

CRESC News

ISSUE 16

APRIL 2013

Britain's postcolonial soldiers: the last gasp of empire or a very modern military?

Vron Ware

What are the connections between military work, war and the reproduction of racial hierarchy? A CRESC/OU event on March 15th incorporated a long historical perspective in a debate on the significance of military service for minority groups today.

In order not to forget Britain's role in carving up the world we need to know more about the earlier histories of military labour under European imperial command, whether in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean or the Pacific. Examining military service in the context of today's wars offers important continuities and ruptures in the ongoing national narrative of racism, citizenship and belonging.

One recent example of this convergence between past and present was provided by an image of a Sikh soldier widely used in the UK print media as an illustration of the 2011 census report on the increasing diversity of British society. In December last



year the turbaned Scots Guardsman Jatenderpal Singh Bhullar was photographed both on his own and with his colleagues in their trademark bearskins in a carefully placed intervention intended to demonstrate two crucial points: first, that the UK has successfully weathered the integration of postcolonial minorities into its most symbolic institutions; secondly, that faith and culture are no barrier to inclusion within the armed forces themselves.

The bearskin headgear worn by troops in ceremonial dress attending to the Queen is, along with black taxis, double decker buses and punks, one of the chief emblems of brand UK. The scarlet coat, gold braids and tall black fluffy hat are instantly recognizable as British 'tradition', nectar to the tourists who flock to the capital the whole year round. The striking visual image of a dark-skinned face under the iconic black fur makes it an obvious opportunity for

continued overleaf

In this issue:

New faces and news from CRESC p2

In praise of Ken Morrison p3

You're in the Zone p4

Everyday Ethics in the Young Women's Group Allotment Research Project p5

Mundane Objects in Public Space: A Comparative Cities Study p6

Nature Gets Complicated p7

CRESC Conference p8

www.cresc.ac.uk

showcasing London as a successfully multicultural city.

But Gdsmn Bhullar is not a member of the elite Household Cavalry normally associated with this role, which explains why he was wearing a long grey overcoat and not the red jacket. As a member of the Scots Guards he belongs to a regular infantry regiment, the only difference being that as part of his training he would be required to carry out public duties as a guard at Buckingham Palace, St James's Palace, the Tower of London and Windsor Castle. While there are several black soldiers in the Household Cavalry who could have been photographed to illustrate Britain's modern military, the key details in this latest version of militarized multiculturalism are not skin colour, but the turban and the beard.

The fact that these items are on show in army uniform, in whatever role or regiment, speak less of a natural process of enlightenment than the effect of progressive laws on discrimination. A chapter in my recent book, *Military Migrants* (Palgrave 2012) documents this process. The Employment Equality Regulations, which came into force in December 2003, incorporated the religion and belief elements of the European Employment Framework Directive into UK legislation. The 'Guide on Religion and Belief' published by the Ministry of Defence explained that this new legal obligation made it unlawful to discriminate against personnel on the grounds of religion or belief.

This step towards becoming an official multi-faith employer was thus mandated by law, reflecting the extent to which, as a national institution, the armed forces were simply conforming to

“

For British Muslims there is unease at the way Sikhs are singled out for their military prowess with the implication that other ethno-cultural groups from South Asia who took part in Europe's global conflicts were not appreciated or valued to the same extent.

”

an expanded HR agenda and the demands of a corporate multiculturalist script. The fact that a soldier can wear a turban is a sign of the successful campaigns by Indian bus conductors and drivers in the 1960s, at least two generations ago. It ought not to be front page news today.

But there is another aspect of this recent history that cannot be explained in such simple terms. Young men and women of South Asian descent in the UK form an important pool for army recruiters for demographic reasons alone. There has been a great deal of time and resources spent on targeting gurdwaras and mosques in an attempt to encourage communities to see the armed forces as a respectable and attractive profession. This is where it gets contentious.

A recent video ('From Slough to Sandhurst') made specially for the recruitment of young Sikhs places great emphasis on the martial tradition of Sikhs in the British Empire up to the end of WW2. Young would-be recruits are shown round the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst by a Sikh officer who proudly points out the artifacts and

memorials relating to the British Indian Army, indicating that membership of the UK armed forces is part of their ethno-cultural. Historically Punjabi Muslims played a parallel role in the British Indian Army, which was famously run on ethnically divided lines after the Uprising in 1857. But it is hard to imagine a recruiting pitch aimed at young Muslims stressing their military heritage in the same way. For British Muslims there is unease at the way Sikhs are singled out for their military prowess with the implication that other ethno-cultural groups from South Asia who took part in Europe's global conflicts were not appreciated or valued to the same extent.

The young Sikh guardsman in his ill-fitting overcoat does not automatically provide proof of the successful integration of Britain's postcolonial settlers. Instead he offers a reminder of the country's imperial heritage which continues to transmit divisive and deep-running conflicts into the heart of contemporary political and cultural life.

Contact: v.ware@open.ac.uk

New faces and news from CRESC



CRESC is delighted to announce that **Daniel Tischer** has successfully passed his PhD viva examination which took place on the 25th February. Everyone at CRESC congratulates Daniel on this achievement and wishes him the very best of luck in his future career.



Adolfo Estalella is a postdoctoral researcher

with an interdisciplinary background in anthropology and STS. During his two-year stay at CRESC he will work on his 2011-2012 fieldwork with the 15-M movement, the Spanish version of the global Occupy movement. He will collaborate with Prof. Penny Harvey.



Since October 2012, **Susan Oman** has been undertaking interdisciplinary research into the politics of cultural practices, participation and well-being at the University of Manchester

for a doctoral study linked to the AHRC Understanding Everyday Participation – Articulating Cultural Values project.



Tim Hutchings started work at CRESC in October 2012, on a 9-month AHRC Early Career Fellowship. He is researching design, marketing and reception of digital

Bibles, investigating the significance of mobile and social media for the relationship between religious readers and their sacred texts.

In praise of Ken Morrison

Karel Williams

Media coverage of the horse meat scandal was dominated by political and corporate attempts to limit reputational damage. Led by the food minister Owen Patterson, everybody was “shocked” to find horse in burgers and lasagne which was the result of “criminal activity”. Led by Tesco, the retailers owned up in full page adverts after promptly withdrawing product; the Irish processor ABP temporarily closed a factory; the Food Standards Agency is investigating but reassuringly says there is no “food safety” issue.

The minister and the corporates are now aiming for closure as they talk about the need to “rebuild trust” amongst consumers and do more tests. But the public interest issue that will not go away is why do we have recurrent food crises? The answers are of course not simple because our food supply systems are complicated. The 2007 foot and mouth outbreak caused by the escape of a laboratory virus was very different from H5N1 bird flu in Bernard Matthews’ farms probably caused by long distance import of turkeys.

But “value lines” from the meat chiller cabinet do seem to generate more than their share of problems. Many would then blame the consumers who buy cheap meat, especially processed product, because nutritional value and/or food safety must suffer at low prices. The “Marks and Spencer pig” is the meat trade’s benchmark product for provenance and purity and that of course is paid for in premium prices and traceable back along a short chain to a producer working to an M and S specification which covers everything from genetics to slaughter.

The horsemeat scandal dramatized the point that value burgers and ready meals come from a very different kind of deconstructed euro animal whose parts and products travel in long supply chains right across the EU, with intermediaries trading on price and the chiller trucks routed differently each week. The question then is whether the necessary price of cheap meat is long international chains, dodgy feed, mechanical extraction of slimes and “drind” extender from god knows where. The provocative answer from recent CRESC research is that cheap meat does not have to be inferior.

To begin with, all supermarket meat supply chains are not the same. The big three supermarket chains (Asda, Sainsbury and Tesco) run buyer led adversarial supply chains where they drive down prices for consumers by capturing the margins of independent processors producing a changing mix of joints and products for several customers. Morrisons runs a vertically integrated meat



“

The provocative answer from recent CRESC research is that cheap meat does not have to be inferior.

”

chain where it owns and profitably operates its own abattoirs and processing plants which are fully loaded and sell the whole animal to its own stores as their one customer.

The only reliable way to quality and safety is through tight control of a short chain. That point emerges from current CRESC research into meat, as it did from our earlier research into banking and finance. In meat supply, tight control can be achieved in two ways. There is the up market way of Waitrose and Marks and Spencer where the control comes from supply chain partnership supported by premium pricing. The alternative is the mass market way of Morrisons where the control comes from ownership supported by efficiency so that Morrisons can compete on price with the current meat counter offer of three joints for £10 against Asda, Sainsbury and Tesco.

The problem with supermarket meat supply is not many poor consumers but a few rich corporates and the constraint here is not economic necessity but organisation and competence. The integrated supply chain is rejected by the big three chains because their organisations are built around buying not making. It will be a long time before Tesco has a Morrisons style director of manufacturing who is responsible for one fifth of the products on the shelves.

“Buy not make” delivers shareholder value for

the big three supermarkets and low prices for consumers. But this works by passing transaction costs to weaker processors whose margins on own brand product for the supermarkets are so low that a respectable Euro processor like Vion in meat is closing or selling its UK operations. Within an EU single market, Romanian abattoirs, Cypriot intermediaries and all the rest are part of the consequence as distressed processors buy in ingredients on price.

The better way of organising meat supply was discovered by a careful Northerner, Ken Morrison, who founded, and for fifty years ran, the Bradford based supermarket chain whose fresh meat is still largely British. The policy of vertical integration was continued under new management after Ken lost control of the company in 2006 because hard-nosed accountants did the math, found it made money and got further into processing (albeit recently with some value meat product from Europe).

No doubt we should all eat less meat for our own health and the planet’s. But let us also praise Ken Morrison who developed a business model of taking responsibility for supply from which other retailers could learn. His folksy justification was that supermarkets is “just taking money off people and giving them something in return”. His good sense was to see that the return depended on reorganising the supply chain.

Most of the corporates involved in the horse meat scandal have preferred to place a call with Burson Marseller or one of the other PR firms which now specialise in crisis management. That may limit reputational damage but it will not prevent further problems in the meat supply chain.

An earlier version of this article appeared in the Guardian’s Comment is Free on 25 January 2013

karel.williams@manchester.ac.uk

You're in the Zone

Kath Woodward

The idea of the zone is one frequently invoked to capture what might be going on when people experience a sense of things fitting together, sometimes in something which goes beyond the routine of everyday engagements or when mind and body are in harmony. An AHRC Research Network Grant for £33,000 led by Prof Kath Woodward at the Open University with Dr Tim Jordan at King's College London focuses on the theme of 'peak experience' or 'being in the zone' in music, sport and work. The project involves a series of workshops to examine the concept and see how it can be explored in each of the domains of embodied experience and involves partners at Brighton and Canterbury Christ Church, Exeter, King's College, Open University and Oxford.

The phenomenon of individuals or groups who routinely perform creatively achieving a state of extreme competence in a specific performance is well known in psychology, where 'being-in-the-zone' [bitz] has been studied. Musicians, sportspeople, creative workers and others all repeat certain actions and experiences but occasionally they repeat these actions—playing a clarinet, bowling, or software coding—with an unexpected and high level of competence, often beyond the level of competence of which the individual thought they were capable; such experiences happen when individuals are 'in the zone'. Analysis of bitz has focused on the internal states of individuals and thus underestimated the importance of culture to heightened creative performance and the cultural significance of achieving a personal best. The zone is not confined to elite performance: bitz has democratising possibilities as well as social properties. This is particularly important for understanding a commitment to participate in activities that depend critically on 'care of the self' both in relation to body and psyche.

Culture is essential to bitz as it can be seen in the collective practices that are necessary to both routine and peak performance. It is not only the affective states and internal emotions of sportsmen and women, musicians or creative workers that explain an experience of heightened competence, but also the cultural framework in which the very distinction of 'routine' and 'peak' is created. Such activities engage wider cultures that define competence such as 'groove' or 'timing' in music, game 'intelligence' or getting your eye in, in sport or 'creativity' in cultural work (such as 'elegance' in computer programming). Without an understanding of such cultures, bitz remains individualised,



Professor Kath Woodward



The zone is not confined to elite performance: bitz has democratising possibilities as well as social properties.



limiting understanding of how to create conditions for nurturing the experience.

This project builds upon the particular resonance and impact of peak performance in relation to the London Olympics in 2012 when the excitement of competitive sport and the ideologies of widening participation of the Olympic Movement were also tied to other cultural forms through the Cultural Olympiad. Culture also provides a means of accessing the experiences of the zone. The connection of culture and bodily performance demonstrates the possibilities of bitz for a wide range of cultural engagements which involve individuals in collaborative enterprises that encompass the interface between personal inner worlds and social, cultural spaces.

Understanding the cultural dimensions of bitz permits a better grasp of how individuals can gain a strong positive appreciation of what is achievable through creative performance and bodily reflexivity. Failure to grasp the role of culture in bitz has individualised its experience and understanding, fundamentally blocking the

possibility of developing effective group-based practices. Understanding culture in this context should lead to the design of practices to promote cultural, emotional and mental wellbeing through enhancing creative performance, whether artistic, sporting or in cultural industries.

The project focuses on this neglected theoretical-practical nexus of culture and bitz across three workshop events devoted to each of the areas, [Cultural Work at King's London on June 17th](#), [Sport in Brighton on July 9th](#) and [Music at Exeter on October 2nd](#). Each event will be overseen by a small group of scholars expert in these areas who have been working with Kath and Tim as PI and Co-I in developing the project, organising the events and inviting key people whose work is relevant to our research.

Theories of bitz builds on psychological conceptions which also attend closely to work on the body thus creating connections to performance and culture, understood as 'being-with', particularly in Haraway's recent work but also in relation to challenging the individualisation of bitz by looking at relationships between people, places and things and focusing on the wider cultural terrain in which bitz is situated. Music addresses research on 'groove' in jazz, music therapy and the specificities of classical music. Sport examines both expressive and existential sports such as surfing and parkour, as well as competitive sports such as football and tennis -and boxing in which the zone is so frequently invoked, but so rarely understood. Work builds on creative and cultural industries' research with a particular focus on software programming.

The project explores three innovative methodologies using workshop techniques—a 'whole event' methodology for tracking bitz in specific performances over the course of the full event from preparation to post hoc reflection, non-representational methods for examining bitz across different cultural areas, and action-research techniques for converting project findings into practices that deliver tangible impacts. The final workshop for project partners is based on sessions from each of the previous three on work, sport and music, to develop future work and another grant bid.

If you want to know more or would like to come to one of the workshops contact Kath Woodward, kath.woodward@open.ac.uk.

Contact: k.woodward@open.ac.uk

Everyday Ethics in the Young Women's Group Allotment Research Project

Niamh Moore

Everyone has ethics, and everyone deals with ethical dilemmas in everyday life. This might seem a banal observation, but it is nonetheless an important one when it comes to thinking about ethics in research, and particularly in what has been termed Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), where academics are not the only researchers.

This realisation really came home to me when making a participatory video as part of a research project with a Manchester-based Young Women's Group allotment project. While informed consent is a key issue in research, and particularly in visual research, during the project I was struck by the realisation that young women were actively negotiating the research process from the very beginning. Some had already taken the decision not to appear on screen and so weren't around when we were making the video, or they made sure that they were behind the camera, holding it, not in front of it; they had already made a whole host of decisions about how they were going to participate in the research or not. Having been involved with the group for some time, I realised that the young women already had extensive experience of dealing with questions of risk and vulnerability, of negotiating ethical dilemmas, both from their own everyday lives, and as part of their involvement in the Young Women's Group (peer research, as well as the focus on participatory youth work) – and that they brought this experience and expertise to the process of making a video together. Many of the young women have had a lifetime of negotiating complicated systems of risk, harm and vulnerability and are quite adept already at making careful decisions about what they want to do, or not, and why.

Equally the youth workers with whom I am collaborating also had extensive professional experience of dealing with ethical issues in a youth work context which certainly included issues of consent. At times they were much better placed to recognise and address ethical issues than I was. While not all other domains have the kind of formal codes of ethics which academic researchers have, they do usually have strong professional codes of practice, and work cultures where ethics are everyday dilemmas, as in youth work.

Conventionally research projects proceed with the academic seeking ethical approval through institutional ethical review boards. Academics often reference disciplinary professional codes

of ethics in approaching ethical issues. Yet, if we start a research project or process with the idea that everyone has ethics, rather than that the academics are the (only) ones with ethics and the only ones bound by professional codes, then we are oriented differently towards dealing with ethics in research, and especially in community-based participatory research. Immediately the academic researcher does not hold all the responsibility for dealing with ethics. This does not, of course, absolve academic researchers of responsibilities in any way; rather it challenges them to develop an even more complex appreciation of ethical issues and how these might arise and be negotiated within a project, recognising that academic researchers often may not know everything that is happening. Rather than, everyone has some knowledge of ethical issues, and the pool of resources for working through ethical issues in a project is expanded. The conventional process for gaining ethical review in universities tends to assume that researchers are powerful, and that research participants are vulnerable. Yet recognising everyone's experience of ethics means that people do not start out inherently vulnerable to the research process, but that anyone may be made vulnerable in the process of research, including the academic researcher, who does not fully understand local contexts. This allows the recognition that community-based researchers may be faced with ethical dilemmas towards sharing otherwise confidential knowledge with the researcher, and with protecting the researcher in certain contexts. Thus involvement in community-based participatory research with academics can place considerable demands on community groups.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have been part of a research project looking at ethics in CBPR, and developing guidelines for these, which opened up a space for reflecting on ethical issues with respect to participatory research project working with a local young women's allotment group. This project was funded by the AHRC Connected Communities Programme (<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/Pages/Connected-Communities.aspx>), and was led by Professor Sarah Banks, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University; it drew on a range of previous AHRC projects in which participants, academic and community-based researchers had been involved.

The ethical guidelines produced through this project and in consultation with a range of others are available on the website of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE):

- Sarah Banks et al, *Community-Based Participatory Research: A Guide to Ethical Principles and Practice*, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, November 2012. <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/CBPR%20Ethics%20Guide%20web%20November%202012.pdf>

There are also a series of ethics case studies and case examples which detail ethical dilemmas and how they were dealt with from this project and across a range of other community-based participatory projects, including one based on the Young Women's Project.

- Sarah Banks and Andrea Armstrong, eds., *Ethics in Community-Based Participatory Research: Case Studies, Case Examples and Commentaries*, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, November 2012. <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/CBPR%20ethics%20cases,%20revised%20Dec%202012.pdf>

There is also an academic paper which further details ethical dilemmas across a range of projects:

- Sarah Banks and Andrea Armstrong with Kathleen Carter, Helen Graham, Peter Hayward, Alex Henry, Tessa Holland, Claire Holmes, Amelia Lee, Ann McNulty, Niamh Moore, Nigel Nayling, Ann Stokoe, Aileen Strachan, 'Everyday ethics in community-based participatory research', in *Contemporary Social Science*, 'Special Issue: Knowledge Mobilisation and the Social Sciences: Dancing with new partners in an age of austerity', forthcoming 2014 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/21582041.2013.769618>

And the videos we made as part of the original research project can be found at:

- Young Women's Group Allotment Videos: 'I love you allot' and 'Spearmint? I'll have some of that' <http://www.likt.org.uk/activities/allotment/>

- For more on issues of in/vulnerability, see the forthcoming CRESC Conference: *In/vulnerabilities and Social Change: Precarious Lives and Experimental Knowledge*, London, 4-6 September 2013 www.cresc.ac.uk/events/cresc-annual-conference.

Contact: niamh.moore@manchester.ac.uk

Mundane Objects in Public Space: A Comparative Cities Study

Francis Dodsworth and Sophie Watson

In recent years a significant element in the governance of our cities has been the attempt to open up public space and to make it accessible to people regardless of age, bodily capacity, gender, sexual orientation or ethnic and cultural background. Much of this has proceeded on the assumption that these categories of urban actor and the spaces that they are included or excluded from are pre-existing, given social and cultural bodies or sites. A recently launched research project in Urban Experiments asks how we might approach public space differently, not as a given construct that is more or less accessible to certain categories of person, but as something constituted through embodied encounters with the mundane objects that shape public spaces. Categories of person such as "the infirm", "the disabled" or the "linguistically excluded" can be rethought in this light as the emergent phenomena of regimes of practice generated in relation to public artifacts rather than stable categories of personhood.

As a point of entry into the subject we have selected a series of objects which are all concerned with fostering mobility: bins, public toilets, signs, bike racks and bollards. We hope to study these objects in four cities: London, New York, Paris and Amsterdam. These are the largest, most densely populated and multi-cultural cities in their respective states and are sufficiently similar to "hold constant" major variables of urban wealth and the general goals of urban planning. They have "neighboring" democratic regimes with well-established infrastructure provision and advanced technological capability. They all have at least some version of the artifacts we are concerned with and to the degree we find differences, which we will, those differences will be fairly subtle. We will look for these differences in artifact and attempt to see in the physical implements (and how they are used) these larger contexts as implemented.

Major social science analysis has, of course, focused on public space. Hence we have extensive literatures on the political, cultural, and architectural aspects of cities, often aimed at learning how well they foster social inclusion, diversity, integration, or capacities to express dissent and gain redress. However, although such approaches are valuable in terms of theoretical richness and enhancing normative awareness, they tend towards the abstract. Where the physical comes in to the picture, it is primarily in regard to matters such as architecture or major transit infrastructure. Such issues, including large problems of urban citizenship, do inform our work and we believe

we will have findings relevant to these concerns. But our primary motivation, for present research purposes, lies elsewhere.

We aim, as a strategic device, at the smaller scale: encounters with the "little" objects of the street and how those objects are embedded, for better or worse, in the stream of everyday life. We stoop to the level of things like waste bins to learn how people use public objects. We want to study the reciprocal relations of city users and city things: how objects shape behavior and how behavior gives form to artifacts, as objects (sometimes at least) undergo physical change through use. Public space, both as social and physical accomplishment, gains part of its reality through these encounters.

Besides research and commentaries on public space, a second analytic tradition we draw on (and try to move beyond) is thus the growing social science attention to physical objects, as taken up in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). We make use of these precedents, but take them public. We want to see how objects are actants in the public realm. We thus mobilize the lessons of STS/ANT to better understand how the city works in terms of everyday citizen practice. In a broad sense, we marry urban studies to STS/ANT, a practice only now gaining adherents, but at least implicit in the recent writings of some major figures.

We have chosen our objects around a common theme: mobility - itself a focus of much social science research and policy attention. Again, most of the extant work has been at the large scale rather than the mundane particulars. A number of our public artifacts may be non-obvious in their roles in urban mobility but, as scholars of ANT and STS emphasize, it is such easily overlooked "side-objects" that are intrinsic to the physical-social ensembles of urban constructions.

We aim to study our mundane objects comparatively in order to bring into sharp relief different urban practices, processes and policy regimes in specific cities. It will also display in the aggregate the range of circumstances that can occur in major contemporary cities, including how people adopt, adapt, or resist the objects in their bailiwick.

By beginning with the concrete, our focus does not assume neatly formed categories of individuals with prior defined interests. A 70-year-old man and a pregnant woman may have in common a need to urinate more frequently than others; a visually impaired pedestrian shares an interest in "sign-reform"



with a non-native speaker-reader. A bollard may create common interest between workers carrying a wide load and a person whose temporary injury has put them in a wheel chair, but neither may be bollard-concerned if and when they shift into other conditions of life. Our approach thus assumes groups in the city are fluid and shifting and formed through their engagement with city objects, in different ways at different times. This opens up the possibility of new social categories and a more nuanced understanding of how different alliances, deprivations, and collectivities are in constant flux in the city. We do not prejudice how such encounters unfold or what the groundings for an object-based politics might be in regard to any particular type of artifact. But we do anticipate frequent discoveries of object-politics as people discover and act on common interests.

We are open both to findings that show individuals using facilities as intended by their official custodians, as well as potential for considerable ingenuity and adaptability of users or downright sabotage. It may be that we find that people use other artifacts and practices not officially designated for a particular purpose by way of working around or compensating for failures in official provision. In effect, we are studying artifact regimes: urban objects as they operate in mutuality with one another and how they embed in larger social, political, and economic contexts specific to time and place.

Note : This project is a collaborative project with Simon Carter (OU), Evelyn Ruppert (Goldsmiths), Olga Sezneva and Jan Rath (UVA), David Pontille and Jerome Denis (Paris Tech), Harvey Molotch (NYU).

Contacts : francis.dodsowrth@open.ac.uk and s.watson@open.ac.uk

Nature Gets Complicated

John Law



Figure 1: Nature all round culture? A distant view of the salmon farm

The fish farm is very large. Out on the fjord there are often up to 800,000 salmon swimming around in the pens. CRESC's John Law has been working with Oslo anthropologist Marianne Lien on the farm in a long-term ethnography of fish farming. This has led us to think about nature and to pose an old question: what does it mean to say that something is 'natural'? On the salmon farm they are very concerned with nature. This shows itself in a variety of shapes and forms, and the business of keeping nature 'natural' takes a lot of effort.

Sometimes nature flows in and through the farm: the weather brings whatever it brings, and the sea washes through the pens. There's no real difference here between nature and culture. On the other hand, sometimes it is important to keep nature out. Birds can be a

real nuisance, so there are held back by nets, while the ever-watchful herons look out for gaps. But the barrier between 'nature' and 'culture' also works the other way round. Culture has to be kept out of nature if nature is to be kept clean, pure and untouched.

The nets round the pens form the first barrier, the first way of protecting nature. If the nets get torn, then the salmon head out into the wild (though they are not half as enterprising as cod which are the Houdinis of the fish farming world). The second kind of barrier is also physical. Onshore (where the smaller salmon, the smolts, are raised) the water coming out of the farm is filtered. If necessary it is treated too. Fish farms have their own sewage treatment plants. A third kind of barrier has to do with parasites. Sea lice breed rapidly on the farm and then they pass through the nets and infect wild salmon. They move, as it were, between nature and culture. The farmers control sea lice by putting small fish, wrasse, into the pens with the salmon. The wrasse eat the parasites off the salmon. If things get bad, sometimes farmers use insecticides too. And a fourth kind of barrier comes in the form of the regulations intended to keep nature untouched. There are rules about the number of salmon and their total weight on the farm. There are rules about when they can be grown. There are rules about where they can be grown. If the parasites are getting difficult, sometimes all the farms on the fjord are told to clear out their fish at the same time in order to give the wild salmon a clear run.

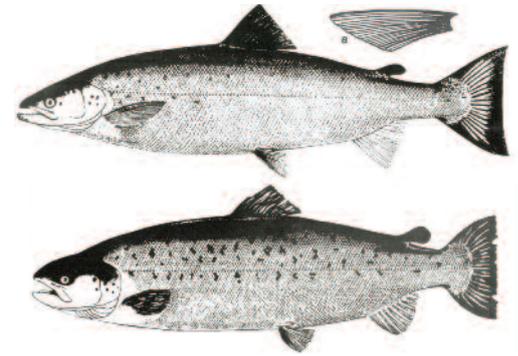


Figure 3: Nature is above, culture below

But this leads us to a further set of problems. Is the wild salmon actually wild? Is it natural? Or, more philosophically, what does it mean to be 'natural'? So, for instance, the salmon that escape mix with those that grew up in the rivers. If you are a fly fisherman you can't always tell whether the salmon you are landing is wild or not. When you get it out of the water you may be able to tell by looking at it (there are field guides with pictures of farmed and wild salmon). But sometimes you won't know unless you send its fish scales to the lab. And even this is only part of the problem. If you return to the question, 'what does it mean to be natural?' geneticists will tell you that a population of wild salmon is one that is genetically adapted to conditions of the river in which it spawns. That's what's natural. But salmon that escape from the farm interbreed with those growing up in the wild. The genes get mixed. Do we want to say that these mixed fish are wild or not? And then, the final complication, for around 150 years the owners of rivers have been catching salmon from the sea, mixing them up, and cheerfully releasing them willy-nilly into their rivers. Perhaps these fish are wild, but most likely their genes belong in another river. They aren't 'natural' genetically.

The conclusion? Nature is very, very, powerful in farming practice and in policy. It is important economically too (tourists pay to visit nature and wealthy consumers buy 'natural' produce). As anthropologists have often observed, it is a powerful Western political and cultural imaginary. At the same time it is variable, it is variably done, and in practice nature and culture get mixed together. Does this mean that we shouldn't care about nature? The answer is: absolutely not. Clean water and healthy fish populations are good. But we need to understand that nature is never untouched. Rather it is reproduced. It takes cultural effort and work, and this comes in endless different forms.

For more details of the *Newcomers to the Farm Project* please visit:
<http://www.sv.uio.no/sai/english/research/projects/newcomers/>.

Contact: j.law@open.ac.uk



Figure 2: Nature is on the left behind the net, while culture is in front

We are delighted to announce the call for papers for the 2013 CRESC Annual Conference. This is on:

In/vulnerabilities and Social Change: Precarious Lives and Experimental Knowledge

The Focus...

In a world of radical political, economic and ecological uncertainty, lives and life chances are increasingly precarious for many. It is becoming ever more urgent to explore the **changing vulnerabilities of the majority**. At the same time, understanding the **in/vulnerabilities of elites** and their sometimes inadequate forms of **expertise and knowledge** is also crucial. These are the two central themes of the CRESC 2013 Conference, which is co-sponsored by the Journal for Cultural Economy. (See attached prospectus, or visit the CRESC website at <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/events/cresc-annual-conference> for more details).

Plenary speakers...

will include: Stephen Collier (New School of Social Research), Thomas Hylland Erikson (Oslo), Stephen Graham (Newcastle), Andrew Haldane (Bank of England), Kate Pickett (York), and Mattijs van de Port (Amsterdam). There will also be sub-plenary speakers, conference streams and panels.

Call for papers

We welcome submissions for individual **papers**, conference **panels**, and conference **streams**. **Panel and stream** proposals should include details of at least three individual papers. (Please visit the conference website for more details, and see closing dates below).

Conference details: time and place

- London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
- 4th-6th September, 2013

How to book your place

- Please visit the conference website (and note the dates below)

Crucial Dates

- 13th May 2013: closing date for paper, panel and stream submissions
- 31st July 2013: closing date for 'early bird' registrations
- 31st August 2013: closing date for all conference registrations (nb: places are limited and registrations may close before this date).
- 4th-6th September, 2013: conference dates

Conference website

Please visit the conference website for details, updates, and contact information, at <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/events/cresc-annual-conference>

On CRESC

CRESC, the ESRC Funded Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change, is a collaboration between the Open University and the University of Manchester. Please visit our website at <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/> for more details.

John Law (john.law@open.ac.uk), Chair, Conference Committee

Susan Hogan (Susan.Hogan@manchester.ac.uk), Conference Manager

