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A Critique of Karl Polanyi's Modes of Economic Integration
Case study of Polish migrant workers in Belfast: Strategies for coping with labour hierarchization at a Mace shop
Violent Memories
Making sense of suffering: Domestic violence in the Northern Irish context
Suicide in the Republic of Ireland: Psychosocial Autopsies, Case Studies from the Coroner's Court and Concepts of Risk
The Printed Accent, A Marque of Distinction
The *Irish Journal of Anthropology* is the organ of the Anthropological Association of Ireland. As such, it aims to promote the discipline of anthropology on the island of Ireland, north and south. It seeks to provide coverage of Irish-related matters and of issues in general anthropology and to be of interest to anthropologists inside and outside academia, as well as to colleagues in a range of other disciplines, such as Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Development Studies, Ethnology and Folk Studies, Gaeilge, Irish Studies, and Sociology.

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Editor’s Note

We are pleased to present this general number of IJA and especially welcome the substantial contribution on Karl Polanyi by two colleagues from the Department of Government in University College Cork. Three of the other pieces form a sub-group around the topic of violence. And, in line with our policy of encouraging student participation, we are happy that two of the articles included are based on award-winning undergraduate theses.

The next number of IJA, that of Spring/Summer 2009, will be a Special Number on ‘Anthropology and Design’, with Dr Adam Drazin as guest editor. It has been planned as a joint-issue with Anthropology in Action, published by Berghahn.

We remind readers that we welcome contributions for general numbers of the journal as well as suggestions for topics and offers to edit special numbers.

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A Critique of Karl Polanyi’s Modes of Economic Integration

Dr Will Denayer
Dr Seamus O’Tuama
University College Cork, Ireland

Polanyi’s emphasis on the 19th Century fails to explain the transformation of traditional, embedded economies into modern, disembodied ones and the causal mechanisms behind the ‘great transformation’ are left unclear. His concept of the market is sociologically empty and therefore unsatisfactory. His interpretation of social regulation is flawed, as his analysis of Speenhamland proves. At the end, it is not clear what sort of a reformist Polanyi is, as his views on the necessity of wages near subsistence level sound very conservative. Polanyi construes reciprocal relations one-sidedly as devoid of violence and manipulation. However, to obtain a realistic picture of reciprocity, it is also necessary to investigate the negative characteristics of this mode of integration. Pace Polanyi, insights based on anthropological research and philosophical studies on the social role of technology prove that the Kula is a combination of both positive and negative reciprocity, combined with a competitive system based on a division of labour, which distributes status and power. In the context of Polanyi’s last work, we suggest that Dahomey, being a failed state, cannot serve as an example of a system based on redistribution.

It is against human dignity to believe in progress.
Hannah Arendt

1. Introduction

Stiglitz notes that the work of Karl Polanyi (1886–1964) is fashionable nowadays: a reference to The Great Transformation and the notion of (dis)embeddedness of the economy has become a standard move in the cultural repertoire of social scientists discussing globalization, social exclusion, democratic deficits and market policies (Stiglitz 2002: 6). Such references, however, often raise more questions than they answer. The same has to be said about Polanyi’s work. It is characterized by excessive ambition, unwarranted generalisations and, sometimes, plain contradictions. It is therefore not surprising that his texts generate confusion and even despair. It also led to malicious political approximation. In the 1970s, Andersen reprinted a whole chapter of The Great Transformation as part of his demonstration that overly generous welfare programs produce perverse consequences (see Block 2003: 226). Of course, no author has control over the reasons why and how others use (and abuse) their work. The simple fact, however, that a chapter of a book, which was meant to mount an attack on market liberalism, could be appropriated by a political opponent to argue in favour of it raises the question whether Polanyi failed to make his case intelligible or whether something else was going on.

The organization of this article is as follows. In the first heading, we discuss Polanyi’s insights on embedded and disembodied economies. Thereafter, we turn to the main argument of The Great Transformation. Polanyi explains that market liberalism was inherently unstable and destructive, but that this was insufficiently recognised by the political powers at the time. Their attempts to protect their societies from the fateful consequences of liberalism and to fuel capitalist economic growth at the same time led to complete collapse, resulting in the cataclysms of the 1930s and 1940s. Next, we turn to Polanyi’s conceptualization of reciprocity. We illustrate Polanyi’s thinking through three examples which, taken together, give a fair and representative sample of this work. The first example deals with the problem of the price of grain in classical Athens and Polanyi’s concept of the ports of trade. The second deals with the Kula ring, which is a celebrated case in anthropology. It is, perhaps, Polanyi’s most famous example of reciprocity. The third example deals with Dahomey and the slave trade, which was the subject of Polanyi’s last book. We argue that each of these case studies is problematic. Finally, we revisit The Great Transformation one more time. We discuss Polanyi’s reading of Speenhamland (the chapter abused by Andersen) whose history was of great importance to Polanyi. He devotes no less than three chapters to it. As we will argue, Polanyi’s account of Speenhamland raises many questions.

2. Embedded and disembodied economies

Polanyi distinguishes between three modes of economic integration: market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity. These modes of integration designate institutionalized movements through which various elements of the economic process are connected and integrated. Market exchange refers to people selling their labour and competences to employers. As a consequence
of unequal access, oligopolistic situations, injustices, and good as well as bad individual decisions, unequal distributions develop. Such inequalities can be kept within certain limits by means of redistribution. The modern European welfare state is – or, rather, was (Mingione 1991; Harvey 1996; Klein 2007) – a modern paradigmatic example of such redistribution, as its gradual building up led to considerable redistribution, administered by the state and fed by taxes. Furthermore, redistribution is connected with modern citizenship, seen as the right to co-decide over the allocation and distribution of redistributive policies (Held 1995; Fraser and Honneth 2003). The third mode of economic integration, reciprocity, differs from both market exchange and redistribution as, more often than not, no monetary exchanges are involved and interactions are informal. Reciprocity functions most often in small, local networks in which – according to Polanyi – relations of power are absent or only marginally present. Reciprocity works on the basis of trust (generalized or not – see Putnam 1995) and fairness and is often a consequence of friendship or kinship solidarity. It is: ‘I do this for you, you owe me’. Services are mostly produced because of a direct need. As we will explain, Polanyi’s account of reciprocity raises several serious questions and objections. For instance what happens to individuals who do not own specific competences and therefore cannot make a useful contribution? There are inequalities and exclusion mechanisms in reciprocity also. For this reason, it is wrong to consider reciprocity as a mode of integration only, as Polanyi and many social scientists have done in the past.

Polanyi distinguishes throughout his work between embedded and disembodied economies. Disembodied economies are no longer dependent on normative socio-political steering. Instead, they function solely according to purely economic mechanisms. In modern societies, the self-steering market is the dominant mode of societal integration: the market reigns supreme. Traditional societies, on the other hand, mediate activities which are necessary in order to satisfy essential needs (i.e. economic activities) through multiple institutions which are themselves not economic by nature. They can be the word of god, customs, family ties, tribal relations, solidarity, the habit of giving gifts, magic, cosmology. In such worlds, there is no distinctive, ‘pure’ economic sphere, although it is possible that there is a division of labour and even that there are markets. Polanyi explains that, from a certain point onwards, the economic sphere starts ‘purifying’ itself from all societal, political and cultural ‘constraints’ and begins to function autonomically (Polanyi 1944: 24ff.). This complex process starts with the commodification of labour and land and finalises when markets develop for goods, labour, land and capital (of which the prices are respectively expressed in prices, wages, rents and interests). Once we have these, says Polanyi, the economy has become disembodied and civilization is becoming ‘a wilderness’ (see Polanyi 1944: 80).

Polanyi continues by attacking the positivism of neoclassical economy. Neoclassical economy postulates the universality of utility-maximizing action and banishes all noneconomic variables from its considerations. Neoclassical theory typically construes relationships among variables, such as supply and demand, and goes on to regard those as universal categories. Likewise, motives and institutions are dismissed as frictional variables (see also Krippner 2003; Block 2003). The culmination, up to this day, is an overarching theory of human behaviour which holds true for all times and places (see also Block 2003: 221). Polanyi raises two main objections to neoclassicism. Firstly, there is the interesting point that no logic of means-ends schema exists independent of context. And because ends are bound up in preexisting institutional arrangements, it is necessary to explain institutions, whatever their specific nature:

(1) The facts of the economy were originally embedded in situations that were not in themselves of an economic nature, neither the ends nor the means being primarily material. The crystallisation of the concept of the economy was a matter of time and history. But neither time nor history have provided us with those conceptual tools required to penetrate the maze of social relationships in which the economy was embedded (Polanyi 1971a: 242).

Secondly, neoclassical theory equates all human endeavour to make ends meet through market oriented behaviour: ‘Where trade was seen, markets were assumed, and where money was in evidence, trade was assumed and, therefore, markets’ (Polanyi 1977: 79). Market exchange is undertaken for gain and for nothing else and, in a market society, the principles of the market economy become true for the whole of society:

Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system … A market economy is an economic system controlled, regulated, and directed by markets alone (Polanyi 1944: 57).

Polanyi explains that ‘The Great Transformation’ took place during the years 1750–1850 in England, when a society based on the tenets of economic liberalism came into existence. This society was unprecedented in its radicalism, as it required the commodification of labour, land and money. These commodities had never been commodified before. In fact, Polanyi says, they cannot be commodified because:

Labor, land, and money are obviously not commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them … The commodity descriptions of labor, land, and money are entirely fictitious (Polanyi 1944: 72).

To Polanyi, the creation of a free market for these commodities was a utopian experiment which had nothing to do with Adam Smith or any of the other liberals (for an account on Polanyi and liberal thinkers, see Block 2003). Instead, it was almost a proto-totalitarian experiment: ‘No market economy was conceivable that did not include a market for labor; but to establish such a market … implied no less than the wholesale destruction of the traditional fabric of life’ (Polanyi 1944: 77). The difference is that commodities are always produced for sale on a market. The ideology of the self-regulating market rests on the idea that supply and demand for land, labour and money will lead to stable prices as if they were true commodities. Polanyi warns that to allow this postulate – let alone to make it sacrosanct – will lead to
the demolition of society and the destruction of the environment. Indeed, the self-regulating market and the political forces behind laissez-faire produced such catastrophic outcomes that protective legislation had to be introduced to deal with its worst excesses (Polanyi 1944: 249ff.). To be clear: Polanyi's argument is not that, before the rise of the market, economies were embedded in social relations and that, after the fateful 'emanicipation of the market', the economy became the organizational principle of society. On the contrary: the liberals wanted to embed society in the economy, but their project could not succeed because it was not economically, politically or socially sustainable for any length of time (see also Block 2003: 226ff.).

John Lie notes that Polanyi's equation of commodification with market exchange is problematic (Lie 1991: 221ff.; see also Lie 1997). The concept of commodification obscures the varied social relations and institutions which constitute social organisations of commodity exchange. As for the 'fictitious' commodities, it falls short of a critique to note the unnatural character of commodities, for the fact is that if objects are treated as if they are produced for sale, then they meet the definition of commodities:

(Polanyi) is content to criticize the idea of fictitious commodities from the standpoint of the Kantian ethical injunction against treating people as means, rather than ends ... By elevating the moral criticism at the expense of the analytical, he discloses neither the institution nor the process of market exchange (Lie 1991: 225).

Lie also objects to Polanyi from the empirical side. Polanyi presents history as if the commodification of non-commodities and the rise of the market society go hand in hand. Lie shows, however, that this correlation does not hold true during the rise of market society in England (Lie 1991: 225; see also Hobshawn 1994; Thompson 1973). He documents that the freedom to alienate land became a significant feature of English society as early as the 13th Century. The commodification of money (being defined as produced for sale) spreads throughout the financial history of England, as, indeed, throughout the West (Wallerstein 1984). Furthermore, the commodification of labour, defined as the process of uprooting or destroying rural communities and creating an urban proletariat, both precedes and follows the rise of the market, economies were embedded in social relations and that, after the fateful 'emanicipation of the market', the economy became the organizational principle of society. On the contrary: the liberals wanted to embed society in the economy, but their project could not succeed because it was not economically, politically or socially sustainable for any length of time (see also Block 2003: 226ff.).

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However, Lie's most important point lies elsewhere. Lie's article deals with the commercial development in England. It illustrates the organisation of commodity exchange between the mid-16th and the mid-18th centuries and describes how marketplaces had their own specific, localized, ways to supply commodities for populations at 'just price' (Lie 1991: 228ff.). According to Lie, one consequence of Polanyi's adoption of the disembedded concept of the market is his overestimation of the economic character, and his underestimation of its importance in non-market societies (see also Krippner 2003; Montgomery 1998 – see below). Lie convincingly shows that the historical record does not support Polanyi's chronology for the commodification of non-commodities (Lie 1991: 229–231). Also, the embedded view identifies qualitatively distinct social organizations of commodity exchange, revealing many heterogeneous forms that Polanyi covers up under the single rubric of the market:

Polanyi's acceptance of all forms of commodity exchange as market exchange is unsatisfactory. The vast and significant set of ... market economies all come under the rubric of the disembedded market concept. Social actors, their interactions, social practices, institutions, and other features remain hidden beneath the veil of the neoclassical concept of the market (that Polanyi accepts) (Lie 1991: 226).

Polanyi passionately attacks the solipsism of atomic rational individualism that underpins neoclassical economy. In the course of this he rehearses many truisms. The alternative, his concept of institutional analysis, is empirical work: it is to examine how societies function, document the relations between the market, redistribution and reciprocity, and conceptualize the economic functions of all sorts of societal and political institutions. But in all of this, the market itself remains a black spot. He is unable to say anything social about it because the market is, per definition, outside society (see also Krippner 2003; Carruthers and Uzzi 2000; Block 2003). The market is thing-like, a non-human mechanism (just as neoclassicism has it), not a social institution in its own right shaped by relations of power, customs and other social factors. As Lie asks: 'Why should we confine the exchange between individuals in weekend flea markets with the transactions between transnational corporations and analyse them under a single conceptual rubric?' (Lie 1991: 230,3)

Obviously, there are several essential differences here and Polanyi does not address them. In fairness, it has to be added that he was far from alone in this during the 1940s-

### 3. Great and small transformations?

The Great Transformation deals with two major developments. The first is the abolition of the Poor Law in 1834 which, to Polanyi, represents the triumph of unbounded liberalism. The second development refers to the crisis of laissez-faire and the collapse of the world economy in the 1930s. The thesis is: clear: market self-regulation leads to crises and destruction (see also Block 2003; Booth 1994; Eichengreen 1996). Polanyi challenges the views of laissez-faire proponents, such as von Mises and Lippman, who argued that a ‘collectivist conspiracy’ was crippling market society because, from the 1870s onwards, various forms of ‘quasi-socialist’ legislation interfered with the self-regulation of the market. Polanyi explains that, instead of a conspiracy, there was a series of efforts in several societies to protect farmers, workers and businesses from the corrosive impacts of the market. The problem was not with these protective measures, but with the intolerable costs that capitalism imposed on vast numbers of people. Yet, here again, problems arise. As Block notes, in seeking to refute the collectivist argument, Polanyi embraces a key aspect of their thinking, namely that the various protective measures did impair the ability of the market system to work effectively (Block 2003: 231). As Polanyi writes:

(Between 1879–1929) … powerful disruptive strains were latent (in Western societies) …
source of this ... was the impaired self-regulation of the market economy. Since society was made to conform to the needs of the market mechanism, imperfections in the functioning of that mechanism created cumulative strains in the body social (Polanyi 1944).

Several occurring problems have been recited before, indeed they all sound contemporary in one form or another: protectionism transforms competitive markets into oligopolistic and monopolistic ones; markets lose their ability to function autonomically as their self-regulation capacities are constrained; individuals are more and more replaced by associations; economic adjustment becomes slow and difficult; unadjusted prices and cost structures lead to depressions; unadjusted policies retard the liquidation of unprofitable investments; and unadjusted prices and incomes cause social tension and uproar (Polanyi 1944: 176; Block 2003: 225). After World War I, liberalism made a last, fateful bid to restore the self-regulation of the system by trying to eliminate interventionist policies in the spheres of world trade and currency. However, as this attempt was doomed to fail from the outset, the result was the collapse of the global economy and the rise of fascism and totalitarianism in Europe. Block, however, rightly notes that it is illogical to claim that a system of self-regulating markets was impossible and that any effort to constrain or limit market self-regulation was doomed to produce a systemic crisis:

(Here again, (his) argument is in tension with Polanyi's insistence on the necessity of embeddedness and the inevitability of hybrid forms. If a purely self-regulating market system is an impossibility, how could it be that the lack of purity inevitably produces a crisis? (Block 2003: 287).)

True, Polanyi suggests a way out of this contradiction (see Block 2003: 225ff.; Humphreys 1969). The problem, he explains, does not lie with the effort to combine market self-regulation with various forms of protection, but, rather, with the misguided effort to establish and maintain the international gold standard (see Polanyi 1944: 141). The problem is that this move resembles a desperate ad absurdum in a play which is meant to promote atheism. Polanyi presents the counterfactual that if states after the First World War had decided to discard the gold standard, they could have escaped the crisis of the 1930s. Why this would be the case is never explained. To Polanyi, the gold standard is incompatible with the measures taken by national governments to protect their populations against the consequences of the unrestrained market. The gold standard is the institutionalization of the abstract logic of market self-regulation (Block 2003: 226). As such, it cannot be combined with any form of redistribution. The problem was that the belief in the gold standard was ‘the faith of the age’. It was not open to discussion, because literally no one — neither Hoover, Lenin, Churchill nor Mussolini — saw the problem. As Block summarizes:

The core of this argument is that the crisis was rooted not in the fact that self-regulation was impaired; the impairing of the market self-regulation was inevitable. The problem was that the various forms of protection practiced by nations coexisted with an international gold standard that rested on the principle of market self-regulation. It was this incompatibility between what was occurring within nations and what was occurring between nations that created disaster (Block 2003: 288).

And so, Polanyi wanders off in this direction. As Block and Humphreys rightly note, Polanyi lived for another two decades after The Great Transformation was published (Block 2003: 226; Humphreys 1960: 340). During those decades, the gold standard remained in force. Still no major crisis occurred during the 1960s; indeed the seeds of a new regulation – neoliberalism and post-fordism – only start to grow after Nixon abolished the gold standard (Block 2003: 234; Harvey 1996). For Block, this logically leads to the question whether the gold standard after the First World War was a necessary and sufficient condition to lead to disaster in the 1930s or whether it was only a necessary one, insufficient in itself (Block 2003: 235). If it was insufficient in itself, then a consideration and explanation of all other factors and their interconnections are called for and this is a task that Polanyi did not address.

4. Reciprocity

Reciprocity refers to non-monetary forms of interactions that are present in small local networks of, for example, ethnic minorities. Reciprocity works on the basis of mutual trust. It is ‘you do this for me, I owe you’. Research has shown that reciprocity plays a role in the formulation of survival strategies of ethnic minorities in deprived urban areas, for example in the activities of ethnic entrepreneurs. For this reason, it has attracted the attention of social scientists, as it was gradually recognized that goods and services did not have to be produced and consumed in officially recognized and registered enterprises (Mingione 1991; for a critique see Krippner 2003). Instead, they could be made, traded, swapped, and bartered among members of informal networks. Reciprocity enables people to obtain goods and services that they cannot obtain through the channels of the market or through redistributive systems, either because they lack the necessary monetary resources or because they are excluded from redistributive systems. Since immigrants, especially low-skilled ones, are often in low-paid employment or in informal employment, the idea is that their social capital and reciprocal relations play positive roles in the development of survival strategies or, more generally, in a wider attempt towards integration. People sourcing information, housing, employment opportunities and so on (Denayer and O’Tuama 2008). As a consequence, both social capital and reciprocity have been celebrated in sociology as instruments for immigrants to build a new life.

However, several serious problems need to be noted. Some refer to the ways in which reciprocity works in reality. Others refer to the ways in which reciprocity has been construed in the literature. Following Polanyi’s original mindset, there is a tendency to interpret reciprocal relations as free from all violence, coercion and manipulation. However, what, for example, happens to the members of an ethnic community who lack competencies and/or resources and therefore cannot contribute to the system of reciprocal exchange? This is a valid question, as every social system, however rich or poor in resources, produces its own social pariahs. Also, it does not refer only to outcasts. According to Komter, the effect of ‘Matthew’s law’ (those who give the most, will
receive the most in return) plays in reciprocity as much as it plays in redistribution and market exchange (Komter 1996: 16).

In theory, networks based on reciprocity are further removed from individual autonomy, self-determination and self-interest than other networks. It is precisely for this reason that they are likely to be characterized by a high degree of authoritarianism and paternalism (see Mingione 1991: 31). The veracity of this truism can be found everywhere. It has been documented that, in the case of Irish migration to America during and after the Famine, reciprocal relations were in part responsible for keeping many Irish immigrants in the large cities of the East coast, where some of them became part of a typically nineteenth-century industrial underclass. They often fell victim to exploitation, poverty, xenophobia and racism even though social mobility was co-determined by the axis of kinship solidarity within the Irish enclaves (the cliché about the ‘Irish cop’ is a case in point). Nancy Green documented Jewish immigration to Paris in almost identical terms (Green 1986) and Davis recently did the same when dealing with Latino migration into Los Angeles (Davis 2003). Therefore, those who want a clear and realistic picture of reciprocal relations will have to investigate the positive and the negative characteristics and effects of this mode of economic ‘integration.’

Polanyi did not deal with such questions. However, on many occasions, he revisits his thesis that pre-modern societies are governed by reciprocity and redistribution. The market, if there is one, is always subordinate to societal, cultural and political forces, i.e. it is embedded and of no great economic importance. Only during the nineteenth century does the market become the pivotal point of all human organisation. We will now examine some case studies, and see what Polanyi has to say about some particular cases.

4.1 The Greek cities and the ports of trade

How can prices be set if they are not being determined by demand and supply? This question is a vital one. Polanyi goes to great lengths to explain that, originally, markets were seen as threats to the communautarist and vernacular organisation of the Greek cities (Polanyi 1971a). Prices were set on the basis of discussions in which mutual rights and duties between groups were negotiated. It was essential that no mechanism should exist to mediate demand and supply. Instead, the nobles controlled and distributed the flow of goods produced within the community. By distributing meat and wool, the nobles recognized the right of the shepherds to herd as well as their own duty to protect them. Such non-market exchange remained dominant until at least ca. 400 BC, when a grain shortage occurred throughout the Greek peninsula and, later, hit much of the Mediterranean. Athens, whose population had grown considerably, decided to import grain from the Greek hinterland as well as from Egypt. To guarantee that the more expensive Greek grain would influence the price of the Egyptian grain an institutional buffer was constructed to ensure that the prices would only influence each other marginally. When the situation deteriorated further, the Athenians erected a base on the island of Rhodes from where the Greek cities could be supplied with Egyptian grain. From this point onwards, prices could more or less fluctuate freely, according to supply and demand. In this way, the region was transformed into an integrated grain market. As the accumulation of wealth was no longer dependent upon the formulation of mutual duties and between several groups, the nobles transformed into a closed class of merchants and entrepreneurs.

Polanyi’s explanation is still being debated today. According to Dodgshon, Polanyi played down the role of price fluctuations and overestimated the importance of the role of trade which was controlled by the city administration (Dodgshon 1987: 110). There is little doubt that the economy of the Greek cities was dominantly redistributive and reciprocal at one point. To Polanyi, the trade with foreign partners and the avarice for mercantile wealth (leading to the class of the superfluous rich that Aristotle despised) destabilized and, later, destroyed the ancient economy. Schapf (Schapf 1998) considers this scenario to be plausible, but he emphasizes that no evidence exists for it. Shapf points to the population explosion throughout the whole Eastern Mediterranean and the resulting waves of colonization for destroying the old economy. Polanyi, of course, knew that there was trade in Homeros, but ritual gifts and redistributive exchange do not explain the circulation of all goods during this time (Meijer and Van Nijf 1992; Bogucki 1999). At this point, he introduced a concept which will resurface in his work on Dahomey, the concept of the ports of trade (see also Polanyi 1971c). Ports of trade are islands of commerce inside mainly redistributive-reciprocal systems and are permitted to exist only under strict conditions. Again, however, the economic importance of the ports of trade cannot be proven. Polanyi tried to strengthen his case by quoting examples of reciprocal exchange, but this is beside the point. Such examples can always be found, but they say nothing about dominant structural economic organization.6 In other words, Polanyi’s analysis is a hypothesis at best, which, insofar as it can be investigated empirically, needs serious reformulation (see also Schapf 1998).

4.2 The ring of Kula

4.2.1. Trade and the ring of Kula

One of Polanyi’s most famous examples (if not the most famous) on organised reciprocity deals with the societal organisation of the Trobiands. The ring of Kula is a very celebrated case in anthropology (Leach and Leach 1983). The ring spans eighteen islands of the Massim Archipelago of Papua New Guinea. Polanyi’s analysis of the Kula ring is not original, as he drew upon Malinowski’s and Mauss’s writings (dating back to 1920) on reciprocity in Papua New Guinea. The ring refers to two imaginary circles that connect the several islands that make up the Kula. Some goods travel clockwise through the ring, while others follow an anticlockwise direction. Many questions have been raised about the existence of this system. Obviously, the ring fulfilled basic economic functions, as fish was traded for fruit, yam for taro. It is established that the ring provided mutual help. This
became pronounced in times of crisis, when calamities occurred. It is also clear that the trade between the islands goes back very far in time. Archaeological findings show that the trade is as old as 5,000 BC.

The Kula ring is an extremely complicated social system to which whole books have been devoted. Doctoral dissertations have been written dealing with specific aspects of the ring or concentrating on one geographical area and, even now, some aspects of the ring are still shrouded in mystery (Harris 1991: 6). Damon explains that the Ring of Kula is much more complex than a merely circular exchange system; indeed the fact that the ring is circular is not its essence. In the ring, two valuables circulate against each other. One initiates participation in the ring by giving an opening gift. Pass Malinowski, opening gifts are not spontaneous but forced, and closing gifts are obligatory (Damon 1980: 271). Regardless of what happened before, giver and receiver generally fall into a clearly asymmetrical relationship. What is given as an opening gift is not important: it can be an arm cuff or a necklace – both are made of embellished conic shells. However, if the opening gift is an arm cuff, the closing gift has to be a necklace. Contrary to what one may think, one does not give an opening gift in order to receive a closing gift. One gives an opening gift so that, after receiving, one may give more opening gifts (Damon 1980: 242). Necklaces travel through the ring in clockwise direction, while arm shells travel anticlockwise.

Malinowski analysed the ring as establishing strong, life-long relationships between parties, although other anthropologists, such as Fortune, mention that relations often break down because of lying and deceit (Damon 1980: 231; Damon 1983: 316; Senft 1996: 382). Ideally, the trading partnerships involve strong mutual obligations (hospitality and assistance). The valuables never remain in the hands of one individual for long, but must be passed on to others within a certain period of time. Eventually, they pass through the whole Kula, covering more than fourteen islands and hundreds of kilometres of ocean. Malinowski reasoned that the expense and preoccupation with Kula must have been functional in nature and served to solve crucial problems in the islanders’ lives. He argued that the Kula Ring served three functions in Trobriand society. Firstly, it established friendly relations between the inhabitants of different islands, and preserved patterns of peaceful contact and communication with trading partners who might, or might not, speak the same language. Secondly, it provided a means for inter-island exchange or trade of goods. Thirdly, the Kula items reinforced status. The hereditary chiefs owned the most valuable shell objects and it was their responsibility to set up the voyages. Polanyi depicts the ring as follows:

We describe (the Kula ring) as trade though no profit is involved, either in money or in kind: no goods are ... hoarded ... (goods) received are enjoyed by giving them away, no truck, barter, or exchange take place in the proceedings are entirely regulated by etiquette and magic ... (and are) exclusively run on the lines of reciprocity (Polanyi 1944: 50).

However, Malinowski’s and Polanyi’s accounts cover only part of the whole picture. Damon explains that for the Muyuw (the inhabitants of what is now Woodlark Island) all the objects that travel through the ring are someone’s kitoums: they are owned by a person or by a group (this was unknown to Malinowski). The fact that the objects are someone’s kitoum obliges responsibility in the way in which they are handled, reminding the recipient that he is a steward of someone else’s possession. Also, the right of participation in Kula exchange is not automatic (as Malinowski thought). One has to ‘buy’ one’s way into it through participating in various lower spheres of exchange (Damon 1980: 276; Wagner 1984).

Kula valuables are ranked according to value and age, as are the relationships that are created through their exchange (Damon 1980; Damon 1983). Participants strive to obtain particularly valuable and renowned Kula objects whose owner’s name will spread through the archipelago. This competition unfolds through different persons making offers and giving gifts to the owner, thus seeking to induce him to engage in a gift-exchange relationship. It has to be noted that the reciprocity underlying the exchanges becomes negative in so doing, as gifts are given with the intention of gain. Kula exchange involves a complex system of gifts and counter-gifts whose rules are laid down by custom. Damon (1980) notes that large amounts of Kula valuables were handled by a relatively small number of people, e.g. amongst the Meyaw three men accounted for over 50 percent of Kula valuables; the ten most influential men controlled about 90 percent of all and almost 100 percent of the most precious Kula objects (see Damon 1980: 284).

The concept of kitoum is critical for Damon because it shows that one has to deal with the Kula not in terms of exchange, but in terms of production (Damon 1980: 286). If this is true, what does the ring produce? It turns out that the ring produces many things. Among others it produces a person’s name (this is, fame) as well as social time. According to a person’s success or failure in the ring, the Meyaw believe that he or she does not age.8 The Kula is conceived as leading to old age (a greater accumulation of lived time). The Kula also produces what the participants call a road. The road determines both the direction and the value of the goods (for example, for an arm shell a necklace has to be returned; for a pig another pig of like size and sex must be returned, etc.). But it is not a simple question of one person giving something to another person, who has to give it back in time. The form of exchange in the ring is triadic: an arm shell or necklace must go to some third person in order to finish the process (Damon 1980: 287). Lower-level valuables do not travel to a third person, but this does not mean that a pig will not go from A to B to C to D as often happens. In this series of dyadic exchanges A has no longer control over the pig that C gave to D. However, if the valuable was not a pig but a Kula valuable, then A would have control over C or the item that is in D’s hands. Subsidiary roads, where lower-level valuables travel, feed into the main Kula where individual owners of kitoums exchange such items back and forth (see Damon 1980: 288ff.). However, this circulation only reproduces one’s position, it does not strengthen it. As Damon argues, the goal of the Kula is not the reproduction of the individual’s place in the group, but his or her transformation. Eventually, much more is at stake than an individual’s name (see extensively Damon 1983: 339 ff.). Then what is at stake?

Every kitoum which is not originally produced by its owner is acquired by him or her as a direct transfer of labour. Although the circulation of kitoums does not lead to the possession of more kitoums, having a kitoum to
circulate does lead to the giving and receiving of more opening and closing gifts (arm cuffs and necklaces), which are the objects which produce names (fame and status). Damon reports that owners of kitoums got their valuables not through inheritance (as they state when asked), but because they were, as recipients, ‘persons’ of the giver (Damon 1980: 290). This means that the actual owner worked with the previous one and that the article was given as the ultimate return for that work. There is an element of inheritance in that, before the elder died, the youth was essentially the elder’s productive resource. It is because of this relationship that the youth eventually received a kitoum, which is thought to represent the labour he had given the elder. Damon elaborates:

In a not so curious way the concept of ‘kitoum’ enjoins the contradictions between Muyuw and the colonial system. When Neate’s employees quit this lumber-mill they often feel cheated because they did not receive something tantamount to a kitoum. Here they are not discounting their wages, only indicating that their wages are only designed, in their view, to sustain them, not pay them for what they have given the Neates (Damon 1983: 342).

To Polanyi, the Kula ring is a classical example of Mauss’s distinction between gift and commodity exchange. Melanesians carefully distinguish gift exchange (kula) from market exchange in the form of barter (gimwali). Both reflect different underlying value systems and cultural customs. The kula is not supposed to be conducted like gimwali. The former involves a solemn exchange ceremony, a ‘display of greatness’ (Mauss) where the concepts of honour and nobility are central; the latter, often done as part of Kula exchange journeys, involves hard bargaining and serves purely economic purposes. Kula valuables are inalienable in the sense that they (or an equivalent object) have to be returned to the original owner. Those who receive them can pass them on as gifts, but they cannot sell them as commodities. But Damon, the anthropologist who lived on Woodlark Island, presents a completely different and much more sophisticated interpretation. It may be realised, he says, that what is circulating in the Kula Ring is, rather explicitly, congealed labour, wealth of a socially determined and socially produced form (Damon 1980: 268). Kitoums resemble nothing so much as capital in the sense that they are used to make something else, i.e. to turn a valuable into a kitoum. In other words, Damon directs the attention to a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship that is to be found in the production and the circulation of valuables and in their subsequent metamorphosis. He concludes:

Although certain aspects of the Kula may be comprehended in terms of generalised and restricted exchange … exchange does not account for the Kula’s dynamics. ‘Ownership’ derived from the sphere of production, not ‘reciprocity’, accounts for the Kula’s dynamics (Damon 1980: 269).

4.2.2. The magical model of ships

Alfred Gell’s research does not deal with modes of economic integration or with trade. Instead, his is a philosophical-anthropological research programme dealing with the social functions of technology. One of Gell’s remarkable case studies deals with the ships of the Trobriands. Here, from a completely different angle, we find an answer that is congruent with Damon’s explanation to the question of what makes the Kula work.

Gell explains that the ships of the Trobriands were exceptionally well made, with the greatest attention being paid to detail. They were large but lightweight and therefore highly manoeuvrable, decorated with carvings and shells as well as painted in many colours— they were works of art. The question is why the Trobrianders put so much effort into building these ships. His fascinating answer is that this was done to dumbfound their trade partners. The ships had to be so immensely impressive that, when they showed up on the shores, they incited fear, stupefaction and submission to the point of creating disorientation (Gell 1998: 35ff.). Gell leaves no doubt that the ships were an essential element of what we nowadays call psychological warfare. The ships were not only used to display richness and abundance, but also, and more importantly, to trigger fear. As a consequence, more shells would change hands.

How can ships have such profound psychological effects? Gell goes back to the time when he was a child in order to give an example of the a-logical/magical thinking involved. When Gell was a boy, the church sold scale models of the cathedral of Salisbury, which was in need of renovation. The scale model was extremely elaborate and obviously fascinated Gell as well as many other boys. To them, the scale model was more perfect than the real building. In the mental world of the children, the model and the cathedral became entwined in a mimetic conflict. None of the boys had any idea how to build a real cathedral, but they all had experience with scale models. To the children, the maker of the scale model acquired almost magical powers, precisely because they knew how difficult it was to make something so small, yet artful and cunningly realistic. Gell writes:

If we consider that the magical attitude is a by-product of uncertainty, we are thereby committed also to the proposition that the magical attitude is a by-product of the rational pursuit of technical objectives using technical means (Gell 1998: 57).10

However, the high competency of the maker of the scale model did not create a disorienting effect on the children. For this to happen, something else is required. Here the mimetic aspect becomes essential. The Trobrianders spend so much work and effort on their ships in order to make them resemble, as much as possible, the mythological ‘original’ ships used by the Polynesian gods. The ships, with their frightening colours and carvings, were meant to cut through the waves as if with supernatural ease, so that it looked as if their owners were as powerful as the gods themselves, or, perhaps were the gods who had come back in order to haunt the people.11

This analysis makes perfect sense. Neither trade nor exchange can be divorced from the fight for status on which political power or, as Damon would say, the division of labour, rests. It is extremely unlikely that the mechanism by which status was distributed had no bearing on the system by which consumer goods were traded. No such society exists. Although the level of stratification was low on the islands, rights and duties existed and were legitimized on the basis of the competency to participate in the ceremonial system of
Kula. Furthermore, status played an important role in the distribution of one particular, but essential, scarce resource on the small islands, namely, marriageable women from different islands that were not connected by blood to the potential husband.

Gell’s analysis highlights that it is faulty to see only altruism and positive reciprocity in the interactions of the islanders. Aside from these, there was also violence and manipulation. This manipulation did not occur occasionally, but was, instead, a structural characteristic of the Kula. There are certain reasons why this is not easy to see. First and foremost, the ring is difficult to analyse because it is a very complex system, far removed from western rationality. Second, because of natural abundance, producing foodstuffs was relatively unproblematic. As a consequence, social stratification was not very evolved, nor was it very rigid (work was being alternated with long ritual feasts). In other words, even the lower strata lived an existence that was not hard. Scarcity occurred only in times of crisis. Furthermore, violence did not manifest itself as oppression. The mimetic principle behind the ships, however, makes clear that violence and manipulation were present and that competition for the shells was relevant for the distribution of consumer goods.

Despite the talk about the need for institutional analysis, the examples show that Polanyi’s conception of economy is underdeveloped when dealing with traditional societies. This is due to his attempt to negate or minimize the relevancy of modern economic notions as scarcity, surplus, and goal-oriented action. However, it is one thing to say that scarcity (in its modern meaning) was absent before modernity, but it is a completely different thing to conclude from this that, in order to satisfy needs, strategic economic action does not explain what is going on in such societies in economic terms. The reverse is true: all societies have always been organized around attempts to minimize scarcity. Polanyi’s great divide is much too simplistic: on the side of tradition, everything is an enchanted magic mountain where nothing is pure, and on the side of modernity everything is pure in the midst of disenchanted economic superstructures and powerless communities.

4.3. Dahomey and the slave trade

4.3.1. The Dahomean ‘state’

In Dahomey and the Slave Trade, Polanyi revisits two notions. There is, first, the concept of the ports of trade and second, the dichotomy between primitive societies characterized by reciprocity and archaic societies characterized by redistribution on the one hand and modern market societies on the other hand. The key distinction remains between market and pre-market systems. Polanyi characterizes pre-colonial Dahomean society as a reciprocal system and the archaic Dahomean state (insofar as this is the right word, which is questionable) as a system of redistribution. As he writes, accounting for the annual customs:

The annual customs was the principal event of the economic cycle. In terms of gross national product and foreign import, as well as popular participation, it was an … institution of unique proportions. … (The king received gifts, payments and tributes, subsequently distributing a part of this wealth as gifts to the crowd. The economic aspect of this process may be analysed as a movement of goods and money towards the center and out of it again, that is redistribution (Polanyi 1966: 33).

Redistribution defines the organization and the direction of channels of flow of the state sector in Dahomey as well as the exercise of kingship. However, once we focus on the global political and economic context in which this pattern operated, then Polanyi’s reasoning begins to look tautological. As Klein writes:

In this model, redistribution defines kingship which defines archaic state. State implies kingship, which in turn implies redistribution … (Polanyi) generated a definitional circle … in which ‘redistribution’ alternates between serving as the major premise for isolating the economic dimension of state power and the political outcome of such an exercise of power now stated in ‘economic’ terms. As such, his concept of redistribution begins to take on the word-magic of those orthodox, market-oriented interpretations Polanyi criticised so sharply (Klein 1968: 212).

Of course, the integration and differentiation of economic and political aspects of archaic state power is complex and subtle, as Polanyi perfectly understands. However, the fact remains that his notion of redistribution is too general and too vague to understand the working of Dahomean state power. And this is only the beginning of more serious problems to come.

To Polanyi, the outstanding characteristic of Dahomey is the dual character of its economy and society. On the one hand, there is the bush, the social organization of which was largely, if not completely, outside the sphere of the state. The villages and the hereditary compounds where the lower classes dwelled were removed from the action of the central administration. Dahomean society, in globo, consisted of a state society and a non-state society. This dichotomy was stabilized, on the top, by the monarchy, with its redistributive sphere of state economy, and, at the bottom, by the ancient, village kin-community and household economy. Polanyi noted that the rural village non-state culture of Dahomey shared certain traits with feudal organization and its manorial economy in Western Europe, while others were strikingly absent:

… the African compound was not fortified and had no military character … its walls ensured privacy not security … nor does the compound carry socioeconomic ruling class privileges that imply disposal over dependent labour … (Polanyi 1966: 73, our emphasis).

The most important difference between a feudal regime and the African system of sib compounds is the absence, in the latter, of a ruling landlord class. Local African chiefs were not feudal superiors and, therefore, Dahomean farmers were not required to hand over a portion of their surplus from which an overlord derives his income and on which he bases his political power (see also Klein 1969; Lovejoy 1982; Somers 1995). The non-state sector of the Dahomean economy was indeed essentially egalitarian, as Polanyi says, but the consequences of this proved fatal for Dahomean society. The Dahomean state tried to collect taxes and to administer the extraction of peasant surplus, but this
proved impossible without the existence of an intermediate level and therefore the state was unable to sustain the urban centres. As Dahomey did not produce trade goods, war was the only option to acquire slaves. Slave raiding became a necessary policy of state because of the lack of economic integration between the rural and the urban centres. The slave raiding, in turn, deepened the state's economic dependency on the West. At this point, Polanyi's assessment of the archaic state of Dahomey as '... a structure of rare perfection' and 'a unique example of a completely developed archaic political economy' turns completely sour. As Klein writes:

To define as primary the 'redistributive' economic function of a state, is to define that state out of existence, to reduce it to the level of an enlarged primitive society ... (N)owhere are his assertions about the 'culmination' of Dahomean state power more flatly contradicted than in Polanyi's own testimony about its administration, its exercise of kingly power (Klein 219).

Dahomey was not a primitive society. It had urban centres in which people lived on trade and commerce. The state is, in its historical essence, an embodiment of urban-rural relations of political power and inter-class relations of ruler-extractor to subordinate producers of agricultural surplus (Klein 1969: 222). However, in Dahomey the state never penetrated down into the basic productive relations that governed the village economy. Pre-colonial Dahomey was therefore what we nowadays call a failed state. It failed politically as well as economically. This is the reason why Klein characterizes as transitional and formative the type of archaic states that established themselves along the coast and soon became economically dependent on the capitalist powers of the West. (Klein 1969: 221; see also Fligstein 1996). This dependency was eventually formalized in colonial rule (Klein 1969: 221). One can speculate that it did not make a lot of difference whether the Dahomean state and its economy were strong or weak, as the evolution of Dahomey was, from the outset, largely conditioned by West Africa's position as the weakest link in the world system (see Wallerstein 1984). Dahomey, as a state (or quasi-state), arose in direct response to the demands of international trade as early as the late 17th century (Klein 1969: 224). In one mediating moment in the cycle of political and economic development, it functioned as an agency of collection for surplus (Klein 1969: 222; Edel 1970). The Dahomean political caste, very early on, had no choice but to follow suit with the Europeans. The warfare, however, depleted the state's revenues further by pulling able-bodied men off the land to fight instead of to farm. Polanyi's opening remarks, about the military efficiency for which Dahomey was feared and the foreign trade and stable currency for which it was admired, point immediately to its fatal weakness – not its strength – namely its dependency on, and congruency to, European and American powers.

4.3.2. Reciprocity and trade in Dahomey

In Dahomey and the Slave Trade, Polanyi also revisits his concept of ports of trade. He repeats that in traditional societies markets only functioned within the general contexts of reciprocity and redistribution. Money existed also, but it too was relatively unimportant and its main role existed in providing a common denominator for goods to be redistributed or reciprocated. Goods not produced by local communities were traded supra-locally in the ports of trade. The political authorities strictly controlled this trade, ensuring that the ports of trade remained separate from the main economic system.

Polanyi explains that, while several markets operated in Dahomey and while the use of money was widespread, the main economic system was based on reciprocity and redistribution. Money was used as a mode of payment, but, at the same time, it fulfilled a much more important function. Money legitimised social stratification. To substantiate this, Polanyi refers to the writings of the fourteenth-century trader Ibn Battuta, who noted the existence of two sorts of money in Dahomey. Thin copper wire was used to pay wages, and only foodstuffs, wood and baskets could be bought with it. Thick copper wire, on the other hand, could be used to purchase everything. In this way, the consumption of the lower classes was kept modest, favouring the higher standard of living of the urban higher classes. The thin wires functioned as an instrument to secure the privileges of the rich. Latham, however, writes that Polanyi misread Battuta on several points. What is more, according to Latham the thin and the thick copper wires were interchangeable. If this is true, the two systems were connected (Latham 1973: 135; see also Edel 1970).

There might not be much to add to this discussion, except that copper wire was also used as money in Nigeria until approximately the end of the Second World War. Bohannan investigated the functions of the wires among the Tiv (Bohannan 1967) and distinguished three systems. On the lowest level, consumption goods such as chickens, vegetables, baskets and pots were traded or exchanged. At the intermediate level, weapons, slaves, cattle and medicine could be bought or exchanged. The third system concerned the exchange of women and their dowries. A girl or woman could only be exchanged for one who was part of the bloodline of the groom. Only in exceptional circumstances was it possible to exchange goods from the first level for goods from the second level. Here, the role of the copper wire proved essential. Copper wire was costly and could not be divided into smaller amounts. For this reason, the thick wire could not be used to buy chickens or baskets, as this would amount to paying an enormous sum without the possibility of receiving change. Bohannan concludes in a Polanyian vein that, on the basis of the indivisibility of the wires, the trade systems remained separate from each other.

However, as Latham explains, the Tiv were not the only people who used copper wire as money (Latham 1973: 23). In the south of Nigeria, near Calabar, copper wire was also in use. Yam from the North, palm oil from the West, and salt and fish from the estuary of the Cross, was distributed among local networks. On the markets, ropes, nets, baskets, clothes, weapons, jewellry, tools and canoes could be bought. The Efik, the Ibibio, the Ibe, the Ekoi and the Efut participated in these markets. The copper wire had all the functions of modern money: prices were expressed in it; it was a generally accepted way of paying, the wire could be saved and accumulated, and credit, rents and interests were expressed in increments of copper wire. According to Latham, this interchangeability held true for almost the whole of Africa. In East Africa, where cattle were used to express prices, livestock could be used to purchase everything. Small transactions could be paid...
with calves, goats or chickens. Furthermore, Latham writes that in Calabar prices were dependent on demand and supply (Latham 1973: 6). There were no restrictions on owning or using copper wire. Even slaves could use it. In other words, Calabar was a fully developed market society. The thick and the thin copper wires, which were not interchangeable, constitute Polanyi’s main proof for the argument that Dahomey was a redistributive and reciprocal system. Market trade only took place in ports of trade.12 Latham, however, argues that the Dahomean urban centres were largely market based, that money was used to purchase all sort of goods and services by everyone who could afford them, and that money underpinned the allocation of political power and status in Dahomean society (Latham 1973: 23ff).

5. Speenhamland or the future of an anachronism

Polanyi argues that the history of industrialization is based, first, on the proliferation of markets and, second, on the reaction of socio-political contexts which fight the commodification of money, land and labour. New social and political actors — cooperatives, trades unions, political parties — take it upon themselves to compensate for the damage that market exchange inflicts. However, in the three chapters on Speenhamland, Polanyi wanders off in directions that are inexplicable.

According to Polanyi, the English working class only originated after the Poor Law was abolished in 1834. This law, decided upon in Speenhamland in 1795 on the initiative of the landowners, came into existence because it was felt that the wage per hour could not be determined by demand and supply alone, but also had to relate to the price of bread. The ruling became law in large parts of rural England as well as in some urban areas. The law which, essentially, postulated the ‘right to live,’ was abolished in 1834 when the middle class won the elections on a programme of laissez faire. To them, the Poor Law was nothing more than an antiquated obstacle to sound capitalist development. That capitalist remuneration did not guarantee the right to live for the peasants and the workers was not their problem.

Block asks the following pertinent question:

Why did Polanyi, a supporter of governmental action to shape economic activity, produce such an eloquent condemnation of the unintended consequences of the … relative obscure Speenhamland story? (Block 2003: 290).

We reproduce Block’s answer below; if he is right, then Polanyi is wrong. However, we present another, perhaps more important, reason: Polanyi’s opinions on Speenhamland betray a mistaken determinist belief in progress.

One would expect that Polanyi would applaud Speenhamland; after all, the Poor Law was a means of societal regulation, directed against the forces which ‘make civilisation into a wilderness’ (the commodification of land and labour). However, Polanyi vehemently attacks Speenhamland. To him, the Poor Law constitutes a cynical and short-sighted policy on the part of the landowners to protect their own quasi-feudal interests. Speenhamland had to be abolished because, in modernising England, the absence of a free labour market was a bigger evil than the existence of it. The Poor Law was utterly destructive, according to Polanyi, because it undermined the self-respect of the labourers to such a degree that, after a while, they chose to parasitise on their meager benefit instead of working. Polanyi does not cite one source of evidence for this ridiculous statement which runs through all of modern history accompanying anti-social and conservative canons everywhere. Instead, he adds that the Poor Law slowed down the process of proletarianization of the peasants by spreading pauperization to rural areas. While this may or may not have been the case (Thompson in his masterwork on the making of the English working class flatly denies it, see Thompson 1973: 153 ff.), Polanyi completely discredits himself by stating that it was not capitalism but the Poor Law that was responsible for the inhumane conditions of the masses. ‘But for the protracted effects of the allowance system, it would be impossible to explain the human and social degradation of early capitalism’ (Polanyi 1944: 80). He goes on to call the Poor Law ill-conceived because it led to a decrease in wages and, as such, constituted a de facto subsidy for employers. The Poor Law, furthermore, made finding a suitable workforce more difficult and thus slowed down an inevitable process: ‘In the end, the free labor market, in spite of the inhuman methods employed in creating it, proved financially beneficial to all concerned’ (Polanyi 1944: 77). Polanyi adds that the pauperization of the labourers was not the result of class exploitation because there were common interests between employers and employees who were free to accept or refuse labour. The inhumane living conditions of workers were not the result of completely insufficient wages (i.e. of massive and merciless exploitation). Instead they were due to the dissolution of traditional communities.

Polanyi never asks himself the question as to why industrial capitalism had to destroy traditional communities and create an urban proletariat for which even the right to live could not be upheld. His answer would, probably, be (inevitable) modernization, but this is just an expression.13 The elementary insight that capitalists principally work towards paying the lowest possible amount of money for labour is completely absent. In the end, Polanyi agrees with the conservative argument that workers have to be threatened with hunger and destitution, otherwise they would refuse to work. Wages need to remain close to subsistence level; every surplus would be consumed carelessly anyway, it would be drunk or gambled away. At the very end of the book, Polanyi comes up with yet another reason why the Poor Law was unacceptable: the Law destroyed the direct relation between work and income:

The utter incompatibility of Speenhamland with the wage system was permanently remembered only in the tradition of the economic liberals. They alone realised that, in a broad sense, every form of protection of labor, implied something of the Speenhamland principle in intervention (Polanyi 1944: 283, our emphasis).

Let us question the seriousness of all of this. Speenhamland has nothing to do with the problems of ‘every form of protection.’ It has to be evaluated on its own terms. Unquestionably, Speenhamland had negative unintended consequences. Whatever else it was,
Speenhamland intended to see to it that the peasants would not die from hunger. As such, it was a form of protection, a modest and necessary form of redistribution.

Let us come back to the question of why Polanyi devotes so much attention to Speenhamland. Block starts by noting that Polanyi's accuracy on Speenhamland does not stand up against the historical evidence. He then explains that Speenhamland was a desperate effort by the rural gentry to stop the advance of capitalism (see Block 2003: 291). Industrial capitalism was ripe to take off, but existing property relations were holding it off checking its development. Capitalists saw the landlords as lazy, unenlightened halfwits, while the landlords regarded capitalists as heartless money-grabbers. As Collier notes, both were right (Collier 2008: 113). According to Block, Polanyi paid so much attention to the Poor Law because the episode was so traumatic to the English working class (in the making) that it took them a long time – much longer than on the Continent – to unite socially and act politically. Block writes that ‘… Polanyi was writing in something approaching a psychoanalytic mode; he sought to describe the historical trauma in … graphic detail precisely so that its impact could be finally transcended’ (Block 2003: 292).

Block is right. Polanyi's discussion on the formation of a working class in England and in Austria underpins his argument. However, we want to make another point, which we illustrate with Hobbes's theory of power. To Hobbes, power originates from comparisons between people. Goods are pursued not because they are necessarily useful but because others try to get them too. This excludes in principle the possibility of being content with what one has. Everything in the Leviathan is potentially scarce as the modus operandi of society rules out that there is ever enough. This is why Hobbes describes society as an endless arena of conflicts (see also Achterhuis 1995). Scarcity is, therefore, a relation between limited means and unlimited averse. This is not to deny that the Middle Ages and non-Western cultures experienced periods of shortages. The point is that, until the nineteenth century, the concept of scarcity did not signify a general condition of mankind. Scarcity always referred to catastrophes, famines, wars. Hobbes, therefore, anticipates the modern meaning of scarcity by two hundred years (Achterhuis 1995: 72).

With Hobbes, the myth of modern economy is born. Once accepted, there seems to be only one road left to deal with scarcity. This road is called development. The increase in productive forces we call progress. By the end of the eighteenth century, the myth is fully worked out by Adam Smith. Scarcity is the original condition of mankind. It is not Hobbes's competitive and alienating desires which create scarcity, but nature, which has to be conquered by labour and by advances in science, technology and engineering (Achterhuis 1995: 74; see also Sachs 1995). This view becomes the paradigm for almost everything that has been said about economy and society. Achterhuis reports that, in the twentieth century, Keynes compared capitalist endeavour to a struggle in the dark tunnel of scarcity. However much he disliked capitalism, it was a necessary stage mankind had to go through. Due to increases in the efficiency of labour, one day the light would shine at the end of the tunnel. Mankind would be able to live humanely again (Achterhuis 1995: 74). In the meantime, however, nature has to be reduced to a field of resources and people are nothing more than bundles of labour.

It is in this spirit, then, that Polanyi makes the point that ‘In the end, the free labor market, in spite of the inhuman methods employed in creating it, proved financially beneficial to all concerned’ (Polanyi 1944: 77). In itself, this sentence is not only wrong, but also scandalous. The peasants who were evicted from the land and fled to the cities to work in the Satanic mills were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Stripped of their humanity, they were used as labour power dying and/or falling into illhealth years, if not decades, before their time. Marx quoting County Magistrate Broughton Charlon's description of a lace factory in 1860 highlights the point well enough:

Their limbs wearing away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stone-like torper, utterly horrible to contemplate …

We are not surprised that Mr Mallet, or any other manufacturer, should stand forward and protest against discussion … The system, as Rev. Montagu Valpy describes it, is one of unmitigated slavery, socially, physically, morally, and spiritually (Marx 1999: 154).

In the pottery industry, children of seven worked fifteen hours a day. In Stoke-on-Trent, 36.6 percent of the population were potters, but more than half of the deaths were from lung diseases caused by working in pottery factories (Collier 2008: 101). Only immigration from the rural areas kept the population going. In the matches industry, children as young as six worked from 12 to 15 hours a day (Collier 2008: 102). Marx in Capital quotes from a speech in the House of Commons in 1863: ‘The cotton trade has existed for ninety years … It has existed for three generations of the English race, and I believe I may safely say that during that period it has destroyed nine generations of factory operatives’ (Marx 1999: 164–5). Polanyi's belief in progress, the idea that pain had to be endured, that capitalism had to develop and in the form it did (never mind the cost in human life and misery on a gigantic scale), also shines through in the use of the word ‘financial’. It is strange, indeed, that Polanyi, the proponent of redistribution, the champion of reciprocity, invokes a monetary standard in this context. The peasants did not want to become uprooted. They did not want to work themselves to death in factories. At this point, labour, being a fictitious commodity, is fully commodified and Polanyi welcomes it.

6. Conclusions: The problem of dark times

What can Polanyi tell us that is relevant for the world we live in? Against economic naturalist conceptions that present 'hunger' and 'gain' as timeless and universal forces that mould society into market forms, Polanyi argues that such motives and their portraits of 'economic man' are themselves artifacts of institutional arrangements. Hunger and gain only dictate human behaviour under specific historical circumstances in which land, labour and money are commodified. As a corollary of this, he holds the view that the nineteenth century universalised the market. Hence, nineteenth-century views of the world naturally embraced economic determinism, since such modes of thinking mirrored all social institutions. Markets,
therefore, are not the expression of primal, timeless instincts. They are social institutions of which the design depends on power relations, scientific notions, culture and other social factors. They can and must be investigated in social terms.

Secondly, there is the insight that any society that approximates the ideal of the free market reduces civilization to a wilderness. Polanyi documents this thesis for the nineteenth century. The rise and reign of the market gave rise to reactions from society that sought to protect itself from capitalism. As a consequence, only aggressive state action made commodities conform to the dictates of the market. Market society in its pure form did not exist for long and, to the extent it did exist, it was a creature of politics: 'The road to the free market, was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized and controlled intervention' (Polanyi in Block 2003: 241). Contrary to popular belief, the same has to be said about neo-liberalism, this 'Maoism of the right', as Gray calls it (Gray 1995: 132). We do not agree with Booth where he states that:

(M)odernity as market society is … from the moment of its birth a contested form … and (ii) challenged politically … It is … expressed in the emergence of both socialist politics and antimodern movements on the Right and in the creation of institutions that reassert society’s governance over both production and distribution … Such projects for reembedding the economy flow naturally from the picture of market-society as ruled over by a disembedded, self-legislating economy … (However) … contrary to Polanyi-type arguments, all economies, including the near-to-pervasive-market economies, are moral economies, embedded in the (ethical) framework of their communities (Booth 1994: 202).

Where is the ethical framework that Booth is talking about? What needs to happen, according to Polanyi, is to restructure society in such a way that the pursuit of gain is not central. Market societies must maintain some threshold level of embeddedness or else risk social, economic and ecological disaster. Therefore, the distinction is not between embedded and disembedded economies – the latter are not an option – but between successful and unsuccessful modes of regulation. To take history beyond Polanyi, during the 1950s and 1960s, western societies were lulled into the belief that capitalism had been sufficiently organized. The welfare state provided fordist production with a human face, although it was an anonymous face, fully functional to commodification. It was redistribution in order to grow optimally. People nonetheless spoke about the social responsibility of capitalism. Half a century later, we know that nothing about the organization of society is clear. And here, Polanyi, among others, can guide us: we need to move away from commodification. This message is more urgent and more important than measures against global warming and all other cataclysms that are coming our way because their management, and with it, our survival, depends on the implementation of a program – a new way of life - which is currently not on the political agenda anywhere, be it democratic or not.

References


1 See Isaacs’s review of Sievers’s Has Market Capitalism Collapsed?: A Critique of Karl Polanyi’s New Economics. Isaacs writes: ‘Dr. Sievers does not make any mention of who Dr. Polanyi is or why a book of 305 pages deserves a commentary of 387 pages’, adding that the conclusion is ‘… repetitious to those who read (it)’ (Isaacs 1950: 161).

2 ‘Single out whatever motive you please, and organise production in such a manner as to make that motive the individual’s incentive to produce, and you will have induced a picture of man as altogether absorbed by that particular motive … (H)uman beings will labor for a large variety of reasons as long as things are arranged accordingly’ (Polanyi 1971c: 236).

3 For a very recent example of this type of thinking, see: R. Reich, 2008, Supercapitalism: The Battle for Democracy in an Age of Big Business. Cambridge: Icon Books.

4 For an overview of sociological thinking in reference to the market, see Krippner (2003), Lie (1997) and Montgomery (1998).

5 As he writes: ‘If ever there was a political movement that responded to the needs of an objective situation and was not a result of fortuitous causes it was fascism’ (Polanyi in Block, 2003: 236).

6 Tandy (1997) argues that proof of reciprocity can be found in Homeros, which is true. He refers to a dispute between Menelaos and Antilochus about a carriage to be used for a competition – both will use the same carriage to drive the same distance. However, this example is poorly chosen, as it does not deal with reciprocity but with courtesy and honour between warriors (the exchange of weapon equipment does not lead to any mutual future obligation). The giving of gifts to guests, on the other hand, can be interpreted as reciprocal, but it is very likely that, in economic terms, this custom was unimportant.
change does not’ (Tilly 1984: 33).

10 Another arena where this feature of magical thinking was brought out was the Trobriand gardens of which Malinowski left a penetrating account. Yam gardens were laid out with geometrical regularity, cleared of the last blade of grass and provided with complicated constructions that were described as 'magical prisms', which attracted yam-growing power into the soil. The litanies of the magician, delivered at the site of the prisms, consisted of metaphors and descriptions of an ideal garden. However, says Gell, if one considers these litanies, one realises that the garden being celebrated is, in effect, not a garden situated in some never-never land, but the one which is actually present. He continues: 'It is apparent that the real garden and its real productivity are what motivates the imaginary construction of the magical garden. It is because non-magical technology is effective, up to a point, that the idealized version of technology which is embodied in magical discourse is imaginatively compelling' (Gell 1988: 9).

12 This is also Lovejoy’s opinion on the basis of two case studies (Salago and Kano in the nineteenth century). Lovejoy concludes that: ‘Polanyi presente mal le phénomène et son concept de “port commercial” est vague. Contrairement à l’analyse statique qu’effectuait Polanyi, seul un regard diachronique permet de saisir tous les facteurs qui influencent l’organisation du commerce. La contribution majeure de Polanyi est constituée moins par sa théorie elle-même que par les réactions qu’elle a suscitées. La confrontation du modèle substantiviste à l’analyse diachronique des données empiriques permet de mieux comprendre les comportements économiques du passé’ (Lovejoy, abstract, 1982: 245).

13 Because Tilly is right in saying that ‘There is no such thing as social change … Many large-scale processes exist: urbanization, proletarianization, population growth, capitalization, bureaucratization all occur in a definable, coherent way. Social change does not’ (Tilly 1984: 33).

14 Polanyi’s assertion, which is conservative enough, that the famous bread scale played a powerful role in depressing rural wages is inaccurate. A large body of scholarship shows that the use of the bread scale was not widespread enough in rural England to have the dramatic consequences that Polanyi attributes to it (see Block 2003: 243).

15 Polanyi wrote, for example, that ‘The Industrial Revolution in England was incomparably more harmful than in other countries. Only here were the horrors of licensed child-labor and systemic pauperization part of working-class history … The horrors of that time still haunt the workers; and this has a distinct bearing on the gradualism which is characteristic of the British working class ... The Continental laborer had not passed through the degrading pauperization of Speenhamland nor was there any parallel in this experience to the scorching fires of the New Poor Law … He … rose to the (status) of factory worker, and very soon to that of enfranchised and unionized worker. Thus he escaped the cultural catastrophe which followed (the Industrial Revolution) ... in England’ (Polanyi 1944, our emphasis). But there is no evidence whatsoever which proves that the Belgians, working in the coal mines of the Borinage and the steel industry around Charleroi or Liege, the French workers of Lille and Roubaix, the German workers in the Ruhr or the American workers were better off than their English counterparts in the early nineteenth century. This is just another of Polanyi’s undocumented and unresearched assertions which seems to fly in the face of the evidence. Note that in the preface of Capital, Marx tells his German readers that the reason for taking his historical material from England was that the situation in Germany was far worse for lack of factory legislation, which started in England in 1833, although it was more often than not, not enforced until 1844.
Introduction
Since 2004, when new member countries joined the EU, there has been a big wave of immigration into the UK. According to the official data provided by the Home Office, 888,000 migrants from accession countries registered to work in 2004–2008. 66% of these applications came from Poland.

Polish people usually come to the United Kingdom in order to work. They are often employed by local factories and warehouses, in construction and catering, and in social services and hospitals. Many workers find jobs through the recruitment agencies as temporary workers. Those who speak English mostly work at call-centres, or as sales assistants; sometimes they are factory or construction-site managers.

This phenomenon has been noticeable also in Northern Ireland. According to the official data from the Department for Work and Pensions, since January 2002 around 23,190 Polish citizens came to work in this region. However, the estimates produced by the Polish Association of Northern Ireland place this number at 40,000. In addition, the greatest number of Polish citizens is located in Belfast. As there are no recent official data available on the number of the Poles in Belfast (due to the fact that the last Census was taken in 2001), I can only refer to the statistics obtained from the Association database, which places this number at 9,000.

In the following paper I will focus on ethnic stratification present at the workplace. That is, I will examine the different strategies that Polish migrants adapt at their work, as a response to a relatively rigid system of positioning on the ethnic stratification ladder. I will thus aim at answering the following questions: How is ethnic membership reflected in the division of labour and in determining employees’ work rotas? What are the different strategies that ‘actors’ employ in their everyday lives in order to cope with the consequences of this hierarchization of labour?

The field and the methodology
This paper is based on my participant observation carried out as a sales assistant at one of the local branches in Belfast of the Mace supermarket chain. I started my job at the shop in September 2006 and at the time of writing I had been working there for nearly a year. There were seven workers on my shift that worked on a regular basis (from 8 till 5 pm), of whom four were Northern Irish and three were Polish.

While the Northern Irish staff had been working at the shop for a couple of years prior to my arrival in Belfast, the Polish employees were ‘newcomers’ and in the course of my stay at Mace, some of them left for Poland, while others replaced them. In fact, the management dealt with the resulting shortage of employees in an interesting way; once someone left the shop, the management went on the Gumtree webpage (www.gumtree.com), where many (current or future) migrants put advertisements that they were looking for a job. This had been the case with me also. Before going to Belfast, I put the following ad on the gumtree webpage:

Hi! I am from Poland and I am going to Belfast to do my PhD in social anthropology. I am looking for a part time job in Belfast to start as soon as possible. I am free in the mornings from Monday to Friday. Please contact me at kempcia@yahoo.com.

The response to that was as follows:

Hi! I saw your ad in gumtree and I could offer you these hours in the Royal Victoria Hospital shop as a sales assistant. Let me know if you are interested. There are already 3 polish girls working in the shop.

In this way – like the other Polish workers – I found myself working at the Mace shop. This relates to the issue of my positionality as a researcher; unlike many anthropologists, I did not go to the shop only in order to conduct fieldwork; I went there to earn a living. Seen from this angle, working as a sales assistant was not the
exotic or the quaint for me. I was a member of the group that I decided to study in the course of my work at the shop. My participation preceded the kind of systematic and conscious observation of the dynamics of the ethnic relations among the workers that I have undertaken in the last months. I made scattered diary entries over the period of time when I worked at the shop, but I only started to take systematic fieldnotes when I conceptualized this paper. While memories can be distorted, as they are time and space contingent (see for example Antze and Lambek 1996), the authenticity of my account can be justified by long acquaintance with the subject. My experiences over months were similar to the experiences of the other workers (compare Blum 2000). In this way, my research questions were formulated after I already had an intimate knowledge of social processes at work and were refined during the course of the research.

However, being an insider to the group under study has its shortcomings. It has been the plague of many ethnographers to become detached from the field of study. This was also my case, especially since the employees of the shop appeared to be strongly segregated along ethnic lines. Nevertheless, while at the beginning I attempted to be ‘in-between’, in order not to lose sight of anything, during the course of my research I found such a positioning extremely difficult, which led me to taking the side of the Polish migrants in the end. As a result, my account presents only one side of the story, it being an emergent construction, written from a very particular location, which comes as a consequence of overlapping identities (see Hill-Collins 1990, Narayan 1993), among which the ones that are most salient are Polish/ migrant worker/ anthropologist.

Structure and agency problem

Before I discuss the ways that ethnic stratification is employed in the division of work at the shop and analyse different ways that Polish migrants use to deal with its consequences, a couple of words should be said about an issue that has been puzzling social scientists for years and has been the constant topic of sociological and anthropological debates, namely the problem of structure and agency (see for example Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1984).

As William Sewell Jr. claims:

Structures tend to appear in social scientific discourse as impervious to human agency, to exist apart from, but nevertheless to determine the essential shape of, the strivings and motivated transactions that constitute the experienced surface of social life. A social science trapped in an unexamined metaphor of structure tends to reduce actors to cleverly programmed automatons (1992: 2).

This quote refers to the main purpose of this paper, which is to disprove the common conceptions about the very nature of migrant work, according to which migrants are passive objects located at the very bottom of the ethnic stratification ladder (see for example Massey 1993, Kearney 1986). The perspective that I take in this work is that all the members of society are capable of exercising some measure of agency in their daily lives. According to Sewell, ‘to be an agent is to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree’ (1992: 20). Of course different possibilities of transformative action are determined by occupancy of different social positions, as defined for example by gender, wealth, ethnicity, but in the end everyone possesses some amount of agency.

What seems to be essential for my considerations is Sewell’s argument about the multiplicity of the structures. Societies, according to him, ‘are based on practices that derive from many different structures … these may sometimes operate in harmony, but they can also lead to sharply conflicting claims and empowerments’ (1992:16–17). In this case, one can consider structure of ethnic stratification as one of the dimensions of the phenomenon, and structure of different forms of capital (such as cultural and social capital) as another. In what follows, I will aim at disclosing how the multiplicity of the structures present at the shop contribute to the empowerment of the individuals entangled in the web of complex power relations.

Ethnic Stratification Structure and Division of Labour

Stratification is the ranking of persons and groups on the basis of various social and sometimes physical characteristics (see Giddens 2006, Brinkerhoff and White 2007). What is at stake in my study is ethnicity as the basis of this categorization, and consequently of inequality. My concern was how ethnic stratification is visible, if at all, in the functioning of the shop. In the course of my research it turned out that ethnic stratification in the shop is reflected in the division of labour and in the way that the shop system is arranged.

The work at the shop is organized in such a manner that the tasks that require the most effort in terms of time efficiency (see Ritzer 2000, Ehrenreich 2001, Leidner 1993) and physical stamina, as well as these which are considered as ‘distasteful’, are done by those who are located on the very bottom of the stratification ladder, that is Polish migrants.

The shop and the workspace

Before I discuss specific examples of how ethnic stratification membership is inherent in the division of labour and the strategies that the actors employ to deal with it, I shall devote some attention to the visualization of the workspace in which the Polish migrants find themselves. I attach its graphic representation, which, although a simple illustration, contributes to the overall clarity of this paper.

The counter is to the left of the entrance, with refrigerators for soft drinks, dairy products and sandwiches located inside. Soup cans and pre-made food sit on the back- wall shelves. Halfway through the shop are situated stands with sweets, bread, cakes, and notebooks. On the right-hand side there are shelves with papers and magazines. Finally, the store-room is located at the back of the shop. It is important to note that cages filled with products are always outside the shopping area and in order to reach the store-room, one has to go through the whole shop.
Garbage girls
As Nedim Karakayali observes,
the tasks that are assigned to strangers often involve objects that are deemed impure, even ‘evil’ and it is the responsibility of the stranger to cleanse the group from those objects … At the very least, such tasks are almost always viewed as being ‘unpleasant’. Conversely, by performing such tasks, the stranger him/herself appears as an impure being (2006: 323).

Polish staff who dispose of the garbage everyday can be seen in this way. One of the shop workers, a Northern Irish man in his 60s, jokingly calls them ‘śmieci’ to denote ‘garbage girls’. What this man holds to be a joke is criticized by another worker in the shop, who claims, ‘Don’t call them like this, it is offensive’. This statement reflects the dual nature of the nickname. Whereas some workers consider it as a joke, others condemn it as being disgraceful and offensive. This pinpoint the underlying problem. Also, the very fact itself that the man uses the foreign word ‘śmieci’ to denote ‘garbage’ is also essential. One may claim that to use his native term to refer to the Polish workers would provoke some uneasiness in the man and this is the reason why he uses the Polish term in order to conceal its patronizing dimension.

Doing tills: Who is next please?
The Polish migrants are the ones who most often operate the tills at the shop. As the shop is very busy, the work at the tills requires a lot of physical and intellectual endurance (compare Ehrenreich 2001). The organization of labour reminds of what George Ritzer calls the process of McDonaldization (Ritzer 2000). The stress is put on efficiency, and the labour is defined in terms of chain mentality. Customers are constantly being served and in this way the shop assistants behind the till are continuously occupied. Even the physical space is arranged in a very specific way. On the right hand side of the till, where it is the busiest – as these locations are the ones most noticeable to the customers – are located the Polish workers. On the left hand side, where fewer customers are served, are located the Northern Irish workers.

At the same time, Polish workers are the ones who most often work at the tills during peak hours. At the time that the Polish serve the customers, the Northern Irish work on the floor. This is much less tiring in terms of physical and intellectual effort undertaken. As one colleague put it, ‘we have to work, while they pretend that they are doing something, but they are just sitting around doing nothing’. In relation to this, the rule that should be kept at the shop according to which none should do the tills more than four hours per day is constantly broken.

Unpacking cages: Who is the strongest?
The Polish migrants are the ones who are responsible in the mornings for carrying the foodstuffs into the shop. This task requires a lot of physical stamina and energy. For example, the foodstuffs include cartons of two-litre coke, or plastic crates containing cartons and bottles of milk.

While Polish migrants are engaged in this, the Irish workers are doing the orders. As some of the workers put it, ‘they treat us like slaves. I could understand that they have to do the orders, but they always do it in a wrong way and then we have plenty of unnecessary stuff to put on the shelves’. Another migrant described her experience in the following way:

When I came to the shop they constantly kept leaving me with all the cages on my own. I haven’t known yet how the products are distributed on the shelves. One day, the manager got mad, because I left a carton of coke in an inappropriate place and out of rage he started to throw it all on the floor.

She then continues:

But then I was the only Polish worker at the shop. When other Polish people came, they were obliged to help me in this tiresome task. But never Northern Irish people. It would be too disgraceful for them.

The last sentence indicates the logic underlying the division of labour at the shop. Although all the employees are in fact blue-collar workers, there is a visible tendency to distribute the tasks in this way; the Northern Irish do chores that are more likely to be considered as intellectual tasks (like doing the orders or changing the prices of the products in the computer system), while the Polish migrants do the tasks that require more manual skills.

Rota system: working days and nights
After presenting how ethnic stratification is inscribed in the division of labour, I will now discuss how it is seen in the way that the rota is arranged. The working schedule changes every week. For the full-time workers, the timetable is the same all the time. However, it changes constantly for part-time workers. Even though there is a great amount of flexibility in the way the rota is set up, as all the employees are allowed to write their requests in a special notebook, whenever they have no specific preferences they are likely to get uncomfortable shifts. This concerns being given inconvenient working hours (as
the shop is open from 8 am to 9.30 pm) as well as getting time off.

While this is the case for everyone, the Polish migrant workers are more affected by these inconveniences than the Irish ones. For example, one of the Polish migrants complained, ‘Why do they always make me work on the weekends? I have only one day per week off. No one else at this shop has to work as much as me’. Another Polish worker noticed, ‘Once I had to work nine days in a row. This was killing. I am sure that if it were a Northern Irish member of the staff, this wouldn’t be the case’.

Strategies of Dealing with Hierarchization of Labour
As I indicated in the first part of this paper, ethnic stratification is indeed visible in the daily functioning of the shop. Yet, there is another level of reality to be investigated in the particular system of power, that Peter Berger refers to as informal power structure (1963). For, when the anthropologist concerns himself with power, he ‘will look behind the official mechanisms that are supposed to regulate power in community’ (Berger 1963: 45). The social scientist ‘will seek to penetrate the smoke screen of the official versions of reality and try to grasp the signals that come from the “underworld”’ (1963: 47).

In this vein, I believe that the migrants are not passive objects located at the bottom of the ethnic stratification ladder, but rather active actors, with agency to negotiate their roles within a relatively rigid system of hierarchization. In what follows, I will discuss how the Polish migrants choose different strategies, in order to moderate the consequences of the ethnic stratification at work in the shop. This is clearly seen on the level of discourse and the level of practice.

Strategies on the level of discourse
As Spindler and Spindler observe:

within any social setting … social actors are carrying on a culturally constructed dialogue. This dialogue is expressed in behaviour, words, symbols, and in the application of cultural knowledge to make instrumental activities and social situations work for one (1987: 2).

Seen from this angle, analysis of discourse is consequential to my paper, as it reveals the meanings that the social actors attach to the socio-cultural reality around them.

Temporality and instrumentality of work
On the level of everyday discourse the Polish migrants emphasize the temporal dimension of their work at the shop. Such an impression of temporality helps them to deal with the tasks in which they are engaged. This is also reinforced by the fact that Polish migrants usually regard their work at the shop in terms of rational and instrumental action, as a sort of trade-off. That is, in most of the cases it has an economic character: most of the migrants are saving up money for purposes defined before they left their home country. As one of the Polish migrants, a girl in her mid twenties, put it:

I really don’t care, I am not going to complain, I am only doing my job, I want to save up for the renovation of [my] new house in Poland and then I won’t work here anymore.

Thus, in most cases the stay in Northern Ireland has a short-term dimension, and Polish people who work at the shop return home after earning a certain amount of money. In relation to this, the Polish workers often tend to draw the distinction between themselves and the Irish workers. This is clearly visible in the words of a girl in her early twenties, who says:

We are only having fun here … A Polish girl came to Northern Ireland to earn some money, whereas they treat it seriously. They will always work here; it is their whole life, while we will go back home.

In this way, Polish people in their everyday discourse aim at highlighting their personal freedom. It is only the matter of their own choice that they work at the shop. They are aware of the fact that whenever they want to, they can return to their home country and in this way they consider themselves to be in a privileged position compared to the position of the Northern Irish people working with them.

Symbolic struggle for power: use of nicknames
The use of nicknames in order to designate ‘The Other’ could be also considered as a symbolic means to reverse the hierarchy of the statuses at play at the shop. Nicknames are what James C. Scott refers to as ‘hidden transcripts’ (1990). Hidden transcripts are ‘discourse that takes place “offstage”, beyond direct observation of powerholders’ (1990: 4). Scott observes that:

Offstage, where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is possible. Slaves in the relative safety of their quarters can speak the words of anger, revenge, self-assertion that they must normally choke back when in the presence of the masters and mistresses (1990: 18).

Nicknames in this vein appear as a species of burlesque, ‘social satire’; they give satisfaction to those who use them (Pit-Rivers 1961: 169; see also Breen 1982) and they are supposed to deride and minimize.

Accordingly, the Polish migrants working at the shop very often use nicknames when referring to their Northern Irish colleagues. The derogatory appellations are especially in order to refer to those who possess the most power. In this way, the manager of the shop is called ‘Kwasny’ (which in Polish means ‘sour’), and two other major workers are named ‘Zgryz’ (which in Polish means ‘jaws’ — its owner has crooked teeth) and ‘Farba’ (‘hair dye’ — its owner constantly changes her hair colour). The Polish staff members particularly dislike them, as they are the ones who impose most authority over them.

Other nicknames, dedicated to those Irish workers located at lower positions of the stratification ladder, are not so offensive. For example, two workers in their sixties are called ‘elderly woman’ and ‘elderly man’ respectively. Their age is an objective trait and it is used not to offend them, but rather to enable the Polish migrants to freely comment on the events at the shop.
Highlighting one’s status: cultural capital at play

As mentioned earlier, there are huge differences in terms of cultural capital possessed by the Polish and Northern Irish members of the staff. While the local workers come predominantly from uneducated backgrounds, Polish workers are university degree-holders.

Paradoxically, however, most of the tasks that require intellectual skills are done by the Northern Irish people (these are cash-ups, pick-ups, doing orders). This increases feelings of relative deprivation among Polish workers, when they think back to their situation at home and compare their position at the shop to that of their Northern Irish counterparts (see Stark and Taylor 1991). It is well reflected in the words of my interlocutors:

After five years of studying German philology I do exactly what you are doing right at the moment, after getting Master of Arts in anthropology, that is working at the shop. The funniest thing is that these Italian mates finished their high school and they are engaged in more ambitious kind of work than we are.

In order to deal with the consequences of their disadvantaged position within the structure of ethnic stratification, Polish girls try to emphasize and increase the level of the cultural capital that they possess at their work place (see Bourdieu 1977). For example, two Polish girls speak in French while doing certain manual tasks that don’t require much concentration. As one of them explained it to me, ‘In order not to totally waste time doing some stupid and senseless tasks, at least we can improve our spoken French’.

Such attempts to display the cultural capital that the individuals possess are also part of the complex structure of power relations in the shop. Sometimes, Polish migrants aim at displaying their skills and capacities in front of their Northern Irish colleagues (compare Lan 2003). In this way, on the symbolic level, they try to reverse the hierarchy of the statuses at play in the shop. For example, while one day two Polish girls were practising their French behind the tills, an Irish worker in his 60s exclaimed to one of them: ‘Don’t show off!’ This suggests that such behaviour causes a sort of uneasiness in some of the Northern Irish members of the staff, who may feel uncomfortable in a kind of situation where the social positions are reversed.

Strategies on the level of practice

Although the division of labour is determined according to the ethnic identity of the workers, Polish migrants attempt to find room for manoeuvre within the relatively rigid system of ethnic stratification present at the shop. This is clearly seen in their everyday practice and it often takes the form of strategic secrets, which ‘pertain to intentions and capacities of a team which it conceals from its audience in order to prevent them from adapting effectively to the states of affairs the team is planning to bring about’ (Goffman 1959: 141).

Time management

Polish migrants engaged in tiresome tasks often try to avoid them by prolonging certain activities or creating certain situations in order to limit the amount of time they spend doing disliked chores. For example, when they are sent to do the garbage, they always spend a couple of minutes more than necessary (as the dumpsters are located outside the shop and in this way beyond the control of management). As one of my interlocutors explained it to me, ‘Instead of rather spending more time doing the tills, I prefer to spend more time outside just chilling out. No one is ever gonna find out’.

Similarly, Polish migrants, while doing the tills, go to the bathroom very often. This practice is first of all a strategic device that they use in order to get away from the tiresome work at the tills. Secondly, very often this is a way to manoeuvre within the relatively rigid system of hierarchization of labour. So, when Polish migrants go off the tills, they call their Irish colleagues to replace them. However, once they return to the shop, they go to work on the floor, leaving the Irish workers at the counter. What is supposed to be only a temporary replacement, then, often turns out to be a longer-lasting one.

Finally, while Polish migrants are doing the tills, they often engage in conversations with the customers. One of the workers said to me, ‘In order to rest, I am used to chat with the customers. In this way, I don’t feel as an object, but rather as an active subject’. In connection with the earlier part of this paper it is also worthwhile mentioning that very often a recurrent theme brought up by the Polish migrants during the conversations is the temporal aspect of their work. Furthermore, some of the workers mention the level of their education to the customers. As one of my interlocutors put it, ‘So they don’t think that Polish people are just ordinary blue-collar workers’.

Final resource: open and collective forms of contestation

Open forms of contestation also constitute a tool of resistance that Polish workers use at the shop. Although it is not frequent, it is a powerful strategy. During the eight-month period there were many tensions present between the Polish and Northern Irish workers. However, Polish people usually did not complain. They justified their behaviour in terms of rational action. One of the workers said to me: ‘I want to avoid troubles at the shop. Soon I will be away from here. I do not want to make enemies’.

Nevertheless, the tension escalated and when it reached its climax (to put it in the words of one of the Polish workers, ‘Irish workers were only pretending doing something, while doing nothing’), Polish migrants did resist. They all decided during one lunch break that at one busy moment they would go off the tills, and hence their Northern Irish colleagues would be left with no choice but to serve the customers. This happened, and consequently the initial tension turned into open conflict. Polish workers explicitly criticized the unequal division of labour at the shop. Because the management was at that time absent, for the owner opened new shops in Belfast and the manager was not onsite during these events, they spoke directly to the owner himself and insisted on changes being introduced to the distribution of tasks at the workplace. As a result, they achieved their goal. The Irish workers started to do the tills and to carry the heavy packages from the cages to the shop. This state of things lasted for around a month, but gradually Northern Irish workers started to go off the tills and to avoid physical effort, and in this way the situation returned to its initial point. However, what is at stake here is not the end result
of the act of resistance, but rather resistance seen as a process, at which particular parties attempt to negotiate and re-define their roles within the relatively rigid system of ethnic stratification at work.

Conclusion

To sum up, the ethnic stratification system is indeed inscribed in the everyday functioning of the shop. It manifests itself through the division of labour at the workplace and it is visible in the arrangement of working hours. However, within this relatively rigid system of hierarchization of labour based on the ethnic background of the individuals, there is a space left for negotiation and re-negotiation of the roles ascribed to persons employed at the shop. This space is carved out within the daily discourse of the migrants as well as in their practices. In this way, Polish migrants are capable of exercising agency at the workplace, and endowed with possibilities of transformative action.

References


1 This information is obtained from the Association's database. It is worthwhile mentioning that the incongruence between the data obtained from the Home Office and the Polish Association of Northern Ireland may derive from the fact that many migrants do not register with Home Office.

2 This supports the findings of the CRONEM study, Class and ethnicity: Polish migrant workers in London (Garapich, Eade and Drinkwater 2006) and the COMPAS study, Changing Status, Changing Lives (Anderson et alii 2006).
**Violent Memories**

**Siún Carden**

This article looks at the presentation of commemorative sites in west Belfast to tourist audiences, with reference to the discussion of the nature of violence between Scheper-Hughes and Robbens in *Social Anthropology*. It then looks at the literature on violence and memory, considering the significance of how violent events are remembered for the construction of collective identity.

**Keywords**: violence, memory, tourism

Around the Falls Road in west Belfast, where I have spent the last year doing fieldwork, a tourist industry has grown up around sites of violent conflict as the conflict itself has receded into the past. The process of presenting this local history to tourist audiences relates to the recent debate about the nature of violence between Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Antonius Robben in *Social Anthropology*, and raises questions about how violent incidents are incorporated into individual and collective memory that many anthropologists have discussed.

Scheper-Hughes proposes 'a continuum of violence' which blurs 'the distinctions between wartime and peacetime crimes, between the exception and the rule' (2008a: 81, 2008b: 85). Robben, however, insists on the need for 'categorizations to differentiate one form of violence from another', suggesting 'four levels of social complexity: crowds, politico-military organizations, families and the self', and asserting that 'violence occurring at each of these levels cannot be reduced to any of the others' (2008a: 83, 84). The intimate and complex nature of the 'Troubles' suffered in west Belfast means that these four levels can be difficult to tease apart, as one incident may be seen to occur at different levels by different interest groups, or at multiple levels simultaneously: Local republican guides relating violent histories to tourists share Robben's quest to 'differentiate one form of violence from another', insisting that 'this was a political conflict between the British state and the IRA' rather than a dispute between neighbouring 'crowds' of 'Catholics and Protestants', 'for example' (Robben 2008a: 83, 84). At the same time, in presenting their own readings of history as having been suppressed or obscured by contradictory interpretations that situate violence at a different 'level of social complexity', these guides demonstrate that the boundaries between such levels can be permeable, debatable and deceptive (Robben 2008a: 84).

One such tour included a visit to a memorial garden in the Ballymurphy housing estate, a small, gated area with the green, white and orange wreaths and black plaques with gilded inscriptions which are standard for commemorative sites in catholic west Belfast. Above a list of names headed 'CIVILIANS' are, in capitals, the words 'As a direct result of Britain's occupation of our country these men women and children were murdered by British crown forces and pro unionist death squads who were under the control of the British state'. Here, the categories of 'civilians' and 'state' forces are vehemently distinguished from each other, with 'pro unionist death squads' subsumed into 'the British state'. Across the road, however, a mural referring to this suspected 'collusion' ends with a statement much closer to Scheper-Hughes's view of violence as a seamless whole, 'MURDER = MURDER'. The tour guide's commentary reflected a belief in the importance of categorizing violence within different social structures, as suggested by Robben, while, by referring to 'civilians' falsely classed as 'paramilitaries', 'political prisoners treated like criminals' and 'loyalist paramilitaries' indistinguishable from 'British security forces', he drew attention to the potential for dissent inherent in such categorizations. The guide also drew the 'links between the violence of everyday life and political terror' that Scheper-Hughes emphasizes, by presenting local deaths resulting from car crime, highlighted in another nearby mural, as part of what, in an interview, he called 'the legacy of the conflict; we're going to be feeling the reverberations of that for a very long time' (2008b: 86).

As around a dozen European tourists and a couple of local visitors took photographs and listened to the guide, two men entered the memorial garden, nodding familiarly to him, apologizing for interrupting, and handing leaflets to the tour group. The front of each said 'Ballymurphy Internment Massacre', the dates '9, 10, 11 August 1971', 'VICTIMS', and, superimposed over black-and-white photographs of the dead, the repeated word 'UNRESOLVED'. Inside, the story of how eleven local people 'were killed by the British Army's parachute Regiment' was told with reference to eyewitness accounts, family memories and 'ballistic and forensic evidence', in an account that contradicts 'The British Army version of events', which it notes 'remains the official version'. At this point the group of tourists was at the focal point of a landscape created to communicate an 'unofficial' version of the violent past, between gable walls celebrating local combatants and rejecting 'official' explanations, within a garden whose central plaque dedicates it to 'All The Unsung Heroes'. As the guide's narrative was accompanied by the arrival of the leaflets, the effect was of being immersed in an environment saturated with accounts of violent memories, directed at the visitors. A development officer with the west Belfast tourism organisation, Fáilte Feirste Thíar, told me that political tours are 'an opportunity for the community to tell their story'. The anthropological literature on violence and memory suggests that struggles over memories of
violence often involve struggles over definitions of ‘the community’, in which group and individual identity are at stake, which in part explains the great importance placed on transmitting these memories by the local people responsible for the murals, the garden, the tour and the leaflets.

The communal identity of a group of people is based on the assumption that they share a broad understanding of the world and the place of the group within it, that, in spite of individual differences, any single member of the group could tell a stranger a version of the story of who they are that the others would recognize. What Maurice Halbwachs calls the ‘collective memory’ is the ‘storehouse’ of common reference points from which these stories are constructed. The relationship between the memories of individuals and the collective memories of societies is much debated, not least because of the common perception that the memories of individuals make up their unique personal identities. The myth that at the moment of death, a person’s life ‘flashes before their eyes’ expresses the notion that living is a process of accumulating memories which add up to an individual consciousness, completed in death when there is nothing more to remember. The association between what we remember and who we are makes disagreement over the accuracy and validity of memories extremely emotive, as such disagreement threatens individuals’ senses of self as well as implying the absence of the consensus on their place in the social world which is necessary to cohesive group identity. When there is a serious discrepancy between the memory of the individual and the collective memory of the group, there is a rupture in the idea of who ‘we’ are.

The term ‘collective memory’ suggests that shared accounts of the past take on a life of their own, as individual stories are combined in more powerful metanarratives which feed back into the way people form their own memories. As Kenny says, ‘Memory … is always the memory of individuals; but individual psychology is inadequate to the task of explaining it’ (1999: 435). The impossibility of recalling the totality of any moment means that to remember is always to recount a selective narrative, forming a structured account from an unmanageably vast and chaotic range of impressions, which are inevitably tainted with knowledge acquired in the intervening time that cannot be eliminated from our present consciousness. This means that even memories never told to another person are not insulated from the influence of the collective memory, which helps determine what we find important as well as what we think it means. Anthropologists investigating ‘historicity, or the way people conceive of history’, such as Marshall Sahlins and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, note that ‘An event becomes such as it is interpreted’ and that ‘Time is continuous, while history is discontinuous, punctuated by the people who interpret temporal flow and historical events’ (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 236, 238; Sahlins 1985: 374). Similarly, Feldman states that ‘The event is not what happens. The event is that which can be narrated’, as life does not happen in a series of discrete events, but rather events are formed from nebulous impressions through the process of narration (1991: 14). This means that remembering constitutes a continual remoulding of the past into events relevant to the present.

The ambiguity of the relationship between ‘what happens’ and the event we remember is heightened when our memories are of violence, both by the ‘indeterminacy’ of unmediated bodily experience and by the high political and moral stakes in determining what has happened to whom (Thornton 1990: 218). ‘Violence itself, raw and unthought, is meaningless’, the mere action of forces on bodies (Thornton 1980: 218). This makes the physical experience of violence particularly inaccessible to the meaning-saturated process of remembering, especially as it is often accompanied by pain, and ‘pain finds language wanting in pain’s excruciating particularity’, the incomunicability of an individual’s physical sensation precluding it from forming part of any collective memory (Daniels: 138).

Yet despite the ‘meaningless’ quality of violence, violent incidents feature among those stories which are told, retold and passionately contested, by people concerned not only with the immediate victims, who may be long dead, but with a quest to establish meaning for the wider community in events which are contained within the bounds of individual bodies and characterized by ‘indeterminacy’. For example, Malkki shows that a theme in Hutu stories of fleeing from violence is ‘the sudden supplanting of a social order by an asocial chaos’ (1997: 109). This ‘asocial chaos’, remembered only as an overwhelming bodily process, nevertheless became a fundamental part of the ‘mythico-history’ with which they gave meaning to the present in the Tanzanian camps, helping form their social identity as refugees. It was from these socially dislocating moments, experienced as ‘mere bodies’ (1995: 109), that the Hutu in the camps began to construct the ‘standard narratives’ that placed them in particular relationships with the groups around them, not only the Tanzanian authorities, but also the Tutsi whose past domination in Burundi was now seen as part of a wider cycle of exploitation stretching back to colonial history (1995: 115). The group identity of the Hutu as effective farmers, ‘true cultivators’, was reformulated into the image of the Hutu as ‘tractors’ and ‘granaries’ for their less productive neighbours, whose superior strength in terms of physical force was thus re-evaluated as something based on Hutu prowess (1995: 120). The repeated experience of violence in 1959, 1972 and 1993 came to be seen as a cycle that could only be broken through appealing to the international community as an ‘impartial audience for the documentation of the “true history”’ (1995: 152). Kadende-Kaiser and Kaiser suggest that what is most important about the narratives created in the camps is ‘the perception of and a belief in a rigid ethnic “other”, based, at least in part, on the watershed events of violence’ (1997: 43).

James also describes how individual stories about violence coalesce into a story of group identity that shapes the group’s reaction to future events. In ‘The Names of Fear’, she analyses an outbreak of fighting she herself witnessed between Uduk and Nuer refugees at an Ethiopian transit camp, relating two Uduk words for different types of fear to the individual and group reactions to this incident. She suggests that ‘fear meaning fear as a response to an immediate physical threat to the individual, often experienced as a bodily, unreflective process, and “kape”, meaning a reflective unease, awareness of a lack of knowledge and apprehension for the group, were both felt in the camp (1997: 122, 123). She describes how people’s reaction to violence moved from the individual terror of immediate physical harm, through storytelling and sharing of
information, to an unsettling awareness of the vulnerability of the group.

From these accounts of disparate narratives being rapidly distilled to ‘standard versions’ expressing the situation of the group, it is tempting to draw the conclusion that the memory of violence simply encourages the formation of a cohesive group identity in reaction to a perceived external enemy. However, Brinkman warns against such generalizations, in her work on Nyemba refugees in Namibia, commenting that ‘Among refugees from this area, ethnicity is avoided as a category of identity’ (1999: 417), countering James’s portrayal of ethnicity as strengthened by exile (1999: 421). In this case, rather than formulating a communal reaction to past violence based on shared ‘mythico-history’, people downplayed any group identity which would more clearly define them as a target for future violence, preferring to blur the distinction between themselves and the local population around them by letting their memories of violence lapse into the untold and forgotten. Brinkman relates this to Malkki’s description of the ‘pragmatics of identity’ employed by Hutu refugees in towns, who refused to accept labels like ‘refugee’, aiming for ‘the unmarking’ of oneself as a ‘stranger’ as opposed to Hutu in camps who constructed ‘mythico-histories’ to explain and reinforce their ‘refugee’ status (Malkki 1995: 195, Brinkman 1999: 421). Brinkman suggests that the ‘highly situational approach to identity’ among Nyemba refugees in Namibia is in part a reaction to fear, based on memories of violence against them as a group, quoting a local informant as saying ‘they are hiding their language, they are afraid to tell about their history. Because they will be chased away’ (1999: 435, 437).

In her account of how the Hutu inhabitants of refugee camps ‘tell about their history’, Malkki highlights the ‘thoughtful, often parodying scrutiny of names and labels’ through which the refugees resist the imposition of unwelcome interpretations on their version of events (1995: 117). Kenny’s assertion is particularly true of past violence: that ‘in certain respects the past is up for grabs. It is really the meaning of the past that is of issue’ (1999: 437). Violence ‘expresses identities and creates tokens of social meaning’, all the more so because it is an indeterminable blank slate invested with huge and malleable symbolic power (Thornton 1990: 225). This makes the incorporation of violent incidents into collective memories a power struggle through which group identities are formed, debated and opposed. Thornton suggests that ‘Power in these contexts is less the ability to cause violence by means of one’s will or authority than it is the ability to impose one interpretation – that is, meaning – among competing interpretations after the occurrence of a particular incident of violence’ (1990: 224).

Pohlant-McCormack has analysed the struggle to establish conflicting interpretations of the outbreak of violence in Soweto in 1976, during which several South African schoolchildren were shot by government troops. She characterizes the government’s response as ‘the collusion of violence and silence’, suggesting that in their attempt to discredit eyewitnesses and obscure their conclusions, they did violence not only to bodies but to memories as well (2000: 24). Pohlant-McCormack justifies calling this attack on personal memory a form of violence with the observation that it damages ‘the ability of individuals to think historically’, impeding their attempts to locate their own experience within collective memory, but insists that individuals can effectively counter such efforts to neutralize the subversive power of memories of violence (2000: 23).

In ‘The Politics of Memory: The Human Rights Movement and the Construction of Democracy in Argentina’, Jelin examines how some people have gone about this, as relatives of victims united in their search for truth about lost loved ones under the slogan ‘Ni olvido ni perdon’ (Neither Oblivion Nor Pardon). Jelin discusses the development of the human rights movement from an apparently homogeneous group of people, with the shared aim of bringing past violence to light, to a much more fragmented collection of people employing different strategies to remember their loved ones in different ways (1994: 46). With the arrival of democracy in Argentina, the complications inherent in the drive to remember became more apparent, as the increasing ability to share stories of violence was accompanied by the realization that ‘at an individual level, one can only forget what one has lived through’ (1994: 47). The human rights movement found itself facing the twin dangers of oblivion, reducing their loss to a matter of politics, and the endless recollection of trauma, continually renewing its tragedy (1994: 53).

The idea that preventing memories of violence from sinking into ‘oblivion’ is a way of denying its perpetrators ‘pardon’ reflects the notion Booth calls ‘memory-justice’, the perception of ‘Justice as the institutionalized remembrance of the past’, which fuels the efforts of many victims of violence to have their loss recognized as part of the collective memory of their society. The institutionalization of memories of violence, for example through official court proceedings and public memorials, is also an attempt to enable the forgetting that is necessary ‘at an individual level’ for life to go on (Jelin 1994: 46). Booth discusses the Saville Inquiry set up by Tony Blair to establish an official account of the events of Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland, as part of the broader effort towards reconciliation after decades of violence. He suggests that such proceedings do not always have the desired effect, as ‘memory in this case still keeps the bitter well open’. Booth recounts how ‘At the sites of the Bloody Sunday killings in Derry, the nationalist community mounted wall-sized photographic murals of some of the thirteen civilians in the moment of their death’ (2001: 778). This memorial, aggressive in its insistence on the re-experience of past violence in the present, illustrates the sense in which violence whose meaning has not been fixed in an accepted narrative carries its irresolvable horror into the here and now. The effect of these pictures is that of a ‘freeze frame’ from real life, frustrating the viewer’s desire to set the film going again and let these people finish dying. Booth comments that ‘in the shadow of remembrance other human goods can wither’ (2001: 789).

Booth’s skepticism about the ability of official narratives to bridge the chasms in group identity caused by violence is supported by Zolberg’s examination of one example of ‘Contested Remembrance’, an exhibition at the USA’s National Air and Space Museum based around the nose cone of the B52 which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, half a century after the event. Zolberg’s analysis shows that the association of the ‘institutionalized remembrance of the past’ with justice and redemption makes public representations of violent
incidents highly controversial, as mixed reactions to the exhibit proved. Zolberg comments that heterogeneous groups or societies, such as the USA, treat public memorials as ‘occasions and sites to enhance commonality’, reinforcing the cohesion of group identity, but they may instead ‘serve as memorials of dissenion’, bringing to the fore the irresolvable ‘indeterminacy’ of violent acts which persists in the mutually exclusive nature of competing claims as to their ‘true’ meaning (1998: 567, 573).

The extent to which the collective memory exists independently of physical events, as a continually emerging statement of ever-changing group identity, is clear in the phenomenon whereby ‘dire events which should (we might think) be remembered are not, whereas things that never happened become the object of collective recollection’ (Kenny 1999: 423). The passing of ‘things that never happened’ into the collective memory can be evidenced in certain cases, like the reported encounter between Yir Yoront Australian Aborigines and Captain Cook which is part of oral history yet, according to the ship’s extensive records, could not have been possible (1999: 424). The controversy surrounding ‘recovered memory syndrome’, the accessing or creating of memories of abuse suffered during childhood much later in life, demonstrates the enormous emotional and political implications of the slipperiness of memory (1999: 423). It might be assumed that, when abuse results in physical injury, the tangibility of the sensory event and the visibility of wounds and scars to other people might make remembering inevitable. However, Linda Meyer Williams’s psychological study of how childhood abuse is remembered shows that of 129 people admitted to hospital due to violent attacks as children, seventeen years later 38% had forgotten the violence done to them and documented by emergency room staff. Violence was more likely to be forgotten if it had been committed by someone close to the child. Kenny suggests that this was because ‘the people around them failed to provide a milieu in which the abuse could be recounted and take root’, emphasizing the way individual memories are shaped within collective memories, as ‘individual and collective experience imply each other’ (1999: 421). This supports Pohlandt-McCormack’s assertion that individuals’ ability to structure their experiences into narrative is hampered by the denial of space for their interpretations within the collective memory.

The question of why collective memory seems impervious to some individual narratives of violence while offering space for others to develop is addressed by Boose, who considers the peculiar resistance of cultural memories to ‘such undesirable histories’ as mass rape (2002: 71). A type of violence whose effects might be thought especially visible to the wider community, as they can include the inconvenient birth of many new people, the rape of large numbers of women by enemy forces has been a feature of countless wars, yet has rarely been part of official narratives. The exclusion of mass rape from collective memories of war was until 2001 enshrined in the absence of rape from the list of crimes prosecutable as ‘crimes against humanity’ under international law. This was changed only after the Bosnian war, which Boose examines in ‘Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory’. Her account of the horrific experiences of violence suffered by Bosnian women is interesting in its insistence that the difficulty in incorporating these stories into Bosnian and Serb national narratives is not because they are asocial events, divorced from the collective memory by their apocalyptic barbarity, but because they are all too informed by the collective memories which make up national identities, and that they were conceived as attacks on group identity itself, through the fracturing of individual and collective memories. Like Thornton and Malkki, she sees violence as echoing the form of previous violent incidents, as she suggests that ‘Serb rape of Bosnian women should be recognized as a projection that has its origins inside of the powerfully invested narratives of Serb cultural memory’ (2002: 93). Boose connects the rape of Bosnian women by Serbs with the collective memory of Serbians being ‘impaled’ by the ‘Turk’; an ‘impalement is always refigured in Serb cultural memory as a rape’, a ‘humiliating memory’ (2002: 85). She presents the mass rape of Bosnian women as part of the ‘ethnic cleansing’, the attempt to eliminate the identity of Bosnian Muslims illustrated in ‘Ron Haviv’s striking portrait of a Bosnian Muslim family’ which was the only item left in an abandoned house ransacked by Serb troops, and from which every face had been scratched off (2002: 89). Boose sees the ‘rape camps’ as a strategy for eliminating the Bosnian Muslims by ‘contaminating’ women of childbearing age, making them ‘unmarriageable’ and, through subjecting them to violence which collective memory would not assimilate, making it impossible for them to be accepted back into society. To accept them and their memories of violence as part of the history of the Bosnian people would threaten that group identity, subjecting it to the humiliation of ‘the feminization of the community body implicit in the acceptance of either the violated woman or the story for which her body is a text’ (2002: 73).

In his analysis of ‘The Shooting at Uitenhage’, Thornton challenges the idea that violence is the result of conflict, an asocial chaos borne out of political tension, suggesting instead that it is rather the other way round, that violence ‘is integral to the social processes that generate the symbols and values that provision the political process’ (1990: 218). He argues that ‘the violence at Uitenhage constituted a form of social order’, that there was ‘no evidence of any plan at any level for the violence’, and there was no functional command structure which could have implemented any such plan (1990: 229), yet the violence took a ‘specific pattern’ which ‘made it especially amenable to moral and political appropriation as a symbol to be deployed in the continuing political process’ (1990:26). For example, it took place at a crossroads, at an intersection between black and white areas, on Sharpeville Day, when the Sharpeville massacre is commemorated. He suggests that the incidents of violence which are remembered are those which conform to patterns established in the history of the group, as Malkki implies in her analysis of the story she calls ‘The Beating of the Bride’, which became a standard narrative Malikoon of the mass ‘impalement’ in which the group identity the Hutu assigned themselves, and it echoed a famous reported attack on a pregnant woman in 1972. Thomson further suggests that certain incidents of violence, such as that at Uitenhage, are not given social form through narration after the event but are actually undertaken as social forms in themselves, enacting a group’s mythico-history (1990: 229). This supports Boose’s portrayal of the rape of Bosnian women as a
projection' of Serbian collective memories, rather than a random overflow of wartime aggression.

While 'violence, raw and unthought, is meaningless', violence can be used not only to damage bodies but also their position within society and the integrity of group identity. This is because the very irreducible, physical and incommunicable nature of the experience of violence means that every act of violence does damage to memories as well as bodies, disrupting both the continuity in people's life histories and that between individual and collective memory. The memory of violence is never quite securely tied down to any single narrative, but always to some degree 'unresolved', and so it is one of the main sites of struggle where group identities are forged, determining where the boundaries of the group lie, people's relative positions within it, and what role the group adopts with respect to other communities. The often-expressed need of individuals to find a place for their memories of violence within collective memory is due to the perceived dehumanizing effect of violence, which sunders the individual from the social world by placing them beyond the realm of language and meaning. Telling the stories of violent incidents is an attempt to reincorporate the individuals concerned into humanity by constructing the shared meanings without which group identity cannot exist, and individual identity cannot be expressed.

References


‘I am a person now – I’m allowed to count.’

Making sense of suffering: Domestic violence in the Northern Irish context

Roscha Cronin

Intimate partner violence continues to affect one in six women in Northern Ireland. In 2005–2006 the PSNI recorded 9,353 domestic crimes. Such suffering demands attention. Based on 10 weeks fieldwork carried out in a women's refuge in the summer of 2007, this article examines intimate partner violence, or what is more commonly referred to as domestic violence, in Northern Ireland through the lens of social suffering theory. Although domestic violence as a topic has been studied by many disciplines, it has been largely avoided by anthropologists. As such, much of the literature on the subject attempts to 'explain' domestic violence, rather than explore the nuances surrounding the situations in which it exists and which influence how and where domestic violence happens. My work seeks to make sense of suffering in this way and examines the social suffering experienced by women living with, and coping after, violent relationships. The analysis is introduced by discussing aspects of social suffering and of my fieldwork and methodology. What follows is broken into three parts: part one focuses on the impact sex and gender has in creating situations where women may find themselves subject to this violence; part two situates domestic violence squarely in the Northern Irish cultural setting, exploring the impact of culture and context on intimate relationships; and part three discusses how structures of inequality restrict women from achieving an equal economic position with men, and ultimately negatively affect the power balance in intimate relationships. This final section also expands notions suggesting that it is only poor women who are abused. The analysis of both the literature on domestic violence and my own fieldwork leads me to conclude that the flexible and reflexive, person-centred and culture-specific approach of social suffering is the most appropriate academic approach to this most complex topic.

Introduction

For example, if I wouldn't do what I was told he would have ... stripped the clothes off me and threw the water round me and tried to push me in to the street. And that happened twice (Sarah, 50).

This essay examines the experiences of women like Sarah who lived with, and through, intimate partner violence. I achieve this by examining both individual women's lives and the forces acting upon them that create sites of 'everyday violence' (Scheper-Hughes 1992). By examining these forces I am able to view these women's personal lives and the collectivity of their shared experiences through the lens of social suffering. I employ what Scheper-Hughes calls a 'woman centred' (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 25) approach, or a 'more “womanly” anthropology … concerned not only with how we humans “reason” and think but also with how we act toward each other, thus engaging questions of human relationships and of ethics’ (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 21). Intimate partner violence is defined by The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety [DHSS] as: ‘threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation’ (DHSS 2005: 10)

While domestic violence has been studied, naming only a few examples, in sociology by Gelles (1976) and Harway and O’Neill (1999), in psychology by Christopolous (1987), in housing rights by Paglione (2006) and in law by MacKinnon (2005), anthropology has been slower to examine this issue. Indeed, while Ayers Counts, Brown and Campbell edited a seminal piece of anthropological literature on domestic violence in 1992 (second edition published 1999), Plesset states: ‘aside from these few pioneering works, few anthropologists have placed intimate partner violence at the centre of their ethnographic studies’ (Plesset 2006: 13). Part of the reason for this is the logistical difficulty of the discipline’s primary method of study, participant observation. ‘Unless one is actually working at a women's shelter, it is difficult to obtain narratives of abuse’ (Plesset 2006: 14).

During summer 2007 I conducted fieldwork in a Women’s Aid refuge in North Down and Ards in Northern Ireland. The refuge provided me with the ideal research site and created a level of trust with its occupants that would not otherwise have been possible to create in the relatively short period of time at my disposal. There, I had the opportunity to work, speak with and get to know over 10 staff, 17 women and 13 children.

Methodology and Writing Up

For this essay I choose to theoretically examine intimate partner violence through the lens of social suffering. Social suffering is ‘the devastating injuries that social force can inflict on human experience. Social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems’ (Kleinman et alii 1997: ix). I use this theory...
because 'case studies of individuals reveal suffering, they tell us what happens to one or many people; but to explain suffering, one must embed individual biography in the larger matrix of culture, history, and political economy' (Farmer 2004: 286). Thus, my analysis focuses on the 'multi-axial modes of suffering' (Farmer 1997), such as sex and femininity, cultural violations and socioeconomic factors. Such strains were revealed as integral to both how the women knew their own situations, and how I came to theoretically examine intimate partner violence. Following Roche's approach to writing up, I engage with the women's life stories and 'attempt to capture, evidence and theoretically add to this authenticity' (Roche 2003: 93).

Moving away from post-modern approaches to social phenomena, which often displace and disconnect individuals from the world around them, social suffering theory has gained a foothold in anthropological texts. Authors are now more aware of the importance of the everyday experience of life, and ultimately suffering, and are placing it in the centre of their ethnographic studies. Experience, subjectivity, violence, power, movement, and social reality are now focal points in many anthropological discussions (Schepers-Hughes 1992; Bourgois 1995; Kleinman et alii 1997; Bourdieu 1999; Das et alii 2000; Schepers-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Bourdieu praises this perspective, stating that it is 'based in the very reality of the social world, and it helps explain a good deal of what happens in society today, in particular, much of the distress caused by clashing interests, orientations, and lifestyles' (Bourdieu 1999: 4). It is these insights I now use to examine domestic violence in the Northern Irish setting, pulling on the strains of gender, culture and economics, and moving between both large and small cultural contexts.

**Womanhood: Aspects of sex and femininity, and its significance to abuse**

... So, you know, he really, he could really do his stuff on me 'cos I was wide open to it you know (Ellen, 41).

That one in six women will be abused at some point in their lifetime is both horrific and noteworthy (Carmichael 2007: 7). There have been multiple studies on issues of femininity and characteristics socially understood to define gender (Currie 1997; Ortner 1996; Bordo 1993). A number of authors have specifically examined the processes through which femininity is learned, or womanhood constructed (Boddy 2001 and 1997; Ortner 1996; Rosen 1996). Below I explore both the processes of 'seduction and entrapment' that many women encounter, and the specific ways in which women's femininity is used as a tool for abuse (Rosen 1996). These two specific aspects were raised by the women with whom I spoke and, for them, were essential to understanding their journeys to abuse.

**Processes of seduction and entrapment**

Rosen illuminates a pattern of 'seduction and entrapment' in premarital relationships that corresponds closely with stories the women I spoke with shared with me (1996: 151–176). The majority of the women I spoke with talked about the speed and intensity of their courtships with some becoming involved with their abusive partners at a young age (Ellen, first abusive relationship 16, Linda, 17; Sarah, first abusive relationship 20). While talking with me, and looking back, they could point to the seeds of abuse they either ignored, or did not see at the time. Rosen describes a particular seduction process she terms 'Cinderella Fantasy'. ‘The Cinderella fantasy refers to the illusion that a man can transform a woman’s life, erase her insecurities, protect her from her fears, or save her from her problems or all four’ (Rosen 1996: 159).

Covering all of these aspects, for Ellen (48) this fantasy was especially true. It was at a particularly vulnerable point in her life that Ellen met Jack. He represented a ‘Prince Charming’ of sorts, giving her the emotional support she needed at the time. Ellen expressed how she became drawn in to a fantasy relationship; a relationship with a man who she thought would treat her right – who would change her life. She remembers saying: ‘I just want someone to love me the way I am. I just want someone for me’ (Ellen, 48). Ellen also discussed with me the intensity of the courtship and how pressure to remain with Jack increased over time. His flattery and compliments gave her a sense of security and the impression that Jack desired to ‘erase her insecurities’.

Jack later went on to psychologically and mentally manipulate Ellen by lying, twisting her words and using them against her and, as a result, controlling her every move and isolating her from her family. To end the relationship, and the threat of yet more violence, Ellen had to seek refuge with Women’s Aid.

**Learning to be feminine**

Similar to Rosen, in ‘Fantasies of Femininity’ Ussher (1997) writes about the prevalence with which young girls are taken in by ideas and myths, not only of beauty but of what it is to be an adult woman. That ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ (de Beauvoir 1972: 295) has been echoed by many authors (Boddy 2001 and 1997; Currie 1997; Ortner 1997; Ortner 1996; Jordanova 1980).

But what happens when the things that ‘make’ a woman are ‘unmade’, or destroyed? Much of this socially constructed vulnerability is what women in my study emphasized as factors in becoming abused, and what the abuser preys on.

When Derek chose to abuse Jane (27), the mother of his three children, it was her appearance he focused on. He constantly made snide remarks about her weight, calling her fat and ugly. Bordo theoretically illuminates this dynamic when she discusses how the body is not only a text of culture but it is also, as many anthropologists have argued, ‘a direct locus of social control’ (Bordo 1993: 165). To combat this control Jane took charge of her body and began to diet and lose weight rapidly. She dropped to half of her original (healthy) body weight and became seriously ill. Jane went as far as to attempt suicide on two occasions. Through his verbal abuse Jane’s husband ‘unmade’ her identity both as a woman and a mother and, as a result, Jane felt life was no longer worth living.

Like Jane, it was Linda’s appearance her would-be abuser picked on when he commented: ‘just because you’re away for the weekend doesn’t mean you don’t keep up your standards’, ‘cos my handbag didn’t match my outfit’ (Linda, 45). However, because Linda had worked with Women’s Aid to understand her past experiences
with violence, she was able to see the early warning signs and end the relationship.

Quick, intense, courtships, full of promise and hope for the future combined with socially prescribed understandings of ‘motherhood’ and ‘the family’ can influence the faith and trust women place in their partners and relationships. What they valued as women – their physique, their motherhood, their education – became prime targets for abuse and control. By breaking down those aspects of their identity of critical importance to their notions of personhood, their abusers were in fact breaking down their gender and understandings of themselves, not just as women, but also as people. Tracey (41), a mother of two, summarises this best:

You lose all your self-esteem, all your self-worth and you just drudge along … You’re last on the list, you’re bottom of the heap, everybody comes before you. And I’m not sayin’ I’m dead selfish now and I come first and the kids come last – but I am a person now. I’m allowed to count (Tracey, 41).

I now turn to the large-scale social forces that effect individuals in many complex and seemingly innocuous ways examining how understandings of violence, traditional morals and intimate relationships affect women caught in the cycle of abuse.

**Contexts: Cultural and private spheres**

The end of conflict does not signal an end to violence for children and women. Post-conflict periods are characterized by rapid increases in prostitution and a rise in domestic violence (Dahrendorf 2005).

It has been well stated that Northern Ireland has a past ‘historically deep’ in suffering (Farmer 1997). Political, institutional and paramilitary violence (Smyth and Hamilton 2003: 19; Knox 2002 and 2000; O’Day 1995; Feldman 1991; Whyte 1991), highly segregated enclaved communities (Roche 2007, 2005, and 2003; Sluka 1989; Burton 1978), and continued high levels of deprivation (Monteith and Mclaughlin 2004) provide a backdrop of some of the past and present challenges facing this post-conflict state. One such challenge is how to deal with the problem of intimate partner violence. Growing faith in the police force (Wilson 2007: 5) has increased the numbers of women suffering intimate partner violence now coming forward (McDaid 2005) but even still the culture of silence that surrounds domestic violence continues to trap women in violent relationships. This context cannot be overlooked.

**The Influence of the Cultural Context**

Cross-culturally, when we compare Northern Ireland with other post-conflict societies such as South Africa, we find that ‘both countries and marred by a “culture of violence”, a legacy of the political conflict they have experienced’ (Knox and Monaghan 2002: 68). We also find that in both countries levels of ‘ordinary’ crime (including domestic violence and rape) rose dramatically post-conflict (Knox and Monaghan 2002: 69). Clearly, when violence outside the home decreases, violence within the home increases. Similarly, in post-conflict South Africa, Gibson sees violence as not only a part of the social psyche but also a fundamental part of the relationship between various social actors, in her case, husbands and wives (Gibson 2004: 4). ‘Ultimately the infliction of violence was understood to increase the ability of the abused to survive, even while harming them’ (Gibson 2004: 16).

Northern Irish case studies are not so different. Here, too, the ability to survive and to cope on one’s own is paramount. Roche’s study of hardening and survival is critical here. Roche recounts the tale of a punishment beating ‘Sharon’s’ brother ‘Ryan’ received. Sharon tells Roche not only is Ryan ‘a wee bit harder now’ but she too is somewhat harder herself (Roche 2003: 173). Such notions of ‘what doesn’t kill you only makes you stronger’ are also central to Feldman’s exegesis on political terror in Northern Ireland (Feldman 1991: 142). This coping strategy or ability to survive is evident in cases of domestic violence also, albeit in a less extreme manner. The government’s most recent document on the experience of domestic violence in Northern Ireland suggests that there continues to be a culture of hardness and survival. 42% of people surveyed responded that they would tell ‘no-one’ about their worst incident of abuse, preferring to cope on their own (Carmichael 2007: 18).

The cultural context of Northern Ireland again plays into domestic violence. During the Troubles Catholic/ Nationalist women could not always rely on the police for help if they were being abused, as there was a suspicion that such calls were traps for the police. On the flip side, if police did attend the scene the woman was seen as inviting the enemy into the area and ultimately of informing. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform. For example, McWilliams quotes one woman: ‘In this area the police are not people that you normally inform.' (McWilliams 1998: 133).

During my fieldwork, an example of this difficult situation was experienced by Susan. Susan arrived at refuge one day extremely distressed. Her situation was especially delicate as her abuser was in the paramilitaries. She was offered a bed for the night but in the end chose not to stay. A staff member discussed how Susan really only had one option if she wanted to leave the relationship: emigrate. The social networks of these paramilitary organizations are so extensive that even refuge could not keep Susan safe. That Susan chose not to stay in refuge can be read as her acknowledgement of this truth and an acceptance of her inevitable return to her abuser. For Susan, living with a member of a paramilitary group, calling the police was not an option – she would have to sort it out herself.

**Private Contexts**

In the private context too there are a number of dynamics that have been affected by the wider cultural context, for example, experience of abuse as a child. Growing up in a violent society many children have witnessed violence either inside or outside the home. Lanclos discovered that experience of domestic violence was so common it was to be found in many children’s rhymes, also finding that the children themselves viewed this as normal (Lanclos 2003: 115). For some, like Ellen (48), experience of abuse as a child can inhibit a woman from seeing the violence in her adult relationships,
becoming as Knox describes, ‘desensitized ... to violence’ (Knox and Monaghan 2002: 68). Ellen explains: ‘I didn’t know it was bein’ abused till I went in to refuge. I didn’t know it was domestic violence ... domestic violence was what my mum got.’ Other women spoke of their fear that their children would become abusers or abused. For example Jennifer worried that her son would replicate his father’s actions in later life. However Jennifer also believed that by leaving her abuser she had taught her son a valuable lesson: If you abuse a woman, she will leave you (because abuse is unacceptable).

As an adult in the private context, issues of reputation and acceptance of violence are critical to understanding adult experiences of violence. Domestic violence thrives in secrecy (Stanko 1993). Common phrases such as ‘putting on a brave face’ and ‘not airing your dirty laundry in public’ point to a fundamentally traditional culture of hardness and coping, as I mentioned earlier, but also of privacy and secrecy. Countless examples support this, here I list just two: Tracey (41), when work colleagues asked her what she did over the weekend, would say ‘boring married life’ or ‘the usual’ in an evasion of the truth; in refuge; Harriet told me it was important she kept a low profile in the town because her children still lived there, and ‘it wouldn’t do’ for people to find out she was living in refuge.

Aspects of a culture of violence whether in the home or in the larger context outside the home are of crucial importance in making sense of domestic violence, both in these particular women’s lives and in Northern Ireland in general. Growing up during conflict, or in what has been termed ‘post conflict chaos’ (Dahrendorf 2005), influences individuals’ perceptions of what violence is, and of what types of violence are acceptable or unacceptable. Above I have shown, through my own fieldwork and cross-cultural comparison, that this has been evidenced in both South Africa and Northern Ireland, as merely two examples of post-conflict countries. The final section of this study examines the dynamics within abusive relationships that restrict women’s choices and keep them trapped in potentially life-threatening relationships.

**Financial Abuse**

It is well stated that women’s economic dependence on men is a primary factor in keeping women in abusive relationships (Warrington 2001; Gelles 1976). ‘To the extent that women are solely or primarily dependent on a husband or male partner for basic human needs such as food and shelter, they may have to endure any number of abuses simply to maintain these basic necessities of life itself’ (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 62).

Linda (45) married into a farming family and was enthusiastic about becoming a farmer and a farmer’s wife. However, she found herself being financially abused from the very beginning of her marriage. She was forced to have her wages paid in to her husband’s account while he constantly put a strain on their family budget by overspending. Years later, Linda discovered her name was not on the deeds to the house and when they went to court for the divorce proceedings she discovered that her husband had in fact been earning almost three times the amount he had told her, and what the family survived on. Linda’s now ex-husband has ‘saved’ enough money to buy a plot of land near her house and continues to stalk and harass her.

Similar to Linda, Ellen’s story illuminates the ways in which women become financially dependent on men through marriage, even if they were economically independent previously:

He says: ‘look once I sell my house’ – here’s me wide open you see – he says ‘I’ll need to go on the deeds to your house, ’cos like, you know, I’ll have nothing of mine’. And I know, I says ‘right enough’ … Oh I know, I know, capital M here, Mug!

When Ellen fled the relationship and went to refuge she lost her house. Her abuser is still living there. Ellen now lives in the Housing Executive house she was allocated while in refuge:

I find it hard sometimes even to say to people where I live, and it’s very hard to come to terms with that … what you’ve had and what you’ve lost (Ellen, 48).

Although I have detailed only two specific examples of financial abuse through Ellen and Linda, their experience is far from unique and is supported by many other women in my study.

**Are only poor women abused?**

A common myth about domestic violence is that it only affects poor women. In fact, domestic violence crosses all social classes (Menjivar and Salcido 2005: 123). In his analysis, Gelles found that the more resources a woman has at her disposal the more likely she is to seek help from informal social networks like friends and family (Gelles 1976). This is supported by a recent domestic violence crime survey: ‘Only a small proportion of [domestic] assaults are reported to the police, with women under 25 and those in households with above average income less likely to involve the police’ (Carmichael 2005: 17, emphasis added). In contrast, women with few resources must either seek refuge or stay in violent relationships. Thus, poor women become socially visible when they leave an abusive relationship. This theory is born out by a comparison between the majority of
women mentioned above who continued to live in their own homes, even if under great financial strain, and another woman I met, Alina.

Alina is Eastern European. She came to refuge following an assault by her boyfriend. She had one child and was pregnant with another. Alina had not been working in Northern Ireland long enough to claim social welfare and so had no recourse to public funds. To support herself financially she worked as a kitchen porter in Belfast. Whilst working during the week she stayed with a friend, sleeping on a mattress on the floor. Eventually, another friend offered her a permanent room in a house closer to her work. Roughly a month later, only weeks before she was due to give birth, she called refuge; she had no food or money. She could no longer work and the family she was living with could not afford to feed her (her unborn baby) and her child.

Alina’s story offers us an insight into the problems faced by poor women when they leave violent relationships. But as discussed above there are many women in Northern Ireland and across the world who have the resources to remain in their homes, keep their jobs, and raise their children, who are suffering domestic violence just as much as women who cannot do those things. Expanding Farmer’s theory that ‘it is poor women who bear the brunt of these assaults’ (Farmer 1997: 275) is to deny ‘rich’ women the validity and reality of their lived experience of intimate partner violence and risks relegating them to an inferior position in the social suffering hierarchy.

Conclusion
This essay has attempted to place domestic violence in both its cultural and personal context. Moving away from traditional ‘explanatory’ analyses I have expanded various authors’ delineations in order to seek out the underlying structures and mentalities acting upon individuals in Northern Irish society. Although this could be read as being solely applicable to Northern Ireland, I do not see it as such and it is my hope that it would not be viewed in this way. Rather, this essay is an example of a way to make sense of intimate partner violence in any context, walking the fine line between structure and action.

To conclude: ‘(i)n discussing each of the above factors, however, it is clear that no single axis can fully define increased risk for extreme human suffering’ (Farmer 1997: 278–279). In other words, suffering, or at least the risk of suffering, is dependent on who you are, where you are, and what happens to you when you are there. Giving credit to the warm, loving and generous women that often experience intimate partner violence, in all its nefarious forms, it is my desire that this essay be used as an example of how to analyse domestic violence in a real and beneficial way; a way which may help inform not only women and women’s groups, but also future policy in this most complex area.

References
Background to Suicide in Ireland; Statistics and Debate

From sin to serotonin the conceptualization of suicide as a psychological and sociological risk has gained increasing relevance and attention in Ireland (Fahy 1991). In the social and historical context of Ireland, there are few risks that have gripped the nation and exposed the fears of human frailty more than suicide. The Irish as a nation are at a crossroads in the history of suicide. With the passing of the Criminal (Suicide) Act 1993, Ireland became the last European Union country to decriminalize suicide and, since that time, the Irish have left behind a developed and practised cultural way of dealing with suicide, which stifled open discussion. This ‘cultural prohibition’ (if you will) used to provide some certainty for the Irish, since it was believed that suicide was wrong, illegal, a mortal sin, an unchristian act, and an act against God. Silence was a way of dealing with suicide, in a culturally appropriate manner – an Irish manner perhaps.

Times have changed, and it seems the manners of the Irish have changed accordingly. The Irish as a nation are now dependent on a nascent cultural system for coping with suicide, defined by openness and discussion, high levels of media interest, funded governmental action, and genuine public concern. Words like ‘epidemic’ and ‘crisis’ abound, especially in relation to young male suicide rates. Similarly, terms like ‘cry for help’, ‘suicide pact’, and ‘copycat suicides’ are often granted as explanations for Ireland’s well-publicized suicide and related self-harm problem (Sheehan 2002). Against a rich backdrop of unprecedented economic growth, suicide rates continue to perplex commentators and the public alike. For all of Ireland’s monetary prosperity and high employment figures, some four to five hundred people each year still choose to end their lives, of which there is an approximate ratio of 4:1 males: females. Carmel McAuliffe in discussing bereavement and suicide points out that:

On average, 400 suicides are annually recorded in Ireland in recent years, which results in an estimate of between approximately 2,400 and 2,800 newly suicide bereaved individuals in one year alone (McAuliffe 2001: 67).

In addition, there is an estimated eleven thousand persons who attend hospitals after acts of deliberate self-harm each year in Ireland (Sheehan 2003: 38).

In Ireland four important characteristics of the suicide debate have emerged over the last three decades. Firstly, suicide research has been heavily characterized by a statistical disagreement, whereby scholars have argued intensely over the importance of the historical trend of under-reporting of suicide in Ireland, and the impact such under-reporting had on true rates of suicide. On one side of this debate, it has been estimated that the steady increase of suicide rates in Ireland is a result of changing cultural attitudes towards suicide, the overhaul of the reporting structures for suspected suicides, and the decriminalization of suicide in 1993. On the other side of this debate, it has been argued that suicide rates have increased due to rapid social and cultural change in Ireland. Michael Kelleher describes such change by saying:

Over the past thirty years, there has been a momentous change in Irish society … the wealth of the country has increased but there has been radical social change in social structure and religious attitude … Family life has altered. The marriage rate is down … in 1992 almost one in five children born was born outside wedlock, which is six times higher than it was twenty years earlier … Marital separation has increased and divorce was legalised by referendum. It is possible that these profound changes in the organisation and expectation of family life have had a
The cornerstone of British social policy to tackle suicide: the presence of mental health problems as a cause of suicide rates, and therefore the suicide problem, based on the theoretical and in turn practical standpoint that suicides are caused by the presence of mental health problems. In a similar discussion Gavin and Rogers (2006) trace the ascendency of mental health as a cause of suicide rates, and therefore the cornerstone of British social policy to tackle suicide:

Beginning with the white paper, Health of the Nation (Department of Health, 1986), suicide has been seen by policy makers as a direct manifestation of mental illness. The prominence accorded suicide as a marker of the state of the population's mental health, has been reinforced and reemphasized in all subsequent policy. Currently, the aim is to try and reduce the number of suicides by at least 20% by 2010 (Department of Health, 2002) (Gavin and Rogers 2006: 137).

Scholarly interest in suicide, especially in the social sciences, has been most influenced by Durkheim's *Suicide*. There is no doubt that Suicide is a seminal moment in suicide research, but perhaps more correctly in the science of sociological research. Over the last 100 years *Suicide* and Durkheim's theories have been exposed to serious and justified criticism, revolving mainly around the accuracy of his statistical data (Douglas 1967). Commenting on the influence on sociology and the work of sociologists, Maxwell Atkinson states that 'fascination (with suicide is) from a distance' (Atkinson 1978: 9). As Gavin and Rogers explain:

> What Atkinson is getting at here is that, for sociologists, it is not so much the act in itself that has been of interest, so much as the conceptual and theoretical issues the possibility of conducting empirical research into suicide has thrown up (2006: 136).

Gavin and Rogers go on to argue that what:

> Durkheim was primarily interested in showing in his study was that the causes of suicide were fundamentally social, rather than psychological. It was the demonstration of the existence of 'social facts', and of the ability of the science of sociology to reveal their impacts, that was really the fundamental concern for Durkheim. The study of suicide was only a means to an end – the end being to establish conclusively that such a seemingly individual act as suicide could be both studied and explained in sociological terms – rather than suicide being an area of substantive concern in its own right.

The difficulty in all research is gaining the appropriate and relevant information. In the case of suicide, by the very nature of the topic, the central actor is missing, making it difficult to judge appropriateness and relevancy. Unsatisfied with studying suicide from a distance and unwilling to sacrifice myself for research, I did everything possible to gain a knowledge of and expertise in suicide. During my Ph.D research I went as far as interviewing clairvoyants, and recorded ‘messages from the grave’ meditated between parents and their deceased children (Sheehan 2003, especially chapter 3). In order to contemplate the complexity of suicide in a more grounded environment I felt it necessary to spend six months attending the Coroner’s Court in South County Dublin (2001–2002). Here I was able to observe the coroner’s inquest into the deaths of suspected suicides. My purpose was to witness how, in a medical and legal setting, suicide becomes officially the reason for a person’s death.

With some considerable difficulty I was able to come to a broad understanding of the process of the Coroner’s Court. When present I took notes and kept accounts of each case and, in order to fill in details, I was able to discuss the cases with the coroner and the court secretary. What emerged was that the coroner seemed to probe the
details of each case with a series of questions (I will return to these and to the act of questioning following the case studies below). The Coroner's Court bears all the necessary hallmarks of jural procedure. The primary role of the coroner in dealing with any death is to establish the following:

- the identity of the deceased;
- the medical cause of death, for example asphyxia, is produced not by the coroner but is taken from the report produced by the pathologist who examines the body;
- the time of death;
- the place of death.

Cases which come to the attention of the coroner normally fall into five categories:

Road Traffic Accidents  
Homicides  
Suicides  
Death by Misadventure  
Accidental Death

The coroner at the end of his ruling will produce a death certificate, which is critical, especially for the deceased family and kin when dealing with any state or private institution. However, under Irish law the death certificate is not legally binding. Therefore, any member of the public can contest what the coroner deems the medical cause of death. Such contestation can happen in the court or after the death certificate has been produced.

For my Ph.D. research, from which the present work is drawn, I interviewed one hundred individuals who had either been bereaved by suicide or attempted suicide. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with health professionals and observed over thirty coroner court proceedings dealing with suicide and other deaths (homicide, death by misadventure, accidental death and road traffic accidents). This time at the court proved invaluable in furthering my understanding of the cultural attitudes to suicide and the undeniable relationship, as expressed by both the coroner and my interviewees, between suicide and mental health. While in the court I made no attempt to speak with families in the court, due to ethical and research constraints.2 Through my observations of the coroner's investigations, the court followed a remarkably similar pattern when dealing with suspected suicides. The ‘suicide cases’ are left to the end of the court’s proceedings or sometimes the court holds ‘suicide days’, where only suicide cases are examined. The practice of holding ‘suicide days’ strongly suggests that the court has, at least in part, decided on the outcome of the coroner’s investigations. The court does not have a similar procedure for other types of death that come before the court. In my observations, I witnessed the coroner examine road traffic accidents, death by misadventure, accidental death in the same sitting of the court. In an interview with the Coroner’s Court secretary I was told the following:

We have suicide days. We have all the suicide cases once every two to three weeks. We hold them at the end of the day, at the end of the court proceedings. We do this so the press (the media are always present for suspected homicide cases, and also accidental deaths at workplaces) are not in the court, and only the families are present and the court is quiet. Having suicide days are the best option for everyone involved …

As each case is called on these ‘suicide days’, those who identified the body, those who were with the person before he or she died, and any other persons that the Garda (Police) sought fit to interview around or after the time of death, are all called to give their opinions of the events leading to the suicide.

Evidence is entered first by the Garda, and then the Garda reads out the statements given during their investigations, and the person (who gave the statement at the time of the investigation) has to openly admit to the court that the statement is correct. If coroner has no questions, the person, is asked to sign the statement, and is then asked to step down from the court.

The coroner is free to ask any questions of the Garda, witnesses, and those interviewed. It is through such questioning that the coroner begins to assess the mental state and/or behaviour of the individual before his or her death. The coroner also begins to match the ‘medical’ cause of death to the social and psychological stresses that might have caused a person to die by suicide.3 On this point, it is my contention that there is a strong distinction between ‘medical deaths’ (for example asphyxia), and the psychologically and sociologically meaningful term ‘suicide’ and/or ‘hanging’.

Throughout the thirty separate cases I observed, the coroner announced to the court that the person had died by suicide. The coroner would then enter on the death certificate either the medical cause of death provided by the examining pathologist’s report, for example death by ‘asphyxia’, or he would identify the means used, for example, ‘hanging’. The coroner never entered ‘suicide’ on the death certificate. This may reflect the workings of the court, as the coroner does not examine the body of the deceased and is dependent on the medical evidence reported by the pathologist. This report is produced in the hospital where the body of the deceased is taken for examination and/or medical intervention. The coroner’s role is simply to establish the medical cause of death. Causation is problematic in the case of suicide. On the one hand, the medical cause of death is what terminates life. On the other, suicide and the act of suicide is the responsibility of the deceased. To further complicate and perhaps distinguish suicide from all other types of death is the fact that mental illness has become the standard of how individual responsibility is explained. The deceased is responsible for bringing about death, but responsibility or justification is found in the psychosocial pathology, which in turns diminishes the deceased’s responsibility. Officially and publicly the death cert reflects medical cause; in Ireland, the verdict of suicide is for the records of the court and for the records of the Gardai, so no further investigations are required. The distinctions between verdict and official records complicate the position suicide has within Irish society. There is a disparity between the verdict of death cert produced by the court. But perhaps these distinctions and disparities also reflect Irish attitudes towards and definitions of suicide in general. The work of the founder of the Ethnomethodologist theory in sociology, Herbert Garfinkel, is pertinent to these distinctions between medical cause of death and reason(s) for a person to die by suicide. Garfinkel’s early examination of coroner’s courts and his reflections on psychosocial autopsies gives
a good sense of the difficulties faced by the coroner when dealing with suicide. As in the cases outlined below, the central actor is deceased, leaving only ‘remains’ of information. The psychosocial pathologist (in the case of the Coroner’s Court, the coroner could be referred to as such) uses ‘… rumours, passing remarks and stories’ (Garfinkel 1967: 137). Indeed, this view has been argued to be little more than a common sense approach to establishing why a person died by suicide (Douglas 1967 and Blum and McHugh 1971).

This is the dilemma faced by coroners when dealing with suicide. Apart from collecting all cases into one day and ensuring that the court is free from disturbance, the coroner is faced with the difficulty of passing judgement on the deceased. In order to further my discussion of the Coroner’s Court, in the following section I will discuss three randomly selected cases from my research.

Case I
This case involved the ‘apparent’ suicide of a man aged 44. The man was married and had one child. As both ‘witnesses’ and Garda described it, the man ‘had hanged himself’. The man hanged himself by securing a rope to two beams in the attic and dropping himself down through the attic door. A note was found under his body, and when the man was discovered efforts were made to resuscitate him; they were ineffective, however. The coroner, after hearing the statements, then asked the brother of the deceased the following questions:

Coroner: Did this come as a complete shock?
Brother: Yes.
C: He was not depressed? And he was not receiving psychiatric treatment?
B: Yes.
C: He was at the time happy, with no problems? Is that correct?
B: Yes.
C: No warning signs? A complete shock?
B: Yes.

The family of the deceased (that I happened to be sitting next to at the time) began to cry after the coroner’s questions, and screamed the name of the deceased. One person had to be helped out of the court by a family member. The scene was less than ideal and the ‘suicide day’ seemed not to be going according to plan. The lack of forewarning as to the ‘intentions’ of the deceased, and the reiteration of word ‘shock’ caused a chorus of disapproval in the public viewing area. When ruling on the reiteration of word ‘shock’ caused a chorus of disapproval in the public viewing area. When ruling on the

Case II
This next example involved a man in his thirties, who after a night of drinking seemingly ended his life by hanging himself. The man’s body was found in the garden shed, located at the rear of his house. The statements of the deceased’s brother and sister contradicted each other and confused the coroner. It was difficult for the coroner to establish the ‘chronology of events’, and the coroner continuously interrupted the reading of statements. The Garda who read out the statements was asked to speak up on numerous occasions and the coroner eventually progressed through the statements in a segmented fashion, by way of intervening questions. The coroner then went on to summarize the statements by posing questions to the family members who had been sworn in:

Coroner: Had he been drinking?
Brother: Yes.
C: Your other brother died recently before that? And he was very close to him, is that correct?
B: Yes.
C: And he was having trouble with his wife?
B: Yes, she had cheated on him.
C: You were drinking and smoking hash on that night? Did he seem alright?
B: Yes.
C: You saw him before he died was he all right? Was he acting strange?
Sister: He was fine.
C: How much did you drink in the car?
B: Lots – but he seemed sober.

This exchange was typical of the court proceedings. The coroner, although sympathetic to the family, allowed little interjection from the family members. The coroner’s questions are based on prior knowledge of the case provided by the examining pathologist and on what the coroner described to me in an interview as over ‘thirty years of experience’. The shortness of the family members’ responses reflects the official nature of the court, and the fact that the suicide has occurred relatively recently (three–six months). From interviews with persons who have experienced a recent bereavement, grief narratives tend to be undeveloped and resistant. The person is still in shock and has not fully come to terms with suicide on John Murphy’s death certificate. Although there is no evidence of mental health problems, it is my belief that John committed suicide. There may have been an underlying and undiagnosed illness, and the presence of a note and the means used are very strong indicators of suicide.
with the suicide. Conversely, where a significant period of time has elapsed, those interviewed were far more involved in the narrative process and the subject and emotional qualities of their narrative.

As before, the coroner expressed sympathy to the family and returned a verdict of suicide. The coroner cited the psychological and social problems and the possibility that this man had a mental illness as the root causes of his suicide. The coroner based his conclusions primarily on the statements of the deceased man's brother, especially about the adulterous behaviour of his brother's wife, and the closeness to his other recently deceased brother.

**Case III**

In this final example, the coroner was in no doubt of the medical cause of death, as the case involved a woman in her forties who had 'thrown herself' in front of an oncoming train. According to her sister, the woman 'had been receiving treatment for depression for twelve years, but seemed fine at the time'. The pathology report indicated that the woman would have been killed instantly, and a toxicology report, also read out, indicated that the woman was heavily medicated or 'drugged' at the time of her death. The coroner returned a verdict of suicide; however, a member of the jury (which can be present) asked if the death could be entered as 'accidental death'. The corner replied:

ğer: It is clear that this woman was mentally ill and we have proof of that. There are very strong indicators that she intended to commit suicide. It is clear that she wanted to end her life.

Jury Member: She could have fallen on to the tracks. She was heavily sedated and could have been in a trance.

C: The presence of mental illness is a very strong indicator of suicidal intent. Thank you for your questions. The verdict is settled.

The position of Gavin and Rogers is that the privileging of the psychological autopsy is a reductionist view of life problems and, as in the cases above, may cause the coroner to miss the complexity of suicide. They offer a more reflective point-of-view, where the complexities of lay knowledge and lay narratives are perhaps better equipped to detail the troubles of a person that dies by suicide. But, as Cooper and indeed the author's own observations show, mental illness is the privileged logic, and perhaps the only real dominant logic in the court. More broadly, the Catholic Church's official view on suicide (Vatican 2) also reflects this position that mental illness, if evident in the case of suicide, no longer makes suicide an act against God or a mortal sin, as the deceased was *non corpus mentis* (Sheehan 2003).

In observing the court, it becomes clear that we recognize the questioning of the coroner as rooted in psychosocial logics, and it is plausible that the evidence of the pathology report had predetermined the ruling of the court. However, there is more going on that a simply examination of the facts in the cases above. Through questioning, the coroner (who is very experienced) is turning the *suspected suicide* into an *accountable suicide*. The questions posed are not simple propositions, but are a methodological means of accomplishing actions. To paraphrase Garfinkel, the coroner does not 'discover an account' of suicide, the coroner 'discovers' a psychosocially demonstrable suicide (Garfinkel et alii 1981). Simply put, in the beginning of the observed thirty cases in the Coroner's Court, the suicide was vague – it was still 'suspected'. From this 'place-to-start', the suicide becomes an increasingly definite thing (Garfinkel et alii 1981). The questions of the coroner reflect an experience of local knowledge of meaning. Each question builds to a conclusion and each question builds to accountability, or as Andy Crabtree states:

Through the exercise of the competence embodied in the interactional work practice, a vague object-of sorts ... comes to assume its demonstrable status as an object-out-there-the-world (Crabtree 2001: 13).

The coroner may have the remit of establishing the medical cause of death, but, in the case of suicide, there is an overwhelming need to make this death accountable for all to understand. To further this discussion and reflection on the privileged position of mental health as the 'cause' of suicide a more in-depth examination of the psychosocial autopsy will be provided.

**The Psychosocial Autopsy**

Derived from Greek, 'autopsy' literally translates as 'see for oneself'. In the case of the psychological or psychosocial autopsy, the investigator (as in the case of an insurance company investigating the suicide of a client, which would make the policy void) uses a *briologe of evidence* to 'see for oneself', in a similar fashion to the coroner in the aforementioned cases. Although there is no established and agreed format for conducting a psychological autopsy, the technique usually contains third-party information, which is typically derived from two sources – interviews with significant others, and records of various types (Ogloff and Otto 1993). It is
generally agreed that the goal of the psychological autopsy is to discern the mental state of a deceased person at some previous point in time. The case studies from the Coroner's Court demonstrate this goal. The psychological autopsy was developed in the late 1950s by the founding fathers of Suicidology, doctors Shneidman, Farberow, and Litman to deal with ‘equivocal’ cases of suicide (Ogloff and Otto 1993). Bruce W. Ebert, produced the following 26-point guideline for ‘what to look for’, when conducting a psychological autopsy:

- Alcohol History
- Suicide Notes
- Writing
- Books
- Relationship Assessment
- Marital Relationship Assessment
- Medical History
- Psychosocial Stressors
- Pre-suicidal Behaviour
- Language
- Drugs Used
- Reflective Mental Status Exam of Deceased’s Condition
- Psychological History
- Laboratory Studies
- Coroner's Report
- Motive Assessment
- Reconstruction of Events Occurring on the Day before Death
- Assess Feelings regarding Death as well as Preoccupations and Fantasies
- Military History
- Death History in Family
- Family History
- Employment History
- Education History
- Familiarity with Methods Used
- Police Report

Several authors have argued that this guideline should be considered flexible, and it is generally accepted that there is no standard for conducting psychological autopsies, despite numerous publications on the psychological autopsy technique. Accordingly, ‘the term “psychological autopsy” describes the goal of an inquiry, as much as a particular technique’ (Ogloff and Otto 1993).

The undeniable problem with the psychological autopsy is not the lack of standards but the very fact that the individual in question is not available for examination. Indeed this is the central problem with all research concerning suicide, including my own study of suicide in Ireland. This is also the central problem with the questions posed by the coroner in court. If the person is not available for questioning, then how accurate are psychological autopsies? What level of judgement can coroners achieve in their questions? Otto and Ogloff, discussing the limits and level of uncertainty of the psychological autopsy, argue that:

Clearly, the greatest limitation of the psychological autopsy is that the individual of interest is not available for examination. This feature, of course, distinguishes psychological autopsies from virtually every other kind of mental health evaluation (Ogloff and Otto 1993).

Even if all evidence points towards suicide, the coroner is still dependent on circumstantial evidence, and second- and third-hand reports. Furthermore, even when the coroner returns a verdict of suicide, under Irish law dealing with the Coroner’s Court, an individual can contest the death certificate and request that the death certificate be examined by another coroner. It is clear that verifying suicide is a tricky business. What is of greater concern is not whether a person actually died by suicide or not, but the use and dominance of psychological logics, which places emphasis on the presence of a mental health problem at the time of interest (suicide). Despite every effort to be certain in deciding on the past actions of the dead, there is an element of uncertainty when deciding on suicide. The following excerpt from an interview conducted with a pathologist exemplifies this uncertainty:

I have examined bodies that have marks on the neck area caused by the person. As if the person has attempted to break free from the rope around their neck and abort the suicide. Did they try to stop themselves dying? No one will ever know. Is this still a suicide, if a person changes their mind? Is that accidental death? I have examined bodies and the person’s neck is torn and bloody. Is this a natural reaction? But you think if they had decided to hang themselves then they would not try to stop it? What do you think?

‘What do you think?’ A question perhaps most anthropologists dislike hearing. In this case the question reinforces the uncertainty of suicide and how the coroner, as a representative and servant of the state, makes judgments. At the heart of this uncertainty is that the person with the ‘torn and bloody’ neck is dead. Was it a life instinct to tear at the rope, or did the person change his mind? Uncomfortable questions, perhaps with no easy answers.

In the same way, the coroner’s investigations into the actions of the dead is limited and, in the end, refutable. The coroner, as shown in the above cases, is deep in the realm of uncertainty when considering the actions of the dead. Moreover, as the views of the pathologist show, even when modes of suicide are lethal (hanging) there is physical evidence of a ‘change of heart’. On this point, the pathologist went on to say:

Even if there are marks on the neck caused by the person trying to get the rope off their neck, I will enter the cause of death as hanging or asphyxia. That is my role. Suicide is in the realm of the mind. It is the concern of the psychiatric ward not the pathology department.

Reading the marks on the body the pathologist is concerned with physical death. Those passing judgment, like the coroner, are not reading the body but charting the mind retrospectively. Through the words of the living and the actions of the dead the coroner asks questions rapidly about a mind which is gone, a mind which could have been changed at that vital moment between life and death. Yet, without much hesitation, the coroner finds cause in the form of psychosocial logics. Suicide in Ireland is most definitely part of the psychiatric paradigm.
I have witnessed first hand the deferring of attempted suicide cases to psychiatric care, as the following excerpts from my research diaries show.

The first example comes from my research diary of January 2001. I had interviewed Michael on a number of occasions and he asked me to attend Accident and Emergency with him due to his abscesses. It later became clear why he asked me to A & E, as the night before he had attempted suicide.

I spent 14 hours in the waiting room today with Michael. He is a chronic heroin addict and has abscesses on his arm and I could smell his rotting flesh. I felt sick, but at least I was not as troubled as him. He tried to kill himself last night. He told me that he had tried to hang himself in his bedroom, but the rope was too long. I could see the bruises on his neck. Finally the doctor called his name. They examined him for five minutes and told him to have a bath with antiseptic liquid in the water every day. Michael told them ‘I’m going to kill myself’. The doctor (who probably was too tired to care) told him that the psychiatrist on-call was not going to see him for another four to five hours, and he would be better off going home. We left, after 14 hours, with nothing. Michael was in tears. I learned that suicide attempts are the concern of the psychiatrist.

The second example comes from my research diary of June 2002. I had known Kevin for the best part of three years. We had a very strained relationship as Kevin had a hostile nature and was prone to acts of verbal and physical abuse. Kevin and I spent a great deal of time in hospital together, as he was constantly threatening to ‘kill himself’. This was the fourth time I had spent an entire night in the A & E waiting area.

I spent another night in hospital with Kevin. He told me during an interview that he was going to kill himself. I drove him to the hospital. We were there all night. Eventually the psych assessment took place in a small room next to the waiting area. It lasted no more than 15 minutes. He was admitted to the psychiatric ward. I told the doctor that Kevin was a recovering heroin addict. The doctor told me that this, according to the doctor, was not a problem and his addiction would be considered if any drugs were to be administered. The next day I visited Kevin. He was stoned from the medication. What is the point? Surely one part of a person’s life (addiction) is connected to their actions (suicide)?

The case studies from the Coroner’s Court and the excerpts above show the psychiatrization of suicide in action. From coroners’ use of psychosocial autopsy to pathologists’ refusal to second-guess their role, and to the treatment (or lack thereof) of Michael and Kevin, suicides and suicide attempts are the problem of psychiatry. It is hard to form a logical argument that breaks the relationship between suicide and attempted suicide and problems of the mind. However, as I have shown, the psychosocialization of suicide is tinged with more than a degree of uncertainty. In the next section of the paper I will draw out the historical aspects of this uncertainty and suggest that it is uncertainty (risk), which is the reason why suicide has become psychosocialized in the public domain in Ireland. As this discussion of risk is concluded I will suggest that there is a less psychiatric, private view, of suicide, which is held by the very health professionals who maintain and promote the view that suicide is chiefly a drama of the mind.

Risk and the Framing of Suicide

Zilboorg notes that in 1918 Sigmund Freud summarized a symposium on suicide held in Vienna by saying:

Despite the valuable material obtained in this discussion, we have not succeeded in arriving at any definite conclusion. We should like to know above all how it is possible that a person overcomes such an extraordinary powerful instinct as the life instinct … Perhaps our failure to find an answer to this psychological question is due to the fact that we have no way of obtaining it … Let us therefore refrain from forming an opinion until the time comes when experience will have solved the problem (Zilboorg 1996: 39).

The study of suicide was in a quandary; the only certainty that appeared clear was uncertainty. Freud and his followers at the time, despite the lack of ‘experience’, propagated the view ‘that every suicidal person is the victim of strong aggressive impulses which he fails to express outwardly and which he, as a result, turns inward, on his own self’ (Zilboorg 1996: 40). This ‘aggression turned inwards view’ of suicide came to dominate the theoretical formulation of the pathology of suicide until the 1950s. In 1959, Robins produced what can be considered the first definitive statement departing from this view, arguing as he did that all suicides were caused not by sociological changes or anger turned inwards but by mental illness. This view of suicide has come to dominate international opinion and has had real influence on the Coroner’s Court process of assessing suicide as a cause of death. To be sure, this strictly psychiatric view has been contested, and some commentators have suggested that suicide attempts are not caused by mental illness, but are instead ‘cries for help’, leading to the establishment of suicide prevention centres and ‘hot lines’ in America. By the 1960s, however, the dominance of psychiatric logics had been well established. Since the decriminalization of suicide in Ireland, there has been a similar growth of support networks and telephone help-lines. However, there is no empirical evidence that such institutions or networks help prevent suicide, or as Lester coined it ‘The myth of suicide prevention’ (Lester 1972).

The courts and public opinion seem to expect physicians to be able to pick out the particular persons who will later commit suicide. Although we may reconstruct causal chains and motives after the fact, we do not possess the tools to predict particular suicides before the fact (Pokorny 1996: 505).

Unfortunately, there is no known tag, psychological test, clinical technique, or biological marker, sufficiently specific and sensitive to enable prediction of suicide (Malsberger and Goldblatt 1996b: 480). It seems there is an undisputable degree of uncertainty when dealing with suicide, be it through the use of preventive or predictive models, or, in the case of the coroner, through
posthumous investigations of both the veracity and causes of suicide. This is a persistent feature of suicide research; one which, I fear, has only deepened. So great is the uncertainty and the unpredictability of suicide that in their introduction to the extensive volume ‘Essential Papers on Suicide’ Maltzberger and Goldblatt state: ‘Though suicide has not one cause, but many, they all flow together into one river whose overwhelming current, mental pain, carries everything before it’ (Maltzberger and Goldblatt 1996a: 1).

If it is the case that all suicides are caused by overwhelming mental pain or perturbation, then what role, if any, have the social sciences in the study of suicide, outside the usual secondary claim that suicide can act as a ‘hydrometer to social change’? Is culture a mere or, worse still, random eddy in the river of ‘many possible causes’, pushed ever onwards by the mental anguish of the individual? In the present case, I do feel that, despite the psychiatric tide, there is significant room for anthropological study in the study of suicide.

In the ever-expanding literature concerning risk and risk culture, there is a recurring statement that the conceptualization of risk and the dissemination of knowledge concerning risk tend to come from specialized groups or institutions. On this point Lupton contends that ‘An apparatus of expert research, knowledge, and advice has developed around the concept of risk’ (Lupton 1999: 9).

In Ireland over the last twenty years notable transformations have taken place in the growth of expert research and knowledge concerning suicide. Changes are evident in reporting measures, decriminalization, and perhaps most interestingly the establishment of internationally and nationally funded agencies, whose aims are to increase awareness about suicide and the relationship between suicide and mental health. Indeed in every county in Ireland there are support groups or counselling services available for those bereaved by suicide, and those contemplating the act. In the aforementioned three cases from the Coroner’s Court, the questions of the coroner fit into this sense of ‘apparatus’, which is based on the format of the psychosocial autopsies, which have been shown to be questionable, and the overwhelming logic, which states that all suicides have multiple causes, but a single driving force – ‘mental pain’. If it is true that we live in Beck’s ‘risk society’, and that Giddens’s assertion that ‘the risk climate of modernity is unsettling for everyone; no one escapes’ (Giddens 1991: 124), then it might become clearer why the coroner deems it necessary to employ the central characteristics of psychosocial autopsy, when interrogating the living about actions of the dead. Since all expert research conducted nationally and internationally tells us that suicide is caused not by an individual’s choice, but by the psychiatric unravelling of the seams of reason of the individual, then the coroner’s questions can be read as part of a ‘risk society’. Perhaps we are all potential suicide cases, waiting for a ‘suicide day’. On this point the coroner told me the following:

We have to know why people kill themselves. We have to keep records so we know, so people can do research and we can follow trends.

The coroner’s statements can be understood in the context of psychosocial risk, and as part of the apparatus of knowledge (Lupton 1999). Several authors have argued that without uncertainty there can be no risk (Lupton 1999, Giddens 1991, Boholm 2003) and, in the case of suicide, there seems to be nothing but uncertainty. Beck contends that part of the ‘risk culture’ involves a strong need to find blame, as he argues in the case of the search for the cause of HIV/AIDS. In the case of suicide, blaming the mental health of the individual for the suicide outcome is central to the way suicide is now constructed in Ireland. On this point Beck states: ‘Blaming is a way of manning the gates through which all information has to pass … and at the same time arming the guard’ (Beck 1992: 19).

In the context of the ‘risk society’, the coroner is engaging in three significant processes through both his/her questions and the pronouncing of verdicts: ‘blaming’ suicide on the psychosocial problems of the individual, as demonstrated in the coroner’s questions; adding (perhaps needlessly) to the democracy of risk (no one person is totally safe from suicide); and ‘framing suicide’ (in the Kantian sense of the sublime). On this final point Boholm states:

The concept of risk can be understood as a framing device, which conceptually translates uncertainty from being an open-ended field of unpredicted possibilities into a bounded set of possible consequences (2003: 167).

In the case of suicide in Ireland, the ‘framing device’ is mental illness, which above all is considered the determining factor and driving force behind the move towards suicide and suicidal ideation. The framing of suicide as a mental health concern does not stop with the Coroner’s Court; it is evident in the Irish government’s strategy and social policy development in relation to suicide contexts where suicide is a matter of definition, prevention, and study. The Report of the National Task Force on Suicide and subsequent government publications have continually estimated that between 75–95% of all suicides (similar to findings in Britain, as mentioned above) are in some way caused by mental health problems:

A psychological autopsy of suicides in Cork between August, 1989 and January, 1993 found that only 18% of young men aged between 15 to 24 years who had committed suicide had received psychological treatment in the year before their death even though almost 75% of this group were regarded as being mentally ill (Department of Health and Children 1998: 19).

This may indeed be the case, but in the act of framing suicide as a mental health problem, what is left in the darkness outside the frame? If we are to employ psychosocial autopsies when framing suicide, then there is any point in the study of suicide, other than to reinforce the dominance of psychosocial logics? Gavin and Rogers well summarize the dominance of the psychosocial approach:

Psychological autopsy, at least as it is currently formulated, appears to reflect the kind of realist ontology, traditionally characteristic of Western medicine. It seems to us that it is an approach to the understanding of suicide that is, in epistemological terms, flawed. Of course, all attempts to unravel the causes of suicide,
whether they be psychiatric, psychological, or sociological, run the risk of falling into the trap of reductionism (2006: 142).

Scholarly research overwhelmingly states that people kill themselves because they are mentally ill. This is the frame that makes sense of suicide. It gives certainty. It makes that which seems strange more manageable, and less risky. Move outside the frame, however, and there is more going on in the dark, and there are less perceptible features of the puzzle of suicide, which need to be addressed. It is in the dark of complexity (to continue the metaphor) that writers such as Alvarez have argued that suicide will be discovered. Something akin to what Gavin and Rogers argue can be considered as 'lay narratives' about suicide. Similarly, there has been an extensive move in medical anthropology to place renewed emphasis on lay narratives as the basis for knowledge and rationality concerning illness and disease (see McKevitt's 2000 work on stroke, for example). It is true there is a great deal to learn about suicide and medical conditions from those who have close dealings with suicide, as Gavin and Rogers explain:

The call to use lay knowledge and to focus down on the complexity of suicide is reflected in the cultural attitudes to suicide amongst the general public in Ireland. A survey conducted by the Irish Association of Suicidology in 2006 showed that most people believed that mental illness is the main cause of suicide, but that family and social relationship problems and alcohol overconsumption are also associated with suicides.

As I have argued, the Coroner's Court is jural in procedure and in ruling. The psychosocial logics that are evident in court are presented as empirical, considered, strategic, and ultimately accountable statements about the dead. It is difficult to see how these will dramatically change, as suggested by Gavin and Rogers, as the coroner, although a single individual, represents the state, in a 'We-ness' familiar to most institutions (Desjarlais 1996). Thus the psychosocial logics, evident in the employment of the psychosocial autopsies, can be read as public framing devices, in the conceptualization of suicide as 'risk' and individual as 'risk objects'. However, as with everything associated with suicide, the issue of certainty is always in question, as, through my observations within psychiatric settings and unstructured interviews with the coroner, there is a private, less considered version of the authoritative psychosocial logics found in the court. The following examples illustrate this 'private' and out-of-sight/site view of suicide.

In an interview with the coroner, he said the following in relation to why men kill themselves:

The most trivial of reasons, very often it is young people that have fallen out with the girlfriend and nobody expects them to commit suicide and people that have been talking to them an hour earlier say that they were in good form and they seem just to go off on the spur of the moment and commit suicide. I often wonder if they comprehend the gravity of what they are doing, because in a lot of cases, young men in particular seem to make the decision on the spur of the moment and nearly always under the influence of alcohol … what can you say … you can't really prevent it.

In a similar situation I asked a consultant working in a psychiatric hospital 'why do people kill themselves?' The reply was:

This place is full of feral males, with nothing else to do but go around taking drugs, killing themselves, and killing others.

The final example involves the entire staff of an outpatient department of a psychiatric ward. In this case I was sitting in the office with a 'severely depressed and highly suicidal patient', as described by the individual's doctor and the file on the patient. He was addressed in an official tone and manner for the time he was in the private staff area. When the patient left the office, the following banter ensued:

Receptionist: He is fucking nuts. He freaks me out. He is mad that fella.
Nurse: I hate seeing him coming in here. He's beyond help; you know what I am saying?
Doctor: That f**ker is mad as a brush; I can't believe he has not topped himself.

As they all began to laugh at the doctor's 'mad as a brush' theory, another patient knocked on the door of the staff room. Silence descended. The institution had returned and I could not believe what I had heard.

These three examples offer a different perspective to what people think about suicide and those who are at risk. Behind the closed doors of the staff room, or in private conversation with psychiatrist, and the coroner, suicide is trivialized, and worryingly considered the action of 'feral males'. The language and attitude are loose and offer a counterpoint to the austere setting of the Coroner's Court. Yet, these viewpoints are not voiced publicly, and perhaps unwittingly reveal what is outside the 'frame', and are in direct opposition to the dominant psychiatric logics in defining what is suicide, at least in the public domain. These examples are not just simple reminders of the public and private dichotomy, or simple examples of the separation between institution and agent. These examples reflect two important features of suicide in Ireland. Firstly, the pervasiveness with which psychosocial logics have come to dominate and frame suicide in Ireland. Secondly, and most interestingly, these examples stem from the uncertainty of suicide, despite best efforts; it has never been soundly proven that suicide is preventable, predictable, or posthumously quantifiable. Behind the closed doors of the psychiatric ward and away from the Coroner's Court, this uncertainty is released. In this private arena, it is acceptable to describe patients as 'nuts' and 'feral'. In private, suicide is not caused by mental pain
or illness; no one really knows why, where, and when a person will die by suicide.

The acceptance of psychosocial logics, in Ireland and elsewhere, and the practice of psychosocial autopsies in the Coroner's Court represent a reductionist viewpoint of suicide, whereby individual responsibility gives way under the considerable convincing weight of mental health as the cause of suicide. To borrow Garfinkel's term, what 'remains' after the death by suicide is speculation and, at best, an incomplete puzzle. But as risk theory shows, this is not enough; it is perhaps in society's best interest to leave people without certainty. The 400–500 people every year in Ireland, and their families and friends need some level of finality. Suicide is no longer committed in Ireland, as it is no longer a crime, so suicide, through the frame of mental health, happens, sadly and repeatedly.

Conclusion
Suicide in Ireland over the last decade has become one of the most keenly debated and psychiatrized risks, which seems to go against the tide of concomitant social, economic, and cultural change. Ireland is truly a post-modern society, and with this comes greater risks and a greater need to quell uncertainty. In an effort to frame such uncertainty, we have armed the guards with psychiatric logic to the point where all 'mental problems' are overhung by the Sword of Damocles, in every form, shape, and method, ready to strike and bring imminent disaster and death, to everyone. In an interview with the head of a national charity for mental health, I was told the following:

We cannot talk about depression or even think about depression without the fear of suicide. Everything is about suicide; no one can have a mental illness and not be thought of as being suicidal.

It is my contention that it is the persistent uncertainty concerning suicide, which even Freud and the last 100 years of psychiatric and psychoanalytical tools have not yet overcome, that has made suicide a prominent feature of mental health evaluation in Ireland. Such is the level of uncertainty, that suicide has been psychosocialized even further; since we cannot predict, posthumously assess, or prevent suicide, then all we can truly say is that it is due to a 'mental health problem'. This is not an ideal position to be in when dealing with life and death.

The psychosocialization of suicide is not removed from everyday life; it is very much an 'experience near' risk in modern Ireland. Once, suicide was not mentioned and therefore was considered not to happen. Now suicide is caused and reasoned, and is a risk to all in society. Perhaps this cultural moment will also pass in the history of suicide in Ireland. Familiarity breeds contempt, so much so that a mental health nurse expressed this to me about suicide:

When I am working with patients and they constantly say ‘I am going to kill myself and I want to die’ I get them to sign a contract that says ‘I will not kill myself’ and that I will not mention killing myself when ‘I am talking to my psychiatrist or my nurse’. I do this so I can get them past their fixation with suicide, which stops me seeing their real problems. It also creates a sense that their suicide would let me down and they might feel bad doing it. If they talk about killing themselves after they signed the contract, I ask them to leave the room and the session is over.

It seems that social contracts, prohibitions, and guilt may return and begin to shape the nature of suicide in Ireland once more.

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Notes

1 Ireland in this case refers to the Republic of Ireland and does not include Northern Ireland.

2 I was informed by the Coroner's Court secretary not to make any contact with family members in the court nor was I given any personal details of the families of the deceased. In Ireland statistical data concerning suicide is only available at a county level. There exist no data concerning suicide at an area level, for postal code or for residence (e.g. estate, street, townland, and parish).

3 There are many ways to describe suicide. In this case I preferred ‘die by suicide’; however, I could have used ‘suicided’. The most common description, ‘committed suicide’, has fallen out of favour, as ‘committed’ refers to an illegal quality of suicide, which is now no longer the case; however, ‘committed suicide’ is still used widely. Note the coroner uses the term ‘committed suicide’ on two occasions.
The Printed Accent, A Marque of Distinction

Robert Power

This essay focuses on the restrained and controlled style of language used in The Irish Times newspaper as it reported the events of the 1916 Rising in Ireland and in subsequent reports of commemorations of the Rising from 1916 to 2006. It attempts to answer questions regarding use of a particular style of discourse in order to produce and maintain a particular style of reader against a backdrop of changing political affiliations of the newspaper and of its readers. The suggestion here is that The Irish Times spoke to the ruling elite in Ireland before it gained independence from Britain, that The Irish Times continues to speak to the ruling elite in an independent Irish state, and that the institution of a newspaper and the institution of a ruling elite are maintained by style.

Introduction

This essay will address the broad question of how social categories are produced and maintained. This will be attempted through an examination of the changing language in one national newspaper, The Irish Times, over a ninety-year period of publication. The essay focuses on a particular social category and the maintenance of this category through a particular style of social discourse. The period covered is from the Easter Rising of 1916 to 2006. The argument put forward is that language style produces exclusive social categories and that the circulation of discourse, in a specific language style, produces specific social categories. 85% of the readers of The Irish Times are what are known as ABC1 readers, although they would not instantly recognize themselves by that title. ABC1 is a classificatory marketing term that refers to consumers who possess a high level of education, formal or informal, and the highest level of disposable income in any given economy. The ABC1s may be viewed as the stratum of society most likely to be engaged in pursuit of taste and style. The essay focuses on the concept of a newspaper as being an established strand, or institution, of the state and the role it plays in circulating national discourse aimed at particular social categories within a nation. For the purpose of this essay an emphasis is placed on the controlled and restrained manner in which The Irish Times reported events during the 1916 Rising and subsequent reports of commemorations of the Rising over a ninety-year period. Historically, The Irish Times was ideologically associated with the ruling Protestant elite in Ireland and the newspaper traditionally supported British rule. However, The Irish Times is currently viewed as a quality newspaper in a modern independent Ireland. The suggestion here is that the controlled style of language of The Irish Times produces a style of discourse that is directed at an exclusive and elite section of society and that, although the political affiliations of both the newspaper and the social category may change over time, the institution of this form of discourse produces and maintains elite social categories.

Basic Concepts

Three sets of concepts will be used in our analysis. Firstly, the notion of strata contained within a society draws directly from the writings of Antonio Gramsci (2007). Gramsci outlines the notion that within any social system the ability exists to create a specialized elite, through a process of education. All actors contain some form of learned specialized skills: 'all men are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social function' (Hoare, quoted in Gramsci 2007: 5). Gramsci divides intellectuals into two distinctive groups. The first comprises ‘traditional professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on’ (ibid), whose intellectual position in a given society intersects with their dominant social class and whose role in society reflects the access to education afforded to the dominant social class. The second stratum comprises the organic intellectuals ‘the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class’ (ibid), who emerge from within the subordinated class in spite of their lack of access to education.

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity (Gramsci 2007: 5).

Secondly, the concept of language style is a reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of taste as the pursuit of the petit-bourgeoisie. For Bourdieu, the distinction between proletariat and petit-bourgeoisie is marked by the possession of various forms of capital. The petit-bourgeoisie pursues taste in an effort to mark their perceived difference to the cultural other of the proletariat. Its members create a lifestyle or habitus within which they act out their role within society distinct from the roles of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Control, restraint, and moderation are key elements of the perceived social capital possessed by the petit-bourgeoisie. For the purpose of this essay, the concept of a restrained language style will be applied to the language style of discourse found in The Irish Times newspaper. The style of language used in The Irish Times may be seen as a form of Received Pronunciation in print, or a printed accent. Received Pronunciation (RP) is a form of accent that is not derived from a geographical region: ‘RP is a supra-local accent; it is reencoded in public awareness as indexical of speaker’s social status’ (Agha
A common example of RP English is the accent heard on the BBC news broadcasts. RTÉ English is the Irish equivalent; however, accents such as a Dublin 4 accent, that are heard in use nationally, could also be defined as RP. The suggestion throughout this essay is that a printed form of RP is the preferred language style of *The Irish Times*. This printed accent is imbued with similar indices of a speaker's class and it is performed as a mark of distinction. It distinguishes class and, as an object, the printed accent may be seen as a desirable brand or marque of distinction for the petit-bourgeoisie.

A third concept to be utilized in this essay is the concept that everyday interaction and interplay within a social system, consciously and unconsciously, creates and maintains that social system. Benedict Anderson's (1991) notion of the creation of imagined national groups through a process of simultaneity will be applied to the production of discourse in *The Irish Times*. Simultaneity creates a reader perception of the existence of likeminded actors within a society. For the purpose of this argument Anderson's point will be used to show how exclusive social categories are produced by newspaper discourse. These three concepts combined may be seen as the overarching theoretical framework within which this essay is framed.

**Socially Constructed and Socially Constructing Objects**

We begin by examining the newspaper as an object, the purpose of newspapers, and the role they play within a social system. We will look at the role that a publisher plays in constructing discourse that results in readers engaging in a conversation with each other and with the newspaper. We will look at the use of a restrained and changing language style contained within reports of a nationalist uprising in Ireland during 1916, and subsequent reports of the celebrations of that event. The focus will then shift to examining the traditional readership of *The Irish Times* and the manner in which *The Irish Times* speaks to traditional institutions of the state. The constant suggestion here is that a controlled and constructed language style constructs and maintains traditional strata within a social system. This controlled style, and exclusive attention paid to the petit-bourgeoisie, allows for a newspaper that once represented the colonizing minority to become the newspaper of reference for the native ruling elite.

Newspapers are published to be read. The voice of the publisher is the only legitimate voice contained within the printed word. Although a reader may have the option of engaging in published discourse through the medium of letters to the editor, they will fill in any given edition and pass it off as legitimate. All paper contains some level of hierarchy from the humble 'post-it' note to the published book. Andrea Pellegram (1998) outlines the hierarchy contained among certain forms of paper in a London office. For internal office use, 'post-its' are an informal paper of choice, available to all actors, and used for the purpose of writing informal notes. They may be used as personal reminders and/or stuck onto desks or computers. Most internal office communications are either written on or printed on blank white paper: 'white paper is everyday and common. It is nothing special and it is used for nothing special' (Pellegram 2003: 105). When it comes to publishing paper to be seen outside the office, 'a different calibre of paper is used' (ibid. 105). In an effort to portray a professional image to the outside world, documentation is 'dressed in fine inks and textured design' (ibid. 105). Certain actors possess the authority to amend or publish these documents. The authority to edit or alter published paper is strictly controlled and in the case of newspapers restricted to the publisher's voice.

A newspaper is a printed product, consumed and published daily, that contains current news of interest to its perceived audience. Newspapers contain an inherent sell-by date. Yesterday's news is old news and as such it is not valued. The date at the top of the newspaper is 'the single most important emblem on it' (Anderson 1991: 33). It could also be described as a 'one-day best-seller' (ibid. 35), whose author has abandoned any thought of a coherent plot (ibid. 33). For daily newspapers, life expectancy is one day and, at the time of distribution of today's newspaper, yesterday's newspaper becomes history. Discourse may carry on; it may even enter into the public arena of other publications and/or other media, such as radio or television, but the object is disposable. Its content, though, may be regurgitated indefinitely.

Newspapers are published to be read, not re-read. The information contained within a newspaper is of central importance to the publisher. The newspaper reader does not appear to play any active role in the published voice of the newspaper. Yet, it is this same reader who creates a social system based on the content that he or she has read in a newspaper. The reader may not consciously engage with the publication, the reader may not be consciously aware that he or she is a member of a social category of readers. However, the reader consciously creates a society based on the publisher's voice. The social category is created from the pulp or the paper-mâché of discarded print discourse. How can an object as everyday and banal as a newspaper shape the world around it? Why do actors do things with these words? Why do actors want this discourse?

Although wrapped neatly in the form of a printed object, the object on sale in a newspaper is its text, its conversation and its discourse. It is important to view the discourse offered by a newspaper as the goods being consumed by the reader. They consciously use goods to shape their social and/or moral universe. If the object is discourse, then the reader is afforded the opportunity to engage in informed discourse: 'man is a social being, and he needs goods for communicating with others, for making sense of what is going on around him' (Douglas 1991: 29). All objects may be viewed as socially constructed and the value ascribed to them may be seen as socially constructed. However, this object, a newspaper's discourse, can be interpreted as simultaneously socially constructed and socially constructing. This still gives the impression that the reader plays no active social role in creating the discourse. The reader appears to appropriate the voice of the newspaper and, because readers are social beings, they consciously circulate that discourse. This suggests that an actor (the reader) decided to form a nation based on someone's notion of how a nation should be governed. Perhaps the notion of nation existed before the publication of nationalist discourse. Perhaps print only served as an indicator of the existence of likeminded actors who now possessed a medium to engage in
conversation. To put this in a different way, which came first, social conditions that promoted a nationalist sentiment or newspaper technology?

The object or artefact is both the really real newspaper and the real discourse that the text in a newspaper creates. ‘How do people employ artifacts to accomplish social purposes in the course of everyday life?’ (Pfaffenberger 1992: 492). Is it possible to separate the discourse from the material properties of the newspaper? The artefact is disposable but, the discourse, depending on its social context, has a potentially longer life expectancy. The discourse within the artefact has a greater social value than the material qualities of the artefact. The type or style of discourse has greater value than the function of the artefact. From a purely utilitarian view, function drives the invention of technology, and form or style is secondary. Bryan Pfaffenberger (1992) deconstructs this standard view of technology. He applies a concept known as the ‘sociotechnical system’ (Hughes 1990) to the interpretation of technological artefacts. Rather than need driving invention, invention must be ‘in concert with the social coordination of labor’ (Pfaffenberger 1992: 497). The example he gives is Law’s (1987) application of the ‘sociotechnical system’ that led to the production of Portuguese mixed-rig vessels during the 14th and 15th centuries. The achievement of the mixed-rig vessel was not just its creation. It was the integration of other elements from within the social system, such as the compass, the astrolabe, the educated mariners and an understanding of Atlantic trade winds, ‘kings, queens, ships, crews, winds, cannons, maps, sails, astrolabes, Muslims and gold’ (Pfaffenberger 1992: 509). The political, economic, technical, scientific and the elite intellectual elements of social systems cooperated to ensure the success of the mixed rig vessel. In order for any technological development to succeed, social cooperation and social context is a prerequisite.

Pfaffenberger’s approach to the standard view of technology may be applied to the topic of this essay. Firstly, if the discourse contained within a newspaper is viewed as a socially constructed object, the social conventions may be said to be in place prior to the technology. This would explain how Benedict Anderson’s process of simultaneity could take root. The discourse created by the technology of print integrated and worked with the existing socially constructed concept of nationalist sentiment. Secondly, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of style may be applied to the style of discourse that print technology produced. The form that this discourse took led to the maintenance of the existing social or class structures within a political system. That is to say that had the cooperation to engage in nation-building discourse existed pre-technology, it also existed post-technology. The style of the discourse shaped the structure of a new social system. If an elitist form of discourse style enabled a nation’s birth, then an elitist form of discourse style would maintain a nation. Thirdly, if the elitist structures prevailed after the establishment of an independent nation, these structures created a new set of intellectuals within the new nation. However, they were ‘the “traditional” intellectuals professional, literary, scientific and so on’ (Hoare, quoted in Gramsci 2007: 3) and not a new style of organic intellectuals. This may explain how a newspaper that published in full King George V’s speech praising the actions of His Majesty’s Forces who crushed a militant nationalist act of violence in Ireland in 1916, negotiated the regime change to become the newspaper of reference in modern day Ireland. The newspaper’s style is valued more than its function. The strata are maintained by style.

**The Irish Times and the 1916 Rising**

In 1916 *The Irish Times* represented the views of the ruling Protestant minority in Ireland. The maintenance of Ireland within the United Kingdom of Great Britain was a central ideology of *The Irish Times* during this period. The political landscape of Ireland changed dramatically between 1916 and 1922. The process of the creation of an Irish independent state began with an uprising on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916. *The Irish Times* was unable to publish on the day of the rising, but they published a paper the following day. In an article entitled ‘The Outbreak’, *The Irish Times* reported on the previous day’s events. ‘An attempt has been made to overthrow the constitutional government of Ireland’ (*The Outbreak*, 25/04/1916) and, after a cautious note moderating the language the newspaper was about to use, the article goes on to say: ‘as soon as peace and order have been restored the responsibility for this intended revolution will be fixed in the right quarter’ (ibid). The use of the word revolution immediately politicizes the violent events of the previous day. As such it may be seen as an indication of the newspaper’s understanding of the fact that, at some point in the future, the politics of its readership might change. The article continues:

‘the rebels took possession of …’ ‘a soldier and a policeman were shot dead…’ ‘rebels volunteers took possession of…’ ‘fierce fighting took place between soldiers and rebels…’ ‘many lives have been lost…’ ‘wounded soldiers and some wounded civilians…’ ‘positions which were seized by the rebels…’ ‘still in rebel hands’ (ibid).

This may be seen as the language of war reporting. The forces of each side are clearly marked out as soldiers, rebels and civilians. The words crime, murder or terrorist, are not yet to be found in the choice of language style; the article, indeed, states that ‘our language must be anti-violence and pro-constitutional government as it calls on the general public ‘to trust firmly in the speedy triumph of the forces of law and order’ (ibid), but there is a complete lack of condemnation or any attempt to condone the violent events of the previous day. Their editorial position altered over the next few days.

In an article entitled ‘The Insurrection’ (*The Irish Times*, 28/04/1916) its choice of language style shifted: ‘Martial law is maintained …’ ‘the back of the insurrection is broken’ (ibid). The word ‘revolution’ and the language of war are not used in this article. In their place comes the language of authority and control. ‘One of the seven ringleaders surrendered unconditionally’ (ibid), and more emotive words are used to describe the destruction of buildings in the city. ‘Liberty Hall is no more than a sinister and hateful memory’ (ibid), and there is constant reference to the ruin and destruction caused by the insurrection. Although the word rebel is used, the remaining participants in the insurrection are described as
‘the outlaws who still “snipe” from the roofs’ (ibid). The language of state control continues with ‘so ends the criminal adventure of the men…’, ‘Ireland has been saved from shame and ruin…’, ‘the whole empire from serious danger’ (ibid). The romantic terms of rebel and revolution begin to give way to the events of the insurrection being described as ‘a record of crime, horror and destruction’ (ibid). Praise is given to ‘our veteran troops’ (ibid), and the newspaper demonstrates its loyalty to the British Army, which has ‘filled the breach and won the day’ (ibid). The final criminalizing comment removes any of the romantic views of revolution that appeared in the newspaper’s first report: ‘Innocent civilians have been murdered in cold blood’ (ibid, emphasis added). The section of the article dealing with the factual events of the uprising finishes with the ominous line that ‘this insurrection will leave behind it a long trail of poverty, sorrow and shame’ (ibid).

As the political elements of the uprising itself are removed from the events of the uprising, the focus of the article shifts to who is at fault in the British government. ‘Urgent and repeated warnings were given to the government … they were neglected’ (ibid). However, the criticism of the British government is brief and the focus of the article shifts back to the political leaders of the uprising. Emotive terms are again used to describe and introduce the language of control and order to the reader:

The state has struck … The surgeon’s knife has been put to the corruption in the body of Ireland, and its course must not be stayed until the whole malignant growth has been removed. In the verdict of history, weakness to-day would be even more criminal than the indifference of the last few months. Sedition must be rooted out of Ireland once and for all. The rapine and bloodshed of the past week must be finished with a severity which will make any repetition of them impossible for generations to come (ibid).

The Irish Times and the 1916 Rising Remembered

The 50th anniversary celebrations of the 1916 rising were celebrated in 1966 against a background of anti-British violence in Northern Ireland. The report of the events in The Irish Times on 14 April centres on the commercial elements of the commemorations and the queues formed by the general public to purchase memorabilia: ‘It is a welcome sign of intelligent souvenir seeking’ (The Irish Times, 14/04/1966). The focus of this article, entitled ‘Better than Bunting’, is the manner in which intelligent people should remember the events of the past and, although ‘there were reasonable fears that the celebrations might spark off explosions’ (ibid), the weekend celebrations passed without incident. When referring to the President’s speech, The Irish Times says, ‘perhaps we have reached the stage now’ (ibid, emphasis added). The use of the first-person-plural ‘we’ indicates a shift in the position of The Irish Times. By saying ‘we’ The Irish Times is speaking for itself and its readers but, more importantly, it is including itself as an addressee of the President’s speech. The Irish Times therefore may be said to have included itself within the body of the Irish public, fifty years after calling for the surgeon’s knife to remove the malignant growth.

In 1999, in an article entitled ‘1916 – 1999’ (The Irish Times, 30/03/1999), against a background of violence in Northern Ireland, the familiar sentiments of the previous seventy-five years of reporting are evident. ‘What is this strange phenomenon called 1916 that seems to raise the blood and paralyse the intellect for so many?’(ibid). In a tone similar to that found in earlier reports, it states that:

the Easter Rising was a calculated conspiracy to spill blood … it was profoundly undemocratic. Its object was to sweep away moderation and compromise … it was also a week of bravery and idealism; a heroic expression of the ideal of Irish nationhood and separateness’ (ibid).

This article is the closest that The Irish Times comes to condoning the violence of 1916. In an effort not to appear pro-violent or anti-democratic the report says, ‘nations defined themselves in terms of their military capacity with flags, banners and anthems’ (ibid) and, in true Benedict Anderson form, it adds the line ‘a willingness to kill and, indeed, to be killed on behalf of one’s country was an essential element of nationhood’ (ibid). Finally, this article outlines the worldwide path of nationalism:

but the Rising is what actually happened; it defined, in great part, the road through which the Irish State has emerged. The United States began with a volley of shots at Lexington. Constitutional Britain began with a devastating war and the chopping off of a king’s head. Modern France began with the guillotine. The United States, the United Kingdom and the French Republic might have emerged anyway through peaceful, political evolution. But they too, in the event, were born in blood (ibid).

A few years earlier, in 1996, as the result of prolonged efforts by the Irish and British governments, a ceasefire had been established in Northern Ireland. ‘The Message of Easter’ (The Irish Times, 06/04/1996) is a call for peace and reconciliation and an end to all violence in the name of any peoples. Somehow, the 1916 Rising had been hijacked by the terrorists during the peace process. The Irish state no longer celebrated the events of 1916 and the newspapers of Ireland refrained from publishing any articles that might inflame the sensitivities of all parties involved in the peace process. As such, this article is very cautious: ‘every generation has to work with what it has received … It need not condemn, and it need not follow’ (ibid), it may be seen as a call for calm and endorsement of the politics of the democratically elected governments. By 2006 however, the Irish state, and newspapers, had reclaimed the 1916 rising as their property. The state engaged in an elaborate programme of celebrations culminating in a military parade and a reading of the Proclamation of Independence at the site of the 1916 rising. The Irish Times published personal historical accounts of individuals involved in the rising. The main focus of these accounts is not the politics of the people involved, but rather the diverse nature of the rebel forces. The articles of 2006 focus on the women involved in the rising, minority religious groups involved, and non-nationals that participated in the creation of the Irish nation, issues that are relevant to the readers of The Irish Times in the Ireland of 2006. A week of articles leads up
... to a sixteen-page pictorial and editorial supplement that outlines the events of 1916.

The previous editor of *The Irish Times*, Conor Brady, in his 2005 volume *Up with The Times*, refers to the fact that it is difficult for an editor of a newspaper to step back from her or his position and engage with the news as it unfolds:

> Editing … *The Irish Times* … is something akin to driving an express train … there is no time or opportunity to dwell on the wonders of the landscape or the novelty of the events that have just passed (Brady 2005: 14).

The everyday pressure to produce a product that contains an inbuilt daily expiry date leaves little time for reflectivity. ‘Newspapers are only newspapers. By definition, they are imperfect products’ (*ibid.*: 2). The main priority of a newspaper is to publish; the conditions and editorial position of a publisher may be established only if they continue to publish.

**The Papier-mâché Nation**

Two studies provide a deeper explanation of the process of creating a nation through print. Firstly, Michael Warner (1958) explores the creation of the modern United States of America through a series of letters that were read out at public meetings during the 18th century. This form of media predated the modern newspaper, and Warner sees them as being responsible for the spread of nationalist ideology. ‘Their paper war articulated and helped to mobilize an intercolonial and protonational public that remained a public of readers’ (Warner 1958: 5). A public was created by text and discourse. A key element of Warner's interpretation of the events that led to the creation of a nation is the every-day banal element of this construction. Warner illustrates Anderson's theory of simultaneity in an actual setting.

Noel Ignatiev (1996) looks at the integration of a marginalized group within a dominant group. Through a process of interpreting every-day public meetings and the letters read at these meetings, Ignatiev explores how Irish immigrants in America during the 18th century became staunch supporters of the state. ‘The white skin made the Irish eligible for membership in the white race’ (Ignatiev 1996: 59) but it did not guarantee their admittance. The Irish in America were able to observe the marginalizing effect that support for abolitionist politics had on them. In an effort to improve their financial position they dropped abolitionist rhetoric from their public meetings and aligned themselves with the white politics of the dominant group. The Irish experience in America may be seen as the bottom-up element in the creation of national identity, where a sub-section of a society chose to integrate within the dominant group contrary to the abolitionist politics of Ireland during the same period. ‘It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny’ (Anderson 1991: 12). The media helped to shape and simultaneously constructed an imagined community among the Irish immigrants in America.

However, both Warner's and Ignatiev's examples contain the element of face-to-face contact that leads to shifts in ideologies. *The Irish Times* reader is not involved in face-to-face contact with the publisher. In order for a face-to-face conversation to take place, both actors must have some sense of each other: ‘a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space’ (Warner 1958: 50). Face-to-face conversation takes place only between known individuals. Conversation is therefore a private function between actors. When a conversation moves into the public sphere, such as the conversation between publisher and reader of a newspaper, the same criterion that applies to face-to-face conversation applies to public conversation. The addresser and addressee must have some sense of each other before a conversation takes place. Before an actor (reader) engages with a newspaper the actor must have some sense of the newspaper. If an actor does not agree with a newspaper then disengagement interrupts the conversation. Similarly, the publisher must have some sense of its potential readers. The ‘letters to the editor’ page affords the reader the opportunity to talk to the publisher. Although these conversations are conducted in the public sphere, they are conducted by private, known, individual actors. Public speech is bounded from within the constructs of the media to become a form of private conversation.

In order for national identity to survive, it must exist at an everyday level in society. Michael Billig best describes this as ‘the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building’ (2006: 8). The important element here is the unnoticed quality of a national sign. It is only during a point of national crisis that ‘heads will be nodded, flags will be waved and tanks will roll’ (*ibid.*: 4). The banal reproduction of nationalism is a prerequisite for the nation to be mobilized during times of war. ‘The rape of a motherland is far worse than the rape of actual mothers’ (*ibid.*: 6). But, in order for actors to engage with this life-threatening ideology, nationalism must be reproduced seamlessly throughout the daily interaction of citizenship. Therefore, nationhood and nationalism is something that must be consciously and unconsciously constructed in the everyday psyche of actors. Nationalism must be reinforced in a banal manner by the singing of national anthems at sports events, by hanging flags, and it must be ‘flagged, in the lives of its citizenry’ (*ibid.*: 6). This flagging of the nation may be seen as a sign of ‘familiar assumptions about nationhood, the world, and “our” place in that world’ (*ibid.*: 93). The banal quality of a newspaper echoes this sentiment, particularly when that newspaper is aimed at an exclusive social category within a social system.

The main section of *The Irish Times* carries local and global news stories. Within this first section there are sections that vary daily. These sections speak to certain strata of the state and, although sections such as the property supplement are primarily driven by advertisement, certain institutions within the state are given a voice. There are weekly education supplements, fashion supplements, health supplements that focus on the benefits of healthy eating and exercise, legal sections contained within the main section, and an opinion-and-analysis section that allows current topics to be debated. The everyday pressure to produce a product that contains the element of face-to-face contact that leads to shifts in ideologies. *The Irish Times* reader is not involved in face-to-face contact with the publisher. In order for a face-to-face conversation to take place, both actors must have some sense of each other: ‘a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space’ (Warner 1958: 50). Face-to-face conversation takes place only between known individuals. Conversation is therefore a private function between actors. When a conversation moves into the public sphere, such as the conversation between publisher and reader of a newspaper, the same criterion that applies to face-to-face conversation applies to public conversation. The addresser and addressee must have some sense of each other before a conversation takes place. Before an actor (reader) engages with a newspaper the actor must have some sense of the newspaper. If an actor does not agree with a newspaper then disengagement interrupts the conversation. Similarly, the publisher must have some sense of its potential readers. The ‘letters to the editor’ page affords the reader the opportunity to talk to the publisher. Although these conversations are conducted in the public sphere, they are conducted by private, known, individual actors. Public speech is bounded from within the constructs of the media to become a form of private conversation.

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of Pierre Bourdieu’s lifestyle or habitus. More than offering reader’s opinions regarding their tasteful consumption, The Irish Times speaks the same language style as its readers. It adopts and controls a similar accent to its readers.

In order to maintain this language style The Irish Times publishes an Editorial Stylebook every two years. This is an in-house publication that contains 171 pages of grammatical rules and preferred language style of The Irish Times. How important is the style of language used in The Irish Times to its readers? The Irish Times receives 1,000 letters and emails every week. Some of them refer directly to the language style of the paper. The Stylebook lists in alphabetical order various grammatical points and it includes the proper titles that are to be used when referring to certain people and institutions. Following a little joke, ‘you write tomato and I write tomato, so that’s alright then’ (Stylebook 2005: 7), the guide begins. The following are some examples taken from the Stylebook.

best practice
not “ise”.

blond
hair colour for both sexes. A blonde is a woman with blond hair.

cent
cent and euro do not take the plural form.

dyslexia
write “Ann has dyslexia” not “is dyslexic”.

Girl
Female under 18.

Queen Elizabeth, on first mention, but the queen thereafter.

The attention that is paid to this guide maintains a recognizable text style for the reader. It also ensures that deviation from the style guide is regulated by the editorial department of The Irish Times. Style is one of the key elements in this essay. It is argued here that, through the use of a particular style, the discourse contained in The Irish Times creates an exclusive social category. That category is maintained by the use of a particular language style.

The four elements of simultaneity, circulation of discourse, active participation and everyday engagement create and maintain a social category. Although the examples above exclusively deal with nationalism, this paper seeks to transpose those notions onto any social category and in particular the ABC1 readers of The Irish Times. This essay began by presenting a theoretical framework from within which an everyday object can be interpreted as both a structured and structuring object. An object as banal as a newspaper talks to the traditional strata of the state and those traditional strata talk back to the newspaper. This private conversation is powerful enough to construct and maintain a nation. Careful use of language allows the publisher to maintain a conversation with its readership. However, this conversation is framed within a particular style, a Received Pronunciation in print, a printed accent that marks distinctions and offers images of lifestyle choices. The style of this language constructs and maintains traditional institutions of the social system. Meticulous attention to detail and the control of language is evident from the production of a style guide by the editorial management of The Irish Times. This maintains an organizational focus on a readership in transformation.

Although the political climate may transform, and the political loyalties of the institutions of the state may transform, the traditional institutions of the state are maintained during transformations. A newspaper that once spoke to the ruling elite maintains its traditional role in the face of a regime shift within a social system. Social categories are produced and maintained within a framework of traditional strata and the language style of The Irish Times maintains its institutional role as a voice within a social system. A reserved and controlled language, in a particular printed accent, marks distinction and speaks directly to the petit-bourgeoisie. The members of the petit-bourgeoisie respond in their pursuit of social capital or style. The stratum is produced by individual taste. The strata are maintained by style.

References
ABC1 refers to a marketing category. Category A is defined as upper middle class, higher managerial, administrative or professional. Category B is middle class, intermediate managerial, administrative or professional. Category C1 is lower middle class, supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional. These three categories combined are category ABC1s.

In 1972 a Guggenheim fellowship enabled a young folklorist, Henry Glassie to conduct ethnographic research in a small village in County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. This book is one of several volumes featuring Glassie’s research in the region. The first of these, *All Silver and No Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming*, was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1976. *Irish Folk History: Folktale from the North* was issued in 1982 and *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community* appeared also in 1982.

The earlier Ballymenone volume, *Passing the Time*, focused on a small number of townlands in County Fermanagh and offered a portrait of 42 households making up 129 individuals. In that book, Glassie analysed a local community, its perceptions of the past and the role of history in its everyday life. A mammoth volume, *The Stars of Ballymenone* is divided into two sections. The first part – ‘Our District of the Country’ – profiles local places such as Ballymenone, Fermanagh and Northern Ireland as well as some individual ‘stars’. Part Two is described as ‘an epic of common life’ and has sections on saints, battles, fairy tales, ghost stories etc. The ‘stars’ come to life in all sections. Of Hugh Nolan, Glassie remarks (p. 2) that ‘age lined his face, the creases blackened with soot, but his eyes were as clear and bright as a child’s – a sign at the scuffed surface of the fine light of his mind – and his words came forth in orderly array, unrushed and precise’.

Individual personalities or ‘stars’ come to the fore in the new book. The most prominent characters are Michael Boyle, Ellen Cutler, Peter Flanagan and Hugh Nolan. The concept of ‘star’ is defined early on as one that ‘glitters within the dichotomous discourse by which Ballymenone’s people make sense of things’ (p. 67). Although their lives are difficult and frequently ‘dull’, each of the local stars ‘shines in the social scene, speaking smoothly and brightly, glittering against the engulfing darkness as the stars above interrupt the night sky with pricks of brilliance’.

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Again and again, characters from the local community are placed on a par with well-known, international writers and strong theoretical references flow in and out of the text easily. A sample paragraph on the discussion of time (p. 130) serves as an illustration of this point:

A straight arrow pointing from the past to the present is too simple an answer. George Kunder pulsed and terraced time. Jean-Paul Sartre set time spinning, moving from events outward, then backward and forward at once. Fernand Braudel tripled time onto parallel tracks, uneven in pace, welcoming chronological dissonance. Estyn Evans turned time on its head, allowing continuity to trump change. Claude Lévi-Strauss stopped time, forcing cool, reversible transformations into contrastive relation with history’s hot dynamic. Hugh Nolan [star of Ballymenone], roughly the contemporary of these noted thinkers, had his own way of building an adequately complex history. He sorted facts of different kinds into different temporal frames.

Glassie’s writing style is eloquent and poetic. Consider his description of Ballymenone as an example:

The wind follows the river, blowing from the west and driving the skies. Low clouds cross quickly. Shadows shift and dip and break, throwing the hills into relief. Light erupts, a white house gleams on a field of green, then it is dark again, the topography flattens. Mrs Cuttler called it God’s big picture-show. Skies, gray with haze, turn baby-blue, then black and metallic as the clouds stream east, bearing Atlantic dampness. Two days out of three it rains – muzzling, drizzling, lashing rains that wrecks all plans, keeping the farmers wary, quick to adapt, ready to act. Already overhead, it is muddy underfoot on the hills that lift above the waters (p. 15).

Some readers might find such a style emotional, sentimental as well as uneconomic with words. For me it is one of the great attractions of the book as it is strongly evocative of a distinctive sense of place, and the text benefits from a ‘slow, leisurely read’.

The localization versus the internationalization of the local community is impressive and readers are given insights at all levels. Again I refer directly to an example from the text:

The era of Hugh McGivney, John Brodison and George Armstrong, of James Joyce and Sean O’Casey. Theirs was the time of the Land League, Home Rule and the Easter Rising. And it was the time of the Russian Revolution, the First World War and the Turkish War of Independence, of the telephone, automobile, airplane and radio, of Kandinsky and Klec, Picasso and Braque, Stravinsky and Bartók, Le Corbusier, Wright and Gropius, Duchamp, Hamada, Proust, Kafka, Gide, Lawrence, Pound, Eliot, Tagore, Boas, Saussure, Weber, Freud, Winkenstein, Einstein – the time of those who got to work before the First World War (p. 86).

As with previous Glassie volumes, some of the most interesting material is contained in the notes. Here, for example, Glassie makes his case for giving the real names of his informants and their locations. This differs from other research in Ireland’s anthropological tradition such as Messenger’s ‘Inis Beag’ (1969), Brody’s ‘Inishkilane’ (1974), Harris’s ‘Ballybeg’ (1972) or Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s ‘Ballybran’ (1977). Glassie argues
against the practice of anonymity, suggesting that ‘pseudonyms permit a drift to fiction’ (p. 421).

Overall this volume is a fascinating read from an interdisciplinary perspective and Glassie draws from the full range of his research experience, not just in Fermanagh but in many locations throughout the world. Peter Flanagan, one of the Stars of Ballymenone for example, is characterized as one of three ‘completely realized artists’ that Glassie met in his lifetime’s research. The other two are Ahmet Şahin, one of the twentieth century’s ‘grand master of Islamic ceramics’ and Haripada Pal, the ‘greatest sculptor of Hindu images in the People’s Republic of Bangladesh’ (p. 181).

As well as an extensive range of notes and a very comprehensive bibliography, the new volume has the added bonus of a CD featuring recordings of stories and songs of South Fermanagh. While many of the 26 tracks were originally taped in 1972, some are more recent. The book is not very expensive. At $35 dollars it is excellent value for a large and beautifully produced volume, representing a genuine treasure in Irish ethnography.

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References


The south Asian community has played a significant role in British life for several generations now through their contribution both to the labour market and to the cultural life of the areas in which they settled. The book cover tells us that this volume is ‘an intriguing blend of scholarship and reportage on the multi-faceted experience of British Asians’. This is, I feel, an accurate description of the book’s content. The style in an unusual one, as the book is divided into three sections, ‘Frames’, ‘Portraits’ and ‘Signatures’. The first section provides a general overview of the south Asian community in Britain, and explores issues such as postcolonialism and multiculturalism. The second section deals with more specific aspects of the community such as the politics of the electorate, healthcare and employment and enterprise. The final section examines the growing contribution of the south Asian community to the arts and media in the United Kingdom. Interspersing these chapters are some short essays, the ‘reportage’ mentioned earlier. These deal with topics of interest to the wider community such as football, ‘curry powder’ and ‘Rusholme’.

In the introduction, S. Sayyid, senior research fellow in the department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, deals with the issue of which term to use to describe people of Asian origin who live or, more commonly, were born in Britain. Combining two words, he coins the term ‘BrAsian’: thus we read, ‘We use the term to … designate members of settler communities which articulate a significant part of their heritage in terms of South Asian heritage … this term is a recognition of the need for a category that points one in the direction away from established accounts of national identities and ethnicized minorities (p5). As part of my own research focuses on British and Irish identities among the Indian community in Northern Ireland, I was particularly interested in this topic – once my eyes had adjusted to the unusual appearance of the word. This idea of dual identity is also examined by a number of other contributors, most notably Claire Alexander, whose chapter entitled ‘Imagining the Politics of BrAsian Youth’ explores, among other issues, the concept of ‘between two cultures’, first described by both academics and the media in the 1970s and still in her words ‘the dominant paradigm’.

A more recent development in BrAsian culture throughout the British Isles has been the growth of both the music and film industries, evidenced most notably by the holding of the Indian International Film Awards, otherwise known as the ‘Bollywood Oscars’, in Sheffield in June 2007 and attracting over 12,000 people to the event. Rachel Dwyer’s chapter examines the summer of 2002 and shows how the term ‘Bollywood’, despite being contested in India, became a buzzword in Britain as awareness grew of the cinematic form through museum exhibitions and film festivals.

I have already mentioned that the academic chapters are interwoven with shorter pieces dealing with more general topics. These include an article on the history of chicken tikka masala, complete with mouth-watering recipes, an article on the rise of BrAsian men and women in the world of football and, my personal favourite, an article entitled ‘Rusholme’, which describes in detail the growth of the ‘Curry Mile’ in Manchester as the south Asian community took over this area from their predecessors the Irish.

I feel that this is an important book that can be used both by undergraduate students and by more senior researchers as it deals with a wide variety of topics of interest to both groups. It is not only of interest to those researching the Asian community in Britain but to anyone researching the development of any incoming community and particularly the changes as the second and third generation of the community grow up and interact with the host community. The ‘reportage’ pieces also provide an interesting and informative break from more detailed academic topics. There is a good index, making specific topics easy to find and linking areas of interest. The style of this book with its mixture of the serious academic and the more personal accounts of life experiences is one that I feel other publishers might like to adopt.

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Windows of opportunity for an anthropologist studying the Travelling community are rare — increasingly so, with social participation in the British Traveller community. Griffin’s fieldwork was facilitated by employment as a housing authority warden on the Westway Traveller site in London in the early 1980s, hired to establish a ‘better line of communication’ between local council and residents. Westway is a microenvironment, standing partly under the flyover of the A3220 motorway, which contributed to high levels of lead emissions from car exhausts. This 1.1 oblong acre (containing twenty pitches, divided by a road not wide enough to allow two cars passing, bordered further by a rail link, and high-rise flats) accommodated at times 163 Travellers, 80% of whom were Irish, the others British or Welsh Romanies.

Griffin’s methodology as warden was as an advocate for the community over his council employers and as ethnographer, for the most part, participant observation, developing a rapport with some of the resident families and members of the British Gypsy community in areas such as Mortlake, an area close to where he grew up as a young boy. This work is as much about the location of that young boy in the landscape, more autobiographical than most ethnographic studies. Griffin, second-generation London Irish, is at once emic (insider) and etic (outsider); he notes that the study ‘eschews the notion of clinical detachment, but at the same time does not recoil from the idea of objectivity' (xviii), following on from the framework of Popock’s, a personal anthropology.

The nexus of the text is families, mobility, and economic activity, set in the social, cultural-historical and geo-spatial contexts of two London districts, Mortlake’s North Kensington and North Hammersmith’s Westway. This text does not confine itself to the Irish, Traveller or settled, but looks at broader historic, cultural and economic movements and peoples in London. Utilizing historical and literary sources, interviews and observation, it is an excellent social history of London, noting its ‘porous borders and mingling populations’ balanced gently with the lives and genealogies of individual families (167). His narrative is awash with lives lived in the urban villages’ borders defined by laundries, brickyards and potteries, and the margins where the Travellers halted, replete with costermongers, hawkers, and rag-and-bone men.

In a sense this nexus extends to the ancient connection of the Irish to Britain. Griffin depicts the tradition of Irish settled and Traveller economic mobility in England, a place of further pastures, a tradition of transhumance. From the bally to booley, the movement of cattle to higher sweeter pastures in Ireland in summer is extended to the droving of cattle to market and the harvest of cereal grains in Britain. This exists today, however far from lauded: ‘Far from being the parasites they are often alleged to be, most Travellers and Gypsies exemplify the enterprise culture … greater risk taking, reduced safety nets and greater individual autonomy. In post-industrial Britain nomadic Traveller society is robust and successful on its own terms because of its flexible pre-industrial social organisation”(xvi).

Griffin has revealed the difficulty in ethnographic inquiry, particularly evident in the Travelling communities, where inquiry is often reduced to ‘thin’ description of communities which mask their identity, often as a first line of defence; as he notes, his own father often hid his Irish identity in the atmosphere of English anti-Irishness. He acknowledges this limitation, but what he does allow for are glimpses into the broad aspects of Traveller culture available to him. He notes that, akin to other ‘nations’, what is represented today has no fixed and singular point of origin but perhaps many, which are constantly evolving and changing. One origin theory, that of the ‘tine ceard’ linkages to ancient smiths and wordsmiths origins, is in keeping with recent articulations of some Travellers and theorists such as Hayes (O h’Aodha) and Binchy, articulations in the main absent apart from brief mention of the work of Ní Shúinéar and Helleiner. Many of the works cited, while seminal, such as those by Mac Ritchie, Sampson, the Gmelchs, and Acton, could have been further contributed to by Travellers themselves, through organizations such as the Irish Traveller Movement and theorists such as McVeigh, Belton, Hawes and Perez, works considered authoritative to the contextualisation of Travellers in Britain.

I endorse Griffin’s advocacy as warden and suggest that some of this ethos could have been translated further into this book. He chooses, however, not to delve too deeply into issues of social injustice, choosing instead an examination of culture, set in a broad context of immigration and race relations which, he rationalizes, will dispel notions of Travellers as victims and social deviants. Traveller culture, decimated by discriminatory practices, has only been kept alive by the resilience of the community itself. His text, therefore, while excellent is still diminished by this exclusion. For example, his return visit in 2004 saw significant changes in Westway, with chalets replacing the mobile homes. He notes optimistically a “proliferation of Traveller conferences”, indicating an open dialogue unheard of in years previous, where Travellers themselves ‘figure significantly in policy making’ (319).

This jars with the realities encapsulated in that same year, which included the ‘revolt’ of ‘Middle’ England over the issue of Traveller accommodation, exacerbated by media and political representation. Travellers such as those of Rathkeale were portrayed as invaders, which ignored the illustrous relationship, as documented by Griffin, held with previous British generations. During the Second World War Rathkeale Travellers kept the sewers working, cleared bombsites and, post-conflict, contributed to building much of the English infrastructure, such as its first motorways. Griffin noted that ‘today descendants of these men in Britain … are at the blunt end of anti-nomadic sentiments and action’ (54). In fact, Griffin omits how blunt; besides harassment and evictions, sentiments culminated in the burning of a Traveller mother and child in effigy on bonfire night. While the author notes that Traveller issues may be to the fore, commentators such as McVeigh suggest, however, a current retreat on gains won by NGOs and human rights organizations, further encapsulated again in the same year with the Housing Act (2004), a legislative response to such social disorder as the effigy burning, which ultimately led to little change in legislation, no repeal of criminalization provisions inherent in previous legislation and no reinstatement of
the statutory duty on local authorities to provide accommodation. Therefore, proliferation does not equate to progress. Further, while Griffin felt that anti-Irishness in the London milieu was a thing of the past, anti-Irish-Travellerism continues throughout Ireland and Britain unabated.

This is remains a unique social history.

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News Miscellany

Conference Reports

EASA Conference, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Mark Maguire

The 10th European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) conference took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, at the end of August. This conference was under the theme of ‘Experiencing Diversity and Mutuality’, which served as an umbrella for an enormous diversity of contributions. Over the past 10 years membership of EASA has grown exponentially, and so too has the scale of its biennial events: the conference in Ljubljana included over 100 workshops, and post-conference figures suggest that, in all, around 1100 delegates attended.

Delegates to EASA conferences have become accustomed to an extremely high level of organization, to cities opening their doors in welcome, and to rich scholarly debates. The 2008 EASA conference proved to be no exception. Overall, the event was marked, if anything, by over-organization: an army of blue t-shirt-wearing students participated in the conference as helpers, sometimes out-numbering presenters at workshops. However, for all the person power, there was criticism voiced about the rescheduling of workshops. Popular workshops were, in some instances, re-scheduled, and both audience members and in some instances panel members did not receive timely notification. This said, few will look back and judge the event in a poor light. The overall impression of the University, city and organizers was a positive one.

The feeling of good organization translated into social events also. As with previous EASA’s, where one felt that cities rather than universities were the true conference venue, Ljubljana was the star of the event. From the opening reception in Ljubljana Castle to the alternative events in Metelkova, the city was the site of cultural experiences, chance meetings, and conversations with colleagues from across Europe. For many delegates, memories of the 2008 EASA conference will be composed of dinner or drinks by the banks of the river, occasionally picking out a familiar face from the crowds strolling past, as delegates and locals enjoyed the late August weather.

Academically, the vanguard of the Ljubljana conference was composed of some notable contributions to plenary workshops and a keynote by Philippe Descola (Collège de France) on ‘Human Natures’. Michael Carrithers and Ulf Hannerz discussed mutualities in practice in a workshop convened by Rajko Muršič (Ljubljana) – many were awaiting the contribution of David Graeber (UCL) who could not attend. The other two workshops – ‘The Uses of Diversity’ and ‘Immobilities’ – were pronounced a success by all who attended. Plenary round tables included a discussion of ‘Anthropology in the European Space of Research’ on issues of co-operation to enhance applied research and gain access to funding sources, and a discussion of anthropology and education focused on ‘Diversity and Mutuality’ in schools.

There was a considerable participation from the anthropological community in Ireland. The representation from NUI Maynooth was marked. Postgraduates, Anne Fitzgerald, David Murphy and Emma Heffernan presented posters on their research (this session also included Sabina Stan from DCU) while Chiara Garattini, Keith Egan and Fiona Murphy presented papers. Faculty members were also represented: Mark Maguire, Steve Coleman, and Patty Gray presented on their on-going research. As usual, institutions such as Queen’s University Belfast and Trinity College Dublin and UU were also well represented, with papers presented by Andrew Finlay (TCD) and Mairéad Nic Craith (UU); Jonathan Skinner, Ioannis Tsioulakis, Elizabeth Tonkin and Mariška Svašek represented QUB.

EASA’s 2010 conference will take place in National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
EASA Extra Curricular Activities and Festivities

David Murphy

For many of the attendees at this year’s EASA Conference, Ljubljana itself was the highlight of the week. Blessed with perfect sunshine and cool nights there were plenty of extra-curricular activities laid on by the local organizers.

MASN (Moving Anthropology Student Network) – established by students in order to facilitate social networking, hold seminars, exchange information and take account of emerging trends in anthropology that sometimes fail to make an impact in the mainstream – kicked off the week’s evening events with a party in Metelkova City. Metelkova is of particular interest in itself, as it is a quasi-autonomous area situated in an old military complex in Ljubljana. It could be described as something of a cross between Denmark’s Christiania and Dublin’s Temple Bar (pre mass tourism/Celtic tiger days). Terrafolk, a Slovenian ethno-fusion band, entertained revellers late into the morning with an eclectic mix of Balkan/Rock/World music sounds, and were surely the cause of some sore heads and sheepishly delivered papers on the first morning of the conference.

On Tuesday night the EASA welcome reception was held in the breath-taking confines of Ljubljana Castle. There were several keynote speakers, a delicious buffet consisting of regional meats, cheeses, bread and other savoury delights, all washed down with some hearty fruit liqueurs and delicious wines. Wednesday’s extra-curricular activities included the Wiley Blackwell Focus Group meeting and several book presentations including Daniel Miller’s ‘The Comfort of Things’ presented by Helena Wulff.

Following an intensive day of presentations (Wenner-Gren Foundation) and meetings of several networks including the mediterraneanist, visual anthropology and Africanist networks, the Sanje festival took place in Zvezda Park. This was a colourful live music event with various performers and revellers enjoying the late evening sunshine and mingling with the crowds drinking and chatting in a wonderful open-air atmosphere that proved the envy of many of the Irish attendees, as we grumbled over the prospects of returning home to the horizontal summer rains and over-priced booze. At this stage of the week many new and old friendships and acquaintances were being reunited, particularly between the gathered Irish and the Viennese who had hosted the CREOLE seminar of a few weeks previous. Again Metelkova proved to be the venue of choice amongst the clubbing-classes followed by parties with locals who lived nearby.

Friday marked the finale of the conference with a debate asking ‘what is happening to the anthropological monograph?’. This was chaired by Helena Wulff, and provoked a lively debate amongst the attending scholars. That evening huge crowds of (slightly jaded by now) anthropologists gathered for the closing ceremony in the Slovenian Philharmonic, followed by the Gala Dinner in the Slovene ethnographic museum, which was a wonderful and fitting venue for the finale, and an event that has truly set a high standard for the organizers of the next EASA conference in Ireland (2010).

Creole Intensive Program Vienna 2008

David Murphy

This year’s CREOLE Intensive Program took place in the University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria from the 23rd July to 1st August 2008. The Intensive Program itself consists of one week of seminars, during which post-grad students and lecturers from the participating universities around Europe present papers, lead discussions, and debate an overall topic. This year’s topic was ‘Movement: The Creole Character of Society and Culture’. During the discussions there was a strong student-led critique of the concept of ‘creole as a model for culture’. Maynooth lecturer Steve Coleman presented a particularly insightful paper which deconstructed the idea of ‘creolisation’ by highlighting the historic/heteroglossic aspects of ‘creolisation’ and other terms that tend often to be taken for granted.

Other papers of note were delivered by Sverker Finnstrom, Bozidar Jezernik, Adam Kuper, and Thomas Fillitz. Several papers were also presented by post-graduate students from and studying in Ireland, some of whom had presented at our own annual Post-graduate Seminar last spring. Monica Weisensteiner presented a paper on refugee integration in Dublin, Sybille Eberhardt discussed methodological difficulties associated with fieldwork, and David Murphy presented a paper based on the concept of ‘the gift and bloodletting at live music performances’. Robert Power also presented work based on his fieldwork amongst emerging Muslim (re)converts in Dublin, and, overall, Irish anthropology was well represented again this year.

This year’s program attained one of the highest attendances to date, and proved an excellent opportunity for the sharing of knowledge, contacts, expertise and general gossip. As with previous years a surprise was in store for several of the participating students, whose ‘participant interactant’ credentials were put to the test, when they arrived at their accommodation only to discover that a few people had to share double beds with their new acquaintances!

AAA Annual Conference, San Francisco, California, USA.

Emma Heffernan

The American Anthropological Association held its 107th Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California in November this year. The theme of the conference was ‘Inclusion, Collaboration and Engagement’. Thomas Strong and Lawrence Taylor represented NUI Maynooth Faculty with papers on their research, whilst Chandana Mathur presented at the launch of the AAA Commission on World Anthropologies.
**News from Members, Colleagues, Institutions**

**Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth**

**Appointments**

Five new staff members have recently taken up various appointments in the Anthropology Department at NUI Maynooth.


Mark Maguire joined the Department of Anthropology in September 2008 as a full-time Lecturer. Mark received his Ph.D. from NUI Maynooth, funded through a fellowship from the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), which was published as *Differently Irish* (2004). He has also worked with the artist and photographer Maeve Hickey on a project on US immigrants in Ireland, funded by the Clinton Institute in UCD. In 2007 he worked as co-Principal Investigator on a project examining service provision to asylum seekers in direct provision centres. In 2008 he held the 2nd Fulbright Advanced Scholarship and Visiting Associate Professorship in Stanford University, where he carried out research on biometric security and migration control. He is currently working on a number of papers on biometric security technologies such as face recognition.

Karolina Szmagalska-Follis will join the Department in January 2009 as a full-time contract Lecturer. Karolina received her Ph.D. from the New School for Social Research, New York in 2007. Her interests include contemporary forms of human mobility and the politics of European Union expansion. In 2007/08 she was the Democracy, Citizenship and Constitutionalism Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. She has worked in Poland and Ukraine exploring the political and human consequences of the new paradigm in EU border and immigration policy. Most recently, she is the author of ‘Repossession: Notes on Restoration and Redemption in Ukraine’s Western Borderland’, an article published in the May 2008 issue of *Cultural Anthropology* which engages with one Ukrainian community’s response to the social and economic shifts in the borderland since 1989.

Thomas Strong joined the Department in September 2008 as a full-time contract lecturer. Thomas received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 2004 based on ethnographic research on embodiment, personhood, and social change in Papua New Guinea. He held research positions at the University of California, San Francisco, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, prior to taking up a post as a lecturer and post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Anthropology and the Centre of Excellence in Global Governance Research at the University of Helsinki in 2006–08. His publications include essays on beliefs about withering male bodies in highland New Guinea, new theories of kinship in anthropological and cultural studies, artificial heart experiments, and transfusion medicine. At present, he is undertaking new research on changing cultures of HIV/AIDS in rich and poor settings.

Jamie Cross joined the Department in October 2008 as a Royal Anthropological Institute Leach Postdoctoral Fellow. Jamie received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Sussex in 2008. He is currently working on an ethnographic monograph, *Aspirational Economies and Precarious Labour in Neoliberal India*, due to be published by the Social Science Press/Berghahn in 2009.

**World AIDS Day**

World AIDS Day on December 1st 2008, was marked by a week long series of lectures, seminars and presentations hosted by the CDPC (The Combat Diseases of Poverty Consortium) at NUI Maynooth. The CDPC is led by the Department of Anthropology and the Institute of Immunology at NUI Maynooth, and represents a combination of scientific, academic and NGO expertise, who, with partners in the private sector, are working together to build educational capacities for combating diseases of poverty, with the initial focus on East Africa. The consortium is funded by Irish Aid under the Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes. Speakers included: Prof Didier Fassin, from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and at the Université Paris Nord; Dr Louise Ivers, Director of Partners in Health’s HIV Equity Initiative in Haiti, Associate Physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and Assistant Professor Medicine at Harvard Medical School; Dr Thomas Strong, lecturer in Medical Anthropology at NUI Maynooth; and Dr Martina Schröder, lecturer in Global Health and Immunology at NUI Maynooth.

**Awards**

Both Patty Gray and Mark Maguire, lecturers in the Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth, have been awarded IRCHSS Research Development Initiative Stimulator Grants. Mark Maguire’s project is titled ‘After Asylum: An Ethnographic Analysis of Refugee Integration’. Mark (with A. Jamie Saris, NUIM
Anthropology Department) recently completed a major survey of the service provision to asylum seekers in direct provision centres, which was funded by the SONAS mainstreaming group. This current project furthers this line of inquiry by examining the effects of asylum systems on the later integration of those who are successful in gaining refugee status or subsidiary protection. The project aims to ethnographically ‘track’ the process of integration for former asylum seekers through sustained qualitative fieldwork. The objective is to explore the everyday lives of refugees as they adjust to new levels of agency, re-imagine notions of belonging and seek to enter into mainstream Irish society.

Patty Gray’s ‘Changing Vectors of Development: Locating Russia in Development Discourse and Practice’ investigates Russia’s past and current relationship to international development aid as a cultural phenomenon, examining not only aid flowing into Russia (which was the dominant story of the 1990s), but aid flowing out of Russia as well (which had been common prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union). In addition, the project will theoretically examine Russia’s seemingly awkward position within the development discourse of ‘global North vs. global South’ and ‘East vs. West’, drawing not only from anthropological theories but reaching across disciplinary boundaries to engage in a wide-ranging dialogue on Russia’s role in international development. Patty Gray has also been awarded an IRCHSS Úlysses Research Visit grant for the Ireland-France Exchange Scheme. The project, titled ‘Documenting two decades of change in Russia’s far northeast region of Chukotka: Two ethnographers sharing perspectives’, joins the efforts of Gray and her French colleague, Virginie Vaté of CNRS Paris.

Dr. Maruška Svašek held an inaugural celebration of Cultural Dynamics and Emotions Network (CDEN) at Queen’s University. CDEN aims to stimulate international, interdisciplinary research on emotions and facilitate the creation of transnational learning/teaching groups.

Dr. Lisette Josephides convened a panel in honour of Marilyn Strathern at the joint ASA/ASAANZ conference on Ownership and Appropriation in Auckland entitled ‘Anthropological Relationships as Appropriations and Investments’.

Dr. Fiona Magowan participated in an international workshop in Madrid on Anthropology in Europe. Along with Professor Christina Garsten (University of Stockholm) and Chris Warren (Concern Worldwide, Dublin), she conducted a Quality Audit Peer Review of the Maynooth Anthropology Department.

Queen’s University Belfast

Rae 2008 Results – Anthropology and Ethnomusicology

The 2008 RAE results confirm the reputation of Anthropology and Ethnomusicology at Queen’s University Belfast as a world-leading centre for research. 100% of staff were returned. The research profile shows that 35% of research is world leading and a further 75% is internationally recognized. The grade profile was assessed on the basis of research outputs, research environment and esteem. Anthropology and Ethnomusicology is one of 11 subject areas at Queen’s University that is ranked within the top 10 in the UK on the basis of the weighted grade point average.

Staff news this semester includes the following activities:

Professor Hastings Donnan has participated in a European Union workshop in Florence with Ulf Hannerz, Michael Herzfeld and others on the Anthropology of Europe. He has almost come to the end of an exhausting year as RAE Anthropology panel chair, which entailed reading and assessing anthropology returns published in the UK over the last seven years.
Submission of Material

Authors are encouraged to submit items for the IJA. Articles, which may be in English or Irish, should be original and should not be under consideration elsewhere. IJA is a refereed journal and articles submitted will be assessed by readers for their suitability.

Articles for consideration should be sent to the Editor or Associate Editor as follows:
Séamas Ó Siocháin, Editor, Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland.
seamas.osiochain@nuim.ie
Fiona Magowan, Associate Editor, School of History and Anthropology, The Queen's University Belfast, Belfast BT7 1NN, N. Ireland. f.magowan@qub.ac.uk

Books for review and completed reviews should be sent to the Reviews Editors:
Chandana Mathur, Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth. chandana.mathur@nuim.ie; or to Máiréad Nic Craith, Director, Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster (Magee), Aberfoyle House, Northland Road, Derry/Londonderry, BT48 7JA. m.nic craith@ulster.ac.uk

Other material (conference and research reports, news, advertisements, letters etc.) should be sent to:
Emma Heffernan, c/o Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland. emma.ja.heffernan@nuim.ie

Presentation

Articles should be in the region of 4000 words. Included should be the author’s name and academic affiliation, the title and a short abstract of no more than 100 words. All contributions should be clearly typed on one side of A4 paper, double-spaced and with wide margins throughout (including notes and bibliographical references). Two manuscript copies should be submitted and a 3.5” disk or electronic copy in IBM PC format readable in MsWord. Receipt of a submission will be acknowledged, and articles will be processed only after receipt of both hardcopy and electronic copies.

The following points should be observed:

Notes should be endnotes and should be kept to a minimum; they should be presented in a typed list at the end of the article and double-spaced.

Bibliographical references in the body of the text should be given in parentheses in standard author-date form (Lee and Devore 1968: 236). A complete list of references cited, arranged alphabetically by author's surname, should be typed at the end of the article and adhere to the following style:


Subheadings should be typed flush left.

Quotations. Single inverted commas should be used except for quotations within quotations, which should have double inverted commas. Quotations of more than about 60 words should be indented and typed without inverted commas.

Spellings. British English (not American English) spelling should be used in English articles except in quoted material, which should follow the original. Use -ise not -ize word endings.