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Conversations with ... Hannah Jones

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Abstract: *Hannah Jones has conducted research on multiculturalism and multiculturalism, local government policy-making, community cohesion policy, migration policy, voluntary and community sector organising, regeneration and urban studies, and diversity and inequality. She is currently leading one of the first research projects funded by the [ESRC Urgency Grants Mechanism](#), entitled "["Go Home": Mapping the unfolding controversy of Home Office Immigration Campaigns](#)", working with colleagues at six other universities across the UK. Hannah is also writing up research with colleagues from the ["Living Multiculture"](#) ESRC project based at the Open University on everyday multiculturalism; and with colleagues from COMPAS, University of Oxford from the EU Integration Fund [AMICALL](#) project on local government practices to improve attitudes to migrants. She worked in London local government before completing her PhD in the Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London. She also holds degrees in Human Sciences (University of Oxford) and Policy Studies (University of Edinburgh). She has been a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University; a Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow in the Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London; a Research Associate at the Centre for Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford; and a Research Associate in the Department of Social Policy and Criminology, The Open University. She is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.*

This year the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick organized an exciting and lively research seminar series. The conveners, Amy Hinterberger and John Solomos, sought out a range of speakers known for their empirically robust and conceptually innovative research in the UK and internationally. Speakers featured in the series such as Suzanne Hall (LSE), Jennifer Curtis (Missouri) and Nisha Kapoor (York) asked pressing questions about the changing landscape of contemporary social research.

What are the lived realities of allegiance, participation and belonging from the base of a multi-ethnic street in south London? Is love a human right? What can be said of the state of race, or more specifically about the nature of the contemporary state which has declared racism is a relic?

In order to celebrate the arrival of seven new members of staff to the Department the seminar series also featured the work of new members of Department. This article features an interview on the research and current work of Hannah Jones, who delivered a research seminar entitled 'Uncomfortable positions in local government: negotiating cohesion, inequality and change', based on her monograph which has been shortlisted for the British Sociological Association Philip Abrams Memorial Prize 2014. The seminar addressed inequalities of power and discrimination at the local government level in the UK. Hannah recently joined the Department in October 2013 as an Assistant Professor having previously worked as a Research Associate at the Open University.

'@uncomfy' is the twitter handle chosen by Jones. The second part of her twitter handle: 'sociologist at large' points to how her research on urgent social matters brings to the fore the contemporary politics of multiculturalism in Britain. But how is this 'uncomfy', or uncomfortable? In Jones' new book she examines how local government officers and politicians negotiate issues like community cohesion policy, diversity, inequality, discrimination, class, power and change. This kind of work, she argues, necessitates some 'uncomfortable positions' when managing ethical, professional and political commitments. This includes negotiating aspects of racial and ethnic inclusion in the workplace, as well as examining how the expression of local residents, such as those in the London Borough of Hackney, can be in tension with local government policy and programs.

AH: *In your new book, *Negotiating cohesion, inequality and change: Uncomfortable positions in local government* (Policy Press 2013) you explore how multiculturalism, inequality and belonging are understood in the day-to-day thinking and practices of local government. Why is it important to study local government in this way?*

HJ: Well I think it's to do with understanding how local government operates behind the scenes, a lot of the thinking around government focuses on national level, or international level in terms of talking to policy makers. But from my experience of working in local government as well I knew that it's not enough to just treat local government as implementers of national policy. What's written down in policy documents doesn't tell you very much about the negotiations that go on, and how people produce those documents as tools, and manage their intentions, commitments and so on around that. I think it's important to look at the people who make up government and how they operate, not necessarily in order to sympathise with them or to humanize the institutions, but because if you want to make progressive change, or to influence how society works, it is important to first understand how it works. Telling policy people that their documents are vague or can be critiqued isn't going to make much difference if they already know that; the question is, why and how does government function, and where are the ways it might then be influenced?

AH: *Your seminar really illuminated this kind of ethnographic sensibility about studying local government. Another aspect of your research seminar that I really liked was how you bring attention to the politics of emotion and feeling to an arena which is often associated with trash collection and other mundane practices.*

HJ: I think part of the work of understanding these institutions is understanding how people operate. There's been a growing attention to emotion as a tool of management in policy and in government – for example, in behavioural economics – and generally across sociology and the social sciences around the 'affective turn'. Often the social science looks at the language of policy, which does often have a strong emotional and affective component. But what I'm particularly interested in is understanding how people operate and get other people to do things, persuade one another, justify their own actions – and often this is about feeling, connected to 'rational' thinking. There are emotional reactions to things like trash collection too, which can be important in making people feel like they live in a place that is well run, welcoming, where people are treated

with respect. But it's much harder to measure how people feel about the trash collection than it is to know whether the bins were collected on time or not.

AH: *The Sociology Department at Warwick has a longstanding reputation as an intellectual gateway for research engagement at a regional, national and international level. Your work is especially attuned to these concerns.*

HJ: Yes, I'm interested in engagement and in using research that relates to different geographical levels. I think it's important to recognize that looking at the local level also connects to regional, national and international forces and concerns. Not just because these processes might also occur in other contexts, but because they are all interconnected, they're all relational. The kinds of concerns that emerge at a local level, say at the moment around austerity, the cuts, migration, attitudes to belonging, are all intimately linked to national and international processes and policies. So recognizing that, you can see global forces in the local are really important, as well as considering whether and how local interactions can add up to and affect things at a greater geographical scale.

I've been working on an edited book with Emma Jackson (who is in Urban Studies at Glasgow University) which deliberately gathers chapters focused on local belonging of migrants and pays attention to how this connects to transnational flows of power and feeling (*Stories of Cosmopolitan Belonging: Emotion and Location*, Routledge/Earthscan, forthcoming 2014). And I think it's really good to be at Warwick where we have those national and international connections, and I'm really keen to stretch that out to think about how we can link that to the micro scale too.

So while her twitter handle might be pithy, the work that it encompasses is far reaching and promises to have significant impact on policy and planning in urban areas of Britain. And it's within this focus on local government, belonging, transnational flows of power

and feeling that larger intersections with the traditions of research that have been carried out by sociologists at Warwick become illuminated.

AH: *Speaking of engagement at a national level you were recently awarded one of the first ESRC Urgent Grant Scheme awards which enables researchers to respond to unforeseen incidents. One of the significant aspects of this scheme is that it helps researchers like you respond rapidly to unexpected and transient events in society. So can you tell me what urgent event triggered this project?*

HJ: That project is about the local, national and the international in some of the ways we were just discussing. If you remember in the summer of 2013, there was a sudden surge in Home Office publicity around migration, there was a very high profile advertising van that drove around some London boroughs, with a sign saying ‘In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest’. The Home Office was saying that was aimed at encouraging voluntary departures from migrants whose paperwork wasn’t in order. That got a lot of discussion in public debate. At the same time the Home Office did a lot of publicity around raids and arrests by Immigration Enforcement teams, including tweeting photographs with the hashtag #immigrationoffender. The project is interested in what that means, how that kind of publicity from the government, from the Home Office, around migration enforcement is connecting to public debates both nationally and locally, and how those online publicity networks that were being used, as well as in-person networks, connect to activism. Because those interventions by the Home Office did lead to quite a lot of oppositional activism in different ways. So it was clearly a moment when public debate was taking off and we were interested in following that controversy through.

We were granted the first Urgent Grant from the ESRC partly because we needed to collect this data immediately before it was lost, and also because our research design is about following through and engaging with these ongoing debates as they happen; we want our developing research findings about the local and national dynamics of public

debate on this issue to become part of that debate themselves. We'll have a local focus in 6 case study areas, but we'll also have a national survey and track national debates. These issues are current in the UK at the moment, but also in other countries in Europe and across the world, so those patterns will be interesting to explore.

AH: *So, it sounds like engagement at regional and national levels is a really significant part of this work. What about in an international context?*

HJ: Local, regional and national scales operate within this work, and the international context comes in two ways. Partly because migration is obviously international and so there's the context and how are those global flows considered in the publicity from the Home Office and reactions to them? But also because this process is something which seems to be mirrored in other countries too, so in the future, developing more research on this, it would be good to link up with looking at the experiences of these kind of publicity campaigns by other governments, and the reactions to them in other countries and other contexts. And how – I don't know, but I suspect – that different national politicians and activists are influenced by debates in other countries. Added to that we are looking at online interactions and by their very nature they can have transnational impacts and disseminations as well as national and regional.

The department was founded in 1970 by John Rex who is most well-known for his studies of race and ethnic relations. Writing in 1986, Rex reflected on the discipline stating that "if we are not to become simply technocrats researching on the means necessary to achieve Government ends and if we are to be able to maintain the independence necessary to look critically at those ends, we need to have a comparative perspective, and that perspective is in turn dependent upon the understanding of theoretical issues" (ix).

AH: *It sounds like you are committed to developing non-traditional collaborations and are keen to push the barriers of disciplinary activity. How do you approach this in your work?*

HJ: In terms of interdisciplinarity, just on this project we're talking about, I'm in Sociology and other collaborators, such as Yasmin Gunaratnam (Goldsmiths), are in Sociology Departments, but we're also working with other Co-Investigators in a range of Departments including Urban Studies, Media, Life Sciences and Education, and Applied Social Research. And we have project partners such as the Runnymede Trust and the Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network. So we're kind of interested in the question at hand, rather than the discipline in particular; but always with a focus on some of the core concerns of sociology, around inequality, around understanding social processes by looking at the individual and the structural.

In terms of working with non-academics, I'm interested in research being connected to other users, and public sociology in the best sense, that is, research that is used by and engages with people beyond academic journals. We're in public institutions and we're publicly funded and we do work that is for the public good, so maybe the public should have something to do with that! On this project, we have partners from national organisations and will also be working with community researchers at a local level, and those groups have been informing the research questions, focus and design of the study from the start.

AH: *How are these goals of collaboration and engagement incorporated into your teaching?*

HJ: That's interesting. I think in terms of my interests and ethos I hope that's always there. As you know, we're all developing new modules at the moment to broaden out the undergraduate and taught postgraduate options in the Sociology Department at the

moment, and one of the possible modules I'm working on is a specialist research methods module that would look at action research, and developing skills for connecting social theory and research methods to work with communities and organisations directly. That would include some engagement with community organisations as part of the curriculum. I'm also interested in developing more regular links with third sector organisations that might benefit from small research projects of the kind that dissertation students produce, where we could match student research interests to the needs and timescales of small (or larger!) organisations working directly on the kinds of social issues that are of interest to our Sociology students.

AH: *The Sociology Department is going through a period of renewal and change – and your work adds a significant aspect to these new dynamics. How do you see it connected to other work in the Department and across Warwick?*

HJ: I definitely think it does fit into the history of the Department, and also the future of it as we grow and develop. As you know, the Department has a long tradition of groundbreaking work on race and ethnicity from John Rex (the founder) onwards, and my concerns around research fit into that. I'm also looking at developing a module that focuses on some of that, on Racism and Xenophobia, which would use some of the local, national and colonial archives that we hold at Warwick in the Modern Records Centre, but also looking into the future around how concerns change over time. Of course that course will be able to use some of the work of our eminent colleagues as key readings! I'm thinking particularly of John Solomos, Gurminder Bhambra and Goldie Osuri. Social justice has always been a question within the Department, and the majority of us are thinking about work that relates to social justice in different ways.

Other people within the Department are working on engaged sociology in exciting ways I'm learning from – Cath Lambert, for instance, whose empirical focus (for example on her current AHRC project, 'The Value of Live Art: experience, politics and affect') is quite different to mine, but whose use of 'live', non-traditional methods to consider how artistic practices relate to sociological concerns has lots of parallels to explore. [She is] also developing teaching with Maria do MarPerreira through an interdisciplinary module

on Gendered Knowledges which I think will include a placement in local community activism, as part of the teaching. Alice Mah's work on urban studies and the work she's just starting with Mick Carpenter on Connecting Communities is about looking at Coventry and its history and present, and again that's about relating the past and future of social issues to one another, and in the process building on long-standing concerns and strengths of the Department. There is of course the very strong theory tradition within the Department too, for instance currently with people like Claire Blencowe, Steve Fuller, and Nicholas Gane, and I'm very pleased to be working in a Department where the connections between strong theoretical work and empirical research are embedded. So I'm looking forward to being involved in all of that and how we develop some new and exciting work together!

In the best (re)inventions of Rex's sentiments, Jones' work continues a rigorous analysis of political and social institutions, but with new creative twists that involve bringing attention to emotion as a tool of management in policy and in government. And indeed, as many people living in the UK can attest, a local government practice, such as trash collection (or the lack of it), often involves some strong emotions.

In the coming months there will be more events and opportunities to engage with the research activities in Sociology @ Warwick. For further information about event and the seminar series see: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/news/scd/2013-14/>

References:

Jones, H. (2013) *Negotiating cohesion, inequality and change: Uncomfortable positions in local government*, Bristol: Policy Press

Rex, J. & Mason, D., Eds. (1986) *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Selected further publications by Hannah Jones

Books and Book Chapters

(forthcoming 2014) [with Emma Jackson] (eds) *Stories of Cosmopolitan Belonging: Emotion and Location*. London: Routledge/Earthscan. (In press)

(2013) 'Collaboration and Mutual Support in the Third Sector' in Marjorie Mayo, Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek and Carol Packham (eds) *Community Research for Community Development*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

(2013) [with Jones, V and Camilo Cock, J] 'Impact Measurement or Agenda-Setting?' in Marjorie Mayo, Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek and Carol Packham (eds) *Community Research for Community Development*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

(2012) 'Interview with sociologist Hannah Jones by Ruth Ewan and students from George Mitchell School' in Ruth Ewan, *Liberties of the Savoy*. London: Bookworks and CREATE London.

(2011) 'Negotiating community cohesion', in Alexander, C and James, M (eds) *New Directions, New Voices*, London: Runnymede Trust.

Research and policy reports

(2012) *Seeing the Difference: Measuring the Impact of Small Community Organisations*. London: Goldsmiths, University of London.

(2012) *Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership: Country research report* - United Kingdom. Oxford: COMPAS.

(2011) *What makes hosting relationships work? How large and small organisations support each other in the third sector*. London: Locality.

(2010) *Sustainability reporting matters: the state of sustainability reporting in the public sector*. London: Association of Certified Chartered Accountants.

See also:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/hannahjones/>