

Department News: Autumn 2011

WELCOME

Welcome to the 2011-2012 issue of the Department of Sociology at the University of Aberdeen E-Bulletin!

This bulletin contains information on recent events, publications, research activities, people, news and views from members of the department, presented in an informal and accessible manner. The Department of Sociology continues to be a place where world-class research is conducted on everything from cross-cultural narratives on cosmetic surgery, to achieving compromise after violent political conflict, to the economic and political consequences of globalization and the changing nature of contemporary work and labour markets and many other fascinating subjects!

In this issue we have a “Spotlight On...” Professor Claire Wallace, recently appointed as Vice-Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange, of the University of Aberdeen. We talk with Dr. Chris Kollmeyer, who is just completing a year’s research sabbatical funded by the prestigious Leverhulme Trust. We also have news on forthcoming books written or co-written by members of the department, and a special focus on three of the department’s Research Fellows: Corinne Caumartin, Natascha Mueller-Hirth and Natalka Patsiurko.

I hope this issue will help introduce you to some of the research and people you might not yet know about and I hope you will be as impressed as I am about what they get up to!

General information about the Aberdeen Department of Sociology can be found at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sociology/>.

Enjoy!

Dr. Cristina Flesher Fominaya
October 2011.

RESEARCH FOCUS

This section highlights several pieces of current or recently completed work being undertaken by members of staff. Please feel free to contact individual staff members if you wish to find out more about their work. E-mail addresses are listed on the departmental website.

Spotlight on....

Professor Claire Wallace



Professor Wallace was recently promoted from Director of Research of the College of Social Sciences to Vice-Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange for the University of Aberdeen. This appointment comes as no surprise to anyone who knows her. Professor Wallace is an outstanding researcher who is internationally recognized in a variety of arenas. Professor Wallace is the former president of the *European Sociological Association*, and subsequently Vice President and Treasurer until this month. She is also former editor of the journal *European Societies*. Professor Wallace is co-director of a Summer School for young Ukrainian sociologists in Crimea together with Olga Kutsenko from the University of Kiev and assisted by Svitlana Babenko who was visiting Aberdeen last month on a scholarship from the RSE (Royal Society of Edinburgh). The aim is to train young sociologists from the "New Eastern Europe" (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia

and Georgia) in current sociology. Much of her recent research and publications have centred around work for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, an EU foundation in Dublin where she has been analysing quality of life in Europe using the European Quality of Life Surveys. She has worked on a series of grants with the foundation over the last six years, the most recent one being to look at the quality of life in new accession states: Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey. This involved presenting findings to the officials in those countries. As part of this work, Professor Wallace and Professor Pamela Abbott have developed a new model for measuring quality of life from a sociological perspective. She is presenting this model at the Tech Fest festival in September and at a conference at the University of Leicester on 23rd September. This research has been published as a string of articles in *Social Indicators Research* and the *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Professors Wallace and Abbott will be seeking further funding to develop this model.

Professor Wallace currently directs the New Europe Centre, where she co-ordinates three major research projects:

(1) Work Care Synergies

An international project funded under the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union to disseminate the findings of European projects on work and care. Co-ordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna. The project runs from 1st January 2010 to 31st December 2012. There will be an event in Aberdeen on 15th November, when a film made under the project will be shown (a sort of docudrama) highlighting the role of fathers. Then there is another event in Edinburgh on November 16th at Dynamic Earth followed by a deliberative forum, using the same film as stimulus. The Director of the film will come up to Aberdeen to talk about it. This project builds on two previous projects for the European Commission which Professor Wallace co-ordinated "Households, Work and Flexibility" and "Social Quality in Work, Care and Welfare". She is presenting results from the latter project at the Robert Gordon University on October 26th and writing a book "The Parental Contract in 21st Century Europe" for Palgrave with Pamela Abbott.

(2) ENRI-East (European, National and Regional Identities in Eastern Europe)

Funded under the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union, ENRI-East is an international research effort undertaken by a network of eleven teams embracing more than 50 scientists from ten EU and CIS countries. The research teams work closely together to acquire new knowledge and achieve a deeper understanding of the interplay of European, national and regional identities evolving along the new eastern borders of the European. It focuses upon national

minorities on Europe's Eastern borders. The research looks at 12 ethnic minorities which straddle the Eastern border of the European Union and how their situation has changed in recent years. It draws upon both survey and biographical research. Those working on the project include Dr. Natalka Patsiurko and Andreas Tziarris, an intern, who has just returned to Cyprus. They have prepared 3 papers from this project that they hope to publish in the coming months.

(3) Dot.Rural

The Rural Digital Economy Hub at the University of Aberdeen is aimed at transforming rural areas in the UK using digital technology. Professor Wallace is co-ordinator of one of the four research themes: Enterprise and Culture. The project is funded by the RCUK (a joint UK research council initiative lead by the Engineering and Physical Research Council)

Professor Wallace also sits as expert on the board of a number of research funding bodies around the world, including the research councils of Norway, Finland and Iceland, as well as on the editorial boards of numerous academic journals. As Vice-Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange she will be focusing on research funding and innovation. She will be concentrating her efforts on the following objectives:

- developing a greater European funding profile for Aberdeen
- developing researcher support and training "from post graduate to Vice Principal"
- reviewing the process of research applications "from idea to dissemination" in order to see where it can be facilitated or where blockages might lie
- to exploring the development of a Digital Humanities Hub at Aberdeen.

Despite her many responsibilities and commitments, students are fortunate to benefit from her expertise in the classroom, when she teaches on European Societies at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and as a supervisor of post-graduate research.

More information on the New Europe Centre can be found at:

[tp://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/research/nec/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/research/nec/)

Talking with....

Dr Christopher Kollmeyer, Lecturer in Sociology



Dr. Kollmeyer was appointed lecturer in sociology at the University of Aberdeen in 2006. He holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he was a faculty fellow in the Global and International Studies Program from 2003 to 2005. His interdisciplinary research focuses on the economic and political consequences of globalization and the changing nature of contemporary work and labour markets. He serves as director of the sociology department's MSc in Globalization programme. For the past year he has been engaged in research funded by the prestigious Leverhulme Trust.

1) Chris you are just completing a one year research sabbatical funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Tell us what you have been up to over the past year?

A portion of my time was spent looking at recent structural changes in society, especially those related to globalization, and examining whether they're undermining the quality of democratic governance in Western societies. Here the main aim was to gain insight into the paradox that, at the historical moment when democracy has become the dominant form of governance around the world, many citizens in the world's oldest democracies are losing faith in its ability to create fair and just societies. This work was mainly theoretical and produced two outputs, a journal article in *Research in Political Sociology* and a chapter in a book edited by Professor Roland Robertson.

However, most of my time was spent on the topic of income inequality. Among other issues, I was attempting to understand why inequality has risen so much in Britain and the United States but not in other similar countries. Presently, the UK and US have levels of inequality that are more similar to less developed countries than to their counterparts in Scandinavia and Continental Europe.

2) What drew you to this area of research?

I was drawn into this line of research for a couple of reasons. First, my work on globalization and democracy naturally pulled me in this direction, in part because many scholars believe that globalization is making it difficult for the democratic state to redistribute income from the rich to the rest of society, and hence causing more inequality. This idea got me thinking about income inequality as a general indicator of the democratic nature of given societies. Second, this area is one in which sociologists, political scientists, and economists have made equal contributions. I've always been drawn to those topics situated at the intersection of these three disciplines. And third, recent empirical advances have made high quality data on this topic readily available. The Luxembourg Income Study and the World Top Incomes Database now have data going back decades on a variety of countries. This allows researchers to empirically test long-standing theoretical explanations for changing income distributions.

3) What does your methodological approach allow you to do that another approach wouldn't?

My methodological approach centres on two steps. The first step is theoretical. Where possible, I try to draw connections between classic social theory and the contemporary empirical phenomenon I'm researching. One of the reasons why economists haven't dominated research on income inequality is that income inequality is only partially determined by markets. It also determined by social institutions, such as trade unions, political processes, family structures, and so on. In addition to Marx and Weber, I find the theoretical work of Karl Polanyi very useful in this regard.

The second step, of course, is empirical. I've assembled a massive dataset on income inequality and a whole host of other economic, political, and social structures. The dataset covers 18 democratic countries and, in some cases, goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. With this data, I use statistical modelling techniques used by economists to try to find patterns of association that may (or may not) match up with sociological explanations.

4) How does this research further our sociological understanding of contemporary society?

The main finding of my research is that, over the 20th century, societies with market economies have developed three main institutions to protect themselves from the vagaries of markets. These institutions are the democratic welfare state, trade unions, and the family. In countries where these institutions have remained strong (i.e. Sweden and Austria), income inequality has remained relatively low over recent decades. But in countries where these institutions have weakened (i.e.

UK and US), income inequality has risen substantially. Oddly, at least according to my findings, the globalization of the economy has little to do with recent changes in inequality, at least not directly. Overall, my general findings highlight the important role that social institutions play in moderating inequality in 00capitalist societies. This is one of Polanyi's main ideas.

5) What are your current and future research plans?

For this line of research, I currently have four journal articles that are either under review or almost finished. Once these works are finished, my plan is to start a book on the topic. This will allow me to look in depth at the historical experiences of the US and the UK.

Pure, unadulterated research:

Many visitors to our department are unaware that behind some of the closed doors along the corridors, intensive research is taking place by our outstanding **RESEARCH FELLOWS**, three of whom we highlight here. These scholars devote themselves full time to research, and are producing innovative work with high social impact, thus making an important contribution to the department and to sociology.

Corinne Caumartin



I came to Aberdeen in March 2011 to join the Leverhulme 'compromise after conflict' research project. I hold a PhD in Politics from Queen Mary (University of London) and worked as a researcher both at the department of International development and the Latin American Centre at the University of Oxford. My research to date has focused on development, conflict and post conflict processes, including security reform in Panama as well as violence, ethnicity and transitional justice in Latin America in general and Guatemala in particular.

My research for the 'compromise' project centres on truth commissions, currently a staple-but contested, component of transitional justice and peace building packages. By analysing witness testimonies in official and non-official truth commissions, the research looks beyond official discourses of reconciliation to examine the interplay between compromise, historical memory and truth seeking.

My most recent publications include:

How Can the Law help Reduce Group based Inequalities? *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol 39, No2, June 2011.

With Graham K. Brown, Arnim Langer and Frances Stewart. Addressing Horizontal Inequalities in Post-Conflict Reconstruction. Aguilar and Gomez Isa, *Rethinking Transitions, Equality and Social Justice in Societies Emerging from Conflict*, Intersentia, 2011

With Graham K. Brown: Horizontal Inequalities in Post Conflict Reconstruction: Guatemala and Nepal in Aguilar and Gomez Isa, *Rethinking Transitions, Equality and Social Justice in Societies Emerging from Conflict*, Intersentia, 2011.

With Diego Sanchez-Ancochea: Explaining a Contradictory Record: The Case of Guatemala. in Arnim Langer, Frances Stewart and Rajesh Venugopal (ed), "*Post-Conflict Resolution and Horizontal Inequalities*", Palgrave, MacMillan (2011/forthcoming).

Natascha Mueller-Hirth

I am a development sociologist whose research has focused on the role of NGOs and civil society in development. I gained my PhD in Sociology from Goldsmiths, University of London, examining transformations in South African NGOs in the neoliberal Post-Apartheid era. During this time, I was based as a visiting researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand's Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) in Johannesburg. I also hold a MA in Social Research (2005) and an MA in Transnational Communications (2003) from Goldsmiths.



In September 2010, I started working for the University of Aberdeen as Research Fellow for the research programme 'Compromise after Conflict' - a major multinational study on the development of compromise amongst victims of political violence in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka. I am responsible for the South African project, exploring issues of victimhood, truth recovery and transitional justice. Before joining the department, I taught at Aston University in Birmingham, at the Open University in London and at Goldsmiths. Other research interests include the sociology of climate change and carbon trading, and the intersection of transitional justice, social justice and development. I regularly contribute to blogs on South African politics and society and have appeared on Al Jazeera's 'Inside Story' on the South African local elections. I have published in *Social Dynamics* and have contributed to national and international conferences. My translation into English of writings by Rosa Luxemburg has been published (Schuetrumpf, Joern, ed. (2008) *Rosa Luxemburg, or: The Price of Freedom*. Berlin: Dietz).

My current research involves interviews with victims of gross human rights violations under the Apartheid regime. Democratic South Africa, perhaps more than any other post-conflict setting, is regularly portrayed as an example of a society that has successfully dealt with past human rights violations. However, this narrative of reconciliation can betray the ongoing experiences of victimhood in Post-Apartheid society, especially given the country's developmental challenges of inequality, poverty and service delivery. The research seeks to better understand the experiences of victims many years after the transition, by acknowledging the broader context of uneven development in the democratic era, examining the impact of victim empowerment policies and theoretically exploring the intersection of transitional justice, citizenship and development studies. This research project forms part of the Leverhulme-funded multi-national research programme on 'Compromise after Conflict', which explores compromise as a social practice in post-conflict settings such as South Africa, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka.

Mueller-Hirth, N. (2009). 'South African NGOs and the public sphere: between popular movements and partnerships for development'. *Social Dynamics*, vol 35, no. 2, pp. 423-435.

Natalka Patsiurko



Natalka Patsiurko works with Professor Claire Wallace in the EC FP-7 *ENRI-East* project, investigating minority identities in eight Eastern European countries in the new border regions of the EU. The project examines interplay of regional, national and ethnic identities among minorities in Eastern Europe, their civil society participation and political mobilization. The research finds that distinct historical paths of minority development, their re-divisions between several states in the post-war Eastern Europe, and their varying levels of integration into post-communist nation-states create distinct patterns of territorial, national and political attachments that cannot be easily encompassed into a single notion of 'Eastern European minority identities'. The project is innovative in creating a comparative-snap shot of identity changes in contemporary Eastern Europe, based on applied sociological research in minority communities. The team is already presenting the first project results in several international conferences.

Natalka received her doctoral degree at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, where she examined recent illegal labour migration from Ukraine to Southern Europe. Her areas of interest include informal economies in post-communist societies, labour migration and migration policies, and nationalism and identity in Eastern Europe.

"Ethnic Fractionalization: Methodological Dilemmas for the Advanced Countries", co-authored with J.L. Campbell and J.A. Hall, article forthcoming in *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2011.

Cultural Sociology at University of Aberdeen

Cultural Sociology has been consolidating itself as a particular strength of the department over the past few years. Four members of staff work in the area of cultural sociology (Andrew Blaikie, Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Debra Gimlin, and David Inglis), which in a medium sized department, makes it an important area of concentration. Innovation comes from the combination of a cultural approach with other sociological approaches in their work (historical, medical, sociology of the body, aging, sex, globalization, memory, identity and political sociology). The strength of the department in this area is further evidenced by the publication of the journal *Cultural Sociology*, founded and edited by Professors Andrew Blaikie and David Inglis. This year, the department launches a new *Masters of Science (MSC) in Cultural Sociology* degree, directed by Professor Inglis as part of its existing strong offering in postgraduate degrees in Sociology. For more information on the department's postgraduate degree programmes see: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sociology/current/postgraduate/index.php>

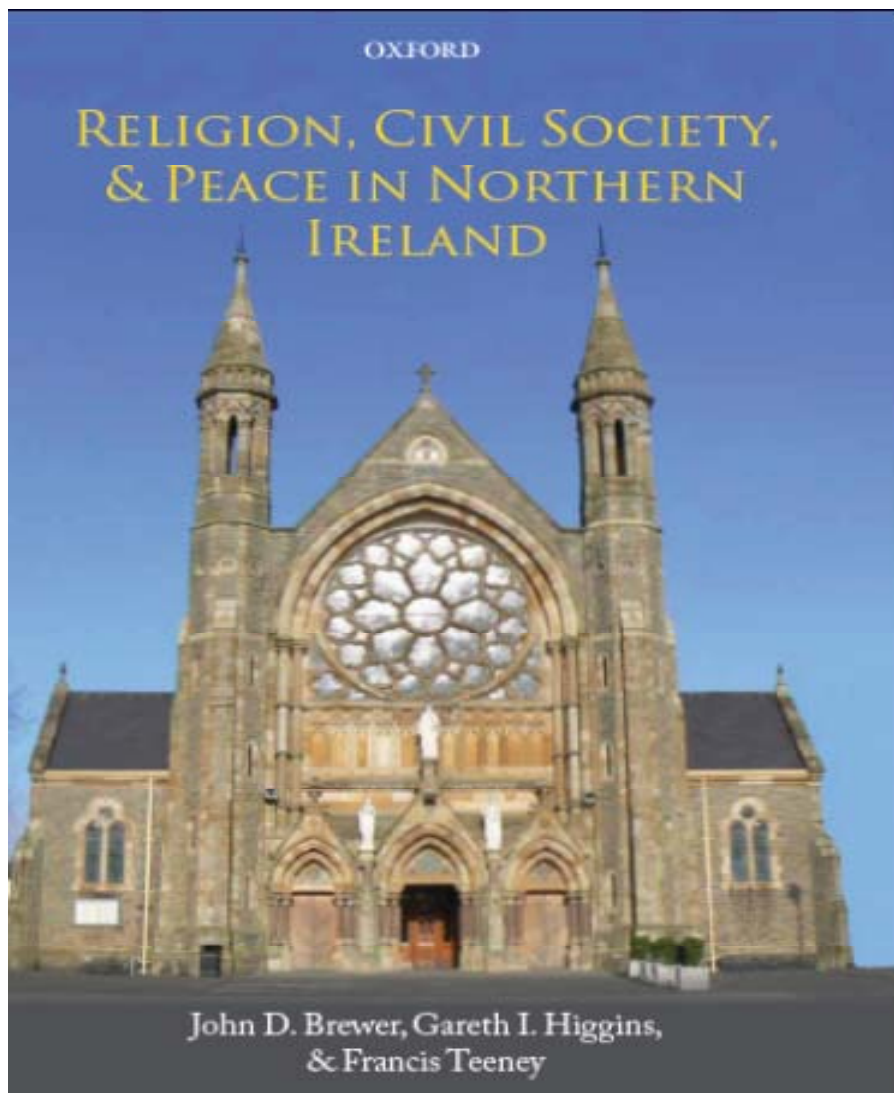
For more information on the journal *Cultural Sociology*, see: <http://intl-cus.sagepub.com/>

Forthcoming books from members of the Department of Sociology, Aberdeen

Religion, Civil Society and Peace in Northern Ireland, by John Brewer, Gareth Higgins and Francis Teeney, published by Oxford University Press, December 2011.

This book develops a theoretical framework for cross national comparative research of religious peacebuilding, which is then applied to Northern Ireland's peace process.

John Brewer has given talks on toleration, religion and coexistence in Dublin and Houston Texas in September 2011, and in January he gives the fourth in a series of peacebuilding workshops for civil society groups in Sri Lanka.



Cosmetic Surgery Narratives: A Cross-National Comparison of Women's Accounts, by Debra Gimlin, published by Palgrave MacMillan and due out in 2012.



In this compelling book, Gimlin draws from repertoire theory and the literature on linguistic accounting to examine cross- and intra-national differences in British and American women's narratives of cosmetic surgery. She critically addresses the competing feminist positions on aesthetic operations, as represented by the many authors who criticise it as a tool of macro-level patriarchal forces and those who instead emphasise women's individual and, at times, empowering experience of the practice. Moving beyond the feminist debate, the book focuses not upon *either* individuals' experiences *or* large-scale structures, but instead upon the links between women's beliefs and practices and the social contexts that shape them. Gimlin argues that the meanings attached to aesthetic surgery – and ultimately, its personal and social significance – are culturally and historically specific; that any society's healthcare environment (which is itself informed by a particular set of values) fosters both understandings of the body and its management and the social meanings of cosmetic surgery; and that the vocabularies used to account for aesthetic procedures reflect distinctive sets of cultural 'tool-kits' made available by specific national settings.

NEWS

Retirement:



Dr. Chris Wright

1971 was a memorable year. It was that year that the British House of Commons voted for UK entry into the Common Market. It was also that year that Rolls Royce went bankrupt and became a part of nationalised industry. A 50 day postal strike crippled mail deliveries across the country.

More important than these economic and industrial developments was the appointment of the fresh-faced Dr. Chris Wright to a Lectureship in Sociology at the University of Aberdeen. Chris had just completed a PhD at the University of Durham. In so doing he was shifting from one major site of sociological activity in the UK to another.

Now, some 40 years after, Chris has retired from the department and the University. His working life has seen eight Prime Ministers come and go, trailing the widest possible array of industrial (and post-industrial) policies with them, from the statism of the 70s to the neo-liberalism of the noughties and beyond. This is significant as, for 40 years, both man and boy, taught the sociology of work and industry to several generations of undergraduate students. As the nature of work changed over the years, often dramatically, so Chris offered students a rare understanding of the intricacies and complexities of workplace life. More than that, he brought a vivid, sometimes trenchant but always good-humoured and kind-natured, sociological imaginary to bear in analysing the changing nature of the world of the worker.

It is impossible to overstate the contribution Chris has made to the department of sociology over the last four decades. His always lively teaching of undergraduate courses; his supervision of a very wide range of PhD students, many of whom have gone on to successful careers in academia and without; his volunteering to run events for prospective students – all of these and more point to his multi-faceted contribution as the team player par excellence. Not for him the selfish retreat into the study, or the denigration of teaching as somehow inferior to research. Yet he also pursued an impressive portfolio of original research in the sociology of work, culminating in a much-cited study of safety (or lack thereof) in the oil industry.

It's not just generations of students who have reason to feel gratitude and affection for Chris – it is successive heads of departments too. As one former HoD liked to say, “no-one ever volunteered for more teaching apart from Chris Wright!”. The generosity and collegiality that Chris has displayed over the years has been truly outstanding.

As Chris moves – somewhat grudgingly, it has to be said, given his love of all things pedagogic – into the phase of working life we might call post-industrial (AKA retirement), I think I can speak for both current and past members of the Department when we say: WE LOVE YOU CHRIS!

You are a great sociologist, a great teacher, a great guy. And we reconcile ourselves to the fact that that great course, the Sociology of Work and Industry, is no longer running, with the thought that you'll continue to play an active role in the department still. After all, where would be without your quips and Les Dawson-style bons mots? We're sure you'll have a piquant response to that question...

(David Inglis)

Promotions/Appointments:

Dr. Debra Gimlin was appointed to the position of Director of Research and Knowledge Transfer for the School of Social Sciences.

Dr. John Bone was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 2011.

Other news:

Dr. Rhoda Wilkie's recent book "Livestock/Deadstock", published by Temple University Press has been awarded two prestigious academic prizes:

The British Sociological Association's Philip Abrams Memorial Prize in April 2011; which is awarded for the 'best first sole-authored book within the discipline of Sociology': <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/publications/PAM.htm>

The Award for Distinguished Scholarship in the Animals and Society Section of the American Sociological Association, 2011

Sociology at Aberdeen tops National Student Survey results

The National Student Survey is open to all final year undergraduate students across the UK to complete each year. It assesses how satisfied students are with the teaching they received in their degree programmes. The 2011 results have just been announced.

We are delighted to say that Sociology at Aberdeen has achieved exceptionally high satisfaction ratings. The overall student satisfaction rate for the department was 97%, placing the department 5th out of 86 universities teaching sociology across the UK. This exceptionally high satisfaction rate reflects, we believe, not just the quality of our teaching but the dedication and commitment of both individual members of staff and the Department as a whole to the undergraduate curriculum. The results indicate that we offer one of the best undergraduate degrees in Sociology in the UK. We will continue to hone the degree to make it as good as it possibly can be. We are totally committed to our undergraduate programme, and we very much strive to live up to the noble aims and fine ideals of the best Scottish university tradition.

For other **news and updates** about department members activities, please see our news pages, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sociology/news/> which are updated regularly by academic staff members.