie 2001). Oguma (2002) points out that the Japanese are united not by belonging to the same ethnicity or race, but by national cohesion which separates Japanese from non-Japanese. Therefore, other concepts such as ethnicity and cultural differences became conterminous in the symbol of national cohesion. Being a Japanese became a primary basis for the differentiation of legal status, drawing a distinction between citizens/nationals and non-citizens/non-nationals (Kashiwazaki 2000). Researchers point out that the legal regulation of nationality enforces the Japanese mode of discrimination (Beer 1981, Taguchi 1983-1984, Beer 1981, Kashiwazaki 2000).

The issue of different conceptual components of 'racial' identity in Japan is also seen in the case of the U.S. Kashioka (1996) points to the optimistic view of attaining a 'melting pot' in the post-war U.S., in which the identity of a U.S. citizen

simply covered identities based on racial classifications.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is difficult to specify the feature of contemporary U.S. American racial structure among different forms of social integrations, such as assimilation, amalgamation, cultural pluralism, and multiculturalism.

Tsuda (2003, 382-383) compares both nations by differentiating cultural assimilation from structural assimilation:

In most cases, some level of cultural assimilation is necessary for socio-occupational mobility to occur. However, in some multiethnic societies such as the United States with a pluralistic national ideology, many minority individuals can frequently retain a certain amount of ethnic distinctiveness and cultural difference without jeopardizing their chances of socioeconomic integration and class mobility. . . . In contrast, a type of 'hegemonic nationalism' (Medina 1997, 760) predominates in homogeneously conceived societies like Japan where cultural assimilation to the dominant majority group is a necessary prerequisite for social acceptance and socioeconomic integration. In such cases, minority groups that remain culturally different continue to face institutional discrimination, impeding their social class mobility.

The development of ethnic stratification in Japan cannot be simply attributed to hegemonic Western thought, due to a number of historical and cultural factors in the Japanese context. In fact, Berting et al. (1979, 32) argue that 'there is a large and perhaps irreducible degree of indeterminacy about complex historical sequences involving large collectivities'.

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<sup>11</sup> Also see Winant's (2001) discussion on double consciousness or racial dualism.

## Issues of Scope and Scale in Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations

The comparative method raises questions about the methods of cross-national comparisons, the scale and definition of units of comparison, the context of comparison and the cultural production and conditioning of particular forms of classification. The central problem is attributed to the extent to which an investigator specifies the scope and scale of the variable.

First, it appears that problems can arise when comparative analyses conceptualize race and ethnic relations in terms of a limited number of qualitatively distinct configurations rather than as a multi-dimensional construct. One example discussed in this paper is African American-Burakumin comparisons. Although findings emphasize a common form of discrimination experienced by these two groups, findings tend to assume that racism is merely deducible to human psychology (e.g., Reuter 1945, Fredrickson 2000), and thus structural differences across the nations are not necessarily observable. In fact, once other ethnic groups in Japan are included in the analysis, Japanese society shows quite different aspects (see earlier discussions on Chinese and Koreans in Japan). However, the exclusionary practices against minorities in Japan are regarded as having the same empirical effect as the practices found in the U.S., which is Fredrickson's (2000) concern (cited and discussed earlier).

Studies limited to the configurations of minority groups often tempt investigators to 'force' cases to fit into an artificially limited set of categories. Weiner (1994) argues that studies of racism have often been reduced to a preoccupation with the disadvantages associated with particular traits of minority groups. For example, in highlighting the outcaste status as the single defining factor of the Burakumin's minority status, a range of other factors (e.g., socioeconomic mobility of minorities and cultural influences) have been obscured (see Berting et al. 1979). In comparisons, these intermediate meanings of race and ethnic relations seem to be avoided when the researcher is clear about the social dimension and its implication of the variable.

Studies limited to the configurations of ethnic minority groups do not possess sufficient explanatory power for some adherents to the comparative method (e.g., Dumont and Pocock 1957; Wong 1999); although transnational patterns are observed in a limited manner (e.g., Fredrickson 1995), nation-specific elements are not determined to demonstrate the cross-national differences (e.g., Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967). To give cross-national comparisons a clearer analytical framework, efforts have to be made to encompass a vast array of possible independent, intervening, and interdependent factors that define the functions of nation-specific elements in order to be incorporated in a more embracing synthesis (e.g., Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967). Because race and ethnic relations are context-bound, they are 'related to various social conformations in such a way that



their meaning is determined by the system, be it a culture, a historical period, a nation . . . .' (Berting et al. 1979, 94).

Cross-national comparison by nature has to have analogy at its heart. However, social configurations of ethnic minorities in Japan are compared with its analogue in the U.S. cases in a large part in separation from intertwined social contexts (Reuter 1945, Beer 1981, Fredrickson 1998). Namely, specific components are laid out to represent the large Japanese context as the macro-variable of 'race and ethnic relations'. These methodological issues and the unrevealed complex interplay of ethnic stratification lead to conflicting arguments about Japanese society in terms of the 'caste-type' stratification by Cornell (1970) and Howell (1996) (discussed earlier). Similar functions may be performed by differing means across nations (Fredrickson 1995), if a variety of dimensions such as the struggle over economic resources, political power, and cultural, symbolic and moral dimensions are included (see Wade 1997).

There is a good reason for being aware of the scope and scale of the variable. Fredrickson (1995, 604) claims that what we compare requires theoretical attention to the meanings of analytical categories. He asserts that John Dower's *War Without Mercy* enforces racist potentiality of American nationalism,<sup>12</sup> while Mills (1997, 81) gives Dower's evidence for his argument that 'the Japanese are

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<sup>12</sup> *War Without Mercy* is a comparison of the role of race in American and Japanese propaganda during World War II. Fredrickson (1995, 602) asserts that the Japanese were quite capable of racially

inheritors of the global Racial Contract'. As Fredrickson (1995) points out, the literature shows that while the total regularity is emphasized, the absolute uniqueness is not given enough attention. Therefore, investigators have to be clear about what facets are emphasized in their comparisons.

I discussed issues of scope as a consequence of the ignorance of the comparative method. Nevertheless, it seems that studies of race and ethnic relations in Japan have suffered from another problem of making a specific case fit into one of a limited number of qualitatively distinct types of 'race and ethnic relations'. One area where this can be seen is in the common practice of analyzing 'race and ethnic relations' in Japan primarily in terms of ethnic stratification dimension, or minority-majority relations.

U.S. American researchers have adopted a racial discourse in the U.S. to conceptualize the Japanese as ethnic dominants. However, the literature discussed above strongly suggests Japanese mode of ethnic relations does not constitute a U.S. type of race and ethnic relations due to a lack of shared components, such as minorities' economic disadvantage (e.g., Gelfand and Lee 1973, Bowser ed. 1995) and the racial attitude of the majority. Rather, the central component of ethnic hierarchy in Japan is attributed to identity issues of ethnic minorities (e.g., abandonment of non-Japanese identities in favor of the pure Japanese identity). It

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stereotyping their American antagonists and proclaiming their own innate superiority to the Yankee 'devils'.

is likely that the U.S. American concept of race and ethnic relations are used interchangeably and in various guises to account for the Japanese context, but the difference in the major components are not necessarily deducible even from large macro-level inquiries, unless the investigator identifies the driving force of social integration (see Weiner 1994).

Although the literature suggests macro-structural similarities in race and ethnic relations between the U.S. and Japan, findings are not persuasive enough to deduce the magnitude of minority-majority relations peculiar to the Japanese cases (Bower 1995). For example, the literature explains the attribution of Japanese ethnic relations to a multiplicity of social, cultural and historical reasons, but they often fail to discuss how innate national affiliations such as 'uchi' (inside), 'soto' (outside), and 'invisibility' are unique to Japan. To put forth an interpretation of the comparisons, researchers are required to observe cases by assuming that comparisons with careful considerations of macro-social contexts may still lead to empirically insufficient substantiations.

How one thinks about race and ethnic relations is often limited and distorted by the received knowledge that racism is ubiquitous in the world (Schlesinger 1943, Winant 2001). However, this is a very different matter from saying that the literature provides partial accounts, or we cannot examine cross-national similarities and differences between the U.S. and Japan because of the absence of any 'true' comparative studies; this is to say that as a consequence, discussions

without clear scale of race and ethnic relations result in natural outcomes similar to Omi and Winant's (1994) world-wide view of the definition of racial stratification.

Strictly speaking, there are many perceptions of Japanese ethnic stratification but they do not necessarily clarify for us the breadth in subtleties of Japanese ethnic relations. Nevertheless, conceptualizing race and ethnic relations as a multi-dimensional construct not only admits to the possibility that some dimensions of race and ethnic relations vary in qualitative ways while others vary quantitatively along a continuum, but it also entertains the possibility that these different dimensions can vary independently and do not necessarily occur in pre-determined configurations.

The problem of alternative and competing narratives of Japan has been left largely unexamined (Doak 1997). Institutional and functional analyses emphasize how ethnic stratification is maintained and rationalized in the Japanese context, to emphasize empirical overlaps between the U.S. and Japan. However, the literature notes that Japanese ethnic stratification is not deducible from the examination of the national identities of the Japanese (e.g., Howell 1996, Hudson 1999). Furthermore, neither class distinction nor the color-line take precedence over minority status classifications (see Reubens 1981). Therefore, comparative analysis of the two systems of race and ethnic relations would be better served by recognizing that the ethnic stratification dimension may be less central to the

overall configuration of ethnic relations in Japan compared to the U.S. and then analyzing ethnic relations in Japan accordingly.

## Conclusions

In this paper I provide a sociological explanation for a problem I have identified in the theorization of comparative race and ethnic relations. This problem with comparative race and ethnic relations can be improved by addressing the way researchers have specified the scope and scale of the core variable 'race and ethnic relations' in cross-national settings. I suggest that comparative race and ethnic relations requires a reassessment of its principles and underlying premises, because past studies are insufficiently conscious of potential sources of methodological error in spite of the availability of a sophisticated comparative method. I also argue the unsuitability of U.S. American concepts of race and ethnic relations in the Japanese context, in which the ethnic stratification dimension and minority-majority relations cannot centrally account for the social configurations of ethnic minorities.

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## **Queer Television Discourse - Reality TV**

### **Abstract**

This paper is a qualitative case study of a dedicated website that contains a chat room and message board where young people discuss the BBC 'Reality Television' series Fame Academy 2. Its explorations of on-line television conversations form a queer discourse that disrupts a normative heterosexual representation. The research generates discussion in the area of interdisciplinary methodology and on-line conversational research. Certain modifications characterise interdisciplinary research areas. For example, in order to tease out queer discourse and its struggle for a position within my chosen television and on-line conversations, I combine aspects of Feminist theory with Queer theory. These theories together with CMC (computer mediated communication) and the use of discourse analysis underpin the foundation of this case study. The computer conversations are a combination of asynchronous communication, which takes place at a different time, and synchronous communications, which take place at the same time (See Munt, 2002). This case study explores the use of interdisciplinary methodologies and how they can be applied to areas of research such as the Internet. For the purpose of this work the researcher engages in a hybrid queer gaze.

### **Introduction**

Fame Academy 2 is a reality television programme that broadcast on British terrestrial television on August 2003 on BBC1. One of the contestants is a young woman called Alex Parks who comes out as 'gay' during a live performance. The series follows the lives of twelve selected contestants who

have entered the 'Academy'. Their age's range between 18 and 35 and their dream is to become famous in the music business. They are judged on their talents as singers and their song writing ability, also their competence to perform in front of a live audience and other students. The BBC set up an official website on the Internet called 'Digital Spy Forum' to enable young viewers of the programme to discuss the contestants activities and performance in the series. The aim of the paper is to develop a discussion about queer discourse found in selected conversations posted on the website message board of 'Digital Spy Forum'.

This case study interprets the young posters linguistic behaviour and their use of emoticons <sup>1</sup> during their discussion about Alex Parks and her revelation that she is a lesbian. What is fascinating about these on-line conversations is the way a hidden queer discourse is presented as a normative position because the 'queer' in this context is not marginalised. Through the posters/viewers use of language they define their social situation on the Internet.

This paper is structured by a two-tier discussion. The first section provides an overview of what disciplines and methods are used. The second details my brief selection of on-line conversational sequences and my analysis of them. According to John Brewer, '[c]ase studies are distinguished [...] by the focus on the instance of the phenomenon, not by the method used to study it' (2000:188). However, this case study is distinguished by both the phenomenon of a queer discourse and by the methods used to uncover its function. A close reading and interpretation of some of the dialogue considered in this paper is a queer discourse and its disruption of the notion of a heterosexual norm and its representation of a lesbian.

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<sup>1</sup> The emoticons are cues that the posters use such as happy and sad face a form of emotional expression within non-face-to-face-conversation.



## Section One

Academia has recently been experiencing a trajectory in canonical disciplines and the uses of methodologies, especially in the area of computer mediated communication research. Mann & Stewart suggest that the Internet as a topic of investigation will have far reaching consequences for research because it is 'both a technological and a cultural phenomenon' (2000:7). The authors argue that the Internet will 'have an overwhelming impact on the theory and practice of qualitative research' (2000:7). They predict that the 'potential for development and diversity is immense' (2000:97). The benefit of and usefulness of interdisciplinary methodologies has a reflexive advantage that can only enhance the outcome of future on-line conversational discourse research (2000:97).

Although Feminist Studies and Queer Theory are envisaged by academia as interdependent, they have also often been presented as being at odds with each other. As Judith Butler (1997) points out

'[t]here can be no viable feminism that fails to account for its complicity in forms of oppression, whether they be colonial, class-based, racist, or homophobic. And there can be no viable lesbian and gay studies paradigm that does not examine its own complicitous investments in misogyny and other forms of oppression' (1997:2).

In this research they are used complementarily to produce further discussions and generate questions specifically regarding to Fame Academy 2. Feminism and Queer theory are not represented as having limitations or opposing positions, rather they are positioned within an exploration of complex and sometimes contradictory meanings of relations of power that are disseminated through the conversational sequences.

There is a chaotic side of research that produces disorder and confusion. The research plan (and its procedures) can become problematic in the

transformation and interpretation of analysis. In my experience this happens between the gathering of information and the writing up stage of the analysis, but I have found that it helps to move between different disciplinary borders. The writing up process needs to be accessible to show all the workings and how the interpretation of the data has emerged. The disciplines and procedures undertaken to theorise and develop any research have become a philosophical approach in itself.

This approach incorporates new skills that include the researcher's experience of the chaos involved along the way. Working across interdisciplinary boundaries has questioned my ideological perspective as a lesbian queer reader, despite the subjectivity of my interpretations that I hold as very important. What I am suggesting is that during this process the social and cultural power relations that are explored tend to be reduced or over simplified in the analysis. Thus, the researcher can get bogged down in the methodology and may fail to recognise the importance of the dialogue and to reflect on what has happened throughout the research process.

As researchers we pursue investigations that add meaning to how we envisage our own complex social and cultural identities and our own narratives of the self. We perform our own research identities through the traditional disciplines of Academia that operate to empower us as individuals and enhance our contribution to knowledge. As a queer, feminist, poststructuralist reader, I position myself as a bricoleur<sup>2</sup> using an interdisciplinary hybrid methodology that grows throughout the research process. This model consists of queer studies, feminist studies, anthropology, sociology, textual analysis and discourse analysis. My approach also includes implementing the tools of digit media and the Internet. 'The researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist works between and within

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<sup>2</sup> This is described and clarified by Weinstein and Weinstein (1991) as a 'Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person. The bricoleur produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced

competing and overlapping perspective and paradigms' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:4)

Levi-Strauss (1966), Weinstein and Weinstein (1991), Nelson, Triechler and Grossberg (1992), all acknowledge bricolage as an undertaking involving practices that facilitate new tools or emerging concepts and techniques produced through the combining of different methodologies. This form of construction can and does achieve a thorough and rigorous investigation with exciting results for the researcher. In this context the amalgamation of interdisciplinary methodologies produces a new challenge to the outcome of research using a hybridized form of communication. Computer mediated communication (CMC) can reveal new discourses and meanings for social and cultural development. According to Mann and Stewart (2000), '[...] CMC offers an excellent site for qualitative researchers who 'observe' discourse online (2000:87). I use the term hybridisation as the act of combining the different disciplines and producing a formatively new critical approach to computer mediated communication. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest, 'If new tools have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this' (1993: 2).

This hybridised observational research model is described as a highly localized experience of people in a social and cultural grouping that informs a particular phenomenon on the Internet. Interpreting and analysing one of these groupings and exploring the antagonistic discourses that take place in the selected on-line conversations is what adds to the richness of this study. Brewer suggests that research can have 'a slavish devotion to methods that can exclude the substance or the interest of the story being told in the research' (2000:2). Therefore, I want to ensure that a queer voice is heard within a normative heterosexual discourse.

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together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problems in a concrete

My case study unravels an online narrative of exchanges of dialogue held between a selected numbers of young posters<sup>3</sup>. The poster's conversations suggest that they are influenced by media representations of gender and identity. They also use a taken-for-granted heterosexist assumption with regard to a queer discourse. This can be observed in the postings and from the print media's interpretations of the contestants taking part in the programme. The next section explains the empirical data and its analyses.

### On-line data

The empirical data or 'thick descriptions'<sup>4</sup> are gathered from the message board postings of Digital Spy that discusses the reality television programme Fame Academy 2. These conversations are available through a service called Internet Relay Chat<sup>5</sup>. The recent synergy of television and the internet enhance the practical tools available to the researcher for this type of ethnographic qualitative study. The computer and the television screen are the interface required to produce participation these conversations relating to television.

A random number of postings relating to Alex Parks were posted on the 'Digital Spy Forum' message board and chat line on 7.8.2003, and they were selected. The messages<sup>6</sup> and postings content have not been altered in any way by the researcher. The messages have been copied and pasted directly

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situation' (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1991, 161).

<sup>3</sup> Posters are the name given to participants who engage in the message boards within newsgroups. The ages of the posters who participate in Digital Spy Forum are between 14-35 the ages of the contestants that take part in the television series are between 18-35. (See <http://www.fame.digitalspy.co.uk/article.ds6008/html>)

<sup>4</sup> This is the term given by Geertz for the data that is accumulated, validated and theorised in qualitative research. (1973, p26)

<sup>5</sup> 'IRC refers to a live chat area of the Internet in which real-time conversations among two or more people take place via IRC software. IRC is divided into channels. When you join a channel everything you type is visible to other people in the same channel and everything they type is visible to you. Most channels have a topic' (Glossary-Mann and Stewart, 2000: 220).

<sup>6</sup> These messages are available on the Digital Spy Forum website and it is a public space that anyone can enter at any time

from the website and no permission has been obtained to use these conversations. This is an accepted and ethical procedure for the collection of digital data from a virtual environment such as chat rooms or newsgroup message boards. (See Mann & Stewart, 2000: 46). However, the pseudonyms have been removed from the conversations of the posters to protect the posters and the font size has been changed and speech marks incorporated for the readers ease. No dialogue took place between the researcher and the posters during this case study.

The data comprises selected messages relating to Alex Parks' 'outing'. Parks becomes the subject of these power relations through her lesbian commodification. The analysis and discourse of her lesbianism supports the suggestion that the 'stylization of lesbian sexuality has rewritten radical sex as a commodity and defused its potential' (Hawkes, 1996: 143). Her commodification has evoked an internalised homophobia. Comments made by Alex Parks confirm this internalised homophobia, yet simultaneously these queer discourses captured on-line, dispute established homophobic postulations. My analysis critiques the deferred meaning of a queer discourse and its power relations within Fame Academy 2.

Queer television discourse evolved in the UK when Big Brother and Fame Academy producers Endemol gained a large audience who voted for the out-lesbian and ex nun Anna in their first series of Big Brother. Alex's inclusion as a queer contestant in the Fame Academy mansion is part of an emergent number of queer identities represented through 'Reality Television'. The on-line conversations are productive in that dialogue is happening that favours a queer discourse. My concern is that these discourses are steeped in homophobic utterances. However, the general zeitgeist mood of the posters also suggests that there is a trajectory to be more liberal in this particular chat forum. Fame Academy 2's

representations of gender and sexuality may have added to this liberal attitude.

### **The television show: Fame Academy 2**

Fame Academy 2 is without doubt a form of media that attracts high audience rating figures nationally. The first Fame Academy broadcast in autumn of 2002 affectedly claimed an audience of 8 million for the final show.<sup>7</sup> Reality TV is an 'attempt to package particular aspects of everyday life as entertainment' (Dovey, 2001:3). Is it a voyeuristic, cheap phenomenon of post-modern television, or do we as human beings hold a natural desire to perform? Whatever the answer, it can be deduced that the illusion of a passive spectatorship is over and that we the watching audience can now participate in these on screen dramas ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

A predisposed or common ingredient of these shows is that they take people to unusual surroundings completely unfamiliar to them. This fly-on-the-wall production embodies a psychological, emotional and physical pressure for the contestants. A twenty- four-seven vigilant eye of the camera casts its judgemental gaze as well as the viewing public. A number of young people from different classes, gender, ethnic and sexual backgrounds compete against each other for a financial reward and celebrity status. The popular discourse that emerges through this television format challenges a<sup>9</sup>common-sense notion of gender and sexuality. The audience can discuss the disclosures of each contestant participating in the programme through the chat room and message board on-line. The discussions on Alex Parks are the ones that generate a queer discourse.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Nielsen TV Media Research ratings.

<sup>8</sup> Baudrillard (1994) gave a lecture at the University of Sydney regarding his theory of simulacra.

<sup>9</sup> See Butler's (1990) 'Gender Trouble' and her influential analysis of compulsory heterosexuality.

## Social and Cultural Pleasures of Television

The second series ran for eight weeks and was broadcast on a Saturday night at 6.30p.m by BBC1. It also features further coverage on BBC3, and returns to BBC1 for the results of who had to leave the Academy at 11.05 the same night. The results were given out live after the BBC News and Sports slot. There was also a Fame Academy Remixed showing at 8p.m. the following night and a Fame Academy Live on weeknights at 7.15 on BBC3. Fame Academy Remixed is a general roundup of the week's positive and negative happenings at the Academy. Fame Academy Live offers viewers the latest developments that are taking place from inside the talent school in real time and this is the production where Alex comes out as a lesbian.

The confessional queer discourse 'Just a part of who I am'<sup>10</sup> was the headline on day two of the news stories featured on the Digital Spy site. The concern for what the British voting public would think of Alex Parks became the focal point of the chat rooms. Digital Spy encouraged discussions on the show daily, and personal postings relating to the contestants appeared frequently. Alex Parks is a 19-year-old singer from Truro, Cornwall. She had a conversation live on air with another contestant that divulged that she was a lesbian. The inside knowledge within the gay community was that this was a possible forced outing due to one of the tabloid newspapers already having information about Alex's sexuality. Alex is out to her parents but allegedly not to her grandmother. Her anxiety was that a sensationalised article regarding her sexuality would be published in a tabloid Sunday newspaper. Immediately after her confession the tabloid Sunday newspaper The News of the World run this headline on August 31<sup>st</sup>,

'FAME ACADEMY ALEX: I'M GAY'

'FAMILY BACK HER'

'FAME Academy babe Alex Parks has confessed to her family she is a lesbian –and they have smuggled a secret message to her saying: "We back you all the way" Alex, at 19 the youngest ever entrant in the BBC show, is tipped to win it. Last night she performed the old Soft Cell hit Tainted Love. But her dad Stephen revealed yesterday she had been terrified her beloved gran Jess would be upset when she found out about her sexuality. So the family sneaked a note from Jess and granddad Stan, both in their seventies, past guards at the Fame Academy mansion in north London telling Alex: "Stop worrying. We love you just the way you are"

Pretence

Talking for the first time about their daughter's concerns, Cornish counsellor Stephen said 'We've known about her sexuality since she was 14. It's never made any difference. We love her. She's worried, but she came out and has been honest. She'd never try to live a life of pretence'. Fame Academy fans have heard Alex talking about her sexuality to fellow contestants. Her mum Jean, a college administrator with three other children, confirmed last night:

'She's anxious how it will affect us. But I want to tell her not to. We're so proud of her [...]'.

Alex's concern about the disclosure of her lesbian identity and her wanting to protect her grandmother can be observed in her words, 'If I could change it I would... life would be so much easier'

(<http://fame.digitalspy.co.uk/article/ds/5473.html>).

This particular tête-à-tête sparked an engaging on-line discussion. To categorise these conversations as just a discourse referring to popular culture and a constituent of television classified as Reality TV, is to neglect

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<sup>10</sup> The melancholy and loss or mourning for an identity that is perceived socially and culturally



the most important presumption being raised in these discussions, that of the language and power of heterosexism. The disclosure of Alex is not about homosexuality per se, it is about the fear surrounding the interpretation of her 'outing' plus how this action was able to disrupt the privileged heterosexual spaces that function within television representations.

The poster's articulations on the message boards constantly perform and reiterate their assumed heterosexual privileges. The posters accomplish this by suggesting Alex does not need to mention her sexuality therefore eliminating agency and power from [an] 'other', who they perceive to be outside of 'normality'. The language used in this context requests the silence and exclusion of a lesbian existence. An assumed heterosexual gaze has built into its psyche a blindness that privileges both its language and its position in society. The conflict created by this blindness functions as an oppression that sends signals outwards forcing the voice of disclosure (the other)<sup>11</sup> to retreat from any social or cultural position.

The oblivious way of thinking and performing a constructed heterosexuality suggests a form of amnesia that disowns the burden of numerous suicides through a crisis of identity that engulfs heterosexual/homosexual prejudice. The gaps that could be made available and habited by queer voices in these television shows are greatly reduced as a result of this prejudice. As experienced by Alex sometimes these voices may need to retreat and on occasion the reinforcing of reactionary or internalised homophobia is what replaces these voices.

### **Exchanges and Interpretations of Chat**

There is an element of moderate stereotyping that is apparent in some of the language used by the posters. The chat room discussions sometimes border on Berger's (1997) statement suggesting the 'simplistic and often

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as 'normal' is demonstrated in this utterance. (Butler, 1997)

dangerous ...illogical and uncritical thinking ...of our everyday lives' (1997:54). However, the notion of a progressive critical account regarding Alex's subjectivity and her same sex desire is also present in the on-line discussions. I argue that Fame Academy 2 as a format of reality television can evoke a queer discourse amongst young people and Alex's disclosure on live television is what prompts on-line queer discussions. Websites and chat rooms dedicated to Alex Parks with a similar format to 'Digital Spy' have appeared on the Internet and more young people have responded to her self 'outing' by coming out themselves. According to Jenny White writing for a column in the 'Outbox' section of the Pink Paper, a London based gay and lesbian magazine, 'Websites like the 'Sisterhood of Alex' have been inundated with messages from women bursting out of the closet' (White, 2004:21)

## Section Two- On-Line Discussions

The thread is Alex comes out...  
and worries what the GBP<sup>12</sup> will make of it.

'So do I, frankly. You would've had to have been totally blind not to see that revelation coming. I wonder how many pairs of Doc Martens and dungarees she's brought into the Academy with her?'

This first exchange discusses Alex's dress code highlighting signifiers of her style that are presented as positioning her as a lesbian. Her dress code Dungarees and Doc Martens a form of clothing and shoes worn by the Greenham Common<sup>13</sup> commonly stereotyped as lesbians in the eighties. As Walters notes, 'these women participated in [acts of] civil disobedience' demonstrating against the military presence and the notion

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<sup>11</sup> In this case Alex Parks who retreats from her outing

<sup>12</sup> Great British Public

<sup>13</sup> 'The peace movement of the eighties was parodied by ...a caricature. Even the Guardian emphasised that the women at Greenham Common were 'punks, some have shaved heads, and others make no secret of the fact that they are lesbians' (Walters, 1998:38).

of hard power, namely the weapons and hardware of mass destruction (Walters, 1998: 67). The stereotypical caricature of the lesbian and her performance as an anti-social, radical man-hating woman was what most media representations produced in the eighties. This was a deliberate distraction by the media to suppress the growing subversive peace movement created and run by women from different social, political and economic backgrounds, which was becoming a real threat to the country's stability. The diversity of this pressure group and its 'consciousness-raising' [element] was vital in giving weight to women's experiences' this meant that both experiences and issues locally and globally concerning women were now being put on the public agenda (Walters, 1998:145).

Three decades after these negative descriptions of lesbians, the dress code signifiers have still not lost their disapproving nuance. However, I interpret the posters' comments that reiterated these stereotypes while discussing Alex's sexuality as being part of a language and dialogue that pertains to a sort of irony. The posters acknowledge these signifiers in their mockery, but give it no real credence other than to suggest a disdain for the ignorance of the media institutions generally. 'Public expressions' or experiences 'of same-sex desire' does not feature often in television and consequently Alex Parks warrant further discussion by the young viewing audience (Hemmings, 2002:58).

'It's funny because ... I did think she might be gay. But I can't really say why. It wasn't that she wore trousers and had short hair - because I'm not an idiot - it was just a vibe'.

The vibe discussed here is the mechanism that substantiates Butler's theory that 'when it is not spoken' queerness is always there lurking in the shadows of numerous narratives (Butler, 1991:13). This intuitive notion or vibe has become part of a post-modern collective consciousness, a narrative that lies below the surface. It posits an understanding of identity

in terms of sexuality that emphasises shifting boundaries, ambivalences and cultural constructions that are temporal. The attention paid to Alex's chosen dress code suggests and provokes an experience of queer pleasure for some of the posters on the Digital Spy site. My interpretation is that the posters read Alex's sexuality through inscribing meaning onto her mode of dress and her hairstyle. At various points in the interaction of the posters Alex's lesbian desire becomes problematic and this is voiced in this posters' concern.

'I hope that it doesn't hurt her chances. Anna in the first year of Big Brother did well (although she didn't win) so hopefully people will not judge by that. Unfortunately while she may do well in the contest, I can see it being a problem when she is out in the real world and real music business. That is, not a problem but she won't get chart hits. Plenty of people do well without that though, Ani DiFranco and PJ Harvey and Sarah MacLachlan do alright'

It can be suggested that while the television text of Fame Academy 2 is intended as a heterosexual text, its receptive meanings changed when the confessional discourse of Alex is broadcast and the viewing audience became subjective in how they dealt with that meaning. The ambiguity and contradictions that define Park's image suggest sexual and gender diversity is what supports a queer<sup>14</sup> reading of her performance and the performance of the posters in the chat rooms. The lesbian narrative according to Hemmings becomes a privileged sign within queer discourse only when the 'sexual object choice is the same as its sexual identity choice' which then forms part of the 'coming out narrative' (2002:114). The sexual tensions generated through Alex's ambiguity and androgynous relationships with the other contestants both male and female challenges

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<sup>14</sup> 'Queer theory is very definitely not resisted to homosexual men and women, but to any one who feels their position (sexual, intellectual, or cultural) to be marginalized' (Dowson, 2000:163).

and disrupts a mainstream homogeneous text. '[Q]ueer narrative allows for a far greater range of sexual behaviours' (Hemmings, 2002:114). Although she has proclaimed her sexuality, the uncertainty of her sexual identity or her sexual object choice, up to the point of confession is what adds to the queer pleasure that the young viewers experience when viewing Alex's performance. As Doty (1993) states 'Queer positions, queer readings and queer pleasures are part of a reception space that stands simultaneously beside and within that created by heterosexual and straight positions' (1993: 15).

Alex's performance as a contestant does not necessarily suggest a desire to inhabit a sexual position or pursue a sexual negotiation. Alex's performance is to challenge herself as a singer/songwriter and win a career as a singer/songwriter.

'Popular culture may have begun to provide us with positive glimpses of lesbian lives, yet young women who self-identify as lesbian necessarily negotiate sexual subjectivity and desire in a cultural context where fears and fantasies associated with the lesbian 'other' are rife, and where on an everyday level they are liable to be subjected to rejection, threat and abuse' (Ussher and Mooney, 2000: 191).

' If she doesn't want her sexuality to be an issue then why did she bring it up? What does it have to do with Fame Academy? If I'd been in there having a discussion about heterosexual role models, I wouldn't feel the need to say 'I'm heterosexual by the way'. It seems to be her that's making the issue out of it'. Tactics, or am I just being cruel and cynical 😊

I interpret the remarks of this posters homophobic language as reiterating the rejection and fears that the writers Ussher and Mooney, 2000 express in the study of young lesbians and what they are subjected to in their coming out experiences. The poster refuses to accept the need

for Alex to express her sexuality but uses the emoticon to diffuse the harshness of the language.

The language of cultural and social politics brings into play conflict and oppression; this poster is making an identity-related claim. Their own identity needs to be stated and their hostile reaction to Alex's disclosure as a lesbian suggests an anxiety of definition.

'Hetero-sexuality is as much a social construction as lesbian sexuality, [h]owever, such is the strength of the assumption of the naturalness of heterosexual hegemony, that most people are oblivious to the way that it operates as a process of power relations in all spaces' including television texts or internet chat rooms (MacDowell and Sharp 1997: 150).

'it was obvious anyway wasn't it? i don't think the gbp 'll care really, but maybe i'm being too optimistic found it really sad that she said she'd change it if she could -pity she feels this way - she needs to start living in a bigger city i think, and she won't be feeling like she wants to change it any more!

The young people who interact in this particular chat room use a dialogue that is learned through social and cultural experiences and this language constitutes their own insecurities, fears and anxieties around the notion of their own subjectivity and identity. Their concerns with regard to their own identities and cultural positions locate Alex as being dangerous even though her performance and representation as an 'out lesbian' is definitely portrayed on television as non-threatening. However, this changes when Alex actually wins the contest in October 2003. In an interview given to *Diva*, a lesbian monthly magazine, Alex states, 'I came out bloody years ago, aged 14, [o]f course I thought about coming out on TV. But I'm proud enough of who I am not to let that worry me'. In the *Pink Paper* in a later interview Alex claims, 'I couldn't give a shit – if coming out had been a problem and I was voted off then it was meant to

be' (The Pink Paper, 2004: 20). What is revealing in this statement is that it contradicts the conversation Alex had with another female contestant on Fame Academy 2 that ended with 'If I could change it I would...life would be so much easier' (<http://fame.digitalspy.co.uk/article/ds/5473.html>)

Alex's uses language that is diametrically opposed yet mutually exclusive in this context, it suggests she feels more secure in her 'outness' when discussing it in a queer environment or for a queer publication. The oppressive positions that can become part of heterosexual and homosexual discourse can instigate hostility as the above posters states. Credence is given to a common-sense notion of the naturalness of heterosexuality and it being positive, good, moral and normal and its derivative homosexuality being viewed as negative, bad, immoral and deviant. The judgement that '[I]esbian desire is dangerous' and that it can be used tactically to move from a position of subordination (the private) to a position of power (the public) is what presents a threat and a risk to the unstableness and ambiguous notion of a heterosexuality identity (Ussher and Mooney, 2000: 191).

'If she came across as strong and confident she'd have problems but she seems quite vulnerable so is non-threatening'.

This utterance elucidates Alex's necessity to have to 'lay claim to the power to name oneself' (Butler, 1993: 227).

'Tactics, or am I just being cruel and cynical?' 😊

The reply given by another poster to the accusation that Alex is using her sexuality as a tactic is dispelled by an accessible explanation of the notion of compulsory heterosexuality.

'Yes, I think you are. Since our society presumes that everyone is heterosexual unless proven otherwise, there is rarely any need to announce that you are straight as it will be assumed that you are. Making it clear that this doesn't, in fact, apply to you is not 'making an issue out of it,' it's correcting a misapprehension about something very important to who you are. I find it difficult to believe that coming out could be a tactic. It's more likely to cause her trouble than not, although I hope not. I think the fact that she is so young will help her. If she came across as strong and confident she'd have problems but she seems quite vulnerable so is non-threatening. I don't think the voters will be turned off by her. But yes, it may be a totally different story when she is trying to build an actual career'. 😊

What is interpreted from this discussion is the challenge that is offered to the stereotype of the homosexual and to the assumption of the compulsory heterosexual normative function. The emoticon of sadness suggesting that in the 'real world' we all are aware that her sexuality will be problematic for Alex's career as a professional singer.

'It's perhaps the impact on the other students, not on the public, that is more important for her at the moment, and it's good to see she got a sympathetic reception. Hope the others are as accepting.'

'Can't see it being a problem. Most people in that age group are pretty cool about sexuality these day, especially creative types' 😊

The age category mentioned here is between eighteen and thirty five, the posters suggest and agree that this age group have a liberal outlook towards sexuality, 'cool and creative types' being the operative words here. This age group is viewed as being resistant to the policing of



non-conformity, and with a shared sense of 'other' to the dominant culture.

## Conclusion

These on-line discussions, while progressive on one level, are sometimes framed in essentialist terms. They illustrate the tensions set up by a complex desire which asserts a queer position and at the same time tries to dissolve the single lesbian identity. The queer discourse found in the Digital Spy Forum at times reflects homophobia and yet at other times questions the rationale of homophobic language and its presumptions. I would argue that Reality TV and its element of queer discourse continue to produce internalised homophobic language and populist or reactionary conversations. As Alex states, 'If I could change it I would...life would be so much easier'. However, these types of cultural productions can also ensure a space for the performance of the queer lesbian. This can also instigate engaging discussions in computer-mediated environments.

Furthermore, it suggests that young people do reflect upon and consider the different social and cultural practises of marginalised groups. While arguing that not all the queer identities represented in Reality Television are progressive these on-line discussions suggest that homophobia can at least be tackled and debated and these forums can be used to instruct and challenge homophobic assumptions. What emerges from my combination and use of disciplines is that a queer discourse can be captured through the use of interdisciplinary methodologies. Brewer has described interdisciplinary methodologies as a 'broad theoretical and philosophical framework into which [...] procedural rules fit' (2000: 2). The rules are then further developed and implemented by the researcher. The procedures chosen can be made more flexible and adaptable, which enables a more fluid practical approach to one's research. An interesting response

can be to resist the traditional binaries between qualitative research and quantitative<sup>15</sup> research and become adventurous in Internet research.

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### **Transgressing the Boundaries: An Experimental Reconnoitre**

Since the societal influence on climate change and the progressive disappearance of species was officially accepted at the UN conference 'Environment and Development' in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, research on the human-environment interaction has increased. In the German-speaking area, the establishment of the programme 'focus on the environment 1993-1995' in Switzerland, the 1994 report of the 'Council of Environmental Experts' and the public sponsorship of interdisciplinary environmental research in Germany mark the beginning of this process. 'Transdisciplinarity' is the magic formula to describe the collaboration of different academic disciplines on environmental problems. It indicates that there is a real problem (not only one of academic construction) that could probably be solved if a broad spectrum of specialist knowledge is applied.

In our current research project financed by the Volkswagen Foundation under the sponsorship programme 'Nachwuchsförderung in der fächerübergreifenden Umweltforschung', we are working together from the perspectives of ecology and sociology to analyse one aspect of the accelerated urbanization of the earth's human population during the twentieth century. We are investigating the relationship between changes in the vegetation of frequently disturbed habitats in rural areas (which are subject to human intervention), and the shift in rural lifestyles towards urbanism. When considering the problem of interdisciplinary research we found out that there is very little reflection on the question of how to combine the methods of sociology with those of ecology. We feel that this problem is symptomatic of the barriers in thought and communication between the sciences and the humanities, and would therefore like to present our methodological considerations in this research paper. In the

first part we outline the division between the two academic cultures (1). We then go on to explain our method for combining ecological and sociological research on the basis of the concept of track interpretation (2). In our concluding remarks we sum up the insights from the preceding discussion and draw conclusions for interdisciplinary approaches in environmental research (3).

### **The Division Between the Two Academic Cultures and Obstacles to Innovation in Environmental Research**

In the mid-1990's the physicist Alan Sokal (1996: 62) 'decided to try a modest (although admittedly uncontrolled) experiment'. With the intention 'to test the prevailing intellectual standards' (62) within the discourse of the humanities, he submitted an essay entitled 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', in which he drew parallels between quantum gravitation and the discourse of postmodernity, to the renowned cultural journal *Social Text*. The essay appeared in a special edition of *Social Text* in the spring/summer of 1996, which contained various contributions on the subject of the 'science wars'. Sokal then published a second article entitled 'A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies' in the journal *Lingua Franca*, in which he presented his first essay as a parody. He claimed he had only submitted the first piece to *Social Text* in order to answer the following question: 'Would a leading North American journal of cultural studies – whose editorial collective includes such luminaries as Fredric Jameson and Andrew Ross – publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions?' (62). 'The answer, unfortunately,' Sokal continued, 'is yes' (62). He drew two conclusions from this experience: firstly, the subjectivism of those disciplines in the humanities which described themselves as 'postmodern', their methodological credo of antirealism, relativism and the refutation of objectivism, were unfounded and impossible to put into practice. In addition, he claimed, 'some fashionable sectors of the American academic Left have been getting intellectually

lazy' (64), in that they no longer tested their arguments for content, judging them instead by the extent to which they conformed to their own views. Those who were taken in by Sokal, on the other hand, objected that they had not shared the views that he had presented in his essay, but had published the text as a contribution by a physicist who took interest in philosophy and metaphysics (Robbins and Ross, 1996). In the subsequent heated discussions, scholars of the humanities who did not describe themselves as postmodernists pointed out that scientific and technical rationality is itself not completely divorced from cultural milieu, social settings and political influence (see e.g. Aronowitz 1997). Influences of this kind, which are invariably exercised by the subject on any scholarly or cognitive process, give cause to doubt the objectivity of any academic pursuit.

This episode in recent scholarship, now generally referred to as the 'Sokal Affair', demonstrates clearly how barriers in thought and communication between the sciences and the humanities persist, despite all attempts at promoting inter- or transdisciplinarity. As early as 1959, Charles Percy Snow (1959) in his Cambridge Lecture gave a vivid description of these two disciplinary traditions, which continue to exist as independent cultures. Yet the attitude of both the culture of science/technology and that of the humanities/literary studies towards the opposing culture is characterised largely by ignorance. According to Snow's diagnosis, reciprocal misunderstandings that can even be tinged with hostility are actively cultivated, even if their overall effect on the intellectual climate is negative. In other words, even if they reduce the potential of academic research to solve real problems.

This blockade is particularly noticeable in environmental research. Even though this field of research evolved from the insight that changes in the environment induced by man can endanger the human race, as yet few methodological models have been developed which might enable scholars to overcome the barriers between the two academic cultures, and

to investigate the relationship between nature and man systematically. Even anthropology, which encompasses both the natural and the cultural dimensions of human existence, has become polarised in the course of these 'science wars' (see Little 1999), notwithstanding its concern to reflect on methods of analysing the relationship between man and his environment (see Vayda 1996). The mindsets of the two academic cultures are influential here. The only form of environmental research that is possible within these conditions is applied research. It is true that sociologists carry out acceptance studies or economic analyses when, for example, physicists are developing new energy sources or zoologists are establishing new nature reserves. Here a peaceful coexistence is possible, because the research concerns belong to separate domains and the areas of competence are clearly defined from the outset. However, as these forms of applied research are exclusively geared towards implementing specific programmes of action within specific contexts, they are unlikely to result in any academic innovation, or in a crossing of the boundaries between the disciplines.

It therefore seems appropriate to ask what it is that legitimates this strict division between the sciences and the humanities. From the perspective of the history of ideas, it is obviously the assumption that nature and intellect, the physical and the mental, are categorically opposed to each other. This tenet of natural philosophy, which can be traced back to Rene Descartes, is in all probability the most solid basis for the schism, even today. However, environmental research need not comply with this tenet of natural philosophy. It need not subscribe to any specific natural philosophy or metaphysics when sketching a framework for possible relations between man and nature; it is free to be open to all natural-philosophical conceptions. The only prerequisite for investigating the network that links nature and man is the simple insight that human



action changes nature and that these changes can be observed and systematically examined as regular relations.

### **Freeing Environmental Research from the Presuppositions of Natural Philosophy**

This liberation of research from a concrete natural-philosophical or metaphysical basis leads on to the recognition that both the sciences and the humanities have developed methods of researching the networks of interrelation between human action and the non-human environment. Admittedly, this recognition is merely a first step towards overcoming the lack of communication between the two disciplinary cultures. Instead of voicing uncomprehending or pejorative statements, or even developing reductive academic conceptions, this recognition exerts a gentle pressure on academics from a variety of backgrounds to comment on the strategies and results of research carried out by the opposing disciplinary culture, and to acknowledge them as contributions to environmental research. The more definite the pressure to collect information on a common research topic and to communicate with each other in the context of both disciplines about the details of various phenomena, the more urgent becomes the need to clarify the relationship between these different methodological approaches to the structures linking man and nature. How can we, in the course of an investigation into a specific subject, develop a common language which, on the one hand, preserves the particularity of the respective disciplinary perspective yet, on the other, is able to convey relevant findings about the common research topic in a comprehensible manner?

Faced with necessity of creating a communicative foundation for our common research project, we turned to the paradigm of the interpretation of tracks as expounded by, among others, Carlo Ginzburg (1979), Gerhard Hard (1995), Umberto Eco and Thomas Sebeok (1983), which has as yet

proved to be a suitable methodological framework.<sup>1</sup> As in the semiotic tradition, we consider a track to be a form of sign: it points the observer directly towards the object that created it. A fire produces smoke, a horse leaves characteristic hoof marks, and a burglar may leave finger prints. Signs such as smoke or a finger print are indices (Peirce 1983: 65-6). They are not a product of the imagination; they exist in precisely the same way as the object they point to exists. There is no smoke without fire, and, similarly, no hoof print without a horse. However, something only becomes an index when it is interpreted as such. If the observer does not recognise the hoof print as such, or considers it to be a mere unevenness in the clay, he will not conclude that a horse has passed that way. Such interpretative processes are naturally subject to error: the mark in the clay could have been left by a cow, and, seen from the distance, a whirlwind looks to the uninformed observer very much like a column of smoke. We therefore need to submit every index, and the possible causal circumstances to which it could be pointing, to critical examination, and to ask whether a general rule can be found for the circumstances in which the indicated event always appears. Taking this final question as our point of departure, we have been seeking indices for concrete, existing relations between man and nature, and investigating whether the relations that we assume exist have genuine substance, or are merely products of our imagination.

Our research project begins with the observation that localities in predominantly rural areas have ruderal plant communities with a higher proportion of native species and so-called old immigrants (archaeophytes, immigrated before 1500) than localities situated close to highly populated areas. The latter have a higher proportion of neophytes (so-called aliens, immigrated after 1500) which means that neophytes are particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Here, we are drawing in particular on Gerhard Hard's concept of the reader of tracks; however, our observations owe more to semiotic pragmatism than to French semiology.

widespread in urban areas (McKinney 2002; Roy et al. 1999). By 'ruderal' plant communities we mean plants that occur primarily in inhabited areas, in locations which are frequently subject to human influence and intervention. Ecological research relates the progressive disappearance of native and archaeophyte ruderal species to the destruction of the locations in which they occur, and the disruption of their dispersal paths, i.e. vectors of seed spread like migrating flocks of sheep (Fischer et al. 1996). In other words, the phenomenon is explained as a consequence of environmental changes resulting from human intervention.

These two developments can be regarded as parallel, but unrelated, phenomena. Alternatively, they may prompt us to seek a different, more constructive explanation.<sup>2</sup> Given the interrelation of human action and nature, such an explanation should, in our view, take greater account of human intervention. Could the transformation of social structures be the cause of these ecological phenomena? It is true that, since the 1950s, changes have become apparent in the social structures of rural inhabited areas to which terms such as 'deruralisation' (*Entagrarisierung*) and 'urbanisation' (*Verstädterung*) are generally applied (Henkel 1999: 90-124). If the propagation of archaeophytes and neophytes is affected by circumstances induced by society, then this could serve as an explanation of the aforementioned phenomena. By formulating this hypothesis, then, which assumes a connection between changes in ruderal species and the transformation of rural lifestyles, we have turned two phenomena which were initially regarded as unrelated into a track. We will now illustrate, by drawing on two examples from our fieldwork, how this hypothesis enables us to interpret these signs as indices for a causal object.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles S. Peirce (1960: 106) describes this procedure as an abductive conclusion: 'Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis. Deduction proves that something *must* be; Induction shows that something *actually is* operative; Abduction merely suggests that something *may be*. Its only justification is that from its suggestion deduction can draw a prediction which can be tested by induction, and

Our fieldwork was carried out in Wetterau, an old area of cultivated land which is situated to the north of Frankfurt am Main and stretches through the Taunus hills to the west to the foothills of the Vogelsberg to the east. As a region which is traditionally agricultural in character, this area has been subject to various changes since the 1950s. Particularly worthy of note are the structural changes in agriculture, but also, of course, the expansion of Frankfurt as a centre for the services sector, the arrival of manufacturing industries at various locations in the region with good transport connections, and finally, the expansion of the suburbs, which are important as administrative and trade centres (Friedberg, Bad Nauheim, Butzbach, etc.).

In the course of our investigation we have drawn on data from a study carried out from 1974 to 1981 by Dr. Wolfgang Ludwig of species of ruderal plant communities in this region. If this study is compared with the results of the survey of ruderal flora that we carried out in the course of our project in 2002 and 2003, a development becomes apparent in the various localities which is described in the relevant secondary literature as a trend for 'classic' ruderal plant communities in villages (Dechent 1988; Otte and Ludwig 1990; Lienenbecker and Raabe 1993): many of the ruderal native species and archaeophytes which were previously typical for villages, such as, for example wild spinach (*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*), lion's tail (*Leonurus cardiaca*), henbane (*Hyoscamus niger*), have decreased drastically in frequency. An exception, however, is for example the Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), which, in contradiction to the trend has not declined, but has even grown a little more common. As this phenomenon cannot be explained simply by means of ecological or regional factors, the only possibility for an exclusively biological approach is to except the Scotch thistle from the general trend as an 'anomaly'.

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that, if we are ever to learn anything or to understand phenomena at all, it must be by abduction that this is to be brought about.'

Within the context of our hypothesis, however, this phenomenon becomes a track which points towards a particular pattern of human action as causal object. And indeed, in the course of our study of ruderal flora we on several occasions found the Scotch thistle – both as a young plant and as a flowering specimen – in flower beds which had otherwise been completely freed of ‘weeds’. This finding invites the assumption that this weed had occasionally been consciously spared by the gardener, presumably because he or she attributed a particular aesthetic value to its impressively large and attractive flowers. This, then, means nothing less than that cultural factors have a direct influence on the composition and development of species communities.<sup>3</sup> This is hardly surprising when one considers that humans have, over centuries of utilisation, selected and cultivated certain species communities, even if this process has generally been oriented rather less towards aesthetic criteria than seems to have been the case with the Scotch thistle.

Our second example, therefore, also refers to a track which points to the unintended consequences of a certain pattern of action. The Australian goosefoot (*Chenopodium pumilio*), generally classified as a neophyte, occurred in the centre of Frankfurt am Main in the 1970s and early 1980s (Ludwig 1972; Ludwig, unpubl. data), however, as can be seen from our historical data, there was no attested occurrence in the Wetterau area. During our first study we were able to locate the *Chenopodium pumilio* within the area of investigation: it was found at the final stop of a bus route which ran from this location to the Nord-Westzentrum underground station in Frankfurt. Within the context of our interdisciplinary hypothesis, this observation serves as an index for a pattern of action which could of caused the spread of *Chenopodium pumilio*. It is highly possible that someone could have stepped in something unpleasant in Frankfurt while in the immediate vicinity of a seed-bearing plant, been unable to remove it from his shoe in the bus,

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<sup>3</sup> This insight is not, of course, a new one. See, for example, Harris 1996.

but, upon arrival at the final stop, have scraped off the offending substance on the edge of the pavement at the bus stop. Whether or not the dispersal took place in precisely this manner, it can safely be concluded that commuters can function as a vector of seed dispersal. Therefore it is more probable that *Chenopodium pumilio* would spread to areas with many residents who work in Frankfurt, than to localities with fewer commuters. This also means that the occurrence of this plant species in a certain locality is not 'coincidental', i.e., lacking an appropriate biological explanation but rather an index for the changes that 'urbanisation' as a social process can cause on the level of plant communities.

The two indices sketched here could point towards concrete links within the network between man and nature. As it is self-evident that nature is also subject to changes effected by human actions, these changes should also be taken into consideration by research. When reconstructing relations of cause and effect within nature, we should also be sure to include the formative actions of human beings in the equation. Admittedly, the resulting conclusions will frequently be hypothetical in character: we are unable to state with certainty whether the relations we assume above have a basis in fact; that is to say, whether we have discovered rules that explain the phenomena that we have taken as indices, or whether these phenomena are the result of mere coincidence. However, the primary concern within interdisciplinary environmental research should, in our opinion, be the development of a framework which departs from traditional disciplinary thought patterns and does not posit a strict separation between the physical and the mental spheres.

## **Conclusions**

The habitual distinction between nature and intellect as two fundamentally different spheres of reality can be avoided in the field of environmental research. By adopting the methodology of track

interpretation, the research process is no longer bound from the outset to a mode of interpreting data on the basis of an assumed division between the human and non-human spheres. This methodology enables us instead to form a variety of natural philosophical or metaphysical hypotheses on the connections and relations between nature and man. Thus the methodology of track interpretation virtually necessitates an approximation between the two disciplinary traditions described so aptly by Snow. The scientifically-oriented environmental researcher is obliged to take the human being seriously as an agency that influences the environment, and to include him in his analysis of the causal chain. The environmental researcher who is oriented toward the humanities, by contrast, must test his interpretation against the object under scrutiny and ascertain whether the relation between two occurrences is a mechanical and causal or a functional one, or whether it is merely coincidental.

It is obvious, therefore, that our conception of the paradigm of track interpretation enables us to examine individual indices which point towards concrete instances of interaction between nature and man, and to extrapolate from them a generalised rule. This rule then allows us to make predictions about the influence of various aspects of human lifestyles on ruderal flora. Only when the effects of these patterns of action on these ecosystems have been investigated more widely will it be possible to formulate an explanation that has application beyond the isolated occurrence. By collecting data according to the methodological standards of our respective disciplines, we avoid reaching pat conclusions in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is to say, while we are still in the process of collecting data, we cannot know whether they will support or refute our hypothesis. Whether the indices are confirmed, and the transformation in lifestyles has some explanatory value for the observed phenomena, or whether they can be explained by recourse to mere physical factors, is something that will only become apparent at the evaluation stage.

Finally, it should be noted that Sokal also based his experiment on a hypothesis that evidently enabled him to 'read' his various experiences with the discourse of humanities as 'tracks'. In the course of his experiment, he tests the reliability of this hypothesis. However, as Ian Hacking (1983) has demonstrated, every experiment is simultaneously an intervention, for which the experimenter carries the responsibility. If our experiment with informed interdisciplinary research will show that the same methodological principles are operative in both disciplinary camps, we can perhaps intervene to bring the 'science wars' to a close and devote ourselves to more important issues.

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### **Feminist Research: Disclosure of Route**

This paper was written as the first chapter area for my PhD and was initially delivered as a paper at the PSA Women and Politics group at St Antony's, Oxford. I set out within the paper the kinds of diverse reading and insights gained in terms of methodology and epistemology and how these were useful in starting an interdisciplinary study.

My research cuts across the subject areas of feminism, politics and history, which meant that any search for a methodological route to research would mean consideration of the historiography of political thought, feminism, epistemology and methodology. Since my research is concerned with a female historical figure and her political philosophy it seemed vital to scrutinise prevalent methodological positions connected with both researching between history and ideas while also considering supplements, challenges and reformulation to these. My PhD explores the theory of Mary Wollstonecraft by looking at the multiple influences in her works and considering contemporary critiques of Wollstonecraft within this revival. I have chapter areas on the influence of the radical circle of Dissenting friends of Wollstonecraft, of French thought from Condorcet and Rousseau and William Godwin as they appeared to develop on the works of Wollstonecraft rather than as we now pigeon-hole or perceive them.

The search for methodological tools to actualise research therefore began with consideration of the works of Pocock and Skinner in order to consider some insights and problems of researching between history and

ideas. I then considered feminist insights from Harding, Miller and Lather, before examining the work of Sapiro and Squires.

Due to a dissatisfaction with approaches to researching between history and ideas, J.G.A Pocock and Quentin Skinner criticised the shortcomings of traditional methodological views and sought to expound linguistic contextualist approaches to this discipline (See Pocock, 1972, 6 and Tully, 1988, 26). Pocock had argued that textual analysis had sometimes led to a perceived coherence of an author which the author had not actually achieved. The views of these scholars are sometimes referred to as the 'Cambridge school'.

Pocock suggested that by studying traditions of discourse employed by authors which includes inherited words, concepts, paradigms and the differences in these over time, the historian can discover how far the author worked within the confines of the prevalent paradigm and how far this was challenged by the author (Pocock, 1985, 7-9). For Pocock, the historian's task is to,

...read and recognize the diverse idioms of political discourse as they were available in the culture at the time he is studying: to identify them as they appear in the linguistic texture of any one text, and to know what they would ordinarily have enabled that texts author to propound or 'say' (Pocock, 1985, 9)

The extent to which the author's employment of them was out of the ordinary comes later. Pocock acknowledges his debt to the ideas of Thomas Kuhn who had considered the history of science as the history of discourse and language (Pocock, 1972, 13). Pocock argues that one must, therefore, both read extensively in the literature of the time and also sensitize oneself to the presence of diverse idioms. On this view language is the 'key to both speech act and context' (Pocock, 1985, 9 and 11). This approach is based on the premise that by '...viewing 'language' as a product of history and as possessing history of its own....the exploration of language might yield historical results' (Pocock, 1972, 12).

It must be acknowledged that a problem with this approach occurs when the researcher offers a misguided interpretation of the paradigm the author is employing.

Skinner found prevalent textualist and contextualist procedures in the late 1960s inadequate, since according to him the aim of discovering the meaning of an historical text lies in considering the author's intention in writing the text (see Tully, 1988, 7). For Skinner this can be attained by examining linguistic conventions of that time, thereby discovering the linguistic and ideological context.

From this, we can, according to Skinner, uncover the relationship between political thought and political action (Skinner, 1976 in Tully, 1988, p.23). In order to gain a purchase on these conventions Skinner suggests reading a variety of literature of both major and minor authors of the same period, with similar assumptions, vocabulary and principles. In this way, he argues, a measure can be gained of the author's stance in relation to prevailing conventions by the author's acceptance of, questioning of and debate of these.

Studying linguistics and the illocutionary force of words of the text under examination as well as its contemporary texts, Skinner argues, facilitates a conclusion as to the author's intentions and how far that author was joking, ironic or serious when writing the text rather than simply a study of the literal text (ibid, 69). A problem with this approach is that discovering an author's intention is very difficult, if indeed possible at all. King suggests that Skinner is under the spell of J. L. Austin, since the difficulties found in Skinner's approach can be traced back to Austin (Skinner acknowledges his intellectual debt to Austin in *The History of Ideas*, King, 1985, 23). Further, King highlights the problem of recovering intentions, since they are not always coherent and added to this it would be impossible to grasp an alien convention. Preston King suggests, 'History is never subject to total reconstruction,

since our evidence is always partial and our formulae about the evidence again is selective' (King, 1985, 21). This necessarily requires that we use our judgement and inference as well as the available evidence in order to facilitate research of this nature. In turn, our work will be coloured by our own experience, gender and culture and therefore will be value-laden rather than value-free. This idea of research being informed by the researcher's subjectivity is given importance within the works of Millen and Sapiro later in the paper.

Examining the works of Skinner and Pocock has provided me with some helpful insights into researching between history and ideas and also provided an understanding of the dangers and pitfalls of this kind of research. One example of such danger is exemplified by Gubar (1994), who cites Frances Ferguson as suggesting that Wollstonecraft would have benefited from a microwave or word-processor. Sapiro (1998) also notes that terms such as passion, reason and education are problematic for those viewing them from a contemporary perspective (see pg 122). Using Eighteenth Century words and phrases with a Twenty-first Century definition means that differences and changes of meaning of words will not be noted and therefore meaning will be at best distorted and at worst lost.

While Pocock emphasises the study of paradigms and language as well as context to provide a fuller measure of the thinker in relation to their contemporaries, certain problems remain as far as my subject of research is concerned. Wollstonecraft utilized Enlightenment rhetoric in order to bring about changes to the perception of women with regard to their capacity to reason, which allowed her to argue for equal education and similar moral rules for women as those enjoyed by men. Wollstonecraft had used prevalent male language in order to challenge prevalent male ideas and perceptions of females. I would argue that

language in the Eighteenth Century was and even now remains essentially male as were and are paradigms, since the producers of knowledge were seen to be and are still to some extent are seen to be male. Even given the fact that Wollstonecraft is using the language used by her contemporary male writers, problems with the Cambridge school remain.

Skinner 's suggestion of uncovering authorial intention is as King suggests impossible. The idea of reading major and minor texts with similar assumptions and arguments to Wollstonecraft would also be problematic, given the nature of her writing and how it differed from male political literature of the Eighteenth Century.

Wollstonecraft has been compared with her male contemporaries, Paine, Rousseau and even Burke. However, she also differed from them in quite radical ways. While Wollstonecraft belonged to a circle of radical friends, they were not calling for Enlightenment ideas about rights and citizenship to be extended to women. I think that this will help to indicate how far Wollstonecraft worked within the circle of English radicals as well as illustrating that she was prepared to go to the further, more radical length of including women to this equation. It will therefore be difficult if not impossible to take all of Skinner's and Pocock's methodological recommendations on board given the limitation of similar texts, both major and minor at the time Wollstonecraft was writing. While I hope to look at the influence of Condorcet's work on Wollstonecraft in terms of the aspect of shared assumptions and similar views, this is also problematic since it leaves the possibility of meaning becoming lost in translation from French to English, though I suggest in Chapter 3 that this area warrants serious attention due to the similarities between the texts. Skinner's idea of measuring to some extent authorial acceptance, questioning, or debate of prevailing conventions does nonetheless remain important since this comparison can be used to illustrate Wollstonecraft's radical departure in political theory.

I moved on to consider the works of Millen, Harding, McRobbie and Lather in order to explore their views on doing feminist research. Knowledge is described by Millen as 'partial, profane and fragmented' (Millen, 1997, 13). The search for truth and generalisation into laws from such truths has declined, so that now it can be argued that all theory is revisable, that observation is fallible and open to interpretation and error (For this argument see Lather, 1988, 570). On this view the task of science is to provide multiple theories and observations which can be measured and may include errors, but which can be revised and cross-checked to provide accounts of reality. Millen suggests a '...compromise between a completely subjective, unique account of experience and a partly reproducible, objective and contextualised understanding, which importantly includes critiquing the researcher's subjectivity' (Millen, 1997, 15).

In conclusion Millen acknowledges that an attempt at objectivity is probably more useful than the sense that we have achieved it. This can be achieved by remaining aware of the assumptions we make as researchers, while also criticising theories in order to bring about reformulation of our work and questioning the work of others. Lather suggests that in order for research to continue, self and social understanding could lead to a self-reflexive paradigm challenging established views on what knowledge is (Lather, 1988, 576). Harding suggests that, '...the class, race, culture and gender assumptions, beliefs and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint' (Harding, 1987, 9)

This would allow an explicit explanation of the researcher's position by which the reader may come to her own conclusion as to how representative, valid and justified as well as how value-laden the approach has been and how far the study has been affected by this. Harding (1987) argues that this approach avoids the objectivist stance which in her view strives to maintain the anonymity, authority and



invisibility of the researcher. Instead, we could be opening up the views of the researcher and object of research for public scrutiny (see Harding, 1987, 9). King has explained that, '...evidence for an event is not the event itself. And so there must always abide a discrepancy between the past that we assume, and the evidence - as presently available- which we display in support of it' (King, 1985, 49). Harding's view, therefore, that the position of the researcher should be made explicit so that the reader considers the value - judgements, can be viewed as an important consideration.

Some researchers have already begun to make their research position explicit, for example Virginia Sapiro declares herself as,

...a political scientist; [ whose]...approach to theory is unmistakably grounded in the practices and canon of that field. [She is ]...also a member of the interdisciplinary field of women's studies, therefore [her]..approach has been shaped by what [she]...has learned...' (Sapiro, 1992, ix).

The idea of prescribing a feminist methodology is unrealistic since this infers one right way, one set of procedures or rules which is the basis for all feminist research. Furthermore, the idea that all feminists will adhere to and accept one methodological position is highly suspect given that feminists have differing ideas about how to attain equality and overturn patriarchal relations as well as questioning concepts such as equality, autonomy and citizenship. McRobbie argues for 'articulation between different forms of feminist practice rather than the intrinsic merits of one over the other' in order to forge a feminist culture' (See McRobbie 1982, 57). She suggests a move away from the way in which many academic conventions of researching such as archive work, writing and constructing arguments, 'go undiscussed or else are mystified as tricks of the trade' (McRobbie, 1982, 49). As a PhD student this mystification is worrying, it is not until confidence is gained by sharing one's work with friends, colleagues and supervisors for feedback that

students are sure their work is on the right track and this is daunting in itself. My own experience within the University of Teesside and as a member of the PSA Women and Politics group has been a very favourable one. Other academics have provided feedback in a very supportive and understanding way since most of them have experienced exactly the same feelings even if the discipline area was different. Giving papers is also very helpful since it requires articulation of your ideas and the feedback can help to explore the assumptions made, arguments and reading which might not have been considered.

Questions of epistemology remain central to my research since Mary Wollstonecraft is an example of a woman producing a works, which challenged the traditional canon of political philosophy of Eighteenth Century England. She '...applied the ideas of the mid - 18th century Enlightenment to the female sex', while also acknowledging influences from other writers (see Ezard, 1993, 3 and for Wollstonecraft's acknowledgement of Locke's influence on education see *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Pickering Masters 1989 edition, 25). This radical departure in political philosophy was met with hostility as women were told by male authorities that they would be corrupted by reading this work. The Reverend Richard Polwhele had considered Wollstonecraft's death in childbirth as richly deserved and he urged others not to read her corrupting works (*Feminism in Eighteenth Century England*, Rogers 1998, 218). This was further illustrated when *A Vindication* was published in reactionary Spain where it was made to resemble an educational treatise which had been written by a man (Kitts, 1994, 353). Even into first wave feminism Wollstonecraft was often considered an unsafe example and it remained the case that men were the knowers and producers of knowledge '...who would go forth to reason and rule in the political realm' (Coote and Pattulo, 1990, 31). This legacy of male knowledge continues within politics and may also be a reason why women within this field tend not to write about the research process and their place within it.

Modules, reading lists and teaching in higher education tends to mirror the canon of 'male knowers' within the politics area so that for modules like Modern Political Thought the works which are included tend to begin with Machiavelli and end with Marx. If one looks at Ancient and Modern conceptions of Justice here the thinkers analysed include Plato and Aristotle through to Rawls and Nozick. Akkerman and Stuurman (1988) have highlighted this situation by recognising that within contemporary texts on political thinkers they still often remain devoid of women's work. Politics undergraduates may therefore be forgiven for believing that throughout history only men have contemplated questions of what the good way is and considered ethics, education and citizenship, unless these students have opted to choose a feminist theory or women's studies module. Such examples go some way to explaining the centrality of epistemological issues for feminists.

It still seems incredible that students are in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century still being offered a 'past masters' view of who knowers are and were. Feminist research has been uncovering gender inequality, and upturning this tradition of male knowledge for some time as more and more women have declared themselves knowers. Examples within political theory are Jean Bethke Elshtain (1981), Zillah Eisenstein (1981), Susan Moller- Okin (1979) and Carole Pateman (1988). However this does not seem to have altered the mainstream political theory syllabus and does not reflect what Spender would assert as a women's movement which has always existed. Shanley and Pateman (1991) explain that Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir still do not usually make an appearance in the canon of texts that make up the standard curriculum of 'political theory' and that William Godwin and Jean-Paul Sartre are much more likely to be read. Additionally not enough feminist research has been de-mystified within the discipline of politics.

Millen, Lather and Harding have provided an invaluable insight into opening up research to the reader of the research. Explicit explanation of

the researcher allows for question, criticism, and acceptance of the researcher's position and the effects of this upon the research itself. The suggestion of an attempt at objectivity together with the researcher's subjectivity and contextual understanding from feminist methodologies also avoids the post-modern claim of uniqueness of research which lacks reproducibility.

Feminist insights into methodology have proved extremely useful in approaching my research though they are of an interdisciplinary nature rather than specific to Politics as a discipline. I now want to consider the specific insights from Sapiro and Squires on researching within political theory. Virginia Sapiro's (1992) eloquent description of her research on Wollstonecraft displays the shift in theories of what research is and does. She explains that an artistic technique called *tratteggio* describes her research on Wollstonecraft. This method is used in conserving wall paintings where portions have been destroyed, and is a delicate and complex process of making tiny brush marks to give the impression that the gaps are filled in when looking at the wall from a distance. This, she argues contrasts with the older view that the gaps ought to be filled in to make the original and retouched portions indistinguishable as though a modern interpretation could be as accurate as an original (see Sapiro, 1992). Sapiro maintains that the differentiation should be maintained for closer inspection which is similar to the ideas of Millen, and illustrates the shift in social scientific research in recent years from a prescriptive and orthodox methodology to ways in which feminists can operate within the social sciences. This suggestion is not an attempt to reconstruct theory to uncover authorial intention but to fill in what we do know and also to make clear that this is an interpretation and furthermore provide some indication of who is undertaking the interpretation.

In *Gender in Political Theory*, Squires suggests that politics have separated into the fields of political science and political theory which remain exclusionary regarding issues of gender. She notes the central

importance of Pateman's claims about the current situation of political theorists who '...are able to admit the relevance or significance of feminist questions and criticisms only with great difficulty' (Squires, 2000).

Squires argues that the development of feminist theory has been largely inter-disciplinary and suggests that there remains an uneasiness between feminist theory and political studies and calls for researchers to reclaim a distinctive disciplinary identity for feminist political studies (Squires, 2000, 14-15). Squires' text has been one of the most helpful and insightful works that I have read on the issues of feminism and epistemology within politics, which uncovers some of the problems and complexities of feminism within the area of politics. This text will be very useful for undergraduates in beginning their research project, for new researchers about to embark on their research project and for established staff members within this area. I do, however still feel that this type of text would be enhanced by a publication of specific political feminist theory and science which would link theory with the practical problems of doing research. Such publications providing different explicit methodological routes alongside the differing research projects from within both sections of politics would be invaluable. This in turn would question the patriarchal nature of politics as a discipline and attempt to 'recast' it in a way that Pateman has suggested as vital.

The insights from both Sapiro and even more recently from Squires have been extremely helpful in marking out some of the parameters of the problems of doing feminist theoretical research within politics. Further, they have, by publishing in this area, facilitated further questioning and scrutiny of how research is actually facilitated within politics, which had often gone unquestioned or mystified.

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Martyn Denscombe (2003) *The Good Research Guide For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*. Second edition. Buckingham: Open University Press. 310 pp. ISBN: 0 3352 1303 0

Martyn Denscombe’s *The Good Research Guide* is perfect to read, but less than perfect to use when actually commencing on a small-scale research project. The reviewer mentions three deficits:

- a discussion of causality is absent from the book;
- the book does not help researchers to design and execute their project, which entails a series of choices; in other words, the book is not sufficiently user-oriented;
- the book contains no examples of research projects.

The book’s author is professor of social research at the Faculty of Business and Law of De Montfort University (formerly Leicester Polytechnic).

The chapters of the book are given in table 1.

| Part I Strategies for social research   | Part II Methods of social research                                  | Part III Analysis   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Surveys<br>2 Case studies<br>3 Internet research<br>4 Experiments<br>5 Action research<br>6 Ethnology<br>7 Phenomenology<br>8 Grounded theory | 9 Questionnaires<br>10 Interviews<br>11 Observation<br>12 Documents | 13 Quantitative data<br>14 Qualitative data<br>15 Writing up the research |

Table 1. Contents of *The Good Research Guide* by M. Denscombe



There are countless works on philosophy of science, research methods and techniques, and there are many histories of disciplines that describe (and explain) the development of scientific thought. Those works do not, however, get you started with a minor research project. If you are a student, practitioner or hold a junior academic position, you may find that methodology is communicated through philosophical erudition or with technical ingenuity—impressive but not very helpful. If you have little time and money and few hands available, and not much of research experience, then you want clear indications in order to move quickly through the landscape of social science. After all, research is not the purpose; it is a means to a goal. Of course, you also want a text easy to read.

Doing research means first to choose from the available spectrum of perspectives, methods and techniques and next to execute what is most applicable. The researcher's main questions are 'What do I want?' and 'How do I get it?'. I cannot imagine that a student of business administration or a staff member of a health institution starts his/her research project with a question like 'What is phenomenology?'. Denscombe's book explicitly promises to be a guide on how to conduct small-scale research projects. I therefore expect a 'do-it-yourself' book and I assume it will not be a guide to reflection only. My criteria will be accessibility, guidance and equipment.

The book has an extraordinarily clear structure. It contains attractive boxes, checklists and helpful internal references. The text is easy to understand and, most importantly, it covers all (but one) of the truly relevant issues. The quality of the coverage can be ascertained by comparing the book's content (see table 1) to that of a number of methodology hand-books: there exists a canon. That Denscombe mentions but does not adequately explain symbolic interactionism and that he does not go into the

mathematical details of statistics, is to be expected. As the author states repeatedly, software takes over computing standard deviation and correlation. Considering the aim and size of the book, the choice to leave such things out is entirely justified.

What is more difficult to accept, is that the book contains no substantial discussion of causality. You can take causality to be many things and I expect a methodology book to discuss a few of them. With Denscombe, the concept is not an issue and the term 'causality' is not included in the index either (the second edition's index!). Some explanation is given about for instance outliers, standard deviation and correlation, but aids touching upon causality are hardly dealt with. 'Researchers wishing to investigate connections in terms of cause and effect need to use regression analysis', is all it says (on p. 263). It turns out to be not very useful, but 'regression analysis' is mentioned in the index.

The book is less than perfect to use when actually commencing on a small-scale research project, this is a significant objection. The author does not guide consultants, practitioners or other project researchers through the process of designing and executing the most suitable way of doing research. The checklists at the end of each chapter do not suffice to help people along the series of choices they will have to make. The structure of the book, although very clear, proves to be methodology-oriented instead of user-oriented. If 'lay' questions had been at the core of the book, it might have been more of a guide. Examples are 'What kinds of information can I use for which purposes?', 'Which strategy and method(s) suit both my information need and the character of my public?' and 'How do I justify the results of my research?'. To mention just one situation for which the book offers little help, imagine that I am a policy evaluator torn between the political wishes of my principal and my own integrity as a researcher. How to tackle such a dilemma? And how do I present a critical evaluation in such a way that the

policy-maker learns from his/her failure in stead of to attack my evaluation research? Evaluation research is not even mentioned in the book.

Another objection concerning the book's user-friendliness, is that there are no examples of small-scale research projects. Without having to add too many pages, the author could have discussed a few situations to illustrate the consistency of research strategy and method or to demonstrate how you plan a research project in terms of time and money.

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Nick Couldry. *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*. (2003) London and New York: Routledge. 173 pp. ISBN 0 4152 7015 4.

Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (eds.). *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*. (2004) London and New York: Routledge. 303 pp. ISBN 0 4152 9174 7.

In his book *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*, Nick Couldry has set himself the task of moving current debates about the media's role in society into another direction, by arguing for a new concept, which he defines as media rituals. In the current debates, Couldry identifies two general positions: a positive and a negative stance toward the effects of media on society. Influential works, such as Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: Whatever Happened to the American Dream* (1961) and Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983) represent the latter approach. Both authors suggest the power of the media has negative effects on society. In their view, media manipulate reality by producing events and images that do not correspond with 'real' events anymore: media reduce our social reality to a dream world that is experienced as more realistic than the 'real' world. There are also more positive approaches to this debate represented in the works of media scholars academics such as Paddy Scannell's *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (1996) and Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz' *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992). These academics attribute positive values to the ways media, and television in particular, influence our daily life practices and our sense of private and public spaces. This approach rejects pessimist attitudes towards popular culture, like Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the false conscious, and draws on active audience research. In Couldry's view,

both schools ignore questions about the media's overall impact on society by either focusing exclusively on power relations or on daily life practices. Additionally, most contemporary studies are based on existing conceptual tools and methodologies (e.g. textual analysis), which are applied to make even finer descriptions of media practices, without amounting to new conceptual frameworks to theorize media practices. According to Couldry, only new concepts offer the possibility to move beyond these levels of analysis by addressing the question of how 'central media' such as television, radio and the press, are entangled with the contemporary social order.

Couldry introduces the concept of media rituals to capture "our sense of 'being with the media' in their totality" (Couldry 2003, 2). Media rituals are ritual acts that are constructed around media-related categories and boundaries—for instance, the distance that media create between a celebrity and an 'ordinary' person. Couldry argues that these rituals legitimate, or even produce the false impression that media are our only access point to our 'social center'. The term social center refers here to the widely accepted, but in Couldry's view unjust, assumption that societies cohere by way of central and dominant values and norms. From his critical stance towards the social center, Couldry introduces the concept of media rituals as a critical analytical tool to demystify those situations "where media themselves 'stand in', or appear to 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organizational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, connected as members of a society" (4).

Couldry's concept of media rituals suggests it is a truly interdisciplinary term. He draws for instance on Emile Durkheim, but also on authors whose work cannot directly be labeled as disciplinary, such as Foucault. Couldry first discusses the term ritual, he uses the Durkheim's definition of ritual, namely an act that reaffirms social coherence, as a point of departure in formulating his own description. Couldry then adheres to a post-Durkheimian approach

by adopting the term to the works of Maurice Bloch and Pierre Bourdieu, who define rituals as acts that mask social inequality. He avoids, however, the risk of narrowing his definition of ritual down to a solemn functionalist approach, by drawing on Catherine Bell's concept of ritualisation that links ritual actions to the wider social space in which they are embedded (Bell 1992, 1997). This allows Couldry to expand the term ritual to new fields of inquiry, such as the analysis of the connection between contemporary media institutions and modern forms of government. In doing so, Couldry is able to connect Durkheim's concept of ritual to the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Michèl Foucault. This leads Couldry to define the term 'ritual' in such a way that it "encourages us to look at the links between ritual actions and wider social space, and in particular at the practices and beliefs, found right across social life, that make specific ritual action possible" (12). In this way, Couldry moves away from cultural studies in which the media text is the central object of analysis. Without reducing this field of research to the margins of media studies, Couldry avoids questions on representation without ignoring questions of power relations. Hence, Couldry offers us a macro-model to investigate the role and functioning of media society at large, and poses questions of representation which investigate how media reproduce dominant ideologies in relation to social exclusion processes, that take place across divisions of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality,

The first three chapters of Couldry's book are devoted to a theoretical delineation of the concept of media rituals. In the next chapters, Couldry applies media rituals to case studies in order to explore the usefulness of the term. In chapter 4, the pervasive naturalness of the media's presence in our daily lives is explored by way of an analysis of several media events. The fifth chapter addresses questions about the close relationships that exist between media practices and spatial configurations. Couldry demonstrates how media turn spaces into sacred sites, by analyzing how fans attribute an almost holy value to sites that have prominently featured in the media. In

chapter 6, Couldry examines how media claim to represent reality by means of an analysis of the reality-television genre. The next chapter shows how media rituals generate new public sites of individual self-disclosure, which in their turn legitimize the media's omnipresence in society. In the final chapter, Couldry explores the question whether there is a world possible beyond media rituals; a world in which access and distribution of symbolic power is more equally divided. Couldry emphasizes, moreover, the need to demystify the media's central, though masked, position in contemporary society.

Despite Couldry's impressive efforts to provide an alternative model to theorize the media's role in society, a few critical remarks need to be made. In the last chapter of the book, *Making the Strange Familiar*, it becomes particularly evident that Couldry is pushing for a neo-Marxist agenda within media studies. There are many similarities between Couldry's concept of media rituals and Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the false conscious. By implicitly referring to the Frankfurter Schüle, his concept of media rituals comes across as another Marxist's attempt to show the ignorant media consumers how media constantly mask their presence through very sophisticated modes of indoctrination, namely through media rituals. Although, there is nothing wrong in pushing this agenda, the implicit ideological stance will certainly evoke criticism of media scholars that identify themselves with the culturalist, or cultural studies, approach. From a cultural studies' point of view, Couldry underscores the idea of human agency too much, by playing down the notion active audience readership. By reducing media consumers to passive audiences that are not aware or able to see through the real deceiving mechanism of mass media. Couldry is perhaps not completely original. This view is closely connected to the Frankfurter Schüle view, which portrays audiences as passive consumers who are 'drugged' by mass media and popular culture that prevent these same masses from resisting capitalist hegemony and exploitation. At the same time, Couldry's

attempt to propose a new agenda for media studies should certainly not be instantly discredited. By moving beyond debates that mainly focus on media content, Couldry addresses critical questions about the position and functioning of media at meta-social levels. This type of analysis is too often ignored within cultural studies, because the primary focus lies on the analysis of media texts and the specific contexts in which these are produced and consumed. But the question remains: are audiences really not able to acknowledge the media's mystified omnipresence in contemporary society, and do people really lack the ability or ambition to break through media rituals.

In his most recent book, titled *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, Couldry and co-author Anna McCarthy approach the media's omnipresence from a different angle by focusing on the relationships between media practices and technologies on the one hand, and space on the other. Couldry and McCarthy introduce the concept of *MediaSpace*, which is open to a much wider variety of approaches to study media than the theory in Couldry's previous book *Media Rituals*. The authors introduce the idea of *MediaSpace* to push for a new agenda in media studies and geography, namely to draw more attention to the specific interrelations that exist between media practices and technologies within spatial constellations (both actual and virtual space). Couldry and McCarthy define *MediaSpace* as "a dialectical concept, encompassing both the kinds of spaces created by the media, and the effects that existing spatial arrangements have on media forms as they materialize in everyday life" (1-2). The concept is a generic term that suggests connections between the works of different authors that contributed to the volume. The wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds for the authors and the different approaches to which each of them adheres resulted in a comprehensive volume that embraces cross- and interdisciplinary research. Some of the academic fields on which the authors



draw are: social geography, media studies, anthropology, urban studies, sociology and cultural studies.

While it is impossible to pay detailed attention to all individual contributions in the volume here, Couldry and McCarthy distinguish five levels at which MediaSpace can be studied. The first level comprises the study of media representations in local, national and global space (5). Whereas the first level does not investigate the spatial dimensions of media processes themselves, the second level focuses on the study of how images, texts and data flow across space (6). This mode of research also investigates how the mobility of media output reconfigures social space. Since this approach is rather site-specific, as Couldry and McCarthy argue, level 3 examines specific spaces of media production and media's consumption (6). This approach has, however the disadvantage of de-coupling media production from consumption. The fourth level moves, thus, beyond this divide, by studying the scale-effects that result from media's operation in space. This level of investigation takes a more nuanced stance towards the entanglements of the differential scale levels (local up to global) at which media operate (7). The final level of analysis goes even further by drawing attention to the various ways how media-caused entanglements of scale are experienced and comprehended in particular locales (8).

Together these five levels of analysis compromise a research agenda for the humanities and social sciences, media studies and geography in particular, that seeks to link the ways space affects media practices and technology and vice versa. To some extent, Couldry and McCarthy's concept of MediaSpace is a more specific interpretation of Edward Soja's (2000) *Thirdspace*, even though the authors do not refer to this concept. Soja has proposed this term to bridge the discrepancy in the study of space that exists between physical and material space (*Firstspace*), and the imaginary of space (*Secondspace*). A lot of research on space concentrates on either

Firstspace or Secondspace. Disciplines such as urban planning and urban studies traditionally focus on the built and natural environment, whereas literary sciences and art history concentrate on the representation and imagination of space. Soja's 'Thirdspace' is an attempt to think these binary spaces together as lived space. 'Lived space' incorporates both the physical spaces we inhabit in our daily lives, as well as our fantasies and images about space. The concept refers to the ways we experience spaces. In Soja's view, experiencing space is always blurring the boundaries between actual spaces and the ways we think, or imagine spaces. In his analysis of the relationships of media and space, Soja, nevertheless, makes the same mistake that he points out in other works. Soja theorizes the spatial dimensions of media from a Secondspace perspective by underlining the different ways in which media represent space. As such, he ignores the physical-material spatial dimensions that underlie media-generated processes of representation.

Couldry and McCarthy's 'MediaSpace', thus, fills this inconsistency in Soja's plea for a Thirdspace. MediaSpace is a concept that makes the connection between the actual (material) spatial constellations in which media operate and the virtual (symbolic) space that media create more explicit. MediaSpace bridges the gap between Firstspace and Secondspace. Couldry and McCarthy clearly advocate a reworking of a materialism-inspired agenda, because, as they state "[it] is more productive to think of media, as with all spatial processes, as complex co-ordinations of presences and absences" (8). Here we can see an implicit reference to Couldry's concept of media rituals, since this level of study is mainly concerned with the taken-for-granted, mystified or 'naturalized' entanglements of scale at which media operate. Nevertheless, due to the openness of the concept of MediaSpace, this (neo)Marxist agenda does not dominate as much as Couldry does in his book on Media Rituals. This is, however, also a weakness of Couldry and McCarthy's volume. The concept is too undefined and therefore open to

multiple interpretations that could lead to a certain vagueness, instead of the specific analytical use of MediaSpace. On the other hand, their book does set a clear agenda for future research in the field of media studies and geography by introducing a generic concept which resists a narrowing down of future research. Indeed, the richness of the contributions in this volume articulate a pluralist and open research agenda that allows for the study of the relationships between space and media from disciplines across all the social sciences and humanities. Considering the promising results of this volume, hopefully other scholars working will contribute to a further study of MediaSpace.

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Nick Couldry. *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*. (2003) London and New York: Routledge. 173 pp. ISBN 0 4152 7015 4.

Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (eds.). *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*. (2004) London and New York: Routledge. 303 pp. ISBN 0 4152 9174 7.

In his book *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*, Nick Couldry has set himself the task of moving current debates about the media's role in society into another direction, by arguing for a new concept, which he defines as media rituals. In the current debates, Couldry identifies two general positions: a positive and a negative stance toward the effects of media on society. Influential works, such as Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: Whatever Happened to the American Dream* (1961) and Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983) represent the latter approach. Both authors suggest the power of the media has negative effects on society. In their view, media manipulate reality by producing events and images that do not correspond with 'real' events anymore: media reduce our social reality to a dream world that is experienced as more realistic than the 'real' world. There are also more positive approaches to this debate represented in the works of media scholars academics such as Paddy Scannell's *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (1996) and Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz' *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992). These academics attribute positive values to the ways media, and television in particular, influence our daily life practices and our sense of private and public spaces. This approach rejects pessimist attitudes towards popular culture, like Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the false conscious, and draws on active audience research. In Couldry's view,

both schools ignore questions about the media's overall impact on society by either focusing exclusively on power relations or on daily life practices. Additionally, most contemporary studies are based on existing conceptual tools and methodologies (e.g. textual analysis), which are applied to make even finer descriptions of media practices, without amounting to new conceptual frameworks to theorize media practices. According to Couldry, only new concepts offer the possibility to move beyond these levels of analysis by addressing the question of how 'central media' such as television, radio and the press, are entangled with the contemporary social order.

Couldry introduces the concept of media rituals to capture "our sense of 'being with the media' in their totality" (Couldry 2003, 2). Media rituals are ritual acts that are constructed around media-related categories and boundaries—for instance, the distance that media create between a celebrity and an 'ordinary' person. Couldry argues that these rituals legitimate, or even produce the false impression that media are our only access point to our 'social center'. The term social center refers here to the widely accepted, but in Couldry's view unjust, assumption that societies cohere by way of central and dominant values and norms. From his critical stance towards the social center, Couldry introduces the concept of media rituals as a critical analytical tool to demystify those situations "where media themselves 'stand in', or appear to 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organizational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, connected as members of a society" (4).

Couldry's concept of media rituals suggests it is a truly interdisciplinary term. He draws for instance on Emile Durkheim, but also on authors whose work cannot directly be labeled as disciplinary, such as Foucault. Couldry first discusses the term ritual, he uses the Durkheim's definition of ritual, namely an act that reaffirms social coherence, as a point of departure in formulating his own description. Couldry then adheres to a post-Durkheimian approach

by adopting the term to the works of Maurice Bloch and Pierre Bourdieu, who define rituals as acts that mask social inequality. He avoids, however, the risk of narrowing his definition of ritual down to a solemn functionalist approach, by drawing on Catherine Bell's concept of ritualisation that links ritual actions to the wider social space in which they are embedded (Bell 1992, 1997). This allows Couldry to expand the term ritual to new fields of inquiry, such as the analysis of the connection between contemporary media institutions and modern forms of government. In doing so, Couldry is able to connect Durkheim's concept of ritual to the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Michèl Foucault. This leads Couldry to define the term 'ritual' in such a way that it "encourages us to look at the links between ritual actions and wider social space, and in particular at the practices and beliefs, found right across social life, that make specific ritual action possible" (12). In this way, Couldry moves away from cultural studies in which the media text is the central object of analysis. Without reducing this field of research to the margins of media studies, Couldry avoids questions on representation without ignoring questions of power relations. Hence, Couldry offers us a macro-model to investigate the role and functioning of media society at large, and poses questions of representation which investigate how media reproduce dominant ideologies in relation to social exclusion processes, that take place across divisions of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality,

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Despite Couldry's impressive efforts to provide an alternative model to theorize the media's role in society, a few critical remarks need to be made. In the last chapter of the book, *Making the Strange Familiar*, it becomes particularly evident that Couldry is pushing for a neo-Marxist agenda within media studies. There are many similarities between Couldry's concept of media rituals and Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the false conscious. By implicitly referring to the Frankfurter Schüle, his concept of media rituals comes across as another Marxist's attempt to show the ignorant media consumers how media constantly mask their presence through very sophisticated modes of indoctrination, namely through media rituals. Although, there is nothing wrong in pushing this agenda, the implicit ideological stance will certainly evoke criticism of media scholars that identify themselves with the culturalist, or cultural studies, approach. From a cultural studies' point of view, Couldry underscores the idea of human agency too much, by playing down the notion active audience readership. By reducing media consumers to passive audiences that are not aware or able to see through the real deceiving mechanism of mass media. Couldry is perhaps not completely original. This view is closely connected to the Frankfurter Schüle view, which portrays audiences as passive consumers who are 'drugged' by mass media and popular culture that prevent these same masses from resisting capitalist hegemony and exploitation. At the same time, Couldry's



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Brooker, Will. (2002) *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans*. New York: Continuum. 288 pp. ISBN: 0 8264 5287 6

*Using the Force* borrows heavily from theories commonly used in the study of popular media fan subculture, particularly from Henry Jenkins's seminal work on television fan subculture, *Textual Poachers*, which itself draws from Michel de Certeau's characterization of readers of popular texts as "poaching" the texts, or appropriating parts or the whole of them in ways that serve their local interests (1992). Brooker, himself a fan of the Star Wars films, wastes no time in dismissing the view that dedicated fans of the space epic are maladjusted and socially inept "nerds" unable to cope with the daily realities of mainstream life. Rather, following in the work of Jenkins, Brooker characterizes dedicated Star Wars fans as creating and maintaining an interpretive community of fans who appropriate elements of the Star Wars saga to explore alternate realities suitable to their emotional, social, and intellectual needs.

One important way that Brooker breaks from Jenkins, however, is in demonstrating the facet of cultural change over time within this particular fandom. As Star Wars is a twenty-five-year-old phenomenon as of this writing, and Brooker himself was a fan from the very beginning, he seizes upon the opportunity to demonstrate how the interpretation of George Lucas's characters and themes differ depending on the standpoint of when a fan has entered the Star Wars fan community. However, Brooker does not theorize on how the broader, relevant historical context might influence the interpretive practices of at least U.S. Star Wars fans (e.g. the need for clear protagonists like Luke and antagonists like Darth Vader in the post-Vietnam War era; conceptualizing relationships between different ethnicities, or alien species, in the post-Civil Rights era, etc.), preferring to focus more on the age of the fans and whether they began their involvement with

Episode IV: A New Hope from 1977, or the prequel Episode I: The Phantom Menace from 1999 as explanatory factors.

Brooker admits his near-lifelong affinity for the Star Wars films, yet his prior participation in the fan subculture, apart from interaction with his grade school classmates that revolved around the films, remains mysterious. He is largely interested in not alienating the Star Wars fan base. "If a study of fans by a fan cannot be read and enjoyed by those fans, something is wrong," Brooker supposes in his introduction (2002). Brooker felt that it was important for himself to come across as a fellow fan of Star Wars to his participants in order to gain their confidence that he would not characterize them as abnormal eccentrics in his research. This confidence was gained easily by Brooker who spoke with fans eager to talk about their Star Wars-related experiences. As a scholar of cultural studies, Brooker's interest in the subject is understandable on the fan level as well. However, Brooker does not address how his subjectivities towards Star Wars fans might influence his scholarly interpretations of their life-world apart from simply being more sympathetic with their thinking and experiences as fans. This is especially crucial in his examination of George Lucas and his company Lucasfilm as cultural producers who come into conflict with fans who use Star Wars stories in ways not intended by their original creators.

Using the Force could be called an ethnographic study in a nontraditional sense. Brooker "hangs-out" in Star Wars fandom on the Internet as a whole for approximately a year, particularly at major websites such as TheForce.net. However, his objectives are to cover different aspects of the fandom, ranging from largely female fan fiction authors who write "slash", or homosexual romance stories involving male Star Wars protagonists to largely male fan filmmakers who stay closer to George Lucas's cinematic vision in both plot and visual effects. Consequently, Brooker does not immerse himself within a social network per se as much as he keeps contact with various facets of Star Wars fandom, mostly on the Internet. His "real world" contact with Star Wars fans occurs in the London area,

though his interactions with the London fans do not take place over the course of his ethnographic study.

Brooker both perceives himself and acts as a fan in his correspondence with other fans, though he is careful to mention in a few places how his acknowledged role as a researcher may have affected his and his participants' interaction. This is especially so, he says, when he comes armed with a tape recorder or video camera during face-to-face conversations with fans. A more subtle and perhaps more important factor he does not acknowledge is his preference for a role as a dominating interviewer rather than as an inquisitive equal. His selected interview transcripts are full of leading questions that almost explicitly steer participants towards certain responses rather than allowing them to freely expound upon their ideas and experiences. Taken as a participant observation project, Brooker comes across more as a participant in a solitary sense of being a fan of the films, but his observation technique is what could be called a "honey bee" method of going from participant to participant to collect the nectar of fan anecdotes, attitudes and artifacts that usually fit within his interpretive preferences. Short interviewing is a useful method for a fan community as wide and diverse as Star Wars fandom, though its utility increases exponentially when compared to a series of more in-depth encounters with participants that were somewhat lacking.

Brooker is undoubtedly enthusiastic about both the Star Wars films and associated literature as well as the fan community devoted to it. His tone easily shines through to make his book more engaging for even those totally unfamiliar with popular media fans in general. For the average academic reader and for much of a general audience, *Using the Force* is very accessible both for its clear and concise verbiage and its constant engagement with this recognizable aspect of global popular culture. However, Brooker does use some Star Wars-related terms that can be unfamiliar to those who are not fans, a problem he acknowledges and minimizes by keeping such terminology strictly within his interview transcripts where they rightfully come up.



As Brooker's method of covering Star Wars fandom was more piecemeal than holistic, so his chapters are not as connected as they could be, nor are they placed in an order that conveys much of any overall intended pattern. Each chapter arises out of Brooker's correspondence with a different segment of the Star Wars fan community, be it a solicitation of email responses from online fans on why they are fans, a barroom chat with a female fan about her Star Wars fan fiction, or a talk with an 11-year-old boy in his bedroom about what he likes about Episode I: The Phantom Menace. The chapters are connected by the broader idea of fans making up an interpretive community that takes Star Wars in different directions for local purposes, but questions of why might the interpretations differ both amongst fans and across contexts were not explored as much. Consequently, much of the material was, though disjointed, certainly of interest depending on the context that was explored.

Brooker's analysis of his data was usually confined to the end of each chapter; no overall analytical conclusion appeared at the end of the book. Much of his separate analyses confirmed his main thesis that Star Wars fans appropriate rather than consume meanings from the films to produce artifacts and conversations that take the material in new directions that satisfy their own interests while remaining true to the spirit of Star Wars as George Lucas had envisioned it (though Brooker does not, perhaps justifiably, explore Lucas's intent in-depth). His analysis differed from chapter to chapter based upon what those specific interests were and what artifacts and conversations existed that addressed those interests rather than how these concrete things might inform and even challenge this thesis.

As an introduction to Star Wars fandom that adds to the annals of particularistic ethnographic reports that make up much of the literature of cultural studies, *Using the Force* finds a deserved place above much of the fray. It makes up for in breadth of coverage and understanding of the participants what it lacks in detailed ethnographic richness of description. Though I was glad to see another

examination of media fan culture from another academic, I was disappointed that Force did not contribute as much ethnographically to a fledgling part of cultural studies that I am professionally and personally aligned to. I would characterize this work as both a notable contribution to media fandom and an implicit plea to approach this burgeoning area with an intention to obtain an in-depth perspective of fans as cultural actors much in the vein of more traditional methods such as cultural anthropology's use of participant observation with a few community participants over extended periods of time in order to gain more of an emic understanding.

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Naples, Nancy. (2003) *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*. New York: Routledge. 272 pp. ISBN: 0 4159 4449 X

Nancy Naples' (University of Connecticut, Storrs) work not only explores, but also reshapes and extends the relationship between feminist theorizing and activism. Her most recent book, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (Routledge, 2003), illustrates the use of a range of feminist methodological approaches informed by a materialist feminist standpoint epistemology. Naples uses case studies from her own research over the last twenty years to illustrate the use-value of such a perspective, making an otherwise dense and theoretically nuanced set of ideas easier to access. The first section of the book provides an overview of both feminist critiques of social science research and efforts to render visible workings of power within the research process.

In Part II of the book, she develops her epistemology, entering into a contentious conversation over the meaning and efficacy of standpoint epistemology. While standpoint theory has been developed and advocated – in various formulations – as a way of privileging perspectives that are otherwise marginal, it has been critiqued with as much fervor. Selectively drawing on the work of feminist standpoint theorists Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, and Dorothy Smith throughout, Naples engages these criticisms in her development of what she calls a materialist feminist multidimensional approach to standpoint epistemology.

She takes up the postmodern perspective that dimensions of self upon which our standpoints might be seen to be founded are themselves unstable and, rather than rejecting standpoint, engages the critique as “dilemmas of the embodied standpoint”. For Naples, the fluidity of subject positions does

not preclude the possibility (and desirability) of theorizing the extent to which different knowledges – sometimes, though not necessarily oppositional – are located in different types of communities, broadly construed. This sort of standpoint approach does not reify categories, but rather has the power to undermine and transform them by highlighting their contingency and multi-dimensionality, here, within the context of ethnographic research. The book may not sell readers on standpoint epistemology, but it will certainly compel them to hone their critiques- or perhaps to adopt Naples' approach and call it something else.

Part III is a powerful iteration of the intimate relationship between the textual and the material, wherein Naples develops earlier insights to make a strong case for bringing a Foucauldian understanding of discourse to readings of the framing of public problems and to policy analysis. Such an approach helps us to theorize the mutually constitutive nature of race, class, gender, and sexuality and to understand ways in which they are at play even when they are not, ostensibly, what is at issue. She looks at both welfare policy and public debate over community control of schools to explain how this approach can help us avoid appropriation or cooptation of social movement rhetoric and illuminate relations of power.

Naples traces the movement for community control of public schools by black and Puerto Rican activists and white allies in the 1960s, through processes of depoliticization and appropriation, to its current status in claims of the religious right, among others. She analyzes newspaper articles and archival data as well as oral narratives to explore ways in which the contested framing of "community control" challenged, participated in, and reproduced "relations of ruling". The claiming of community control as a response to institutional racism, for example, had different implications from grounding the claim in a separatist arguments and from arguments about efficiency or liberal reform. Certain types of arguments, though with similar

goals in mind, lent themselves differentially to other contexts with very different, even explicitly conflicting, political agendas. Through this and other examples Naples illustrates the nature and importance of discourse in shaping the meanings and deployment of a given rhetoric. This straightforward “intro to the importance of discourse analysis” cautions the reader to think critically about the grounds on which rights claims and other political arguments are made.

Drawing on the arguments and strategies extrapolated in the first two sections, Part IV explores the possibilities and challenges of activist and participatory research through more explicit discussions of narrativity in different formulations and contexts. She begins by discussing value of an “everyday life” approach to policy analysis, that is, an approach that foregrounds the implications of policy for women’s everyday lives. She discusses her conversations with women AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients earning four-year degrees through a training program in Iowa in order to highlight disjunctures between women’s lives as they narrate them and cultural constructions of the welfare recipient. Analysis from this embodied standpoint indicates the simultaneous and interwoven material and discursive constraints on women’s lives imposed by welfare policies.

She concludes this section with a discussion of the need for a reconceptualization of survivor discourse and a practical analysis of various methodological approaches to this political project. Through her attention to the differing needs, goals, and strategies of survivors, Naples emphasizes the limitations of the (already well established) utility of standpoint epistemology here.

*Feminism and Method* is a valuable contribution to ongoing discussions regarding how to research better; this is an excellent text for use in graduate

methods classes and for anyone looking for an introduction to feminist epistemology or interested in feminist or activist methodologies. It might also be used in its entirety or in part in undergraduate courses in feminist theories, social welfare, or social science methods. Naples' approach to concerns about power, subjectivity, reflective practice, and social change is critical, practical, and accessible. While it provides a thorough overview of feminist epistemological concerns, the greatest strength of the book is its practice-oriented approach. The range of issues that Naples draws upon from her own research suggests the broad applicability and adaptability of the strategies she develops. Finally, aside from some distracting typos, the text is very readable. Students should find the presentation accessible and engaging.