

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is the last newsletter you will be receiving before we meet in Brisbane for the XV World Congress of Sociology in July 7-13, 2002. Our research committee has had an especially productive year with two interim conferences: 'Biographical Methods and Professional Practice' which was held in London from October 19-21, 2000 and 'Methodological Problems of Biographical Research' which was held in Kassel, Germany from May 24-26, 2001. Not only were these conferences interesting and stimulating in terms of the work presented, but for many of us it was a welcome opportunity to meet old friends – or, as one board member put it - 'see the family again.' The conferences also brought new faces to the research committee and I would particularly like to welcome all newcomers who can be counted upon to introduce fresh perspectives and ensure that biographical research remains alive and kicking.

I am proud to announce that a new interdisciplinary journal has recently been initiated by our board member, Victoria Semenova (together with Elena Mestcherkina, Victor Voronkov, and Lena Inowlocki) in collaboration with the Research Committee. It will be called **Interaction. Interview. Interpretation** and will address a wide range of issues concerning biography in changing society with an emphasis on Eastern Europe.

The World Congress of Sociology is right around the corner. In this issue, you will find the list of sessions for Biography & Society. Our RC belongs to the middle-range within the ISA with 49 dues-paying ISA members. This made us eligible for 8 regular sessions and two joint sessions with other RC's. I am delighted to inform you that one of these joint sessions, 'Who is the "We" in the "How Do We Know"? Some Issues Behind the New Methodologies and Our Efforts to Transform Society' has been selected by the ISA coordinators Linda Christiansen-Ruffman and Arnaud Sales as one of three parallel sessions to be held in the morning along with Symposia. This is a 'first' for our RC and will give us more visibility in the Congress than we might have had otherwise.

The rest of the program is varied and includes many of the topics, which have been so successful in earlier conferences. At the last business meeting in Kassel, we decided that we needed a session which would generate debate and have, therefore, included a roundtable

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called 'Temptations and Dangers in Doing Biographical Research,' which – with a title like that – can't help but produce a few sparks.

In the tradition of this newsletter, we have selected several papers from the conferences which were held this past year - papers which we felt would generate discussion. The first is the keynote address which Andrew Cooper from the Tavistock Center held at the conference 'Biographical Methods and Professional Practice' in London. In addition to providing another take on the problem of identity – a familiar subject for the readers of this newsletter - his presentation illustrates the advantages of crossing disciplinary borders when doing biographical research. Two pieces from the conference in Kassel 'Methodological Problems of Biographical Research' tackle a methodological and ethical issue which many of us encounter in our research – dealing with differences between researcher and informant. We believe that this is an issue of importance to us all and hope that these papers will provoke reactions for future newsletters. For those of you who missed the conferences, do not despair. Two conference reports have been provided which give you a taste of what the conferences were like.

A final note of thanks to the following persons is in order. I would especially like to thank Robert Miller who attended the ISA meeting for the Research Committees in Montreal last summer and for thinking constructively about how we can increase our visibility within the ISA. Sue Fisher has done an able job in managing the finances and membership lists for the RC and ensuring that the newsletter is distributed to all of you. Henk van Alst has done his usual wonderful job in producing a newsletter, which is not only interesting but pleasing to the eye.

And, last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Helma Lutz. We have worked together on this newsletter for nearly 8 years and it has been one of the most enjoyable collaborations in my experience. While it is time to 'pass the torch', I will miss the conversations and the long working sessions, including (among other things) struggling with recalcitrant computers, grouching about 'incompatible' files and e-mails that bounce back, and consuming countless cappuccino's and bagels from Gary's, all to the tune of the latest tango waltz. I wish our successors at least as much fun (but, hopefully, fewer computer problems).

I look forward to seeing you in Brisbane.

All best wishes,

Kathy Davis

VIEWPOINTS

THE SOCIAL SUBJECT IN BIOGRAPHICAL-INTERPRETIVE METHOD: EMOTIONAL, MUTE, CREATIVE, DIVIDED

Andrew Cooper, Dean of Post-Graduate Studies, The Tavistock Clinic

In this short contribution I ask some questions about the conceptualization of the ontology of the social subject which informs the biographical interpretive method of research. Arguing from a psychoanalytically informed view of the subject I suggest that emotionality, creativity as it derives from our capacity to dream (or what Freud referred to as primary process thinking), and our hesitant and uncertain development of subjects out of infantile states of near complete inarticulacy, are necessary dimensions for a fully developed concept of what it is to be a subject. My recent experience of listening to the accounts of war trauma counselors in Kazoo, reminded me that the origins of psychoanalysis (and the work of the Tavistock Clinic in which this conference is being held) remain as relevant to our project today of understanding the social subject as always and everywhere simultaneously a psychological subject. In this view, emotionality is the essential foundation of all true mental activity, dreaming the foundation of all creativity, but equally both these functions may be attacked and damaged by the trauma of social and political terror, upheaval and dislocation. The Europe in which we work today is not so far removed from the Europe of 1900, 1914 or 1945. Biographical interpretive research has the potential to grasp the complicated relationship between the psychological and the social subject more fully than any other research method but only, in my view, if it is capable of accepting an ontology of deep subjectivity such as psychoanalysis proposes.

My association with the biographical-interpretive tradition of research has been a fairly marginal one. I have never practised it, although I have taken considerable interest in its development and in its theoretical and methodological possibilities. I was pleased to be asked by Prue Chamberlayne to contribute to the opening plenary of this conference, but equally given my comparative naivety with respect to your work I was also anxious about what I could possibly say which would be of value to you in the course of the event. I decided upon two things. First that I wanted to speculate a little with you about the nature of the biographical and social subject which is your preoccupation; but also, given that we are meeting here at the Tavistock Clinic that I wanted to try and join these speculations to some reflection upon the work of this institution and ideas about the subject, and subjectivity, which its work embodies.

As an institution with an international reputation, with a central commitment to psychotherapeutic practices and training in the psychoanalytic and systemic traditions, the Tavistock Clinic is the object of a good deal of mythologizing, ideological distortion, rivalrous attack and, to us who work here, it often seems willful misunderstanding. In short, it seems to be feared and even loathed as least as much as it is loved and admired. For the Tavistock Clinic, the lived life and the told story are certainly not one and the same thing. The institution was founded in 1920 and its early work was strongly associated with the understanding and treatment of what were then known as the 'war neuroses'. This, as I shall go on to explain, is not a matter of just historical curiosity. The institution grew as a centre for both clinical practice, applied research in mental health work, and increasingly, as a centre for the training of mental health professionals in psychotherapeutic skills. It is, in many senses, a political institution. But the particular meaning of this that I would like to emphasize to you concerns our commitment to the provision of public sector mental health and psychotherapeutic services and training programmes. We are now formally incorporated into the British National Health Service as an NHS Trust; we train people from and for the public health care and social care sectors. Within the relatively new NHS quasi-market we now provide clinical services for children and families, adolescents and their families, and adults to a wide spectrum of London and near London health authorities; some of our more specialized services are offered on a regional or even national basis, and as a training institution we have a national remit in England and Wales for the mental health training we provide. It is not widely known that the politics of our relationship to the founding of the British Welfare State are still reflected in the fact that many, although not all, of our senior management posts (including my own) are elected by the professional staff group rather than appointed in a conventional manner.

As I have indicated the clinic's psychotherapeutic traditions lie not only with psychoanalysis and its applications, but also with family systems work. But it is essentially in relation to the psychoanalytic tradition that I want to develop my theme in this short contribution. However, I want first to tell you something about what I have been doing in the last week, which, as events unfolded, I decided was an obvious starting point for what I would say. I returned to England

yesterday evening from three days rather intense work in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo where I had been asked to teach and participate in the final assessment of a group of thirty-five students who had undertaken one year's training in psycho-social responses to war trauma. This programme of training was originated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in association with the University of Pristina and latterly with the Tavistock Clinic itself. Interestingly, I found myself traveling to and returning from Kosovo via Vienna, which was as you know the birthplace of psychoanalysis. On my first day in Pristina I listened with a panel of other tutors and organizers to twenty half hour presentations by students of their work with Albanian Kosovar families who had experienced persecution and terror of one kind or another in the course of the recent war. Students had worked in groups locating families in need, engaging with them and in most instances video recording at least some of their counseling sessions. An extract of video recording accompanied by what we refer to in clinical training as a process recording of the interaction (an account of the exchange accompanied by a report on the feelings and thoughts and other subjective reactions of the counselor) formed a central part of the presentation made by each student. But of course, it was the stories they told of the dreadful events in the lives of these families and communities, the stories of the survivors' of mass executions, the burning of houses and villages, everything that happened under the rubric of what became known as 'ethnic cleansing', which formed the centre of their narrative of their work as it was told to me. These stories, as well as the account of the work undertaken by the counselors themselves were related with a dignity and professionalism, which impressed itself upon me more and more as time went by. It was a curious combination of matter-of-factness, intensity, pride, humour and analytical distance. What in the end struck me so forcibly I suppose was the absence of any suggestion of hatred or desire for revenge in any of these accounts. I do not think that this had in any sense been suppressed or censored, although how the state of mind which pervaded these presentations came to be achieved is something I have to confess I do not understand. It is important however, because the absence of a retaliatory or hating dimension to these workers' emotional stance in relation to their work released them into an ability to concentrate on the emotional matter at hand: the mental pain of these families, their suffering and the losses that they have incurred, their sense of hopelessness and helplessness, everything that constitutes what we call trauma. Genuine trauma makes us mute, sometimes literally, more often metaphorically as our bodies or minds struggle to represent the state of internal devastation through some displaced or distorted

means – what we know clinically as the symptom, and what psychoanalysis took as its original object, namely the 'hysterical symptom'. Now, I am not proposing that biographical-interpretive research, whatever the circumstances under which it is conducted, should attempt to in some way directly incorporate the techniques of clinical psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. I would not even really propose that Kosovo trauma counselors attempt to do this, and certainly the students of whom I am speaking were not trained to even attempt such forms of intervention, never mind the fact that their work is normally undertaken in people's homes, in parks and gardens, sometimes in cafes or orchards. Notwithstanding this, it was clear to me that they were able to facilitate change and development in the lives of their compatriots, often in the space of just two or three meetings. How is this possible?

Well, the answer lies I think in understanding the place of emotionality, of emotional experience, in what it is to be a human subject. In their presentations none of these students displayed overt strong feeling, but it was absolutely clear to me that their capacity to feel, to identify and empathize with the suffering of the families with whom they worked, lay at the heart of the success or impact of their work. I think I know this not just because they often described the grief they felt themselves even if they did not show it, but because I continually found myself overtaken inside by eruptions of grief in response to what I heard. I came to think in the end that part of what I and the one other colleague on the panel of assessors who sat through all thirty-five of these presentations were being asked to do, was to endure at an emotional level something of what these counselors had themselves endured at the level of feeling in their relations with the traumatized families to whom they were trying to offer something.

To the psychoanalytic practitioner this is a familiar set-up. The therapist listens to the story told by the patient at the level of the articulate but also, and probably more importantly, the inarticulate, at the level of the transmission of unprocessed raw emotional experience. The capacity to emotionally ingest such experience, and then think about and give words to this experience so that it can in some way be offered back to the patient in a form which allows them to integrate this raw and uncivilized dimension of feeling into their minds with the aid of the symbolic capacity which language constitutes – this is what we regard today as being central to the psychoanalytic project. In turn the therapist receives something of this same processing function from the supervisor.

It is not primarily an intellectual, cognitive or interpretative function. It is primarily a

transformative function with emotional experience as its object. Well, it was Wilfred Bion, the psychoanalyst who worked for many years at the Tavistock who elaborated this understanding into a complete theory of mind and the development of mind. In doing this he became one of the few psychoanalytic theoreticians to make a genuinely original contribution to the theorizing of the ontology of the human subject. The essence of this theory is more or less captured in what I have already said – in the development of mind, emotional experience precedes thought, and true thinking only comes into being as a result of the capacity to bring the function of mental attention into sustained relationship with emotion. The accurate, or I think Bion would have said 'truthful', apprehension of our emotional states of mind together constitute the foundation of the possibility of having a mind at all. This theory has many consequences, which I cannot pursue now, but among them is that much that passes in our world for thinking, particularly perhaps in the realm of the academy, would not in Bion's view really count as such.

My question with respect to the topic, which is your preoccupation, namely biographical-interpretive methodology, is fairly obvious and straightforward. Does the method take proper account, in a *living* sense, of the emotionality of the subject? If so, how is this dimension processed by researchers and incorporated into the analysis and findings of your work?

If trauma in some sense returns us to a state of desperate inarticulacy about our experience, then I think it is not stretching a point too far to say that Bion in common with most other psychoanalytic theoreticians, would take the view that we all begin life in a state roughly akin to the traumatic. Quite irrespective of actual trauma, how far any of us succeed in fully leaving behind the primitive inarticulacy, which attends our infancy, is a central preoccupation of the psychoanalytic project. In common with Freud it was Bion's view that dreaming is itself a form of thinking in some sense intermediate between complete emotional inarticulacy, and the full possession of the faculty of mind, for which it is also a necessary constituent. To become articulate about our dreams and to regard dreams as a form of articulation is more or less a *sine qua non* of the psychoanalytic enterprise. Now it is well known that one common symptom of trauma is the repetitive nightmare, in which some version of the traumatic event is revisited compulsively and painfully in dreams, sometimes for periods of years on end. The Kosovo students of whom I spoke earlier had been trained to try and understand the importance of dreaming, or the lack of it, in the experiences of the people with whom they worked. In their presentations they

frequently described changes in the quality and content of people's dreams; but also just as importantly the *resumption* of dreaming among subjects where this seemed to have ceased in the wake of traumatic experiences; or in some cases if dreaming had not ceased, dreaming about the dead or missing relatives had ceased but was now revived. Exactly one hundred years ago in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud described the laws governing the operation of the dream work, or the primary process, which was the other name he gave to this kind of thinking. One does not need to delve far into this book to understand that the principles governing the construction of dreams are the same principles which underlie all forms of what we colloquially refer to as creativity. Poetry, drama, and the visual and plastic arts all rely upon the operation of the primary process. In fact it is my contention, not original, that all creativity in whatever walk of life depends upon the operation of the kind of thinking from which dreams derive.

Now, it is one of the central points of interest of the biographical-interpretive method that it emphasizes the creativity of human subjects in relation to the social context of opportunities and constraints, which the subject inhabits. I think the very idea of social subjects who are capable of 'strategic' functioning with respect to their possibilities and predicaments itself implies creative capacity, because strategy itself entails the essentially imaginative elaboration of a possible future or futures attained through activity in relation to circumstances which are only partly known or predictable. So, my question to you as researchers bears once again on what conception you have of the creativity of the sociological subjects who are your concern. The idea that all of us actively produce and reproduce on a day-by-day basis the social structures and systems which are themselves the condition of the possibility of social action and constraint, is a phenomenal advance upon the terms in which the old agency-structure debate used to be posed in sociological theory. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration always struck me, in this sense, as a profound advance and I know that some of you have deployed his thinking in relation to your own empirical research using biographical-interpretive method. However, I often think that Giddens, in common with many of the implicit theorisations informing methodologies in the hermeneutic tradition, remains implicitly wedded to an over-rationalistic view of human nature and of social strategy as a core aspect of human activity. Really then, I am asking whether the explicit or implicit ontology of the human subject represented in biographic-interpretive method is actually adequate to the epistemological project which you have realized with such notable success. We are all, at least in our untraumatized aspects, necessarily creative and dreaming subjects. In my

view, if we were not, we would not be subjects at all. I wonder whether you agree?

The work of the Tavistock Clinic has its origins in a period of terrible instability and conflict in Western Europe and the world, when mass destruction and warfare and the mass displacement of whole populations made it urgent that we understand better how to respond better to the impact of trauma on individuals and societies. In today's Europe, I suppose that by some measures we have achieved some degree of social progress, but if so, recent events in the Balkans remind us how tenuous and provisional any such progress really is. In the new Europe it may be that economic migration is as prevalent a cause of displacement, dislocation, exclusion and marginalisation as flight from persecution and war. But whatever the focus of our preoccupations and activities as professionals, we each respond to

THE MEANING OF DIFFERENCE

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Over the last ten years, the concept of difference has become a major issue in sociology. Theories concerning social inequality have come to differentiate 'lines of difference' such as class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion and many others, in order to understand the complexity of social positioning. Gradually, these reflections have entered empirical studies as well as methodologies. Regarding the biographical approach, researchers like Stanley (1990) or Song and Parker (1995) have discussed the important role of researchers as co-agents in the process of knowledge production. They have focussed on the fact that researchers intervene in people's life when collecting details about their respondents. However, a look at a wide range of contemporary publications shows that *the relationship between interviewees and interviewers during the interview* is still a neglected one in the presentation of biographical research. The researcher's subject position and his or her relationship to the interviewee(s) is either avoided, or not considered worth writing about or it is not considered a problem. This is even more astonishing because there is no other method and theory, which deals with the meaning-making system of real people to such an extent as biographical research. While many researchers do their utmost best to understand the individual motives and action schemes of their interviewees, exercising elaborate methods of interpretative text-analysis, their understandings are absent in the final text. Why is this so? Generally speaking, I can think of the following reasons:

the personal, biographical and social experience on the basis of our own history of suffering, conflict and transformation. If we don't, I believe we should. The social subject is, I contend, always and everywhere also a psychological subject. The great strength and power of biographical-interpretive method is that it is capable of grasping this complex dialectic more fully and meaningfully than any other method of research I have come into contact with. My question to you is really only this, how deep a concept of the psychological subject are we capable of embracing in this sociological work? Can we do justice to this issue without a living engagement with the emotionality of the subject the deep sources of their creativity, and the recognition that we are all as subjects ultimately divided from ourselves. With this, I welcome you to the Tavistock Clinic and hope sincerely that the story of the next two days will be productive and above all a creative one.

To begin with, there may be *disciplinary, professional reasons*, partly deriving from the problems of legitimizing the method and the particularity of single case analysis towards the protagonists of quantitative approaches. In order to prove the viability of the data, researchers may avoid any hint that the text is a product of personal interaction. Within the traditional disciplinary polarization between 'quantities' and 'qualities' (users of qualitative or quantitative methods) the protagonists of the quantitative approach have a long time history in successfully pretending that the personality of the researcher has no influence on the reaction to questionnaires and thus on the production of knowledge. As this view still prevails within sociology as well as within wider society, protagonists of the qualitative approach have to operate in a hegemonic field. They find themselves defending their method as non-subjective by applying quantitative criteria to their analysis and using the interview as textual abstraction in which the activities of the researcher are no longer visible.

Another reason can be found in the belief that once a respondent embarks on telling his or her life story, he or she gets so absorbed in the story that the audience does not matter any more and the influence of the listener is neglected. This view is widely embraced by those who define a biographical interview as a *narration* of an experience which comes closest to the experience itself – as, for example, Fritz Schütze (1983) does. Consequently, 'the experience of the narrator' and

the question how this experience it re-iterated, re-memorized and reworked, is the focus of the analysis and not the influence of the person which triggered the narration. And, of course, an additional reason may be the lacuna of methodological instruments themselves for helping to detect the researcher in the text. This enumeration is by no means complete and one can think of many other reasons. Most of them are understandable and as a researcher I find myself entangled in pro's and con's. However, I do wish to argue *for the recognition of this relationship*.

Against the background of my own experiences as a researcher who has worked in cross-cultural and cross-national settings for many years, I became more and more convinced that the various differences between the researcher and the respondent have to be made a focus of analysis, because they make a difference for the research results. As researchers, we not only reconstruct experiences of our respondents from our own point of reference, we also activate and reproduce experiences and knowledge along the 'lines of difference'. Among these differences are those of gender, class, ethnicity, age, skin colour (black and white), nationality, sexuality and western or non-western origin.

This is not to say that every difference is important at any time; it obviously depends on the research theme if one or several of these aspects should be taken into account. For example, it is probable that in a research on the 'coming out of young lesbians,' the sexuality and gender of the researcher is more interesting than her national or class background. It depends on the context and the research question which of these aspects has to be thematized. A Dutch colleague of mine used to say: 'You always have to remember that I am black, but you have to forget it at the same time.'

In the following, I wish to use various author's warnings to outline why differences cannot be neglected:

1. The first warning comes from the long and heated debate in gender studies. The critique of the presentation of texts from a *universal perspective* was the focus of early feminist debates, unmasking this view as a *particular* and *essentially male* one. Later on, black feminists followed up on this, deconstructing the universalism, whiteness and middle-class boundedness of *the female perspective*. These debates triggered off various reactions within feminist scholars's circles and eventually reached other areas of social science research. Donna Haraway's metaphor of the 'god-trick' describes the complex issue of knowledge production. She warns us against false claims of how to understand the social, and instead favours an approach focussing on the

entanglement and embeddedness of researchers in their own social worlds, which give them access to particular knowledge. As a consequence of her work, it is important to make assumptions and background knowledge visible and employ an intersectional analysis which takes race, class, gender, nationality and sexuality aspects equally serious.

2. Another warning concerns the *asymmetry in use of languages*. It comes from researchers like myself, who's work deals with the situation of immigrants. In the large majority of studies on immigrants the language in which the communication took place is not mentioned. In most cases, researchers are from a majority ethnic background and the respondents are from minority ethnic background and in most cases the researchers do not speak the mother tongue of the interviewees. It is often argued that there is nothing problematic about this since immigrants have to find their way and survive in the country of sojourn and that their ability to speak in this country's language, therefore, should be taken for granted. Consequently, researchers only mention those cases where the language ability of the respondents was not 'good enough' and a translator had to be hired. Those who use translators seldom mention the personality of the translator and do not focus on the process of the translation itself. Yet, translation is transportation of meaning and in the process of transportation, meaning can either get lost (what often happens) or become newly created (equally interesting). In one of the very rare articles dealing with the issue of translation and the role of the translator, Bogusia Temple (1997) argues that treating 'language as a process' involves more than the sum of words. Instead, she pleads for making the social world of translators an aspect of the analysis, as "translation creates the 'original' text rather than the original being the starting point" (ibid,613). (I would like to thank Brian Roberts for the reference to Temple's work). Another aspect which is often overlooked is the fact that the mastery of language is an entitlement to the more powerful position in a communication. In his work on language, Pierre Bourdieu (1990) has demonstrated to what extent language is a tool of distinction in the performance of power. Thus, ignoring the fact that language is linked to social positions in society and that this may complicate the communication between a respondent who does not respond in her or his mother tongue and the researcher who is a well educated person from the dominant group of society, is in my view a crucial mistake in much of so-called 'ethnic minority research'.
3. A third warning is derived from the work of the German philosopher Joachim Matthes who works on intercultural relations and religion. He has

often raised the questions about the transculturality of methods and whether western logic and social sciences can be applied sine qua non to non-western contexts. In one of his texts, he quotes a young Indian female student of computer sciences whom he interviewed in a project on religious change in Singapore. The young woman says:

You asked me to tell you how I think of myself as a Hindu. I did that in a very detailed way. However, please do not understand everything I told you, as if I had told you about my religion. I have of course passed through the western educational system myself, and I know it very well. I know in which categories western people usually think and talk. That is why I talked to you about my Hinduism as if it was my religion. I hope you understand what I have talked to you about. I would not understand my Hinduism, as if I had a Hindu religion, however. No other Hindu would do that, either. I would not even talk of my Hinduism as what you described as my religion. That is a very western manner of looking upon us. Please do not forget these things when analysing the recorded stuff.(Matthes, 1999,420, translation H.L.).

A quote like this is meant to cause the researcher's confusion. However, I suppose that many of us would rather throw it overboard, just because it is too complicated to deal with. Matthes concludes that:

Every kind of query reckons with a culturally based and culturally effective pattern of question-response behavior like the one developed in western societies due to the tradition of the Christian understanding of the relationship between mankind and God and the demand of institutions (the Church, the State) in the occident to which their members are accountable. This cultural pattern cannot be taken for granted elsewhere, where questioning is also possible. But you are mistaken if you perceive the answers you get with the same expectation concerning their validity, which is justified in the western context. Not to mention the fact that in Asian societies, for example, you contravene habitual norms and patterns of manner by

making use of a strict methodical distinction between the role of the person questioning, the interviewer and the one answering questions, the interviewee, which is demanded in the western world. If other methods such as the narrative method of questioning are used, it is easily missed that the rules of narration and especially the rules of what can be narrated (is allowed to be narrated or can be put in words) differ a lot in different cultures. Moreover, there will soon be difficulties concerning the technical complex of rules regarding the investigation and evaluation the way it was developed in the social and cultural studies of the societies of origin on the basis of their valid rules of narration."(ibid.,422).

With this in mind, what to do? I close with a plea to take these warnings seriously. We cannot pretend that power relations stay outside of the interview room; we cannot take for granted that just because all humans use language for communication, all have the same understanding of narration and meaning-making; consequently we cannot assume that their story is their individual story - their own story.

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THE ROLE OF THE OUTSIDER/INSIDER IN NARRATIVE RESEARCH

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'I am an outsider in my own life'. These words, which are the starting point for these reflections, were spoken by my colleague and co-writer, Tita Marlita, in a group discussion that took place at the outset of the project that we are going to describe in this paper. We were discussing the possibility of a collaborative project to document and analyse the development of thinking about

women - feminist thinking - in the core group of teachers, researchers and students in Kajian Wanita, the only graduate programme in Women's Studies in Indonesia. I had worked with the programme since its inception in 1990 as a colleague from a university in the North (Canada) and as Co-Director (with Prof. Dr. Saparinah Sadli) of a linkage project designed to support and

strengthen the Women's Studies programme. Such linkage projects, while ostensibly rooted in 'equal partnerships' between the Northern and Southern institutions actually embody profound inequalities and a covert form of intellectual dominance, usually arising from the fact that the money, and therefore, the power, originates in Northern funding agencies, and from development theories that assume a 'transfer of knowledge' from North to South.

Early in this process we discussed who was an 'outsider' in this context, and who would count as an 'insider'. The group under discussion - the 'Core Group', like many such groups, was not a strictly bounded, homogenous group with a fixed membership. The boundaries were shifting and permeable. There was a reluctance to define exactly who was a member. People were included if they included themselves. It was not homogenous except in the sense that they were all focussed on the Women's Studies programme and they all had some academic credentials and commitments. Otherwise, it was diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, religion, marital status, parenthood, academic rank and class - all profound differences in the Indonesian context. Discussion of 'outside-ness' focussed as much on the unmarried being 'outside' marriage, the young being 'outside' the privileged position of the elderly, the non-Javanese being 'outside' the dominant culture, and so on. We were all, me included, 'outside' in some contexts, and 'inside' in others.

Tita took the discussion one stage further when she looked at her own life and argued that she was an 'outsider' to the person she had been in her own past - that the graduate student returned from overseas was a different person to the one who went; that the happily married young woman is different to the unmarried young daughter dreading the pressure from her family to give up her aspirations in favour of family requirements. While I still felt diffident about my role in the project, the rest of the participants felt that they had disposed of this issue: indeed that insider/outsider was yet another of those 'northern concepts' that didn't quite fit Indonesian experience. Our ambiguous definitions and understanding of insider/ outsider led us to enter the research determined to listen to the nuances of our different approaches and to see if we could understand from *both* the inside *and* the outside how this group was understanding the situation of women in Indonesia and developing appropriate, culturally relevant feminist theory.

We developed the process of the research in several stages and over a number of years (1995-2000). While the general principles were clear from the beginning, we allowed ourselves to develop our

approach based on what was emerging from each stage. The research focussed on the Core Group - a self selected and fluid group of faculty, researchers and students in the Women's Studies Programme, usually numbering about 12. The Core Group would decide on the topic or materials for discussion. This often involved each member writing something, which would be circulated in advance and discussed at the meeting. The meetings were tape recorded and transcribed. If I was not in Jakarta at the time, the transcription would be sent to me in Canada. I, along with other members who had not been at the meeting, would comment in writing on the discussion, and this commentary would then become part of the research materials as well as feeding into the next discussion. This process has, over the period of the project, produced a mass of written material, all pertaining to the ideas held by Core Group members about various aspects of 'feminist' thought. It also reflect something of the process of interaction, of influence and of change in the group's thinking.

In this paper, I am focussing specifically on one aspect of the research - namely the concept of Insider/ Outsider. This first became an issue because of my involvement as an 'outsider' to Kajian Wanita and as a non-Indonesian, but it also illuminated more than whether my participation was valid. It enabled us to explore the complex positioning of every group member as both 'inside and outside'.

All I want to say about the literature we used to establish our approach is that - first - we started with a re-read of Merton's oft quoted paper of 1972. Having read many other references to this paper, I suspect that it is more often quoted than actually read, and I would like to remind you that is it positioned at least as much politically, in terms of recognising and dealing with the knowledge claims being made by Black Americans at the time. His primary issue is who *knows* and, more importantly, who has the right to *claim to know*. It's a carefully argued paper but a couple of points in particular seemed relevant to our situation. One is that 'This neglects the crucial fact of social structure that individuals have not a single status but a status set: a complement of variously interrelated statuses which interact to affect both their behaviour and perspectives' (Merton, 1972:22), going on to argue that this means that 'aggregates of individuals share some statuses and not others; or, to put this in context, that they typically confront one another simultaneously as Insiders and Outsiders.' - a conclusion closely in line with that reached by the Core Group in Kajian Wanita. The second point leads into his conclusion that, 'the intent is, rather, to transform the original question altogether. We no longer ask whether it is the

Insider or the Outsider who has monopolistic or privileged access to social truth; instead, we begin to consider their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking'(Merton, 1972:30) finally concluding, 'Insiders and Outsiders in the domain of knowledge, unite. You have nothing to lose but your claims. You have a world of understanding to win'. This provided us with our agenda in terms of working through our differences.

Secondly, I want to remind you of the sustained critiques of a research perspective rooted in male experience and identity by feminists, who are 'outside' this perspective. When black, Southern, colonised or otherwise marginalised women enter the lists, the 'insider' critique can be devastating, concluding that all studies by 'outsiders' are illegitimate both politically and intellectually. The response to this has been some agonized moral and intellectual contortions by white feminists about the possibility of engagement in the research process with any group that could be considered less dominant, including my own hesitancy about my role in this research.

I am, as you see before you - a late middle aged, feminist academic, with British roots, who has been domiciled and active in Canadian academe for 20 years. I had the usual kind of patchy, traumatic marriage, children, divorce, single parenthood, Ph.D under difficult circumstances, fight into the university system, and steady involvement with both feminist activism and academics. I became involved with the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies at the University of Indonesia in 1980. Tita is a much younger woman, with a relatively conventional, middle class Indonesian upbringing. She was intelligent and determined enough to insist on getting a degree (in Literature) and gradually became involved in Women's Studies and feminist thinking. This led to her scholarship to do a Masters in Women's Studies in Canada. She was a successful student, but found exposure to Northern and student ways of life and Northern feminist thinking challenging and threatening, especially to her strong identity as a 'good Muslim woman.

Feminism

Tita's analysis of the material on 'feminism' focusses on its problematic nature for the Core Group.

'Where do women from Kajian Wanita stand? Clearly these women who have been involved in women's issues academically and professionally for almost five years, (at the point when the project began) cannot be labelled as disagreeing with feminism. However, it is also too reckless to simply label them as feminists.

Discussions around feminism and the feminist label reveal that the word and the label are still problematic for them despite their awareness of the diversity of feminisms and its global reach, which puts it way beyond the early stereotypes of a movement of (western) women who burnt their bras, left their husbands and children, and fought for sexual freedom.'

My reading of the same material noticed *'that the many 'feminisms' of the west have been playing an increasingly important role in the formation of ideas about women and the development of action directed at strengthening women's position in Indonesia. I was struck by the profound ambiguity in Indonesian women's use of all these influences. In particular there is a deep and widespread suspicion about the term 'feminism'. 'What is this based on? Is it the negative resistance to something external to the culture or is it, more positively, the shape of an effort to take what is good and appropriate from the western forms of feminism and make something genuinely appropriate to Indonesian women.'*

These two threads wove their way through our attempts to make sense of the several discussions on this topic. I found myself wanting to 'correct' certain understandings of what 'western feminism' meant, as well as resisting any sense that western ideas should have any priority. At the level of practical politics, it was easy to see what was going on. In countries like Indonesia, feminism has often been regarded as totally western idea and hence not fully accepted, especially in governmental circles. Adopting feminism and claiming to be feminists might therefore hamper Kajian Wanita's progress in gaining broad acceptance.

But the Core Group also felt the need to keep their distance from feminism because of the concepts of individualism and liberalism, which are predominant in Western theory. Tita describes it thus: *'The data reveals a general feeling that individualism, which emphasizes individual rights and self-autonomy as a principle in society tends to isolate women from their children, their husbands, their parents and their community and other women. And this idea seems too strange for these Indonesian women who are raised in more traditional ways that greatly value motherhood, marriage, parents and the collective interest.*

I was especially interested in these experiences of cross cultural contact and conflict, and in the way in which the Indonesian women exposed to foreign study learned to balance their 'Indonesianness' with the new ideas, although I found myself deeply uncomfortable with the idea that they had gone to the North in order to learn some 'correct' form of feminism. Tita wrote about one such experience thus: *'When SOP began her*

study in England she was still convinced that Indonesian women were less oppressed and their condition was better than those of women in England, so she was not really interested in Women's Studies or feminism. However, through discussion with her western peers her interest and concern about women's issues grew stronger and she realized that women's oppression is universal. But the universality of women's oppression does not necessarily mean one universal theory of feminism... thus there is always a need 'to be pluralistic to be able to understand the different perspectives and attitudes given to one particular women's issues' In the first analysis, Tita had focussed on the emergence of pluralism as a way of accomodating the clashes between western and Indonesian priorities. For her it was a practical way of absorbing new ideas without losing the cultural values that were important. In contraxt, I found myself admiring the maturity and tolerance with which SOP had responded to what were clearly startling and distressing experiences. In this case, Tita was 'tougher' in her analysis than I was.

Tita wrote: While they were studying abroad, neither BID and SOP could see little relationship between what they were learning and what they thought of as the Indonesian reality. It was only after they came back that pieces of the puzzle began to fit together. Both became angry and resentful at what they could now see was the general oppression of women in Indonesia, as well as the restrictions on their own personal lives. For example, BID returned to be: *'still their little daughter.....People may think and accuse me of being poisoned by western feminist ideas, or not being desirable to men. This is when I cannot speak up for myself. This is when I have to consider others' feelings.'*

I felt, more strongly than Tita, that as the result of these experiences both women had worked through to a mature understanding of how to use Northern feminism while remaining true to their ideals. I ended up arguing much more strongly than Tita that the examples illustrated that *'fine and complex ideas have emerged from the crucible of direct experience.... that neither woman backed away from the open conflict between values and customs they held dear and the new ideas.... and that working through of the conflict has produced a set of mature formulations that reflect a integration of western and Indonesian ideas.'*

Some participants claimed that they were too 'humble' to claim a 'title' such as 'feminist' - for example, one said *I don't think I have a good enough understanding of women's issues.* Another, who had been actively involved for many years said: *I think we are still bothered with the question whether we are feminists or not. I see myself as a women in development oriented person. I'm not brave enough to say that I'm a feminist in terms of accepting feminist*

as a spirit, but to say that I'm a 'women in development person' I do have the guts. As I pointed out, while both these participants use the word 'humble' it is clear that their position can also be explained in terms of a refusal of the perceived imperatives of Western feminism. In other words, I was much more inclined than Tita to 'call' them on hiding behind a smoke screen of the acceptable 'humble' label.

I looked at this material as an Outsider, and saw that in part the refusal to adopt the label stems from a refusal of the all powerful, colonising maw of 'western feminism'. Despite Western feminists' acknowledgment of increasing diversity of 'feminisms' based on increasingly diverse realities, cultures and identities, the word 'feminist' still conveys a homogenous, dominant and threatening image to many women from outside the west. From this perspective, Indonesian women's refusal of the term can be seen as a useful critique of the way in which western women have 'presented' their ideas.

In conclusion, I have attempted to put some flesh on an actual example of Insider/ Outsider research. I have drawn attention to the fluidity and contingency of those categories, and to the ways in which we all operate as Insiders and Outsiders all the time. Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which these distinctions make sense, and the project described in this paper is one of them. I was an Outsider in ways that were significant for the conduct of the research. I was especially aware of my Outsider status during the analysis. I feared that my 'view' would override that of the Insider, Tita, especially given my more senior status. One of the reasons that we wrote our first accounts separately was to allow each of us to develop our own priorities and interpretations. As we came together, we found the differences in our analysis both challenging and illuminating. For me, the main challenge was in arriving at a shared interpretation while leaving the data with aspects of ambiguity, fluidity and contingency.

I do not know whether I have been successful in my attempts to work as an Outsider. I may have simply contaminated the study. On the other hand, without my insistence and my conviction that the project was important, it would never have happened. We did learn from each other, and the Core group did become more cohesive and mutually respectful as a result of the discussions. They did move closer to generally shared positions and to a greater understanding of each other's experience. I learned a great deal about the participants. They learned less about me, but they would argue that that was more because I was more of an Insider than I thought. For me the focus was on *difference* especially difference between Indonesian and Canadian experience. For

them, it was about understanding nuances and variations in order to strengthen a collective understanding.

I think that we still have to ask critical questions about our role in research, maybe especially when we are studying groups outside our own culture. We have to recognise that no research is complete or certain, or, probably, wholly ethical. But its partiality and the honest attempts to be ethical may be the greatest strengths that we have.

Politically we have to recognise identity and the varieties of experience that give rise to it, but we

do not have to accept the limiting boundaries suggested by Insider/ Outsider. We have, to go back to Merton, to recognise the value of Insider and Outsider status only in bringing together their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

BIOGRAPHICAL METHODS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE CONFERENCE, LONDON, OCTOBER 19-21, 2000

Liz Forbat and Rebecca Jones, Open University, UK

[Scene: A messy and overcrowded office in the depths of the Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.]

Rebecca We'd better write this review for the 'Biography and Society' newsletter before we get lost in the data for our PhDs again.

Liz Yes, and since we've both come to biographical methods from different backgrounds, we've probably got quite different takes on the content and impact of the conference. What did you make of it, given your interest in gerontology and sex?!

Rebecca Well, more about older people than about sex, I think my abiding memory will be of the Age Exchange 'Good Companions' theatre group and that amazing play they did about their lives spanning most of the twentieth century. Apparently they've toured in Europe too. It was such a good reminder of why I got interested in biographical approaches to research in the first place and I really liked that it was older people who were doing it all, but then I would like that!

Liz Yes, you would. Rhetorically, a good use of 'stake' there! Talking of which, did you notice that several of the papers drew on discourse analysis? I guess I found that particularly interesting because of my own interest in analysing biographical narratives in that way.

Rebecca Yes, well, you would! I thought it was also very interesting that there were lots of different approaches to biographical work represented – biographical-interpretative method, thematic analysis, narrative analysis and probably more that I didn't recognise.

Liz Yes, I thought it was a really good idea to incorporate a methodology workshop. Chris Curran ran a session on the biographical-interpretative

method – did you go to that?

Rebecca No, I went to Jo Stanley's workshop on creating non-linear life stories using plasticine!

Liz Ooh, I missed that, so that I could attend the session with Lena Inowlocki, Denise Burnette and Ulrike Nagel on generalising from case studies. So what was the plasticine like?

Rebecca I thought it was a good introduction to what could be a very useful resource in helping people to tell their stories. She got us to make representations of our life stories, using plasticine, things like having your family represented by green blobs and your work-life by red lines, or whatever, thinking particularly about the relationships between the different parts and about what was missing from our representations.

Liz That sounds really interesting and reminds me of the opening plenary session and the paper by Andrew Cooper from the Tavistock Centre, where he talked about the social subject as being a psychological subject too- illustrating his idea with a very powerful account of counselling of people in Kosovo who had been the subjects of persecution or terror during the course of the recent war. His paper looked to the emotionality of the counselors doing this work, and challenged us to think about biographical methodologies which may also be able to unpack emotionality and what it is to be a human subject - a very potent way to introduce the conference itself and reinforce the European (and global) reach of theorising the social (and psychological) subject.

Rebecca I think you got more out of his paper

than I did, with your psychology background.

Liz I really liked his emphasis on the importance of hearing and responding to the emotional content of talk. I thought a lot of papers then went on to reflect this theme and built in notions of psychodynamics. Maybe the venue had an impact on the way in which papers were framed and discussions proceeded.

Rebecca What do you mean?

Liz Well, the Tavistock Centre is a key training and clinical practice institute based on psychodynamic principles – I thought that really added to the conference 'buzz'.

Rebecca Right. I didn't really notice a psychodynamic theme, but I did notice a very strong emphasis on reflexive practice and critical autobiography, which I thought was great. There were some really good papers on this, like Alice Stollmeijer's, Rosemary Du Plessis's and Maxine Birch and Tina Miller's.

Liz Ooh, they're all women!

Rebecca Yes, there were a lot of women speakers, unlike some conferences you go to where ninety percent of the delegates are women but only ten percent of the speakers.

Liz Actually that highlights that they and several other presenters were drawing on feminist theory and methodology.

Rebecca Yes, that's one of the reasons I got a lot out of the conference. But going back to those papers, and especially Maxine Birch and Tina Miller's paper, I really liked the dialogue-style of their presentation,

Liz [interjects] like this review!

Rebecca Quite. With their two voices and the really substantial audience comments, that paper had a real buzz to it too. They raised some really interesting questions about how researchers make judgements about 'good' interviews, which are often those in which respondents reveal personal and private information. This may then match up to respondents' feelings that the interview was 'therapeutic' which raises all sorts of ethical issues. The audience comments covered both these issues

and other ethical dilemmas arising in biographical research.

Liz Talking of the audience, did you notice how international the delegates were? I think there were representatives from 23 European countries, and 10 countries beyond Europe, because of course it was partly funded by the European Commission

Rebecca Yes and of course to complicate the issue there was also a Finnish person from Italy, a Chinese person from California and an American who did research in Australia..... and many others I am sure!

Liz Yeah it was really interesting to see how biographical methods are being used differently across these countries. This led to quite a lot of talk about the potential for comparative research.

Rebecca But, I can't believe the conference was as good as we seem to be painting it. What wasn't good about it, apart from the overheated rooms?

Liz Well, I'm sorry I missed Dan Bar-On's paper on biographies of descendants of Nazi perpetrators and three generations among survivors of the Holocaust. In terms of my biography, I guess I'm particularly interested in that since spending time in Israel. Everyone I spoke to raved about the paper in the coffee breaks afterwards. How about you?

Rebecca Well, as you know my research is about older women and sex, so I was really looking forward to Julia Zelikova's paper on the construction of women's sexuality in Soviet Russia. But she wasn't able to make it to the conference, which was disappointing.

Liz But we're still being quite cautious in our comments, aren't we.

Rebecca I don't think the genre of conference reviews allows us to be critical of papers, unless we're prepared to go into great detail about why we disagreed. So shall we only say that some papers were controversial and some reflected their titles better than others!

Liz Very enigmatic, lets leave it at that...

[And they returned to their PhDs]

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH, KASSEL, MAY 24-26, 2001

Noga Gilad, Open University, Tel Aviv, Israel

What can be said about methodological problems in biographical research, which has not been said yet, and what would be interesting for the audience? I found the topic of that conference most difficult for me. At the time I had written my abstract, any methodological problems I was concerned with were not yet clear for me, and so I 'scribbled' a few general sentences over what I

had thought are the 'real' problems in my case: conducting a biographical research in the always-changing present situation of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank, whereas such research is better utilized in retrospect.

Later on I realized, that I will not be able to do the presentation suggested in the abstract. At the

same time I was already able to reflect upon my most difficult methodological problem, but was not ready to share it with the audience. So I thought I will ignore that issue and report my very interesting findings instead. Perhaps some methodological problems will emerge while presenting. In short, I could not decide on where to orient my paper: on the empirical material, on a reflexive account on the methodological problems, or on a reflexive account on what I will not talk about?

All of that inner discussion has started a second process: what kind of papers will I hear 'over there'? What kind of methodological problems and biographical research are others involved with? What kind of connections will emerge between all of the various presentations and informal talks in the corridors? Would methodological problems be presented or described and 'answered' in order to share others with the knowledge accumulated?

To what extent can we focus our papers on methodological problems and leave aside our fields, contents and theories and use these simply to illuminate our claims? To what extent can we comply to the request and turn our conventional frame upside down? I should orient my report about the conference held in May in Kassel on these questions. I guess that in most of the cases, [people] remained loyal to the conventional style, and mentioned interesting methodological considerations only at the margins of their presentations. Indeed, the theoretical concepts and the biographical reports and conclusions were illuminating and aspiring, however, there could still be made a more extensive and comprehensive effort to address the issue of the conference. Perhaps unlike in other matters where we feel more secure on 'what we know and what to tell', here we were less secure and, therefore, concealed and marginalized more our insights.

I learn that lesson only now by reading several written papers and reflecting upon my own difficulties preparing for the gathering. That means that the major contribution of a conference can be when at the end everybody goes home and each may decide what it was all about, what he has learned from it, both from his own presentation and from the presentation of others.

The conference setting at the Kassel University was quite friendly and suited well the size of the conference (about 100 participants and 45 speakers altogether). Most came from Europe and a few from far away countries such as Mexico, Brazil and South-Africa. That has also influenced the range of themes and issues discussed. I have the feeling that the themes concerning 'East and West' Germany (and that includes also the

collapse of the communist regime in former Soviet Union) were elaborated more than others. This included a session on the effects of that collapse from the perspectives of creating careers.

The conference organizers Prof. Fischer-Rosenthal and Ulrike Loch did their best to help us with any last minute needs and certainly did a very good job on their part. (those who helped in that process and were not mentioned are thanked of course too!)

The first session I attended was quite experimental, in the sense that it was based on a session already held in October 2000 in Tavistock, London, and was thus re-discussed according to the new framework of the current conference. It actually required that the audience is already oriented to the material, which could be supplied in advance by mail or email. It caused some problems in the sense that presenters referred indirectly to their papers and it was not so easy to comment on that and develop that desired shared discussion, although there was plenty of time for that.

I will therefore address interesting aspects from the written papers in the session which discussed problems that rise from generalizing from single case studies in a comparative research, concerning methodology, social policy and social theory. That seems a reasonable general framework, which enables discussing nearly everything else. From the papers some quite interesting life-experiences and methodological questions emerged. Ulrike Nagel from Magdeburg presented a research conducted by former West German colleagues concerning former east German economic elites, who maintained a leading position also after the coming down of the wall. The analysis of 20 managers revealed the experience of a dense control by the state over life-course decisions, including decisions about ones career. Ulrike Nagel reflected on the fact that the researchers tended first to categorize it as repression of individuality and autonomy. By doing that they neglected the point that many of these people were offered good chances and opportunities at a young age. Nagel refers to that phenomena with the concept of 'processing of people' by the regime borrowed from the welfare world. As a consequence these people also develop a 'reservation mentalis', a mental reservation towards those in power, people political culture and state philosophy.

Nagel suggested that 'the generation of the east German cadres under study, because of the experience of being processed, developed a mental reservation toward their political leaders, ... which has been built up steadily over the life course as the seed or one of the seeds of the velvet revolution.' She presents 3 types of coping (out of five) that allowed maintaining a sense of autonomy. From these microanalyses she shifts to

the macro level of millions of people being institutionally processed, for example, 65 million unemployed in Europe or the groups of migrants. Nagel suggests that 'biographical research bears much more potential for macrosociological diagnosis and even prognosis of processes of social change than produced up to now'.

Here it is an example where a serious methodological claim was merely presented as a fact without discussion in detail: to what extent does institutional processing of people develop same patterns of coping for millions of people? To what extent is the biographical method an efficient tool for these observations? To what extent can we learn from the experience of the few that have managed to maintain benefits of the system and refer it to the experience of the masses? Particularly the scholarly analysis of the very interesting case which deals with strong changes in social structure is a rich source for methodological discussions over researchers reflexivity, as well the rest of these questions.

Other papers dealt with the change imposed on people following the collapse of the communist regime and its 'incorporation' into the institutions of the West (as for example, the case of a Russian businessman demonstrated by Victoria Semenova, or the situation in the former GDR) or immigration (as was the case in the papers of Lena Inowlocki, Helma Lutz) through a reflexive research conducted in a University, involving migrant students who were attending classes in migration theories, and a research conducted by Olaf Struck which discussed the case of coping with the change in Eastern Germany. Using theoretical concepts such as frame analysis or habitus and relevant structures proved 'incapable of providing a clear explanation on how and under which conditions change occurs in structures of relevance and habits'. Struck claimed that 'the actions which constitute coping strategies of nearly all east Germans interviewed are directed towards achieving a stable career trajectory. Their actions can be characterized as pragmatic and in most cases are successful.' Struck claims that the interviewees showed specific signs of de-solidarisation with the state. The research focused on 'career and family formation under the new conditions' of skilled workers and academics who graduated from vocational schools and universities in 1985, 1990 and 1995, with a combination of macro-, micro-, and meso analyses using qualitative methods and the biographical method. An interesting concept mentioned is using the degree of detail as a criterion of authenticity and consistency, which at the evaluation phase would be by identifying discrepancies between an event and its description. (based on Schütze.).

An interesting session was dedicated to the theme of 'holocaust survivors and the following generations', chaired by Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal. Here we could get insights from various perspectives: Julia Vajda from Budapest discussed the case of a Jew who is in search for a life-story, or actually who splits his biography into two following his new interest in his Jewish background after his visit to Israel. Yael Witkon from Tel-Aviv developed a model that describes the opposite attempts of Israeli Jews who are in constant search for their severed European (German) roots, a process that takes place over three generations. Brigit Schreiber from Oldenburg discussed the unfolding process in an interview between a German, non-Jewish sociologist and a Jewish survivor. Ayala Yehekel from Beer-Sheva presented part of her dissertation about re-biography of Holocaust survivors. In this case there were few reflexive remarks by the presenters, who no doubt were connected to the themes presented in a way that profoundly affected the ways they handled the research process. The attempt of Ayala Yehekel to describe a more conservative type of research definitely resulted in serious methodological problems, such as the use of excerpts from a single interview to support a quantitatively-based research design, and the absence of generalization and theoretization of the data with which she provided us. In contrast, Julia Vajda artfully portrayed the struggle of an individual without apologizing for referring to 'a single case,' leading instead down various paths. Yael Witkon had attempted a more complicated task, to incorporate the stories of three family members with the cultural cross-generational structure in the Israeli society, focusing on the particularities of the German-Jewish immigration of the 1930s. That seemed to have been a completely different type of crisis in comparison with the other discussed at the opening of the paper, the collapse of communist regime and the way it interferes with individual life-course.

WORLD CONGRESS

The XV ISA World Congress of Sociology will be held in Brisbane, Australia July 7-13, 2002. The Research Committee on Biography & Society RC38 invites proposals for the sessions listed below. Individuals who are interested in presenting a paper in a session of the Research Committee should contact the appropriate session coordinator as soon as possible and send a 150-word abstract to the session chair no later than November 1, 2001. The final deadline for session organizers submitting abstracts of the accepted papers to the ISA is January 1, 2002. All program participants (paper givers, session organizers, chairs, discussants, etc.) must register before January 1, 2002. Otherwise their names will not appear in the Program Book and abstracts of their papers will not be published on Internet.

1. Collective identities, social conflicts, and personal biographies

Chairs:

Gerhard Riemann (University of Bamberg, Germany), e-mail: Gerhard.riemann@sowes.uni-bamberg.de

Lena Inowlocki (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Germany, e-mail: inowlocki@hsfk.de)

In societies characterized by rapid processes of social change, collective identities of majority and minority groups can be questioned and challenged and can thus become a focal point of intense conflicts. In studying personal biographies of those involved in such conflicts, "practical solutions" (Howard Becker) of meeting challenges to shifts in collective identities can be reconstructed, but also trajectories of being uprooted and losing one's sense of belonging. Asking about such processes is one way to ask how "macro-processes" relate to personal biographies. How is the work of cultural transmission and the conduct and organization of one's life accomplished under conditions in which there are new constraints, new cleavages and new choices? Do specific modes of day-to-day conduct, of style of life, serve the function of continuing everyday life as it has always been? What are the consequences of the loss of collective identities and the emergence, rediscovery, or authentication of new collective identities for personal biographies and relationships?

2. Producing biographies: Intersectional Data and Reflexive Process

Chairs: Susan Bell (Bowdoin College, USA, e-mail: sbell@polar.bowdoin.edu) and Sue Fisher (Wesleyan University, USA, e-mail: sfisher@mail.wesleyan.edu)

This session seeks papers that explore how multiple, complex and sometimes conflicting axes intersect in the production of biographies, especially intersections among sexuality, race, gender, ethnicity and class and/or those that are situated in different times and places. We are interested in papers that interrogate these intersections both in life being told and reflexively in the interview process.

3. Contested meanings: Interpreting single cases from multiple perspectives

Chairs: Kathy Davis (Utrecht University, Netherlands, e-mail: kathy.davis@let.uu.nl) and Helma Lutz (University of Münster, Germany, e-mail: hlutz@uni-muenster.de)

In this session participants will analyze a biographical interview using different theoretical, methodological, or normative perspectives. By focussing on one case, the multiplicity of possible interpretations of a single case will be made visible. The aim of this session is to show how differences in interpretation are not a problem, but rather a resource for generating a better sociological understanding of life histories. We will select a case and we invite anyone who is interested to participate in this session to contact us.

4. Sexuality and Gender in Autobiographies

Chair: Elina Haavio Mannila (University of Helsinki, Finland, e-mail: haavioma@valh.helsinki.fi)

5. Biographical Research and Professional Practice

Chairs: Ursula Apitzsch (University of Frankfurt, Germany, e-mail: Apitzsch@soz.uni-frankfurt.de) and Prue Chamberlayne (Open University, UK, e-mail: P.H.Chamberlayne@open.ac.uk)

6. Cross-Border Identities

Chairs: Roswitha Breckner (Berlin/Halle, Germany, e-mail: r_breckner@compuserve.com) and Julia Vajda (University of Budapest, Hungary, e-mail: h13073vaj@ella.hu)

In what way do social borders which are constituting relations between 'we' and 'them' have an impact on the construction of biographies? How are processes of multiple identifications with different or even contradictory communities shaped? How are changes of identification biographically embedded and experienced? The session will be organized along these questions focussing on biographies related to borderland and migration experiences, as well as to processes of 'doing being' (Inowlocki) Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hungarian, Romanian, German, Italian etc. Other kinds of social borders

challenging biographical processes of identifying with or rejecting collective entities are also welcomed.

7. Interdependence of Collective and Individual Violence in Family and Life Histories

Chair: Gabriele Rosenthal (University of Göttingen, Germany, e-mail: g.rosenthal@gmx.de)

8. Temptations and Dangers in Doing Biographical Research (roundtable)

Chair: Feivel Kupferberg (Aalborg, Denmark, e-mail: Fk@i4.auc.dk)

9. Joint session: Ethnic Business and Biography (joint session with RC02 Economic Sociology)

Organizers: Ursula Apitzsch (University of Frankfurt, Germany, e-mail: Apitzsch@soz.uni-frankfurt.de), Jan Rath (Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, e-mail: rath@psc.w.uva.nl), Lena Inowlocki (Institute for Peace Research and Conflict Studies, Frankfurt/Main, Germany, e-mail: inowlocki@hsfk.de)

Ethnic business has recently become a preferred field for research on issues of economic sociology. Research on ethnic business has been conducted in a structuralist way, on the one side, focusing on ethnic, cultural, legal, political or market structures, which produce opportunities and constraints for entrepreneurial activities of migrants. Or, on the other side, research has focused in a relational way on the effects of membership in ethnic networks. A common feature of this research is that ethnic business is thought of as a collective achievement. More recently, however, entrepreneurship as well as ethnic entrepreneurship have been considered in relation to human agency, as a processual development embedded not only in social, economic, legal and political structures, but also in biographical process structures. Ethnic entrepreneurship is thus conceptualized as an individual strategy emerging from the frame of collective opportunity structures. This has been considered lately also under gender specific aspects.

The joint session will discuss issues arising from this new biographical perspective. Researchers are invited to present papers addressing issues of the biographical embeddedness of entrepreneurship: β entrepreneurship as a product of a special socialization process, but also as a terrain of socialization itself;

β the impact of social structures on the biographical process and on the process of becoming self-employed; i.e. structures of family, ethnic networks and ethnic community, but also experiences of racism and social exclusion, or of integrational social policy;

β the specific barriers which arise through the

impact of social structures, and in which ways resources are activated by individuals in their efforts against social exclusion, and towards gaining social integration and economic prosperity through self-employment;

β biography and entrepreneurship as a gendered terrain of social relations.

Special session:

Who is the 'We' and 'How Do We Know?' Some Issues Behind New Methodologies (with RC32 Women in Society and RC09 Social Practice and Transformation)

Coordinator: Kathy Davis (e-mail:

Kathy.davis@let.uu.nl), Marilyn Porter (e-mail: mporter@mun.ca), Ulrike Schürkens (e-mail: Ulrike.schuerkens@caramail.com)

This session is intended to bring together three RC's with common interests in exploring recent changes in sociological methods and methodology, and their implications for our research in the 21st century, especially the responsibility of Sociology to work towards transformatory potential. It fits with the general theme of the Congress: "The social world in the 21st century – ambivalent legacies and rising challenges" and provides an opportunity to explore, with concrete examples, some of the epistemological and methodological issues lying at the heart of sociological discourse. The last decade has seen profound doubts being voiced about the legitimacy (or even efficacy) of 'traditional sociological methods', both quantitative and qualitative. Several RC's, especially those working in interdisciplinary ways, have found themselves open to new ideas about how we acquire knowledge about the social world, how we understand it and what our responsibilities are to the people we study and work with. Indeed, more profound issues have been raised about who learns what in exchange between 'researcher' and 'subject', exemplified in an increased appreciation for the role of reflexivity in sociological research and a desire to develop participatory methods. Sociologists have become increasingly concerned about finding more sophisticated ways to gain access to the life worlds of individuals living in different social and cultural contexts as well as understanding how lives change over times and space, as well as remaining sensitive to our obligation to contribute to the transformation of those lives.

Where does this leave the sociologist? Where does it leave the feminist? Can we 'know' anything and if so, how? How, especially, can we work at understanding how society changes and in what ways transformation takes place.

These issues, in various forms, have long exercised

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