

# **Sexual Stories go to Westminster**

Narratives of Sexual Citizens/Outsiders in Britain

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## Abstract

'Sexual citizenship' is relatively a new term, which emerged in recent decades with gay and lesbian demands for 'equal rights' with heterosexuals. Rather than taking the concept of sexual citizenship as given, this thesis investigates the conditions of its emergence and the process of its making by focusing on 'stories' of/about homosexuals or homosexualities, which have been circulated, debated and represented in the British parliament. I analyse these stories at three different moments in time: during debates on the Sexual Offences Act in the 1960s; Section 28 of the Local Government Act in the 1980s; and the Civil Partnership Act in the 2000s. In particular, I explore the gradual coming-out of what Scott calls, 'the evidence of experience' in the debates, which, in the form of personal stories, has become an important way of (re)presenting/relating evidence of the 'truth' of homosexual identities, linked in turn to the idea of their rights/rightness. A number of questions guide my inquiry. What are the conditions upon which a (sexual) story's access to the political arena is authorised (or rejected)? Who tells stories or whose stories are told? What 'problems' do stories recount? How are personal sexual stories publicly represented and contested in parliament? What moral and political effects do these stories have on political claims about sexual rights and responsibilities? In addressing these questions, I explore the complexity of stories' journey from personal to political in the sexual citizenship making process, which entails not just a transition from non-recognition to recognition, but also a process of exclusion and misappropriation whereby stories, in the process of becoming public narrative, are often rigidified and formalised, producing stereotypical/fixed 'facts' and 'moral' points. In analysing this problematic process by which sexual stories enter into a public and national political domain, and make their case for the recognition of sexual rights in Britain, I hope to shed light on the more general question of what it means to be a recognised (or recognisable) sexual citizen in contemporary Britain.



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## Declaration

I certify that the thesis is solely my own work and no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted for another degree or professional qualification.

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# Chapter 1

## **Introduction**

### *1.1 Stories and Journeys*

#### **1995: Juhyun**

As an overseas student, I first came across issues around gay and lesbian movements in 1995 when I heard stories about the London Pride march where around two hundred thousand people rallied together in Victoria Park. One of my Korean friends commented on this story derisively: ‘nowadays you can only find political radicalism in Britain either in gay and lesbian rights movements or animal rights movements’. What I understood by his sarcasm was that these two issues were too trivial to be considered social movements. One is too personal and individualistic – it is perhaps too personal because it is ‘sexual’ – and the other one is perhaps too apolitical and socially irrelevant. I remember I was silent then.

At that time, so-called ‘sexual difference’ was never been an issue for me. The word itself was not even in my vocabulary. So



natural was the story (the fact) about 'we-heterosexuals' heard in South Korea, that the word, gay or lesbian, first appeared strange and mysterious belonging only to a culture called Western. I remember that I understood the story I heard about people who were publicly and politically voicing support for their sexual difference in Britain in 1995 as a 'fact' of cultural difference. And as a 'fact' of cultural 'difference', the strangeness found in sexual difference posed no more or less a problem than a lot of other culturally-specific strangeness I found in U.K.

By understanding the story of sexual difference as a fact of cultural difference, I distanced myself safely from the story I heard in 1995. I recognized that the story had nothing to do with me. My detachment from the story, however, was accomplished with an ambiguity; for, in hearing a remote story of the Western, I found myself wandering into my own experience, and felt that I was, for some reason, connected to the story through my intimate relationship with a woman – a relationship I could not then find a name to describe. I suppose that this ambivalent feeling of both detachment from and connectedness to the story I heard of the gay and lesbian Pride march explains why I was silent on hearing my friend's derisive comment on gay and lesbian movements. I didn't know how to respond.

This feeling of ambivalence continued, and I found that hearing non-heterosexual stories of any kind became a frustrating experience. It was particularly painful to watch American daytime television talk shows such as *The Jerry Springer show* and *The Ricki Lake Show*, which were wildly popular even in Britain since the mid-1990s. Their guests, if I mention just a few, frequently featured drag kings, drag queens, gay teenagers, lesbian transsexuals, lesbian mothers, gay fathers, bisexual couples, transsexuals and their girl/boy friends, cross-dressing lesbians, same-sex married

couples and so on. Their deep secrets and 'peculiar' stories of intimate/sexual life experience told in the public space of national television were jeered and booed by audiences and followed by the words of experts who quickly fixed guests' intimate/sexual troubles. I often watched these shows in the dining room with my Asian friends. Unsurprisingly, most of them seemed to be bewildered as well as disgusted by what they watched. At one time, one of my friends, I remember, said that he wanted to change the channel, because he felt sick of hearing these freaky stories. He frowned and said, "Oh, I hate these Western perverts. I don't understand why we are watching this nonsense. It's not good for our mental health". We let him change the channel.

Why on earth do these 'perverts' tell their weird sexual stories on national television, I wondered. And how could they tell these stories in the first place? I remember that I always used various unintelligible, idiosyncratic 'metaphors', 'signs', or 'words' to describe my sexual experience with a woman in my diary: nobody (including me), I thought, could understand what precisely I meant by them. But how else could it be described? My intimate relationship with a woman was an unsayable part of my life. Experiencing it and telling a story about it were two different things for me. And telling a comprehensible story about it in public, in the presence of others who would talk back to your experience, was an impossibility. My experience was purely the private, which drew upon no one else's experience and found no context to be told. My sexual experience could not find its expression in stories.

So, how was it possible for these Western others to tell their claimed 'real' sexual stories, to publicise them, and to talk back to audiences and other guests who ridiculed and laughed at their stories? I was interested in this question, not because I felt my sexual experience remained radically different from theirs, but



because their stories forced me to question my own disturbing sexual experience, to recount my idiosyncratic memory, to 'name' my experience as they did, and to feel the need to reflect upon (or even tell) my own 'real' sexual story – the story I did not possess. Hearing their stories provoked in me a desire for some integration between my imaginary, untold stories and the stories of these Western others. At the same time, however, it was clear that there was an instantly recognisable danger of such a storytelling. Private stories that cross the boundaries of the public are open to the interpretation and evaluative judgements of the listeners. The ways in which guests aggressively interrupted each other's telling, audiences hurled insults at guests, professionals imposed 'correct' meaning on sexual stories they heard, the strangeness/oddness found in sexual stories became the means of public entertainment, and my friends' angry refusal to hear 'Western nonsense', made me realise all too clearly that these 'freaky' sexual stories, told in the daytime talk shows, provoked far more hatred/denigration than an invitation for understanding and empathy. Indeed, the recognition of myself in the Western 'freaks' and my potential story in their publicly 'unwelcome' stories led all too readily into shame and guilt, pushing me back to the safe world of my private secrets. Once again, their stories could not (and should not) be my story, not simply because of a fact of cultural difference, but because of the likelihood that my untold sexual story, perhaps identified in their told stories, would be demeaned, disparaged, unshared, corrected and refused. I could not bear the burden of shame – the price that, I thought, I should pay for discovering and telling of the ghastly experience of radical foreignness/otherness found in me.



## **1999: Research Project**

Through my experience of anxiety and ambivalence associated with sexual storytelling/listening, I have become increasingly interested in conditions under which one can (cannot) tell 'certain' personal stories; in the inter-personal relationships formed around one's storytelling and listening; in the contested social/public field in which one's stories are enacted or shadowed; in the complex interplay between one's private stories and their public meaning; and therefore, in the suppression, discovery, and the transformation of one's stories within one's personal network and the wider social world.

It was also with this interest I began to wonder why I had never heard stories of 'homosexual experience' in South Korea. The year I heard about the London Pride march in 1995, South Korea's London Embassy proudly announced that: 'Homosexuality is rare in Korea and for this reason it has not been necessary to frame laws relating to it' (IOC, 1995). Homosexuality was perhaps rare in Korea because one seldom told/heard stories of 'homosexual experience' in South Korea. Or it was, as I discovered later, rare, because if one told a story of same-sex experience in terms of 'homosexuality', one told within a carefully negotiated network of secrecy where one still remained publicly invisible and unrecognisable.

In the face of what did not appear (or what was not there) in South Korea, I wondered what it was 'really' like for western (sexual) 'others' to tell their stories of being or becoming gays and lesbians in Britain. Coming-out, as I literally understood, meant coming out to the public with sexual/intimate matters which are private. Further, these private sexual/intimate matters were viewed by many as involving perverse and unnatural ways of being/living, which should be, therefore, hidden away from the public. I then wondered what

made some (or many) individuals in Britain come out to others as gays or lesbians, resisting the abnormality linked to their sexual experience.

In 1999, I decided to do research on gay/lesbian 'coming out' stories in Britain as part of my BA research project, and started searching the internet, reading a number of different (and also similar) coming-out stories told by gay men and lesbian women living in Britain. I eventually dropped the project, however. In reading stories of coming-out, I found myself searching for stories that could explain my sexual experience. I was preoccupied with finding the meaning of what I had done, and what it could mean here in Britain. Some stories, I felt, provided me a means with which I could redefine my relationship with a 'friend' as something 'different' – different from a pure friendship – and re-imagine myself as someone 'different' – different from the heterosexual. For the first time in my life, I was consciously reflecting upon my deviation through the concept, 'sexuality difference'. The more I thought about their stories of coming-out, the more they made me think that I perhaps could be a 'lesbian'.

It was, as I remember, also around this time, I was asked by an Asian friend if I was a lesbian. I did not know why he asked me that question. I did not ask him why he asked me such a question: I was afraid what he might say then. But another friend of mine quickly responded to his question with a voice of anger, and said, 'It's too much!'. I did not know what she precisely meant by 'too much'. Was she saying that I was 'not' a lesbian? Was she simply blaming him for being direct? Or was she saying that I was 'close' to be a lesbian, but not a lesbian? Then I quickly realised I was perhaps crossing the line 'too much'. I had perhaps talked too much about my project, about my interest in gay and lesbian stories, or about coming-out stories that I had read and heard. I had perhaps shown my affection



for a 'special friend' too much. Or I had perhaps questioned myself too much, and consciously or unconsciously behaved differently.

His question made me worried for many days, and I could not even focus on my work, including the project I was working on. In the end, I dropped the project. It was not difficult to understand why I was so affected by his question. I was worried then. I felt anxiety. Being/becoming sexually different felt like I was being/becoming a stranger to the familiar. Crossing the line felt as if I would no longer find a natural home, located close enough to be surrounded by my family, friends, and the community where I once belonged. In reading coming-out stories of others, I felt the suffering and grief their acts of coming-out caused to their family and friends. I did not want to be a cause of pain to my parents and friends. I could not take the risk of becoming a stranger to them. I thought I had to somehow live (or at least pretend to live) the heterosexual life, which was already there, given and safe. And I came back to Korea.

### **2003: Parang**

It was a strange experience being at home. I found out that living where I used to live and being Juhyun who I used to be did not necessarily mean that I was 'being at home'. If home meant being in one's place where one feels 'most comfortable and familiar' (Ahmed, 2000: 84), I was not at home in 'being at home'. I had lived away from home so many years. In returning home, I brought the memories of being away from home, the curiosity and doubt about myself, with me. And instead of finding comfort in what was already safely given at home, I was, for some reason, distressed with the familiarity of home. Home was lived as a discontinuity between the past and the present, and it was lived as a tension between my two names.



I had lived as Parang since 2003. Parang means 'blue' in Korean. It is my 'chosen' name. No-one in my family knows that I have such a name, however. Neither do the friends with whom I went to school or those who meet me at work call me Parang: they only know me as Juhyun.

Parang is the name that connects me to many lesbians in Korea, however. Most of them only know me as Parang, and I only know them as 'Tree', 'Ginger' 'Snail', 'Moon', 'Ninety' and so on. We do not ask each other what our 'given' names are; for we know our two names do not cross the boundary that divides different sides of our lives in Korea. I am, as Juhyun, read as being a heterosexual. And I am, as Parang, read as being a closeted lesbian.

The experience of having two names is common for those who inhabit two different communities in South Korea. Communities are experienced as having rigid boundaries of belonging for each name. And although my body inhabits two different communities, my names do not cross the boundaries. If I were recognised as being Parang in the heterosexual world, I would lose my place recognised in society as Juhyun. I experience my two names as being mutually exclusive. At home, as I still find, there does not seem to be a meeting point between the two.

The year I started having two names was also the year my parents started to pressure me to get married. For them, I was already becoming too old for marriage. They were anxious about my age. I was 31, and my parents thought that I should have had a child by that age. But it was also around this time I began to hear stories of same-sex relationships being increasingly recognised in western societies. With the stories of gay and lesbian couples gaining legal recognition in many western societies, I also came across the words, 'sexual rights' and 'sexual citizenship'. Many Korean lesbian

women whom I met through the internet in 2003 introduced me into a 'safe' way of being/becoming a lesbian; I learned I could be/become a lesbian as Parang in South Korea. But the phrase, 'the sexual citizen' seemed to suggest to me that I did not need to be a lesbian in such a way. 'Sexual citizen' came close in cultivating an image in which the sides of my life as Parang were merged with the life of Juhyun. The term, sexual citizen seemed to be 'the' point where my two names could possibly meet, resolving the dilemma that involved a splitting of Parang and Juhyun.

In the emerging notion of 'sexual citizenship' that emphasises the idea of 'belonging' and 'participation', I imagined collective subjectivities in which one finds one's lived stories of sexual difference are safely integrated with others', making their case for public recognition within the broad intersubjective world of citizens. The civilised word, citizenship and citizen, neutralised my feeling of fear around sexual difference. The word, I felt, was about 'us', including sexual others/strangers in the way that 'we' did not need to feel as strangers/others any more in society. After all, it was, I expected, possible to be (or to become) an 'I' as Juhyun – the name familiar to my family, friends, neighbours, and to the community to which I thought I belonged. I was excited about the word, 'sexual citizen', and I became interested in stories of western 'sexual citizens', not as Juhyun in 1995 or Parang in 2003, but as a potential sexual citizen who hoped for a just inclusion of Parang as Juhyun. I came back to Britain in 2003, and started PhD research on 'sexual citizenship' in Britain.

## **2005: Lilly and Mo**

I met Lilly and Mo in 2005.<sup>1</sup> Mo was a 63-year-old white British

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1. I met Lilly and Mo (pseudonyms) at a *Gay and Grey with Dignity*



lesbian woman who described herself as working class. Her partner, Lilly, was 66 and identified her class as 'working class origins, quite poor, educated into middle class but don't fit in'. Both had been married for about twenty years before they came out as lesbians. Mo, like most married women of her age and class, never managed to gain secure employment, and was living on basic state pension and benefits. Lilly, however, was trained as a teacher and had worked in various occupations including teaching until she retired, and this left her a better pension income compared to Mo. In the face of inequalities of income and status, Mo and Lilly had developed 'little strategies to keep the relationship equal'. Lilly told me that:

I feel one of the things about marriage is that a lot of women, particularly when they have children, are totally dependent on their husbands financially, and the relationship alters. There's a real power thing.... I've always felt proud that our relationship really is two individuals who're committing to be together, not that one is dependent on the other. And there are ways we've done it like, I have more access to a little bit more money than Mo,...but one of the ways we've adjusted that is that Mo takes charge of money we put aside every week for housekeeping. Mo's in charge of that, so I'm in a way dependent on her (Lilly, 66).

Mo and Lilly, however, worried that the dynamic of their relationship would soon be changed with the Civil Partnership Act being introduced in Britain. After December 5th in 2005, they said, same-sex partners would be treated like married couples in Britain. And one of the ways in which they would be treated on a par with

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*Conference* in Scarborough in April 2005. After the conference, I had a chance to talk to them about my research project, and they kindly allowed me to interview them for their thoughts on the Civil Partnership Bill, and to include their stories in this dissertation. I had originally intended to include their stories as well as stories of 12 other lesbian women whom I interviewed in 2005 in the thesis, but as the parliamentary stories subsequently became my main focus of analysis, I decided not to do so. Here, I wish to express my deep thanks to all for sharing their stories with me.



heterosexual couples was that they, like married/or cohabiting heterosexual partners, would be 'jointly' assessed for means-tested benefits such as income support, housing benefits or council tax benefit.<sup>2</sup> According to Mo, this change would put her in an unwanted position as she would be, in both financial and emotional terms, dependent on Lilly. Mo said:

As our fortunes have gone up and down, we've managed to work out how neither of us is too dependent on the other for money. But after this [Civil Partnership Act], and because of the benefits I will lose, I will now be financially dependent on Lilly. Suddenly, the next big problem is – I get free dental treatment, because I receive benefits, I get free – I have to ask Lilly. "Can I get my teeth done?" You know, this is what's wrong with marriage. Heterosexual women really have a rough time because they are kept in a position of asking all the time. They should have copied us. It should be that married couples should be treated as two individuals.

According to *The Underpensioned: Women*, the report published by Pension Policy Institute (PPI) in 2004, married women in the U.K are more likely to work part time because of their caring

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2. With the Civil Partnership Act being introduced in Britain, those who receive state benefits but live as if they were civil partners – live as if they were married/cohabiting couples – may no longer be able to claim state benefits; for they will be seen as the dependent of their partners. As MP. Jane Griffiths (Labour), during the House of Commons debates on the Civil Partnership Act in parliament in 2004, tells the story:

It should not be forgotten that gay and lesbian couples are not treated as households for the purpose of benefits entitlement. When I introduced my Bill [Jane Griffith's Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill] I had letters from several people in same-sex partnerships who said that they were claiming benefit because they could. Their partners could afford all the household expenses, but my correspondents claimed housing benefit because they could. That is wrong. Benefits should be paid because they are needed, not because someone can claim them. That is the sort of anomaly that should disappear when the Bill [Civil Partnership Bill] becomes law, as I fervently hope it will (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col. 204).



responsibilities (80% of part timers are women), and have low earning incomes (PPI, 2004). Rather than, however, being recognized as an individual who is entitled to have full welfare rights, a married woman is treated as a dependant of her husband who is responsible for her 'within the limits of his own income', reinforced by 'less eligibility of welfare programmes' (Davis, 2004: 42). Not only has this idea, which is integrated in the current welfare system in Britain, affected 'the identities of men and women of the middle class' but also this has been 'the model of aspiration for members of the working class as well' (42). And the Civil partnership Act modelled upon 'marriage' is not free from this class as well as gender biased state regulation of marriage. Mo, illustrating this point, also said:

Whoever has thought this [Civil Partnership Act] through, there are far more women who are living below the poverty line and who are living on the state benefits than there are men. So it's obviously women who are going to lose out.

Mo and Lilly said that they did not want to register for Civil Partnership. This was not simply because they would be disadvantaged in material terms by being considered as a valid couple by the state. As Mo's state benefits might be taken away with the Civil Partnership Act coming into force in Britain, they worried that their equal relationship, which they had been so proud of, would be taken away too.

When I heard their stories, something Eskridge suggested came to my mind. In his book, *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage: From Sexual Liberty to Civilized Commitment*, William Eskridge asserts that 'equal marriage rights will civilize both the lesbian and gay community' and dismantle gendered role divisions inherent in marriage. This is because: 'the old-fashioned marriage of breadwinner husband and housekeeper wife cannot be replicated by same-sex couples; at least one of the husbands will be a

housekeeper, and at least one of the wives will be a breadwinner' (Eskridge, 1996: 9). If this is what Eskridge finds significant in the same-sex marriage rights – that is to say, at least one of our lesbian wives will be a breadwinner – this was what Mo feared the most. She would be dependent on her lesbian wife who would become a breadwinner. Her story made me realise that citizenship, in an unequal world, might not always bring positive benefits. The prevalent ideas of sexual citizenship and rights, mobilised around civil partnership registration are for her not the markers of inclusion, but exclusion.

### **2007: Thesis**

This thesis, I initially hoped, was about the stories of 'belonging'. In searching for what it could mean 'to belong' to a shared community as a sexual citizen, I came to Britain in 2003, and embarked upon this project. By coming to Britain, I hoped to explore the ways in which the meaning of 'sexual citizenship' had involved the creation of a community, in which sexual minorities (or sexual others/strangers) in Britain were recognised and accepted as citizens.

There are, however, as I have gradually found, many different stories of belonging. And one's story of 'belonging' and 'inclusion' as a sexual citizen was often inseparably bound up with the story of 'estrangement' and 'exclusion' of the other. My search for what it is to 'belong' as a sexual citizen in Britain has gradually entailed the other: what it is to be 'recognised' as a sexual stranger or other, and to be, therefore, 'excluded' from the politics of citizenship. My interest has become less in how stories of 'belonging', which I expected to hear in Britain now, differ from the stories of 'exclusion' of the past, but the interplay between the two, which has constituted



and is constituting opposing potentialities of being (or becoming) sexual citizens/others in Britain. This is how I 'now' understand the journey I have taken to write this dissertation.

## *1.2 About this Thesis*

As Fraser and Gordon argue, citizenship is not merely a word, but a powerful humanistic term: 'Citizen and citizenship are powerful words. They speak of respect, or rights, of dignity....We find no pejorative uses. It is a weighty, monumental, humanist word' (Fraser, & Gordon, 1994: 90). Yet, it is, as I have found, ironic that such a humanist word has, at the same time, constantly evoked a widespread anxiety over its exclusionary sense. For example, referring to the term 'second-class citizens', frequently used in reflecting the exclusive nature of citizenship in contemporary liberal democracies, Vogel argues that:

This [second-class citizen] is a curious term. It suggests that membership of a political community is both universal and hierarchically ordered. The lower ranks in this order will typically include ethnic minorities, immigrants, poor and disabled people, and women. As far as the law is concerned, the individuals belonging to such groups are recognized as full members of the community. Yet, they are, in many important respects, treated as if they were not (Vogel, 1994: 76).

This paradox around citizenship as the source of both belonging and exclusion is taken as a starting point for discussion in this thesis. The community imagined through the word 'citizenship' – like the community imagined through the word 'nation' – transcends boundaries of difference: it creates, in the minds of individuals, the image of abstract, imagined, collective subjectivities that embodies 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1991: 6-7). To put it another way, the power of the words, citizens and citizenship, lies in both their emotional and political appeal to create 'we', the source of

belonging that transcends the dividing world of individuals. Yet, finding commonality out of difference may, at the same time, require excluding many different ways of being in common, and citizenship that aspires to solidarity based on communal identification can easily lapse into exclusionary process, separating the worlds into two categories such as 'Us' versus 'Them' (Turner, 1997). These contradictions and contestations involved in (sexual) citizenship-making are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

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In the course of writing this thesis, I have been constantly reminded of the fact that citizenship is an essentially 'contested' and 'contextualised' concept (Lister, 2003). The language of citizenship has been, indeed, mobilised in diverse ways in legal, political, social, economic, cultural, and moral discourses; and it has been used in different contexts (national, global, institutional, and personal) with different practical and normative implications. Further, the idea of citizenship itself is continuously extending further. The classification of citizenship has been constantly updated, as a wide range of new rights claims associated with citizenship have emerged and have been contested. Along with the traditional conception of civil, political and social citizenship (Marshall, 1950), there have been various 'new citizenships' emerging such as cultural citizenship (Turner, 2001; Pakulski, 1997; Stevenson, 2003), minority citizenship (Kymlicka, 1995), ecological/environmental citizenship (Smith, 1998), global/cosmopolitan citizenship (Urry, 1999), consumer citizenship (Cronin, 2000), disabled citizenship (Barton, 1993), all largely altering and expanding the core idea of citizenship in the contemporary world.

Sexual citizenship, as Richardson argues, is one of the new citizenships, recently conceptualised primarily as an attempt to



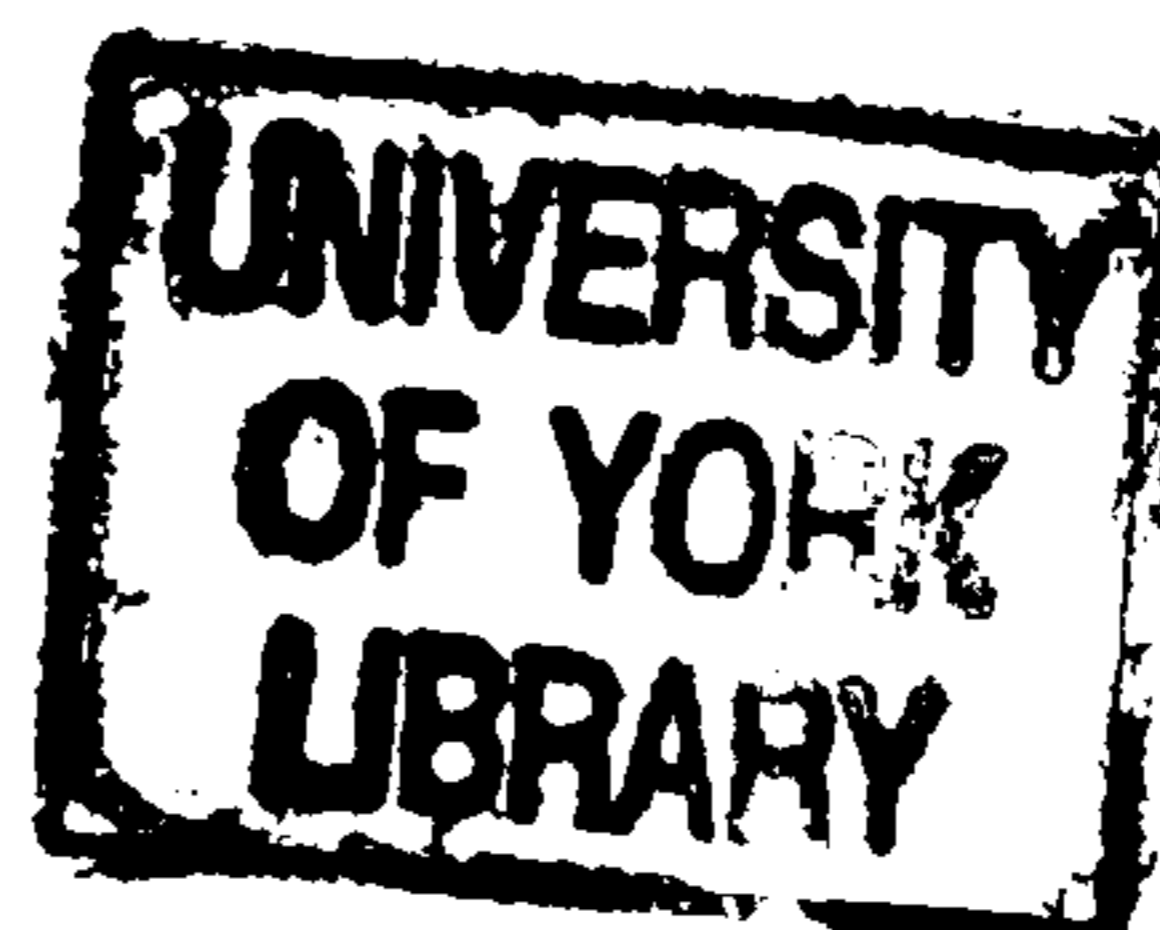
recapture what used to be called gay and lesbian rights (Richardson, 2000b: 9). In fact, the emergence of the 'sexual citizen' who makes 'sexual rights' claims is itself a recent historical and political phenomenon, and has only gained academic and public recognition in Britain since the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> However, given the problematic nature of the concept of citizenship as notoriously contextualised and contested, any attempts to theorise sexual citizenship are not easy, making an adequate empirical approach even more difficult.

Faced with this problem, a number of studies start with a kind of working definition of citizenship, to which a specific meaning and structure in relation to sexuality is added later (see Bell, & Binnie, 2002). My approach to the idea of sexual citizenship is different. Rather than determining what should constitute the basic components of sexual rights and citizenship in advance, I explore the process of complicated, and perhaps incomplete sexual citizenship making by drawing upon several 'contested, 'contextualised' and 'emerging' gay and lesbian stories, which have entered into public debates in Britain, and established contested and clarifying boundaries of belonging and citizenship.

Stories and storytelling, according to Maines, are 'ubiquitous'

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3. There is now a voluminous literature on sexual citizenship, approaching various issues around sexuality from the perspective of citizenship. For a general discussion on the subject, see: David Bell and John Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Theory and Beyond*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); David T. Evans in *Sexual Citizenship: the Material Construction of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993); Morris Kaplan, *Sexual Justice: Democratic Citizenship and the Politics of Desire*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), Shane Phelan, *Sexual Strangers: Gays, Lesbians, and Dilemmas of Citizenship*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Kenneth Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogue*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Diane Richardson, 'Sexuality and Citizenship,' *Sociology* 32(1) (1998): 83-100; Carl F. Stychin, *Governing Sexuality: the Changing Politics of Citizenship and Law Reform* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003); Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Sexual Citizen,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 15(3-4) (1998): 35-52.





existing in most of our communications and social activities. Nevertheless, storytelling is not just like any speech act. It has a certain structure: we select events/experience and transform them into story elements by using a particular plot ordered in a specific time/space setting (Maines, 1993: 22). In other words, stories 'have a point'; they provide a means of making sense of our personal or collective experiences/events through which our pasts and futures are reconstructed and projected. Stories are also highly contextualised. Located in a specific individual, institutional, social, historical, cultural context, 'story' events – even when they are translated into factual events – are likely to produce multiple versions of story lines, adding particular viewpoints of narrators, generating 'potential sites of conflict and competition as well as cooperation and consensus' (Maines, 1993: 23).

As one of the most contested and contextualised stories, we hear stories of/about citizens through both public and personal languages and discourses. I (or s/he) tell(s) personal stories about my (her/his) expectation of or disappointment with the communities as (would be) citizens. We (or they) tell stories about the relationship between our (or their) behaviours/identities and our (or their) membership to a particular community as citizens or others.

Through the story telling act, people use a particular plot and rhetoric, select and reconstruct both individual and collective events/experience to provide the condition for their stories to flourish in the public. Well-crafted stories, which have (or create) meanings for those who listen to them, can generate a sense of a 'we' that 'involves some degree of affective bond and a sense of solidarity' (Davis, 2002: 19). Told and retold, stories that circulate widely can often successfully translate private events/experiences as public events/experiences, constituting 'our' stories at a particular spatial/social/historical juncture (see Ewick & Silbey, 2003). Or, equally

possible, publicised events, which create meaning for 'us' and shape 'our' personal stories, can invite contestation from 'their' versions of events, fomenting discord and schism between 'us' and 'them' (see Delgado, 1989).

In telling sexual citizenship stories, I am not simply interested in 'retelling' gay and lesbian stories that have personally and publicly been told and circulated in Britain. Sociologically grounded, the focus of my analysis is rather on: particular contextual conditions in which sexual story's access to the public is authorised (or rejected); the manner in which stories are emplotted; the kinds of interpretations or explanations of events/experience stories offer; the conflicts or compromises among stories; the ways in which stories are articulated (or disarticulated) as stories of 'us/citizens'; and with what political effect at a given historical moment. Like any other storyteller, I also exercise a degree of selectivity in choosing particular stories that I will use for my analysis – 'personal experience stories around the (homo)sexual' that enter into the representational public/political arena, the parliament, and shape relations between the legitimate and the sexual in a given historical and social context. Such stories are not much studied as 'personal experience stories' types; for stories about events, told within specific institutional contexts of retelling/representation, include events not experienced by storytellers (politicians) themselves. Nevertheless, the examination of such sexual stories, I argue, would help us to understand various ways in which power relations interplay with storytelling practices – the ways in which private narratives of 'I' become integrated into public narratives of 'We' – contributing in the making (unmaking or remaking) of sexual citizenship in Britain.



### *1.3 Chapters*

This dissertation is organised into two parts. In Part I, *The Context of debates: Stories of Sexual/Intimate Citizens*, I review the contexts in which ‘stories of intimate/sexual citizenship’ have emerged and been contested in Britain (Chapter 3), with particular focus on the challenges the ‘narrative’s turn in social sciences’ raises for citizenship studies (Chapter 2).

I begin in chapter 2 by reflecting on two conflicting notions of storytelling, postmodern storytelling on the one hand, and counter-storytelling on the other, which have recently emerged in the west and, in different ways, answer the following two questions: (1) why should we become interested in stories and storytelling in the social sciences; and (2) what do stories have say on issues around justice and citizenship. My task in this chapter is, then, to work closely with these two perspectives of storytelling – to show epistemological dilemmas and political questions they raise – which I then explore with reference to the model of ‘stories of intimate/sexual citizenship’ currently mobilised in Britain in Chapter 3 and 4.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the contested ‘moments’ in which ‘sexual stories’ are seen to have emerged in Britain, and discuss, in particular, the implications of attention to sexual stories and sexual storytelling for political theorisation of intimate/sexual citizenship.

In Chapter 4, *Politics of Storytelling*, I extend the discussion, and explore in detail the attempts to use storytelling in the practice of intimate/sexual citizenship making, and problems that are likely to complicate and challenge the politics of ‘stories of intimate/sexual citizenship’. Chapter 4 is also a linking chapter which could be read as an introduction to Part II. Here, I provide a methodological framework for the analysis of ‘political storytelling’, and illustrate



some of the themes that are developed in detail in Part II.

By way of reading stories recounted in the parliamentary debates on same-sex sexualities, Part II, *Sexual Stories go to Westminster*, attempts to show both the problematic aspects and the effects of political storytelling involved in the making of sexual citizens/others in Britain. Here, I compare and contrast the narratives deployed in the parliamentary debates on same-sex sexualities present within three different legislative moments – the Sexual Offences Act in the 1960s (Chapter 5), Section 28 of the Local Government Act in the 1980s (Chapter 6), and the Civil Partnership Act in the 2000s (Chapter 7). Each chapter follows the ways in which sexual stories enter the public/national political domain, the Parliament, and make their case for the recognition of sexual rights in Britain. Here, I identify: (1) the role stories and storytelling play in the making of sexual citizens/others; and (2) problematic ways in which stories have been articulated (or disarticulated) into the politics of sexual citizenship in Britain.

Chapter 8 ends the thesis by raising some questions of the relationship between storytelling practices and sexual citizenship politics, highlighting tensions between the two.

# **Part I**

The Context of debates:

Stories of Sexual/Intimate Citizens



## Chapter 2

# **The Narrative Turn in Social Sciences**

### *2.1 Introduction*

Sexual citizenship is a relatively new term, and its newness encourages us to inquire about the emergence of the concept itself. Rather than analysing the concept of sexual citizenship as given, I said earlier that I make inquires about the process of its 'making' by focusing on 'stories' of sexual citizenship. In this chapter, I discuss a framework for thinking about sexual citizenship 'stories' by first asking the question: why 'stories'?

Here, I argue that 'part' of the answer can be found from stories about stories in the social sciences themselves, which are now increasingly telling of what Maines calls, a 'narrative's moment' (Maines, 1993: 23). In chapter 2, therefore, I analyse some prevailing sociological stories that tell us why and how this narrative's moment comes about, what it entails, and what this narrative's moment may have say on issues around citizenship. Particular attention is paid to two conflicting notions of storytelling, which have recently emerged,

and, in different ways, answer the question, 'why stories'. They are postmodern storytelling on the one hand, and counter-storytelling on the other. My task in this chapter is then to work closely with these two notions of storytelling – to show the epistemological dilemmas and political questions they raise – which I then explore with reference to Plummer's model of 'stories of intimate/sexual citizenship' in the following chapters (Plummer, 2003).

## *2.2 Narrative Imperatives*

Narrative's moment, Maines argues, is the moment whereby the social scientists have increasingly come to terms with the possibility and the desirability of a narrative approach within the field of social sciences (Maines, 1993). This moment is a 'genuine' one in the sense that the renewed interest in the study of narratives now involves an epistemological shift within the field of social sciences (1993: 17): in embracing a narrative approach, social scientists, rather than viewing themselves first and foremost as scientists, assume the role of narrators who reflexively inquire into their own and other people's narratives. And however disturbing this shift may be for some, this narrative's moment, according to Maines, is now solidly grounded – narrative has now moved from the 'periphery' to the 'centre' within human sciences (Plummer, 1995: 18).

In recent years, we indeed find a renewed interest in both theorising and analysing stories across diverse disciplinary and theoretical boundaries within the humanities and social sciences (see Kreiswirth, 2000). At the same time, the concept itself, which was once predominantly associated with fiction or fable rather than with social sciences, has undergone a significant change (Patterson & Renwick, 1998: 315). Framed ontologically, the concept of story or narrative has become an indispensable lens through which we see



ourselves – not (simply) as *homo sapiens* (rational creatures), but (more fundamentally) as *homo narrans* (storytellers) (Fisher, 1985). Epistemologically, story has become increasingly associated with a way of making knowledge claims – knowledge claims not based on the model of rationality and impartiality, but based on highly contextualised, localized, and often conflicting stories that are open to negotiation. Framed in this way, we hear various stories about stories prevailing in this narrative's moment, which, in a much shared manner, emphasize the storied nature of our lives and our knowledge: it is through stories we come to make sense of ourselves, know the world, understand and interact with each other.

Questioning the status of stories as 'merely' stories, Mark Turner, for example, speaks of stories as basic 'mental instruments' through which our lives become 'possible' – a means of 'thinking, knowing, acting, creating, and plausibly even of speaking' (Turner, 1996: 4). Stories, for Jerome Bruner, are what make our life meaningful; it is stories through which we 'structure' our perceptual experience, 'organise' memories, 'segment' and 'purpose-build' the very events of life (Bruner, 1986: 15, 21). Charles Taylor, who links story to the notion of self/identity, argues that we can only assess our moral-ethical condition through webs of stories: 'in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good' and 'this sense of good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story' (Taylor, 1989: 47). Richard Rorty, who follows a similar line of reasoning, argues that the moral-ethical condition that leads to 'human solidarity' could be only achieved by our narrative 'imagination' – the imagination that increases 'our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people' (Rorty, 1989: xvi). And telling stories, as it is such a large part of what we do – thinking, interpreting, identifying, and bonding – is, McCall argues, the very



'human activity' that 'creates society' (McCall, 1990: 145).

Stories, in this narrative's moment, seem to have appropriated most, if not all, aspects of human life. Indeed, stories and storytelling, as Maines argues, are 'ubiquitous', existing in most of our communications and social activities (Maines 1993). They are, in Bennett and Royle's words, 'everywhere' (Bennett, & Royle, 1995: 41). Existing so much naturally and inevitably throughout most of our social interactions, narratives or stories, Hayden White argues, 'could appear problematic only in a culture in which it was absent or....refused' (White, 1980: 5). And the opening passage of Roland Barthe's *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* also captures this narrative's supposed universality perfectly:

The narratives of the world are without number...[The] narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of man-kind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives...narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: It is simply there, like life itself (Barthes, 1977: 79).

If narrative is universal, we find that social science, which aspires to achieve a more complete, unified, and objective understanding of the social world, had long abandoned a narrative approach in its disciplinary field precisely because of narrative's overloaded status – its supposed universality. Stories may appear universally – as 'everywhere' as 'simply there, like life itself' – but they are, for this very reason, not trustworthy. When contrasted to science that quests for truth (the correct representation of what actually happened), which is, in turn, subject to the collective approval of a group of experts who produce scientific knowledge, there are simply too many stories. And this is because of what story does (or does not).

Story does not reflect 'truth' in any straightforward way. Quite the contrary. Stories, rather than simply reflecting what happens,



constitute events by imposing meaning on them. This, what Norman Andrews calls, 'impositionalism', means that telling a story necessarily involves a certain kind of interpretative violence', which, when judged by the yardstick of science, is not verifiable or falsifiable (Andrews, 1991: 120). The two scientific rules, what nineteenth-century science calls 'verification' and twentieth-century science 'falsification', enable, Lyotard argues, 'the horizon of consensus to be brought to the debate between partners (sender and the addressee)' (Lyotard, 1984: 22). Although drawing a consensus is not necessarily the 'sign of the truth', the reverse is, nevertheless, accepted as correct: in the conception of scientific knowledge, there is this underlying presumption that 'truth of a statement necessarily draws a consensus' (Lyotard 1984: 22). No such rules, however, are applicable to stories that allow a consensus to be drawn, for stories, by their nature, supply a plurality of contradictory and conflicting 'interpretations'. At best, stories can be described as self-legitimizing. At worst, they are, by their very form as stories, deceptive – merely fables.

Seen like this, the idea of narrative or story, if taken too seriously, endangers the very possibility of their being social 'science' – precise, neutral, objective, rational and, therefore, universal. Writing during the heyday of the positivist era, Read Bain, for example, argues that mere narrative approach will lead sociology to 'remain forever a bastard discipline sired and dammed by common sense and normative knowledge' or to be 'a hodgepodge of pretentious words, random observations, speculations, opinions, pious hopes and fears, attitudes, wishes, sophistical logic, and literary purple patches' (Bain, 1935: 486).<sup>4</sup> Concluding that stories

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4. Driven by the quest for recognition as a scientific discipline, the social sciences, Maines notes, have not been friendly towards the idea of a narrative approach to the study of social life. Instead, the idea of value-neutral, quantitative, objective, and rational knowledge about human



are never subject to 'proof', an anthropologist, Metraux Cartry classifies narrative statements as 'belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology' (Lyotard 1984: 27). Contrasting storytelling to 'scientific' inquiry, Maurice Mandelbaum, a historian, also informs us that:

Typically, the person who tells a story may be inventing what he tells us, or he may be recounting what he already knows, or he may be inventing what he does not know about matters which he is recounting; but he is not in any case engaged in an inquiry which aims to establish what did in fact occur (Mandelbaum, 1967: 414).

If storytelling is intrinsically backward, deceptive, and therefore inferior to scientific inquiry, why are so many social scientists interested in narrative or stories now? How is the use of story as a means of an inquiry justified? What are story's main features that explain its appeal to many social scientists? Further, the question that interests us is: what have these questions to do with a citizenship study in the first place? Rather than a scientific inquiry into citizenship, why consider stories of citizenship in general and stories of sexual citizenship in particular? These questions raised then can be summarized into two questions: (a) Why should we

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experience has been predominantly valued, which has, in turn, largely transformed the meaning of the term 'human experience' to that of measurable 'human behaviours'. Here, becoming scientific, Maines argues, has meant 'becoming very good at measuring things', and social life of experience has become 'what the measuring instrument measures' (Maines, 2001: 164-5). Human experience, categorised into countable and describable 'small units', are then rendered into 'aggregated data', providing 'generability' and 'predictability' for social science. By contrast, Maines argues: 'the richness and ambiguity represented by large samples of narrative data' are considered as 'unwieldy, hard to quantify and compare, providing little generability or predictive value, and therefore unscientific. These limitations have led more scientific-minded sociologists to dismiss the validity, reliability, and overall value of narrative data' (ibid.).



become interested in stories and storytelling in the social sciences?;

(b) What do stories have to say on issues around rights and citizenship?

These are two main questions I plan to address in the next section (and also in Chapter 3 and 4 in the case of (b)). In particular, I shall discuss two conflicting notions of storytelling which have recently emerged, and which, in different ways, answer the question (a) by linking it to the question (b) of justice and citizenship. They are postmodern storytelling on the one hand, and counter storytelling on the other. Their similar ways of conceptualising storytelling as a form of social critique, and their different ways of facing 'an epistemological dilemma', I suggest, offer us a useful path towards considering those two questions posed above (see Disch, 1994: 11). In what follows, I will, therefore, briefly outline these two notions of storytelling.

### *2.3 Storytelling and Social Critique/Action*

Some recent pronouncements on our post-modern condition relate narrative's moment to a more extensive 'postmodern turn' found in the realm of scientific knowledge in western societies characterised as: (a) a broad scepticism towards any foundational knowledge claims based on 'the idea of science as Truth'; (b) a rejection of the necessary separation between power and knowledge production; and (c) a critical understanding of changed relations between 'knowledge producers and citizens' (see Seidman, 1994: 5).

In postmodern theorising, social science that searches for the universal truth is a modernist dream. The dreamer is a middle-class, white, western, heterosexual man, and it is 'a dream of power over others' (Stivers, 1993: 411). His use of detached scientific reasoning,

freed from his passions, culture, history, and interests, is no more than a legitimating rhetoric for his particular 'interpretation' (a particular story) of social life, which, nevertheless, claims the status of universal truth – the feature of what Lyotard calls metanarrative. Here, 'the Science of Man' elevates the kind of evidences presented through the consensus of the privileged to the level of 'the' human scientific knowledge. At the same time, it devalues and suppresses other situated subjugated knowledge by regarding them as merely personal and irrational 'stories'. Postmodernists argue that the universal consensual definition of scientific knowledge attained through the use of 'reason' is, then, based on the exclusion of possible dissensus arising from multiplicities of perspectives found in these little subjugated 'stories', which could challenge a metanarrative of a culture. And if so, these subjugated little/local stories are important means to present differences, to reveal discontents in dominant accounts of the world, and to challenge the stability in received universal knowledge.

Proponents of postmodern storytelling believe that the heterogeneity and conflictual multiplicity found in these subjugated little/local stories has a further important political implication in the postmodern condition of 'incredulity toward metanarratives': the impossibility of consensus. Lyotard who supports such a view argues that the universal consensus upon which the modern Enlightenment citizenship project is built is no longer a political possibility. People now become aware of a plurality of conflicting legitimating 'little' stories in which the metanarrative that tells 'the' universal truth and human progress no longer has the universal appeal it used to have. In this context, what we can (and should) attempt to arrive at, Lyotard argues, is 'an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus' (Lyotard, 1984: 66). This means that we need, rather than a single and overarching



theory of justice and an idea of universal citizenship, 'a new pluralist justice' or 'a justice of multiplicities' whereby the goal of just dialogue is now 'paralogy' – an introduction of different ideas and interpretations contained in little/local stories, which constantly transgress the universal rules that draw the boundary of political community.

The idea that storytelling is an important means to challenge a privileged standpoint that makes claims to universality is similarly found (but certainly with different political implications) in counter-storytelling perspectives. A counter-story, by definition, is a story that resists and delegitimises a dominant version of social reality. The dominant version of social reality, Richard Delgado argues, is like 'eyeglasses we have worn a long time', being 'nearly invisible', but nevertheless constantly being used by us to interpret the world we live in (Delgado, 1989: 2413). These eyeglasses we wear are the cultural 'stock stories' ('master narratives')<sup>5</sup> – stories that are implicitly or explicitly 'written for us' with reference to objectivity and normality, and defended by systems and institutions that constitute our specific culture and political community (see Fine, Harris, & Carney, 2001: 7). These stock stories that we 'absorb' and tell as members of a specific society, not only frame our sense of reality by filtering the world in certain ways, but also guide us in how to experience the reality: they are, in other words, prescriptive as much as they are descriptive.

Here, the key function of dominant cultural stories, Molly

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5. A stock story is defined by Delgado as 'the one the institution collectively forms and tells about itself. The story picks and chooses from among the available facts to present a picture of what happened: an account that justifies the world as it is' (Delgado, 1989: 2421). In justifying the world as it is, stock stories 'help maintain the status quo' (Richardson, 1990: 128). Stock stories are, Sarmas argues, 'those that are part of, and reinforce, the dominant discourse' (Sarmas, 1994: 703).



Andrews argues, is in offering people 'a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience': '[U]ltimately, the power of master narratives derives from their internalisation. Wittingly or unwittingly, we become the stories we know, and the master narrative is reproduced' (Andrews, 2002: 1). A stable and ordered social reality constructed through dominant cultural stories is, however, never complete. For whatever reason, experiences that conflict with the dominant story of social lives provide a potential source of counter storytelling. One may find examples of this in experiential-based stories created by those who are underprivileged and marginalised in our society. Stories of counter experiences of reality told by marginalised persons are often denied their existence and regarded as 'not real', because they do not fit into the dominant/normalized version of reality. Reclaiming one's own 'real' stories against the dominant story of reality, in this context, not only makes visible the fact that the latter is 'just one of many possible stories', it also 'open[s] new windows into reality', offering us alternative ways of seeing and knowing realities (Delgado, 1989: 2414).

From a counter-storytelling perspective, storytelling is, then, a powerful means to 'give voices to those who are silenced or marginalized' and to provide ways of expressing their own version of experiential reality different from that of the privileged (Richardson, 1990: 128). In this way, proponents of counter storytelling, like postmodern critics, recognise the fact that there are conflicting stories we tell about the real, and the importance of such conflicting storytelling as a means to challenge dominant accounts of a single, value-neutral, objective, and natural reality. However, their conception of storytelling differs from that of postmodern critics in the sense that their endorsement of storytelling as a means of a social critique does not mean that consensual storytelling is no



longer a political possibility. Quite the opposite. Counter-storytelling is critical for its capacity to provide more adequate and transformative ways in which we can understand and communicate our different contextual realities, and to create a more inclusive and consensual political community – consensual not from the perspectives of the dominant, but, this time, from the perspectives of the below, the very location whereby our realities are truly experienced.

Here, we should recognise an important difference between postmodern and counter storytelling perspectives: while the former resists any claims to foundational truth and therefore the possibility and legitimacy of consensus among conflicting stories, the latter attempts to provide grounds for trusting (counter) stories upon which we can build democratic consensual politics. The ‘fact’ of stories, in counter-storytelling perspectives, is measurable through experience, and the democratic consensus is, in turn, premised on a belief in the explanatory ‘truth’ of experience over rationalist abstraction. But it is precisely here, around the issue of experience, that we find a particular epistemological dilemma confronting both postmodern and counter-storytelling perspectives.

According to Ewick and Silbey, ‘the political commitment’ found in a counter-storytelling perspective that seeks to give ‘voice’ and bear ‘witness’ through stories is based on ‘the epistemological conviction that there is no single, objectively apprehended truth’ (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 199). And such an epistemological understanding is based on the postmodern implication that: story/ language, rather than it simply reflecting reality, is responsible for creating and shaping a particular view of reality. However, this counter-storytelling perspective, which defines reality as a storied construct, has a tension with its empiricist assumptions underpinning an evidence-based approach to storytelling – ‘the



evidence of experience' (Scott, 1991). On the one hand, it recognises that: there is no such thing as objective truth existing outside the webs of stories that construct a particular perspective of reality; it is 'power' rather than the so-called truth that 'settles disputes' among these conflicting stories, and set the rules of consensus and agreement for members of a particular knowledge/political community (Disch, 1994: 10). On the other hand, there sprang from this the evidence of empirical experience which grasps the 'truth' of stories, and serves as a way of talking about what really happened (Scott, 1991: 774). Here, the notion of experience, as Scott argues, appears as 'subjective witness' to the 'authentic' and 'immediate' truth of a story, establishing the possibility of (alternative or new) 'objective knowledge' against hegemonic constructions of social worlds (Scott, 1991: 781). And this, in turn, provides the possibility of consensus among storytellers, because, however diverse and conflicting their perspectives and positions may be, the evidence of experience provides 'an unquestionable ground for explanation' – the 'real' thing existing outside established meanings (Scott, 1991: 788).

The postmodern approach to stories, however, problematises the notion of experience that lies at the heart of counter-storytelling perspectives. According to postmodern perspectives, consensus built upon any claims to foundational truth – whether it is grounded on abstract reason or subjective experience – is repressive; for it, by telling 'the' story, puts an end to stories. Seeking an alternative 'real unity' founded on experiential based knowledge claims is nothing less than a transcendental illusion: for the heterogeneous character of contemporary society is composed of a multiplicity of 'little' narratives that are incommensurable with each other. Even what counts as experience, as Scott reminds us, is 'nether self-evident nor straightforward: it is always contested, always therefore political' (Scott, 1991: 797). Rather than attempting to elevate experience to



the position of 'new' truth and close off further storytelling, postmodern storytellers/listeners, who bear witness to the indeterminacy of experience, should aim to cultivate difference and fragmentation, creating a justice of disensus – a justice of multiplicity. The value of postmodern storytelling, committed to a justice of multiplicity, lies not in discovering alternative truth, but in denouncing 'all monopolies of narratives' (Kearney, 1998: 209). As Lyotard exhorts:

Destroy all monopolies of narrative....Remove from the Narrator the privilege he gives himself and show there is just as much power in narrative listening and narrative action (in the socially narrated world)....Struggle for the inclusion of all Master Narratives, of theories and doctrines, particularly political ones, within the (little) narratives. So that the intelligentsia may see its task not to proclaim the truth or save the world, but to seek the power of playing out, listening to, and telling stories. A power that is so common that people will never be deprived of it without riposte. And if you want an authority – that power is authority. Justice is wanting it (Lyotard, 1977: 86 cited in Kearney, 1988: 209).

Just what does it mean to destroy 'all monopolies of narrative' in praxis? In the world of 'radical inequality', Mary Hawkesworth argues, such a 'relativist resignation', proposed by postmodernism's seductive text 'reinforces the status quo' (Hawkesworth, 1989: 557). The postmodernists' commitment to multiplicities and the endless play of difference through story-telling/listening may sound appealing. Yet, as Susan Borbo argues, the postmodern ideal of storytelling, which celebrates our ability to 'play out' stories across boundaries, 'obscures the located, limited, inescapably partial, and always personally invested nature of human "story making"' (Bordo, 1990: 144). Here, in seeking for a justice of multiplicity, the theories of postmodernism, replaces the fantasy of the 'modernist, Cartesian view from nowhere' with 'a new postmodern configuration of detachment, a new imagination of disembodiement: a dream of being everywhere' (Bordo, 1990: 143). By effectively producing an equally



problematic, abstract, postmodern version of Archimedean impartiality, the theories of postmodernism, Nancy Hartsock also claims, 'present less an alternative to the overconfident theories of the Enlightenment than a parasitic continuation of its preoccupations' (Nartsock, 1996: 46).<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps more problematically, the postmodern idea of storytelling, 'committed to a justice of multiplicity', itself reveals a paradoxical dilemma (Kearney, 1998: 210-1). To destroy 'all monopolies of narratives', we need to suspend 'all' criteria of ethical discrimination. Yet, as Kearney rightly argues, this 'prescription against universal prescription can itself be taken as a universal prescription' (210). To put the dilemma more sharply: in order for us to protect a justice of multiplicity (a justice of dissensus), a fundamental ethical consensus, as it appears, 'must lie at the foundation of a political community' – 'we have to agree to disagree' (MacGowan, 1991: 203).<sup>7</sup> Yet, an ethical limit to fragmentation/ incommensurability is precisely what is lacking in the postmodern ideal of storytelling. What we then find here is an ethical circle of thought being operative within the postmodern politics of 'just' storytelling, which, according to Kearney, poses the following

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6. If the *transcendental* voice of Enlightenment subjectivity is associated with the *situated* knowledge of those privileged, educated, middle-class, and white men, the *omnipresent* voice of postmodern subjectivity, according to Nartsock and Sangari, is a *situated* voice of the 'self-ironizing' western 'bourgeois' subject whose 'felt absence of the will or the ability to change things as they are' is expressed through 'the voice of epistemological despair' (Sangari, 1987: 161 cited in Nartsock, 1996: 46).

7. MacGowan describes this paradox clearly: 'Only some political order, organised around some consensus, can preserve incommensurability in a world where power or a different kind of social order is always capable of violating these separate spaces. Where there are no metaphysical guarantees, there can be only communal, political ones, and that means that the conditions of action and of freedom must be the products of a social order, not the result of an achieved distance from that order' (MacGowan, 1991: 203)



paradoxical questions: 'How do you reconcile a justice of multiplicity with a [postmodern condition of] multiplicity of justices?'; when we speak of 'the' justice of multiplicity, 'whose justice are we talking about? (210)'

The conflict between counter-storytelling and postmodern storytelling creates dilemmas, which cannot be easily resolved within the idea of narrative as it is theorised by either marginal or postmodern critics. In their view, narrative is understood either as an authentic voice of experience or a disembodied voice of nobody. And between such extremities, we find that stories are either equated with lives themselves or embrace an abstract promise for disembedded lives.

According to Disch, a dilemma arising from this recurring conflict is an epistemological one, which raises the following question: 'Is it possible to account for storytelling as a practice of critical understanding without recourse to the kind of Archimedean pronouncement that stories claim to unmask or to essentialist claims about the sincerity and authenticity of the marginal scholar?' (Disch, 1994: 11). Again, this is not just a question of academics, but a question about the political possibility/limits of 'mutual understanding' – about the 'viability of democratic ideals'. Particularly, the question is: 'Are non-coercive relations possible, within and among the various groups in this world, in light of its plurality?' (Ibid.).

In Chapter 3, and 4, I explore the ways in which the contemporary academic discussions around 'stories of sexual/intimate citizenship' have been organised, in part, as an attempt to answer these two questions. Specifically, Plummer's work on intimate citizenship represents an interesting attempt to configure sexual/intimate citizenship beyond the dilemmas facing marginal

and postmodern critics. In spite of their difference, the common problem Plummer finds in both marginal and postmodern storytelling perspectives is the lack of attention given to intersubjective relations within which the 'actions' of storytelling takes place. For Plummer, stories are neither simply the representation of the real, nor the transgressive critical practice. They are, rather, the products of 'joint' communicative 'actions' operating within the fields of intersubjectivity (see Plummer, 1995: 20-24).

Story telling, Plummer argues, 'cannot be in isolation from hearings, readings, consumings' (Plummer, 1995: 25). Every act of storytelling involves 'someone telling someone else that something happened' (Smith, 1980: 232)<sup>8</sup>: it is inter-subjective 'joint actions' in which a teller (or tellers) and listeners/readers constitute a significant feature of the narrative situation. Stories told in this intersubjective context, do not simply recount what happened, but they convey meaning for and 'request certain response from' the readers/listeners (Davis, 2002:12). According to Walter Fisher, audiences access stories through 'their inherent awareness of narrative coherence' (Fisher, 1985: 314). They question whether or not the stories they hear/read are intelligible, accountable, and reliable. And they also ask whether or not the stories are consistent with other related stories or with stories of their own – whether they 'ring true to the stories they know or believe to be true' (314). Our implicit or explicit awareness of the fact that we tell a story in the presence of others who may (or may not) 'see and hear what we hear', and therefore may (or may not) respond to our story in a way

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8. No one, Richard Kearny argues, 'tells stories to oneself except in the form of a fictional alter-ego': even when one tells a story to oneself, one imagines oneself as the other with whom one engages anticipated interactive communication (Kearney, 1998: 247).



that assures us of 'the reality of the world and ourselves' reminds us that our storytelling is intrinsically dialogic, informed by the stories of others (Arendt, 1958: 50). Our stories, in order to convey meanings of our lives, need to communicate with stories of others.

Telling a story is then a result of being 'engaged in fitting together lines of activity around stories' (Plummer, 1995: 20). We are, Plummer argues, engaged in 'story actions'. Or as Chambers tells it, we 'do things with narrative', just as we 'do with words' (Chambers, 1984: 3). And one thing we 'do' with stories is that we create 'webs of interconnected narratives', which, according to Plummer, makes a 'grounded' moral/political project of citizenship possible (Plummer, 2003: 98). This aspect of storytelling – the ways in which stories 'gather people around them' (174) and contribute to the community/citizenship building – is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 and 4. Here, I discuss Plummer's attempt to use storytelling in the practice of intimate/sexual citizenship making in detail (Section 3.4, 3.5, and 4.2), and problems that are likely to complicate and challenge his ideas and politics of intimate/sexual citizenship (Section 4.2 and 4.3). Before I move on to this topic, however, I first analyse the contested 'moments' in which 'sexual stories' are seen to have emerged in Britain – the late-modern contexts – which, Weeks argues, provide the context for the emergence of sexual citizens. It is to this I now turn.

## Chapter 3

# Moments of Sexual Citizenship

### *3.1 Transgression/Citizenship*

In his article, 'The Sexual Citizen', Jeffrey Weeks identifies two distinctive moments (or elements), which have existed within feminist and gay lesbian politics in Britain since the late 1960s: 'a moment of transgression' on the one hand, and 'a moment of citizenship' on the other (Weeks, 1998: 36).

Weeks characterises 'a moment of transgression' as the moment of 'challenge to the traditional and received order of sexual life' (Weeks, 1996: 82): the moment when sexual dissidents, through various transgressive and subversive acts, confront the existing institutional and social forms of exclusion, and express their 'difference' (Weeks, 1998: 47). Here, 'carnavalesque displays' such as 'the men dressed as nuns, the mythologized bra burning of feminists, the women in leather on motorbikes in the vanguard of lesbian and gay pride marches, the kiss-ins in public spaces in capital cities' are,



according to Weeks, all clear manifestations of difference, constituting the moment of transgression (Weeks, 1998: 46-7). It is the moment that involves 'the constant invention and reinvention of the self', the subversion of traditional ways of being/living defined as 'the' normal (ibid: 36).

This politics of transgression, which is, in part, about the rejection of the status quo, is acknowledged by Weeks as a useful means to make excluded voices heard in public. But its usefulness, Weeks argues, cannot be far-reaching unless this moment of transgression finds its 'proper home' – the home in which the excluded voices find their recognition and inclusion in society. In other words, 'the moment of transgression' is a politically and tactically viable strategy only when it is complemented by the demand for inclusion, which he defined as the claim for 'equal rights under the law, in politics, in economics, in social matters and in sexual matters' (Weeks, 1998: 47). This is what Weeks calls 'the moment of sexual citizenship'.

Elizabeth Wilson (1993a) offers a similar line of argument. According to Wilson, a sexual politics that only emphasises transgression is ultimately an 'elitist' and 'minoritarian form of politics' (Wilson, 1993a). By reading Foucault's notion of transgression in which transgression is defined as an incessant crossing and recrossing of every line, which in its turn create a 'transgressive spiral', Wilson recognises an elitist 'transgressive impulse' in that 'once a transgression becomes merely a widespread habit it has lost its magical aura of initiation and privileged experience' (Wilson, 1993a: 111). Simply prioritising transgressive performance and displays, while rejecting any kinds of commonly supported political dynamic that could possibly limit transgression turns this 'transgressive spiral' into an ever-circling movement which, according to Wilson, renders it impossible for the movement

to have any realistic vision of future society other than an elitist vision of transgressive utopia. Wilson, like Weeks, argues that the transgression can be a temporary political strategy, but it alone can never be an effective political force that can fundamentally transform a society. As Wilson puts it:

The concepts of transgression, dissidence, subversion, and resistance – which have become familiar in radical discourse since the mid 1980s – are oppositional, negative. They are the politics of being against, they are the politics of rebellion. Yet since they are cast in the terms set by that which is being rebelled against, they are the politics, ultimately, of weakness (Wilson, 1993: 109).

Why, after all, are we transgressing? Transgression's ever circling movement's answer seems to be 'transgression for transgression's sake'. It is this notion of limitless transgression with no final political goal in itself on which both Weeks and Wilson ground their criticism. For Weeks and Wilson, we need to get past the impasse presented by the transgression cycle. And in order to move beyond the ever-crossing transgressive impulse, we need to set limits on this transgression cycle through some mutually supported and persuasive political forces.

Returning to Weeks's discussion of sexual politics, we find a particular kind of transgressive politics Weeks addresses in *The Sexual Citizen*, which is 'sexual' politics. The dilemma Weeks identifies in the moment of sexual transgression is to be found from the very question he is implicitly asking: what are we transgressing and why?

What are we transgressing? For Weeks, the moment of sexual transgression has a private/public dimension. It is the moment when the private goes to the public: that is, sexual issues and the intimate personal life stories 'leak into' the domain of the public, constituting public problems (Plummer, 2001: 245). Now, why? The



ultimate aim of sexual transgression, according to Weeks, is paradoxical. The sexual transgression displayed by sexual dissidents within the public sphere stems from their struggle to 'protect' their intimacy in the private sphere; for the protection of their right of privacy is only possible when their right of privacy is recognized and respected by the public. The political dynamic underpinning the sexual transgression therefore necessarily intersects with demands for rightful inclusion in the public sphere. In other words, the moment of citizenship, that is the moment of mutual recognition of the right of privacy in the public sphere with balanced responsibilities, is the necessary consequence of the moment of transgression. As Weeks puts it:

Without the claim to full citizenship, difference can never find a proper home. The sexual citizen then makes a claim to transcend the limits of the personal sphere by going public, but the going public is, in a necessary but nevertheless paradoxical move, about protecting the possibilities of private life and private choice in a more inclusive society (Weeks, 1998: 37).

From this point of view, we can now recognise how the notion of sexual citizen is understood by Weeks. For Weeks, the concept is 'a contradiction in terms' in the sense that in order to be a sexual self, primarily constructed as private, we need to negotiate our right of privacy in terms of citizenship rights in the public sphere (ibid: 36). For Weeks, the sexual citizen is then 'a hybrid being, breaching the public/private divide' through which one's sexuality is carefully managed in contemporary society (Ibid.).

This story about the sexual citizen is my starting point. More specifically, the concern of this chapter is to critically examine the modality of sexual citizenship conceptualised by Weeks through a number of binary pairs; transgression/citizenship, exclusion/inclusion, private/public, rights/responsibilities and difference/inequality. Although Weeks himself noted that his conceptualisation



of the sexual citizen was contradictory, the contradiction in Weeks's scheme of things was, nevertheless, complementary. It is complementary as long as the political purpose of the moment of transgression is in finding its proper home in the moment of citizenship, and private issues/stories go into the public domain for their rightful inclusion and recognition.<sup>9</sup>

Week's logic of argument is contradictory, however. If, as Wong argues, 'transgression were only to find a proper home in citizenship', it 'would have to be predetermined, judged, and absorbed by the moment of citizenship' (Wong, 2006: 211). Here, the questions that can be asked, however, are: who decides/defines the 'moment' of sexual citizenship? On whose terms of 'inclusion' and 'equality', is the moment of citizenship produced and why?

In the sections that follow, I shall repeatedly return to these questions, and reveal contradictions that lie behind the relationship between transgression and citizenship (or exclusion and inclusion, private and public, and difference and inequality). As a way to make

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9. In his conversation with Sue Golding, Weeks elaborates the complementary logic he finds between the moment of transgression and the moment of citizenship as such:

What I suggest is that in any radical political movement there's always the moment of transgression when you try to pull the pillars down, when you try to challenge the status quo. In terms of gay liberation, it was the moment of gay liberation itself, of exploring sex, of cross-dressing, of experimenting with drugs, of exploring relationships, or whatever: that's like the moment of transgression. But linked to that is the moment of citizenship, which is the moment of making claims on society, a claim for inclusion. Making that claim for inclusion may seem assimilationist, but actually making demands on a culture which denies you is extremely radical: it identifies the frontiers of the conventional, it demarcates the lines of struggle. So, you can see transgression and citizenship as simply the different faces of the same moment of challenge. One is separating, the other is calling for belonging. But you can only do one with the other (Weeks, 1997: 323).



the contradiction apparent, I first discuss more about this ‘moment of sexual citizenship’ conceptualised by Weeks, to which I shall now turn.

### *3.2 Exclusion/Inclusion*

Being a confident member of a society as a citizen means being an insider of a particular political, social, cultural, and sexual map (Plummer, 2003: 53). For those who mark difference in that map, the invitation to be a citizen does not simply involve the recognition of their difference. It can also, in many ways, involve the process of normalisation of ‘the’ difference (Seidman, 2001: 323). And the process of normalisation of ‘the’ difference is often followed by the process of re-differentiation and exclusion, in which who exists inside and who exists outside of this newly drawn map is further defined in terms of their citizenship status. The moment of citizenship, then, may not really be ‘the’ moment of citizenship, but rather be one of the ‘moments’ located within the boundaries drawn and redrawn between transgression and citizenship. In this picture, the boundaries of exclusion are shifting, and the moment of citizenship reconstructs and reconstitutes diverse (often conflicting) ‘new’ moments of transgression and exclusion.

I will return to this point later, but suffice it here to say that the politics of sexual citizenship, for the very reason that it involves the continuous political process in constructing/reconstructing moments of citizenship/transgression, calls into question the heart of Weeks’s claim in which sexual transgression is seen to be ‘the’ strategic and constituting moment of ‘the’ moment of citizenship. Rather than celebrating ‘the’ moment of sexual citizenship as the proper home of the moment of transgression, this suggests that we need to question the political nature of this home existing within a

particular social/cultural/political frame in which some of those would-be-sexual-citizens are defined as 'transgressive' subjects, being excluded from entering this home at a given historical moment.

For many, the constant mapping process in the citizenship politics through normalisation and re-differentiation means that there is always 'Otherness' created and excluded in the moments of sexual citizenship. Those who recognise this logic inherent in the politics of sexual citizenship, therefore, emphasise the costs of mobilising current sexual politics in terms of citizenship (Bell, & Binnie, 2000; Richardson, 1998; Cossman, 2002; Stychin, 1998). For example, Seidman, in his article, *From Identity to Queer Politics* (2001), engages, at length, with the question of 'normalisation' involved in citizenship politics. According to Seidman, gay and lesbian politics in the West, which have increasingly sought a politics of citizenship in their struggle for inclusion – for equality rights as members of community– have been effective only insofar as (would be) gay citizens have been able to present themselves as 'virtually normal' citizens (see Sullivan, 1996).<sup>10</sup> And this, Seidman argues, is because:

Citizenship involves not only juridical enfranchisement but symbolic incorporation into a national community. Individuals aspiring to the status of citizen must claim to possess the psychological, moral, and social traits that render them good and warrant their integration. In this regard, gays have claimed not only to be normal, but to exhibit valued civic qualities such as discipline, rationality, respect for the law and family values,

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10. According to Richardson, the 'equal rights approaches', which have focused on obtaining the same rights as heterosexuals, have increasingly come to dominate gay and lesbian politics in Europe and USA. In Britain, the successful lobby group, Stonewall, can be seen as following assimilationist and 'integrationist strategies to achieve social change' (Richardson, 2005: 516).



and national pride' (Seidman, 2001: 323).

According to Stychin, this politics of citizenship, which creates the conditions for a normalisation of homosexual identities, is also a 'politics of exclusion'. Claiming that a strategy for inclusion in the national imaginary of citizenship often result in the making of new boundaries of exclusion, Stychin argues: 'in attempting to achieve legal victories, lesbians and gays seeking rights may embrace the ideal of "respectability", a construction that then perpetuates a division between "good gays" and (disreputable) "bad queers". The latter are then excluded from the discourse of citizenship' (Stychin, 1998: 200).

For others, however, the fact that citizenship has been mapped in ever more inclusive ways can still mean that the politics of citizenship, for this very reason, provides an ever-constructive vehicle through which the moment of sexual citizenship can be envisaged. Particularly relevant for our discussion here is a well-known story of 'the three elements of citizenship' theorised by T. H. Marshall (Marshall, 1950); for his analysis of the progressive 'expansion' of rights over time in Western society, starting from 'civil' in the eighteenth to 'political' participation rights in the nineteenth and finally to 'social' rights based on universal entitlements to education and welfare in the early twentieth century, is broadly adopted by its supporters, adding various 'fourth' contemporary elements into his evolutionary model of citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

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11. In presenting his socio-historical model of citizenship, Marshall distinguishes three different sets of rights associated with citizenship, which have been exercised through different socio-political institutions developed over time:

Civil or legal rights are institutionalised through the law and include things such as the right to own property; freedom of speech, thought and faith; liberty of the person and the right to justice. Political

Weeks's project of 'radical humanism' in which the sexual citizenship politics is seen as an important means for sexual dissidents to struggle for their recognition in contemporary Western society is one example of this vision. For Weeks, the current cultural and political frame is explained in terms of: (1) 'the democratisation of relationships'; (2) 'the emergence of new subjectivities'; and (3) the 'development of new narratives or stories about personal life' (Weeks, 1998: 39). By 'reflecting wider social changes and providing the language which makes change possible', these new stories, which narrativize (1) and (2), are the context for the emergence of the sexual citizen: these 'new' stories not only work to undermine old binary divisions (such as heterosexual/homosexual binary divisions) that hitherto defined sexual politics, but also through their interaction bind us together, creating 'new', 'inclusive' collective subjectivities as sexual citizens (40).

Weeks's rather optimistic vision of the moment of sexual citizenship is then based on this changed map in the West where traditional hierarchical sexual boundaries between, for example, men/women and homosexuality/heterosexuality, are seen as being radically dissolved, while 'new' narratives or stories around personal life remedy the 'limitations of earlier notions of citizenship', making the concept more 'comprehensive' and inclusive (Weeks, 1998: 39). Rightly or wrongly, we therefore arrive at this question: do we live in a society where sexual 'otherness' is negotiated in remarkably inclusive ways?; what political role do stories play in the making of 'inclusive' sexual citizens?

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rights are institutionalised in the parliamentary political system and councils of local government and include the right to vote and participate in the exercise of political power. Social rights include the right to a certain level of economic welfare and security (Richardson, 1998: 84).



In the rest of this chapter I discuss ‘the context for the emergence of the sexual citizen’ Weeks elaborates in terms of the democratisation of relationships and the emergence of new sexual subjectivities – in the context of what Giddens termed late-modernity – in more detail (Section 3.3 – 3.6); and how this late-modern context relates to the ‘inclusive’ moment of intimate/sexual citizenship theorised by Ken Plummer (Section 3.5 – 3.6). Linking Plummer’s idea of intimate/sexual citizenship with Young’s conception of ‘differentiated citizenship’ in Section 3.6 and 3.7, I discuss some of the paradoxes/dilemmas that arise in the ideas of ‘moment of citizenship’, which I shall further discuss in Chapter 4 in relation to the contradictory role stories play in the making of sexual ‘others’/‘citizens’.

### *3.3 Living in an age of Uncertainty*

In the 1999 BBC Reith Lectures, Anthony Giddens, in capturing the image of a world that escapes our tight control and organisation, describes a kind of new society we are now living in as a ‘Runaway World’ (Giddens, 1999). The world, especially in Western countries, has become an ‘erratic and dislocated world’ that brings new kinds of uncertainty and risks into our lives (Giddens, 1999): it is a globalised world where local traditions are radically broken down; our sense of risk is heightened as social relations become more and more lifted out from local contexts of interaction; and even conventional ways of doing democracy are increasingly questioned. It is a world of ‘high modernity’ that involves ‘crisis’, ‘danger’, ‘anxiety’, and ‘insecurity’ deeply affecting our living experiences in the world as well as our innermost personal feelings (Giddens, 1991: 12-3).

This is, indeed, one of those familiar stories we frequently hear

about western society today. We hear about the stories of the 'post-modern' (Lyotard, 1984) or at least 'late-modern' or 'high-modern' society (Giddens, 1991) that signal the end of 'traditionalism' (Giddens, 1994a) and 'patriarchalism' (Castells, 1997), generating 'risks' (Beck, 1992), 'uncertainty' (Weeks, 1995) and 'anxiety' (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997), symbolised in globalisation (Albrow, 1996) and individualisation (Bauman, 2001). Characterised in various ways as such, the society has been seen as moving into a world of unforeseen changes and instability both on a social and an ontological level.

Particularly interesting here for our discussion is the ways in which sexual citizenship discourse comes into this messy picture of western society. According to Weeks, the fourth element that we now should include in the Marshallian model of citizenship is sexual rights (Weeks, 1995: 121). Our question is: why, at this particular moment of what Giddens describes as 'the age of uncertainty', do we find our sexuality has become the issue that is addressed increasingly in terms of citizenship? To answer this question, I find it useful to first engage Giddens in our conversation. This is because his understanding of those changes taking place in the western society and their relationship with our sexuality forms an important part of the ways in which current intellectual discourse of sexual citizenship is constructed in Britain.

To begin with, it is important to note that high modernity, in Giddens's term, is double-edged. However varied the ways in which our Runaway World is characterised maybe, this – at least for Giddens – does not mean that we are now simply left without any power to control our society. Quite the contrary; Giddens knows how to put the word 'opportunities' beside this 'crisis'. According to Giddens, those new risks and dangers that the Runaway World brings into our lives open up, at the same time, new possibilities of



action and existence for humankind, which could be more beneficial and safer in the long term. Indeed, Giddens sees this new opportunity as emerging from what he calls 'life politics' (Giddens, 1991: 209). And for us, it is particularly interesting to see the way in which Giddens develops his notion of life politics in close relation to what is happening in the sexual and emotional lives of western societies. From this point of view, it seems appropriate here to look closely at the kind of approach that he provides, largely as a way of foregrounding my own attempts to link it to contemporary discourse of sexual citizenship.

### *3.4 Rights/Responsibilities*

We are, according to Giddens, experiencing a deep transformation in the nature of sexual identity and intimacy. Like other traditions, the traditional family, once based on traditional marriage and traditional sexuality, is now in a breakdown crisis. In its place, we see rather contingent, uncertain, and even risky relationships developing with the emergence of what Giddens calls 'plastic sexuality' (Giddens, 1992).

'Plastic sexuality' is sexuality freed from its traditional relation to reproduction. Its emergence is analysed in his book, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, in terms of the long-term development of modern methods of birth control and reproductive technologies, which helped sexuality, especially female sexuality, to become fully autonomous from its naturally given relation to 'reproduction', 'kinship' and 'generations' (Giddens, 1992: 27). This separation between reproduction and sexuality has changed two things. Firstly, it weakened patriarchal control of the female body. The division between 'virtuous' married mothers and those unmarried but sexually active 'fallen' women was an effective force through which

men could traditionally police women's sexuality within the patriarchal marriage system (Giddens, 1992: 29). This, according to Giddens, has now crumbled as sexuality has become almost completely separated from reproduction, and women, by making a further move towards sexual revolution over the past few decades, successfully undermined male sexual privilege. Secondly, heterosexuality has lost its privileged position, too. It is no longer the only legitimised sexuality justified by its natural connection with reproduction. The logical consequence of the escape of sexuality from reproduction is that the meaning of sexuality, freed from a mix of nature and tradition, becomes fundamentally bound up with 'a quality of individuals', something that needs to be reflexively sought by individuals in their relationship with others rather than being pre-given (Giddens, 1992: 27). As Giddens puts it:

'Sexuality' today has been discovered, opened up and made accessible to the development of varying life-styles. It is something each of us 'has', or cultivates, no longer a natural condition which an individual accepts as a preordained state of affairs. Somehow, in a way that has to be investigated, sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms (1992: 15).

If plastic sexuality is sexuality that has no intrinsic content or form, but something that has to be reflexively sought by individuals in their relationship with others, its emergence, according to Giddens, is closely linked to the development of a new form of personal relationship – 'the pure relationship'. The pure relationship as an ideal type is a reflexive relationship, being constantly negotiated by both parties as a part of our 'reflexive project of self' (Giddens, 1991: 5). For this very reason, it is also 'internally referential', meaning that the relationship is sustained not by external forces, but by mutual efforts of both parties to bring sufficient emotional satisfaction for each other (Giddens, 1991;



Giddens, 1992: 58). Here, love becomes 'confluent love' that Giddens contrasts with 'romantic love'. Emerging in the late eighteenth century with the idea of individuality, freedom, and self-realisation, romantic love depended on 'projective identification' with the other through whom one found a feeling of completeness (1992: 61). This was the idea of true love or what Giddens calls, 'forever' and 'one-and-only' kinds of love that could be easily associated with the traditional and monogamous marriage institution (1992: 46, 61). Confluent love found in the pure relationship is in many ways quite opposite. It is contingent, temporary and relative rather than fixated and monogamous: the relationship lasts 'until further notice' depending on the degrees to which intimacy develops (1992: 63). 'Commitment' and 'trust' based on mutual emotional satisfaction and sexual pleasure are important for intimacy to grow, but as the relationship is inherently voluntary, it can also be easily broken up. This is what Giddens calls a 'contradiction' of the pure relationship.

It is a feature of the pure relationship that it can be terminated, more or less at will, by either partner at any particular point. For a relationship to stand a chance of lasting, commitment is necessary; yet anyone who commits herself without reservations risks great hurt in the future, should the relationship become dissolved (1992: 137).

There are two main ways in which this contradiction between 'trust' and 'risk' inherent in pure relationships can be resolved: there are, in Giddens own words, 'good' and 'bad' ways to resolve our intimate problems (Giddens, & Pierson, 1998: 127-8). The good way is to form an intimate relationship based on 'dialogues', 'trust' and emotional care for other's feelings and desires. It is a relationship between autonomous equals, and each party in the relationship, therefore, 'has equal rights and obligations' (Giddens, 1999). Mutual respect and communication is the key dynamic that makes a relationship work. And this 'emotional democracy', as Giddens calls it, opens up revolutionary possibilities of a 'wholesale democratising



of the interpersonal domain' including our friendship, kinship and other social relations (Giddens, 1992: 3). The bad one, by contrast, is precisely the opposite. It's a way of life sunk into compulsiveness through 'addiction' or 'co-dependence'. Driven by anxiety and insecurity, it draws back to tradition and the ritual of the past where relationships are primarily based on 'arbitrary power', 'coercion' or 'violence' (Giddens, 1999). As a result, our autonomy and equality gained through detraditionalisation are sacrificed here.

Having said our intimate problems emerged with plastic sexuality and pure relationships as such, it is interesting to see how he finally translates his analysis of intimacy into politics – 'life politics'. Life politics is 'the politics of life-style' closely related with decisions involved with the question, 'how shall I live?' (Giddens, 1992: 197). In such a way, life politics is directly related to the ways in which we develop our self-identities (including our sexual identities) and personal (or sexual) relationships in society. What Giddens is trying to show from his discussion of contradictions in the pure relationship is that our life choice decisions, uprooted from tradition, now have ethical dimensions: as autonomous equal beings, we can now choose our lifestyles, but what we choose has direct impacts on others with whom we form our personal and social relationship. Stories of plastic sexuality prevail 'here' in late-modern societies, and the possibility of intimacy that promises democracy in our post-traditional and post-patriarchal society is 'real'. What we need is, then, to develop some kinds of ethical guidelines or principles for our choice making. And our sexual identities and relationships, seen as this life political issue, should also be placed in this ethical frame, the one in which 'a conjunction of happiness, love and respect for others' is possible (1992: 181).

Apart from a rather grand moral narrative based on 'good' and 'bad' ways we can lead our personal lives, precisely what this ethics



of personal life would be like in our post-traditional society is not much discussed by Giddens. Nor does he provide any specific ways in which 'good' ways of doing intimacy can be encouraged against 'bad' ways. What is implicitly suggested by Giddens, however, is that we can in some way institutionalise this new ethics by specifying rights and obligations, not simply in 'formal' but also in 'substantive' ways (Giddens, 1992: 187). It is interesting here to note that Giddens, in his final suggestion for a desirable late-modern society, uses this traditional language of citizenship of 'rights and duties' that need to be extended to the sphere of the intimate. As Giddens quite bluntly puts it:

Rights and obligations: as I have tried to make clear, in some part these define what intimacy actually is. Intimacy should not be understood as an interactional description, but as a cluster of prerogatives and responsibilities that define agendas of practical activity (1992: 190).

How has this conclusion shifted the terrain of the debate around intimacy?

### *3.5 Private/Public*

'Intimate citizenship' as conceptualised by Ken Plummer is perhaps the perspective that deals with the subject that is left by Giddens most directly.

In a similar way to Giddens, Plummer recognises stories of 'intimate troubles' having emerged in our intimate/private lives as we enter a late modern world. In Plummer's own words, we now face 'intimate troubles' around 'new families', 'new sexualities', 'new genders', 'new reproductive technologies', 'sexual abuses' and 'a whole gallery of new personal types' including sex addicts or people with AIDS (Plummer 2003: 5-7). Again, like Giddens, these troubles

are seen as having emerged as a result of proliferating personal choices. The old grand narratives and structures that once provided firm guidelines over one's life have now gone. Using familiar vocabularies similar to those employed by Giddens, Plummer suggests that we are now entering a world of 'choices', 'flexibilities' and 'multiplicities' against 'unity', 'permanence' and 'continuance' (Plummer, 2001: 239; 2003: 18). As choices available for the individual increase, so does our feeling of uncertainty, anxiety, or danger over our choices. This, according to Plummer, generates a tension around what he calls 'contested intimacies' in late modern society where conflicting choices, practices and morals over the kinds of personal/private lives we now should be leading become the main cultural and political battle (Plummer, 2000: 439; 2001: 246).

How does the language of citizenship come into this battle? Having described various intimacy troubles that have emerged in late modern society, Plummer asks the following questions: 'How can we live in a world of growing differences, contradictions, tensions, and confusions without finding a few slender threads of continuity to which we can cling? Can we indeed find some universals – however tenuous – on which we can agree in a time of such rapid change and, for some, social disintegration?' (Plummer, 2003: 49-50). For Plummer, a language of citizenship, when it is reworked in the late modern context, can provide a useful map that can guide us to answer these questions.

Citizenship has been traditionally understood in terms of 'a set of practices' (juridical, political, economic and social) and 'a bundle of rights and duties' that arise there from, which together define a person as a common member of a polity (Turner, 1993; Isin, & Wood, 1999). Conceptualised in this way, citizenship provides a singular and universal identity to citizens – associated with our common membership of a polity and bound up with equal rights and



obligations, we are required to leave our narrow individual or group interests and differences behind, and to play an active part in the political, social and economic lives of our community.

It is perhaps this universal aspiration of citizenship that attracts Plummer who attempts to find a way we can reach the terrain of common ground in the context of growing intensity of 'intimate troubles'. At the same time, however, Plummer recognises fundamental problems intensely emerging in both theories and practices of citizenship in our late modern society, which need to be addressed before we utilise the idea of citizenship in the sphere of the intimate. The main problem Plummer identifies is arising from the fact that the universal citizen identity in a polity, often formally prescribed in the law, is now to be constructed out of evermore heterogeneous life styles and various particular identities emerged in late modern context. In other words, what concerns Plummer here is the problem of citizenship in late modern society where life politics based on choices and differences make the search for the universal identity implied by citizenship becomes increasingly difficult (see Purvis & Hunt, : 457-8). The problem multiplies even further since these newly emerging areas around life politics have never given due attention to the way in which citizenship has been traditionally conceptualised. These problems, combined together, directly challenge his efforts to theorise citizenship above the complex heterogeneity of intimate/private lives.

What is to be done? According to Plummer, we need to modify our conception of citizenship so as to accommodate present social changes (Plummer, 2003: 141). Indeed, he suggests the term, 'invention of intimate citizenship', as a possible response.

Extending the notion of rights and responsibilities to 'our most intimate desires, pleasures and ways of being in the world', intimate

citizenship concerns issues like: 'the decisions people have to make over the control (or not) over one's body, feelings, relationships; access (or not) to representations, relationships, public spaces, etc.; and socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences, erotic experiences' (Plummer, 1996: 48; 2003: 14). Here, intimate citizenship, at least in theory, bridges a gap between the private, the zone of one's personal choices and lifestyles, and the public, where the traditional notion of citizenship has been clustered around one's political and social lives. It refers to the process of 'public discourse on the personal life' in which a multiplicity of personal choices and conflicting voices around intimacies are publicly discussed and our collective rights and responsibilities are, therefore, being constantly negotiated (Plummer, 2003: 68).

In practice, however, the question of how we can collectively arrive at a consensus on those intimate issues, which is being increasingly contested in late modern society and often crystallised in terms of essential differences through identity politics, still needs to be answered. Here He echoes the importance of dialogue, communication, and trust put forward by Giddens as a way to democratise our citizenship practices (Giddens, 1999). From the reframed intimacy based on dialogue in late modern life, Giddens sees the potential for deepening democracy in our society as a whole. Plummer goes further, claiming that we need to learn how to do dialogue to actualise this potential. Indeed, we need another invention beside 'intimate citizenship', and this, according to Plummer, is 'dialogic citizenship'.

'Storytelling' lies at the heart of Plummer's idea of dialogic citizenship (Plummer, 1994; 1995; 1996; 2001; 2003). Through story telling/listening we can recognise differences, understand and sympathise with the position of others, and create a moral path to settle our conflicts. For our storytelling to work this way, however,



we need to 'learn' ethics of dialogue that involve the following: mutual recognition based on respect for others; understanding of emotional and situational basis of storytelling; and finally continuous efforts to find something in common out of differences (Plummer, 2003: 86-91). Here, being a good intimate citizen means becoming a good dialogic citizen who, according to Plummer, 'does not speak in monologues but inhabits a world where people are interrelated and able to communicate with one another' (Plummer, 2003: 87).

One of the problems that immediately appear in this perspective, which Plummer also seems to recognise well, is that our searches for a common ground through good dialogue based on storytelling does not necessarily mean that we will always reach an 'inclusive' sense of good. On the contrary, it is also very likely that we may end up with a position in which we all agree on creating a world of relativism and celebrating our differences with little regard for any universal values. This, what others often call, 'the politics of difference', is far from what Plummer advocates. In the idea of citizenship, Plummer finds boundaries that are always and unavoidably drawn between who is and who is not a member or citizen. Although he suggests that the boundaries are not permanently fixed, but always being 'reworked' and 'shifted', they nevertheless provide 'a recurrent site for debates about what is good and what is not' (Plummer, 2003: 55). Seen in this way, the idea of intimate citizenship also embraces a kind of moral standard for inclusion that we all perhaps need to agree as 'a basic precondition' for our dialogue (Plummer, 2003: 110). In other words, our recognition of differences needs to be followed by the recognition of basic moral standards upon which our dialogue can search for further common ground. Plummer outlines the following lists of universal values on which our ethical dialogue is to be grounded.



They are: the need 'to promote democratic policies'; 'to enlarge areas of autonomy, choice, and freedom'; 'to extend the spheres of justice and equality to all'; 'to designate a common program of human rights'; 'to minimize harm'; 'to acknowledge minimal human functional capabilities'; 'to recognize others'; 'to promote daily caring for others'; and 'to sponsor an ethic of love' (2003: 111-114).

These are some basic values that constitute what Plummer calls 'thin universals', or what is alternatively called, 'minimal consensus' (Plummer 2001: 246; 2003: 95). It is on this minimalist morality Plummer sees the possibility of building further common values if we practice his suggested way of doing ethical dialogues in our social lives. Indeed, intimate citizenship is all about developing these moral standards of inclusion through our common efforts to understand others based on ethics and storytelling. The boundaries are drawn in which we define who is and who is not included among intimate citizens, but they are, in essence, 'moral' boundaries. They are constantly redrawn and shifting, but firmly grounded on the ethics of 'love', 'respect', 'understanding', 'freedom', 'choice', 'justice', and 'equality'. As long as we are all willing to 'sit and talk', to tell and listen to stories, the ways in which these moral boundaries are drawn are therefore, in principle, inclusive. Indeed, Plummer concludes his book, *Intimate Citizenship* with optimism and argues: 'if we can learn how to talk and how to listen, we may begin to sense that in the end there are some common values that hold humanity together' (2003: 146).

From what we have discussed so far, we know where his optimism fundamentally comes from. Both Giddens' and Plummer's overemphasis on heightened individual choices in late modern society leaves them blind to the fact that we are still making choices in the context of persistent structural inequalities. According to Jamieson, for example, Giddens ignores the ways in which intimacy



and gender inequality coexist in many heterosexual couple relations today (Jamieson, 1999: 491). This is because, contrary to what Giddens argues, contemporary heterosexual intimate relations are shaped not only by our 'desire to feel equal and intimate', but also by other material and social circumstances that condition the way we make choices in our personal relationships. Gender gaps in employment, earnings and career progression, for instance, give men more choices to control domestic financial matters, as well as choices around opting in and out of domestic work and child care (1999: 484). This, in turn, often generates gender different ways in which the sense of caring, intimacy and love are constructed in many heterosexual relationships: men's caring is often expressed through their generous income support in the household, whereas women's love and caring are measured greatly through their devotion to housework as well as to their mothering role (1999: 485). In this context, heterosexual couples still sustain the sense of good and intimacy 'despite unequal sacrifice for their common good', which, however, considerably challenges the heart of Giddens notion of pure relationship based on gender equality (1999: 484).

For Jamieson, when our unequal structural relations condition the way in which we make choices, our search for common good based on our different personal choices can also be bounded by this structural inequality. Unlike Giddens, Plummer overtly acknowledges that intimacies in late modern society are very much located 'in worldwide inequalities of class, gender, age, race and the like' (Plummer, 2003: 145). In the context of inequalities structuring our daily lives, he also admits that intimate citizens working towards common good may, in practice, generate 'intimate inequalities' upon which new patterns of exclusion and marginalization can emerge in the intimate citizenship project (Young, 1990: 259). Nevertheless, Plummer unconvincingly translates these problems related with



inequality into the troubles around depoliticised 'differences', producing largely a liberal and pluralistic framework for his intimate citizenship project. As a result, a number of theoretical reductions follow.

Grounded in differences rather than inequalities, Plummer first reduces various intimate troubles into moral troubles. Here, we find Plummer defines conflicts 'embedded in cultures of class and income, ethnicity, and race, gender and sexual orientation, age group, and religion' – the conflicts that might have emerged from existing patterns of inequality and discrimination – as 'moral conflicts of our time' which fundamentally concern 'the ways in which other people should live' (Plummer 2003: 34). These moral troubles found in public spheres are then individualised. They are, according to Plummer, the product of proliferated individual choices and increased individual life politics which have emerged in our late modern society. Here, individual choices are not treated as different (and perhaps unequal) social choices, carefully negotiated by individuals under certain material, and social conditions. Instead, Plummer re-moralises these choices. In other words, they are primarily moral choices exercised increasingly by free individuals in a society where absolute lines of virtue and vice have collapsed. This situation is then seen as having created what Bauman calls the 'ethical paradox' in our society:

The ethical paradox of the post-modern condition is that it restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised....Moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice (Bauman, 1992: xxii).

Our intimate life, seen as being caught in this ethical paradox, requires some sorts of collective moral responsibilities. Here we find the model of citizenship becomes increasingly useful for Plummer.



By reframing its traditional language of rights and responsibilities on ethics and dialogue, Plummer invents ways in which the standards of inclusion for intimate citizens, fundamentally lacking in our late modern society, can be envisaged (Weeks 1995). However, as we have briefly noted already, this is largely done through a number of reductive conceptualisations in which his confusion between inequality and difference lies at the heart of this optimism. What would happen to the story of intimate citizenship if we take the question of inequality more seriously than Plummer did? It is to this we now turn.

### *3.6 Inequality/Difference*

The emergent trend within the social sciences in recent times has increasingly drawn its attention to ‘the problem of difference’, and the ‘problem’ of difference is often perceived in terms of the ‘difficulty’ that it brings into the notion of social unity and cohesion (Seidman, 1997: 2).

Giddens, in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, pointed to the late-modern condition under which lived sexual difference termed ‘plastic sexuality’ emerged. According to Giddens, sexuality and intimacy, freed from their intrinsic relation to reproduction, have become a site of individual life-styles/choices and an autonomous value sphere – the source of what Plummer calls ‘intimate troubles’ in late modern society. As we have noted already, Giddens suggested that we need to develop a kind of new institutionalised sexual ethics that could guide our choice making, to which Plummer responds in terms of his intimate citizenship project. Based on a communicative ethics built into his conception of intimate citizenship, Plummer saw the problem of inclusion of sexual-intimate difference in late modern society as one that could be optimistically addressed. Here, Plummer

asks us to be good intimate citizens – respectable and self-reflexive citizens who, by morally empowering ourselves through our experiences and shared democratic principles, can perform an ethical dialogue with others, and therefore successfully deliver common good out of our differences.

But what would such optimism be like if we approach the problem of difference ‘differently’? As we have noted already, Plummer, in developing his idea of intimate citizenship, partially recognises the fact that existing structural inequalities in late-modern society can generate conditions under which his intimate citizenship project that works for a common good may reproduce ‘intimate inequalities’ (see Plummer, 2003: 31, 57). Nevertheless, Plummer does not investigate this issue further, and the problem of intimate inequality largely remained, in fact, in the background in his theory of intimate citizenship. Instead, we found the problem of difference, the conflicts around different moral values and the search for dialogue among them, was the main issue dealt with in his project for intimate citizenship. Here, we are simply interested in knowing why this was the case.

To answer this question, we need to know a particularly way Plummer understands the problem of inequality in our society. We noted two things already, that is: (1) Plummer reduces the problem of inequality to the problem of difference, while (2) difference is fundamentally conceived as ‘diversity’ being rooted in increased individual life-styles/choices in late modern society. Together, these arguments largely depoliticize the problem of inequality and difference, and open a space for Plummer to search for a kind of ideal of ‘power-free’ but ‘choice-negotiating’ dialogue among plurality upon which discursive democracy above ‘politics’ is envisaged.

We, however, are going to put issues around inequality and



difference differently from the way Plummer did. And to do this, it might be helpful to us to attend to the story of 'differentiated citizenship' proposed by Iris Marion Young here (Young, 1989). Like Plummer's intimate citizenship project, Young's conception of 'differentiated citizenship' is based on Habermas's model of communicative ethics that finds in dialogue an effective means for recognition of social differences and their inclusion in democratic society. Contrary to Plummer, however, Young does not simply reduce the problem of inequalities to the problem of differences and depoliticized/individualised diversities. Rather, in her attempt to find a political and democratic condition for the possibility of a just political citizenship based on communication, Young attends seriously to the problem of unequal social differences that structurally hamper a just political dialogue among differences. From this point of view, Young develops her theory of differentiated citizenship that aims to offer a way of synthesizing a politics of difference with equality under what she calls 'a communicative democracy' (Young, 1996b). Our main question is, then, whether her way of synthesization of difference and equality provides a convincingly different space to rethink sexual citizenship from that being presented by Ken Plummer.

### *3.7 Paradox of Difference*

Although Young does not directly approach the question of citizenship through the lens of sexuality, her general argument takes the case of sexual minorities as one example of 'group differences', being excluded and marginalised in the modern politics of citizenship founded on 'the ideal of universal citizenship'. For Young, this is a kind of paradox: for the ideal of 'universal' citizenship in the sense of 'citizenship for everyone, and everyone the same qua citizen'

runs counter to the very politics of modern citizenship that excludes certain groups defined as 'different' (Young, 1989: 251). How does she explain this paradox?

In the ideal of universal citizenship, Young finds a troubling logic inherent in modern political thought that uncritically associates the meaning of universality with 'generality' on the one hand, and with 'equal treatment' on the other. According to Young, this approach is problematic: it stands directly opposed to the democratic meaning of universality embedded in the idea of citizenship that assumes 'the inclusion and participation of everyone' as citizens in a polity (Young, 1989). This is for the following reasons.

To begin with, universality seen as the expression of 'generality', Young argues, tends to impose a 'homogeneity' of citizens in practice that excludes those who are not able to take up 'the general point of view' (251-2). To be able to adopt the general point of view, the point of view that we, as citizens, have in common, we are asked to transcend our particular interests, values, affiliations and feelings that differentiate/divide us, and to instead impartially search for a general interest or common good (see Barber, 1984). For Young, however, such a view that we can take up an impartially general point of view is a 'myth' (Young, 1989: 257); for it is impossible for us to 'adopt a point of view that is completely impersonal and dispassionate, completely separated from any particular context and commitment' (Young, 1990: 103). Perhaps, it is just a political fiction that mythically promises a desirable goal of our politics – the creation of a general will as the expression of our unity. However, in the context of social inequality, this political fiction serves an important ideological function. According to Young, where there are significant differences of power and resources among social groups with their ethnic, sexual, gender, racial, and class differences, the ideal of universality as generality tends to universalise the particular – the



particular point of view of the privileged (Young, 1990: 115). As Young puts it:

In a society where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens persons should leave behind their particular affiliations and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce that privilege; for the perspectives and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public, marginalizing or silencing those of other groups (Young, 1989: 257).

Framed in this context, Young argues that universalism as 'equal treatment' is just as problematic. Rather than increasing political equality, it politically systematises and legitimises the marginalization or exclusion of underprivileged social groups who are particularised in relation to generality in citizenship politics. The ideal of 'equal treatment' assumes that we, as citizens, are all treated in the same way – the same rules and principles apply to everyone without discrimination. Nevertheless, when the particular point of view of the privileged is universalised as generality, universally applying its rules and principles to everyone with the ideal of 'equal treatment' means that 'differences' of those underprivileged groups derived from their particular histories, situated experiences, interests and affiliations has to be, in practice, constantly 'measured according to norms derived from and defined by privileged groups' (Young, 1989: 255). For Young, this is a politics of assimilation. It requires us to transcend our underprivileged differences in order to be treated as the same. Nevertheless, as long as real group differences remain that makes one not the same as 'everyone', it leaves particularised group differences at a permanent disadvantage – the disadvantage that Young theorised in terms of 'a dilemma of difference' (Young, 1989: 268).

Here, in the context of their 'differences' conditioning their exclusion, underprivileged groups have to prove their sameness as



citizens in order to participate in the citizenship politics. At the same time, however, 'to participate means to accept and adopt an identity one is not, and to try to participate means to be reminded by oneself and others of the identity one is' (Young, 1990: 165). This, according to Young, then constructs an irresolvable dilemma that those oppressed and underprivileged groups face in citizenship politics: that is, their efforts to prove their sameness through participation is precisely what confirms their very difference resulting in their exclusion.

From this point of view, Young argues that in order for citizenship politics to be truly universalistic in the sense of 'inclusion and participation of everyone', we need a politics of 'differentiated citizenship' based on two principles: (1) instead of pressing for 'generality', we need a politics of difference that affirms group differences; (2) and for this to be possible, we need 'different treatment' rather than 'equal treatment' in citizenship politics.

For many theorists of citizenship, the emphasis on group differences rather than their commonness as citizens is a source of their fear of social fragmentation and division (see Elshtain, 1995; Gitlin, 1995; Miller, 1995). For Young, however, the existence of group difference is not only a given condition of our differentiated societies on which our political theory of citizenship should be usefully based, it is also a 'desirable' condition. At the heart of this claim lies the notion of 'mediated social relations' that, Young argues, structures our modern social life (see also Tebble, 2003). According to Young, our social life is ever-more mediated by vast networks of the market economy with its highly complicated division of labour and webs of social administration that characterise our multifaceted institutional relations. This has a specific effect on our lives. It produces profound socio-economic dependencies among us to the extent that 'nearly everyone depends on the activities of seen



and unseen strangers' (Young, 1990: 237). At the same time, however, our different structural locations in these socio-economic networks generate a relational sense of our affinity or differences through which we encounter each other. As a form of social relations, Young defines such a lived sense of connections or differentiations through which we live our life in our plural and structurally differentiated societies as social groups.

Since our structural locations differently condition our experience and knowledge of the society, Young argues that the different perspectives we derive from our group differences constitute each of our partialities in society. For Young, this means that 'no one can claim to speak in the general interest, because no one of the groups can speak for another, and certainly no one can speak for them all' (Young, 1989: 263). Only when we attend to all of our group particularities being 'voiced, heard and taken account of' in the communication and decision making process, can we arrive at a political judgement which is legitimate as well as objective. Seen in this way, our political problem, Young argues, is not the existence of real group differences that makes one not the same as everyone. Rather than being an obstacle, politically recognised group differentiation is an important 'resource' for the working of a democratic public – a resource with which we can 'correct biases' arising from the dominance of partial perspective as generality (Young, 2000: 83). However, to the degree that our society is differentiated by unequal structural relations in which some of our groups 'have significantly greater ability to use democratic processes for their own ends', social group differentiation increases the likelihood of marginalization and exclusion of disadvantaged group perspectives (Young, 2000: 17). For Young, our political problem is then this unequal group differentiation that hampers a just political communication and decision making across our differences.



From this point of view, Young argues that a truly inclusive citizenship politics that attends to group differentiation needs a reconceptualised meaning of equality that rests on differences rather than sameness; for equality that facilitates ‘the participation and inclusion of all groups’ in a democratic public often requires ‘different treatment’ for oppressed and disadvantaged groups that have no equal voice in public (Young, 1990: 158). Here, different treatment, seen as an important political means to undermine unequal social group differentiation, should involve institutionalised mechanisms that support the following three things: (1) ‘self-organisation of group members’ so that group members can obtain a sense of collective empowerment based on their shared experiences; (2) ‘group generation of policy proposals’ so that group perspectives can be taken seriously into account in the decision making processes; (3) ‘group veto power’ in relation to certain policies that affect a specific group directly (Young, 1990: 184). In this articulation of special rights with group representation that attend to unequal group differentiation, Young finds a democratic space in which distinctive voices and social perspectives of oppressed groups can be properly heard and respected. And this, according to Young, rightly promotes a truly universal citizenship in the sense of full inclusion and participation of everyone as citizens in our democratic processes.

At this moment, it would be interesting for us to compare Young’s idea of democratic citizenship to that of Ken Plummer. Both of their democratic citizenship projects accommodate matters of difference within the communicative terrain as articulated by Jurgen Habermas upon which we are expected to build a truly inclusive universal citizenship. Plummer, in the face of increased differences in our society, emphasises the needs for inclusive citizenship politics in which we, as citizens, are expected to resolve problems arising



from our differences collectively through a supportive and democratic dialogue. In a similar way, Young recognises the importance of democratic communication across our differences as a way of broadening and deepening democracy beyond assimilatory citizenship politics. For the inclusion based on communicative democracy to be truly possible, however, there are conditions to be fulfilled.

For Habermas, the conditions required to arrive at democratic agreement and understanding based on communication are represented in his conception of 'the ideal speech situation', which has following characteristics: (1) 'nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded; (2) 'all participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions'; (3) 'the participants must mean what they say'; and finally (4) 'communication must be freed from external and internal coercion' (Habermas, Cronin, & De Greiff, 1998: 44). In Habermas's scheme of things, this symmetrical condition of the ideal speech situation, which allows all persons the same chance to participate in discourse, promotes a democratic potential for a shared process of collective deliberation. On the other hand, however, they only reflect an 'ideal' context rather than a practical reality; as Young has repeatedly argued, we are not communicating under ideal conditions of equal power, free from any kinds of distortion and forms of coercion (Young, 2000: 17). This means that if this ideal speech situation and its promise for communicative democracy are to have any practical significance, the gap existing between the ideal and the actual contexts in which we communicate each other should be bridged.

Plummer, by theoretically reducing the problem of social inequality to the problem of plural differences and diversities, bridges the gap between the 'ideal' and the 'actual' dialogic situation. Here, the 'ideal context' is unsoundly compounded with 'the actual



context' to the extent that we are 'actually' seen as communicating more or less under 'ideal' conditions of equal power. In contrast, Young's way of bridging the gap is different. Young acknowledges that our social differences, structured in the context of economic, social and cultural power imbalances, give rise to the problem of communicative power imbalances among different groups. Here, with the resulting prejudices and biases, we have a problem of misrecognition of difference that seriously hampers a just political dialogue among differences. The solution is to promote 'institutionalized means for the explicit recognition and representation of oppressed groups' so as to open an ideal democratic space where inclusive political communication across differences becomes possible (Young, 1989: 259).

By presenting how 'what is ideally thinkable' is politically possible in our actual context of unequal social differentiation, Young seem to have bridged the gap not only between 'the ideal' and 'the actual' dialogic situation, but also between the theory and the politics of inclusive universal citizenship. Yet it is not without its problems or its critics. One of the most common criticisms directed at Young's idea of group differentiated citizenship is its essentialist tendencies toward difference (Phillips, 1993; Wilson, 1993b; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Phelan, 2001). Young makes it clear that her definition of social group is anti-essentialist; social groups do not arise from some essential or substantive set of shared attributes, but from 'a sense of identity' relationally, contextually and fluidly constructed out of social relations and processes (Young, 1990: 48). Nevertheless, the allocation of group rights through institutionalised forms of group representation, Phillips argues, may run the risks of freezing group identities at the political level, effecting, in turn, the ontological reification of the group that represses group difference within the group on the one hand and impedes wider solidarity



across differences on the other hand (Phillips, 1993: 96).

Behind this charge of essentialisation of the group, however, looms another, closely linked problem. And this arises from an apparent paradox inherent in the idea of differentiated citizenship, or what I might call, the paradox of differentiation. It is well to be clear what this paradox is.

### *3.8 Paradox of Differentiation*

In her latest book, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Young openly rejects the charge of essentialism by distinguishing her politics of difference from identity politics that implicitly or explicitly present a static, singular and essential conception of group identity and difference. Young is keen to emphasise that her conception of group difference is based on a 'relational logic' rather than a logic of substance (Young 2000: 86); groups are not distinguished from one another by virtue of some specific attributes that constitute their distinctive identities, but by structural relations or structural inequality in which 'they stand to others' (Young 2000: 90). In other words, group difference for Young exists only in and through the relational context of structural group differentiation, and this is, in fact, repeatedly and unambiguously affirmed throughout her book.

If this relational conception of social groups enables Young to avoid the charge of essentialism, her politics of difference does not easily escape the problem. When the relations between groups are constituted as relations of power, disadvantaged and underprivileged groups suffer from social injustice that, according to Young, takes two forms: 'oppression, institutional constraint on self-development' on the one hand, and 'domination, institutional constraint on self-determination' on the other (Young 2000: 29-31). Social justice,

which underpins her account of inclusive democracy, is then defined in terms of social and institutional conditions that promote self-organisation and self-determination of oppressed and dominated groups, expressed in terms of special rights associated with specific group representation for oppressed groups.

Here, we find Fraser's criticism of what she calls 'the identity politics model of recognition' becomes useful, for I think her criticism is equally applicable to Young's politics model of difference presented above. It is worth quoting Fraser at length:

Having begun by assuming that identity is dialogical, constructed via interaction with another subject, it ends by valorizing monologism – supposing that misrecognised people can and should construct their identity on their own. It supposes, further, that a group has the right to be understood solely in its own terms – that no one is ever justified in viewing another subject from an external perspective or in dissenting from another's self-interpretation. But again, this runs counter to dialogical view, making cultural identity an autogenerated auto-description, which one presents to others as an obiter dictum. Seeking to exempt 'authentic' collective self-representation from all possible challenges in the public sphere, this sort of identity politics scarcely fosters social interaction across differences: on the contrary, it encourages separatism and group enclaves' (Fraser, 2000: 113).

A question arises here is: what would happen to Young's politics of difference if we take her relational logic of group differentiation more seriously, and apply it to her own model of politics? The answer might be: 'a paradox of differentiation' arises.

When the relations between groups are constituted as relations of power and subordination, we can demand rights to self-determination and self-development for all of our disadvantaged and underprivileged groups in the name of our 'difference' being disadvantaged. Since our differences are constituted within, not outside, the relational context of unequal group differentiation,



however, underprivileged groups face an irresolvable dilemma in relation to the context that constitutes their differences. Laclau describes powerfully and persuasively what this dilemma is:

The basic point is this: I cannot assert a differential identity without distinguishing it from a context, and in the process of making the distinction, I am asserting the context at the same time. And the opposite is also true: I cannot destroy a context without destroying at the same time the identity of the particular subject who carries out the destruction. It is a very well known historical fact that an oppositionist force whose identity is constructed within a certain system of power is ambiguous vis-à-vis that system, because the latter is what prevents the constitution of the identity and it is, at the same time, its condition of existence. And any victory against the system destabilises also the identity of the victorious force (Laclau, 1995: 100).

What Laclau is pointing out here is a paradox of differentiation. The paradox of differentiation arises from ambiguities inherent in any differences constructed in the context of unequal differentiation. Here, the right to difference of misrecognised groups has to be asserted within a system of power that constitutes and (at the same time) excludes their differential identities. According to Laclau, this entails the radically disturbing fact that the possibility of retaining a fully achieved difference depends on its very 'failures in the full constitution of a differential identity' (Laclau, 1995: 100). This is because of the following reason. If a differential identity is fully achieved, this can only be so within a context in which it is differentiated. The context whereby it is differentiated, however, constitutes its difference as it is and at the same time it is not. Its fully achieved identity within that context, therefore, means that either it is fully integrated to the context that denies its identity, or it supersedes the context that recognises its identity. In either case, however, it fails to fully constitute its differential identity. In the formal case, there remains missed fullness in relation to its identity. In the latter case, it inevitably destabilises its own identity. What



does this paradox leave us with? Is there a way around this dilemma?

So far, I pointed out two problems with regard to Young's idea of 'differentiated citizenship': its essentialist tendencies toward difference on the one hand; and the paradox of differentiation it generates on the other. In Chapter 4, I discuss how Young, by integrating her model of 'differentiated citizenship' into the framework of a communicative democracy based on 'storytelling', goes some way towards overcoming these dilemmas, especially, the criticism that her model encourages a sort of identity politics – 'separatism and group enclaves' (Fraser, 2000: 113) – which 'impede wider solidarity across differences' (Phillips, 1993: 96).

Young distinguishes her model of 'communicative' democracy from the ideal of 'deliberative' democracy: while the latter is seen to privilege rational, dispassionate, and logical arguments, the former, which attends to the problem of inequality and social differences, extends political forms of communicative interactions to include storytelling (Young, 1996b; 1997a; 2000). This is because of three reasons: (1) storytelling, Young argues, is a mode of expression that is 'equally' applicable to everyone; (2) it promotes mutual understanding across our differences by revealing the context of our differentiation; and, therefore, (3) aids in constituting 'a total social knowledge' (see Section 4.2).

Yet, as I shall argue in Chapter 4, Young's attempt to incorporate the normative force of 'storytelling' into her model of citizenship politics is problematic: to the extent that the idea of storytelling, upon which the notion of intimate/sexual citizenship is currently mobilised in U.K, is disconnected from the sociological/political analysis of power relations, its use as an inclusive strategy largely results in a de-politicisation of citizenship politics. In Part II,



*Sexual Stories go to Westminster*, I take up this issue in more detail, and discuss the political implications of storytelling for sexual citizenship making in Britain, analysing in particular, problematic ways in which storytelling has been deployed in the political debates on the homosexual/ity.

## **Part III**

Sexual Stories go to Westminster



## Chapter 4

# Politics of Storytelling

### *4.1 Introduction*

From the partial decriminalisation of adult homosexual acts in private by the Sexual Offences Act (1967) to the most recent Civil Partnership Act (2004), a series of Parliamentary debates about same sex sexualities provides a distinctive source in which we can identify a range of official sexual stories told in Britain. Several in-depth, content-related studies that analyse various ways in which homosexuality has been discursively constructed in the parliamentary debate exist (see Reinhold, 1994; Smith, 1994; Stychin, 2003; Rahman, 2004; Waites, 2005; McGhee, 2001; Moran, 1996). Most of these studies employ Foucauldian discourse analysis, tracing and identifying particular ways in which the 'truth' of homosexuality has been spoken of, and with what regulative knowledge/power effects.

Foucauldian discourse analysis, it is argued, is useful in analysing changed or continual ways in which various ideas and knowledge, called upon in the Parliamentary debate on a specific homosexuality issue, produce a location for a collective '(dis)identification' and 'subjectification' (Epstein, Johnson, & Steinberg, 2000: 8). And this is because the 'truth' of homosexuality, discursively established in the official debate, works as a boundary marker, often separating those who are sexually acceptable members of the community from those who are not, and, therefore, associates ideas/practices of eligibility for 'community belonging' with notions of normative sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

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12. In her discourse analysis of a Parliamentary debate on Section 28 Local Government Act during the late 1980s, Susan Reinhold, for example, investigates the ways in which the idealized notion of nuclear family form based on a naturalized conception of 'human sexuality as heterosexual' constructs homosexuals as 'threats' to the family as well as to the state/nation that upholds family values, thereby invoking fear around the homosexual 'Other'. Anna Marie Smith's analysis shows how such fear, deployed in the Section 28 Parliamentary debate, further constructs homosexual identity in opposing binary terms, that is 'good' and 'bad' homosexuals, establishing boundaries of who are acceptable homosexuals and who are not: good (safe) homosexuals are those who are closeted, self-limiting and self-disciplining homosexuals, while bad (dangerous) homosexuals are those who constantly attempt to cross their closeted frontiers by proselytizing and 'promoting' their homosexuality (Smith, 1994: 204-5). Stychin, who analyzes the recent Parliamentary debate on Repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, however, finds that 'somewhat different good homosexuals' are discursively promoted under New Labour government (Stychin, 2003: 40). Ideas and knowledge about homosexuality as biologically fixed rather than a matter of choice are increasingly deployed in the debate, and homosexuality, for this reason, is no longer seen as being 'dangerous' because 'it is not contagious' (Stychin, 2003: 36). This discursive switch found in the Repeal of section 28 constructs 'new' good homosexuals: rather than being completely closeted, new good homosexuals are those who, like good heterosexuals, channel their relationships into long-term, monogamous, and desexualized romantic relationships, fully conforming to good heterosexual family values. In other words, homosexuals, in order to be good members of the community, must now become like 'good' heterosexuals.



The 'truth' of homosexuality and homosexual identity spoken of in the parliamentary debate is, however, contested '(moral) truth', situated in what Smith calls the 'evidence game' (Smith, 1994: 192). Parliament is an agonistically organized national, political institution whereby argumentative contests over 'truth'/'rightness' often involve, as in court proceedings, the practice of telling supporting or contesting evidence – evidence used as a source to support or contest political '(moral) truth' claims. And it is here, in this evidence game which involves the practice of presenting evidence, that we find, as I shall show later, a complex set of narrative strategies becoming prominent in parliamentary debate (see Section 4.3).

In the next three chapters that follow, I examine continued or changed ways in which politicians tell stories about (or of) sexual minorities as an important way of telling supporting or contesting evidence about the specific (or general) issue-related '(moral) truth' of homosexuality in Britain (Chapter 5, 6, and 7). What I am particularly interested in discussing is a gradual coming-out of what Scott calls, 'the evidence of experience' (the evidence of same-sex experience) in the debate, which, (re)presented in the form of personal 'true' stories of same-sex experiences, become an important way of (re)presenting/telling the evidence about the 'truth' of homosexual identities, linked, in turn, to the idea of their rights/rightness (Scott, 1991).

To this end, I pay specific attention to the recent debates on Civil Partnership in the British Parliament (Chapter 7). My prime focus will be stories of same-sex experience told during the debates, which, as they comprise a significant part of the debates, enter the political spectacle, and become the very grounds and warrants for political claims for recognition (or misrecognition) of rights/rightness of same-sex relationships. Bearing this in mind, however, I first want to give a critical overview of some of the theoretical approaches to '*personal experience stories around the sexual*' relevant for this

chapter (Plummer, 1995). This, taken up in the next section (Section 4.2), will help me to ground a methodological question that I plan to address in this chapter, that is: what may happen to personal experience stories around the sexual when they enter the representational public/political arena, the parliament? (Section 4.3) It is also this question the later three chapters that follow hopes to illustrate in more detail (Chapter 5, 6, and 7), This chapter finishes with some brief comments about story data, selected and represented for the analysis in Part II.

## *4.2 On Sexual Stories of Citizenship*

In her critical assessment of the ideal of deliberative democracy that privileges the 'force of the better argument' in the democratic decision making processes, Iris Marion Young argues that a truly inclusive democratic process in our highly differentiated multicultural societies should accommodate storytelling that complements arguments. And this is for the following reasons.

Firstly, storytelling, Young argues, is a more democratic and egalitarian mode of political communication than rational arguments. Here, the main problem with deliberative practises that demand rational, dispassionate, and logical arguments is that, as Sanders points out, 'some citizens are better than others at articulating their arguments in rational, reasoned terms' (Sanders, 1997: 348). Rather than being universally applicable, the proposed procedures of deliberative argumentation, Sanders argues, tend to universalise the interests of those who can make good, reasoned arguments – those who can make use of a white, western, and middle class male standard of reasoning and objectivity. This results in what Young calls a 'communicative exclusion': many people who would be affected by political decisions are excluded from the



political decision making process simply because they express their thoughts and needs in styles and languages different from rational argumentative forms. Storytelling, according to Young, weakens such exclusive tendencies inherent in the deliberative approach to democratic politics. This is because storytelling, contrary to rational arguments, is not exclusive; it is a mode of expression that is both universally and equally applicable to everyone. As Young remarks: 'Because everyone has stories to tell, with different styles and meanings, and because each can tell her story with equal authority, the stories have equal value in the communicative situation' (Young, 1997b: 73).

Secondly, telling and listening to stories of one's experience, unlike conflicting arguments, facilitates understanding across our differences; for it 'reveals the particular experience of those in social locations, experience that cannot be shared by those situated differently but that they must understand in order to do justice to the others' (Young, 1997b: 72). Here, understanding across difference means more than a simple recognition of our experiential differences, however. A true understanding involves, to borrow a term from Hannah Arendt, an 'enlarged mentality', that is, the capacity to imagine oneself in the place of the other, and to think from the perspectives of differently situated others (Arendt, 1982: 42-3). For Young, storytelling makes this act of situated thinking possible, for stories reveal not only experience but also how those differently situated others understand the meaning and values of their particular experience, thereby serving to explain to outsiders what experiential practises 'mean to the people who hold them' and 'why they are valuable' (Young, 2000: 75).

Thirdly, stories are not only steps in arguments, revealing particular experiences and their meanings, and thereby promoting understanding across our differences, they also aid in constituting 'a



total social knowledge' (Young, 2000: 76). Stories are the expressions of social relations, in the sense that, in one's story of self-experience, we, in fact, find the story of one's related-experience with others who affect one's experience. In listening to variously situated others' stories, one can, therefore, 'learn about how their own position, actions, and values appear to others from the stories they tell', which, according to Young, helps listeners to develop fully reflexive thinking about an issue in a way that 'takes account of the perspectives of others' (ibid.). In sharing and combining stories expressed in public, we can, Young argues, then form what she calls, 'a collective social wisdom' – an enlarged social knowledge which plays an indispensable function in our inclusive democratic political decision making process.<sup>13</sup> As Young, summarising her argument thus far, argues:

There are two general conclusions to draw from this account of the role of narrative communication in which people aim to solve collective problems through discussion. First, narrative can often play an important role in argument in democratic discussion. Where arguments about policy or action depend on appeals to need or entitlement, narrative provides an important way to demonstrate need or entitlement. Narrative also contributes to political argument by the social knowledge it offers of how social segments view one another's actions and what are the likely effects of policies and actions on people in different social locations (Young, 1997b: 73).

Yet, if Young discusses the reasons why the use of personal experience stories in political communication is fundamental to

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13. Young's ideas here resemble those of Arendt. According to Arendt, stories enable what she calls, 'representative' thinking (similar to Young's notion of 'reflexive' thinking), which is vitally important for ethical judgement: 'The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would think and feel if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking' (Arendt, 1977: 220-1).



restorative justice, Plummer, in his *Telling Sexual Stories*, highlights the fact that personal stories, in order to perform such political/public tasks, first need to come into their time: stories, in other words, need to establish social worlds waiting and willing to hear them.

Stories, according to Plummer, 'have their times' (Plummer, 1995: 126). Some stories, which were not told in the past, may now be widely told and heard with much bearing on our contemporary lives. Equally, stories with which we were familiar in the past may no longer be felt to have significance or to be appropriate for today, becoming alien to our own present culture. It is also possible to think here, however, of stories whose time, Plummer argues, has not yet come to be told by those who live them, and, therefore, still remain largely 'hidden from sight' or stories that have not yet even been imagined, let alone been told (Plummer, 1995: 114). Why is this so? How do silenced stories come into their time for telling? These questions, which Plummer asks in his *Telling Sexual Stories*, are closely linked to relations between the realm of private and public in which stories live and travel. Let me discuss Plummer's argument in more detail.

A personal life of a great suffering often leads to a situation where facts, events, or experiences remain unnarratable; for it exceeds normalised, intelligible life patterns and, therefore, creates a deep sense of incommunicability (see Jackson, 2002: 92). Such facts, events, or experiences that often find no social context to be told are without meanings or 'do not convey meanings'. They are, at most, what Hannah Arendt calls, 'an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings' in which story often 'fails' (Arendt, 1973: 106, quoted from Jackson, 2002: 92). In what conditions is one then able to tell one's story about 'an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings'?

In analysing the coming-out of silenced sexual stories that



Plummer finds in the Western world, both old and new sexual stories such as gay/lesbian stories, rape stories, survival stories, the cross-dressing stories, transvestite stories, and transsexual stories, Plummer proposes what he calls, 'the generic process of telling sexual stories', a rough sequence through which sexual stories come out from the silence into their time. The sequence is: '1 Imagining – visualising – empathising; 2 Articulating - vocalising – announcing; 3 Inventing identities – becoming story tellers; 4 Creating social worlds/communities of support'; and finally, '5 Creating a culture of public problems' (Plummer, 1995: 126). He further explains the process as follows:

The process can be pictured as a move from an 'inner world' of telling stories to the self privately to an increasingly public one where the circle of discourse becomes wider and wider. In the earliest moments, the story can hardly be imagined: it may be told privately as a tale to oneself. Later it gets told to a few people – a lover, a friend, a psychiatrist. Slowly it can move out into a public domain where it comes to take on a life of its own. It becomes part of public discourse (Plummer 1995: 126).

From this point of view, storytelling, one may say, is like a journey (Plummer, 1995: 83). It has both its own temporal and spatial dimensions – a passage from the private to the public, structured, in turn, temporally with a beginning (its departure from one's isolated monologue), a middle (becoming an intersubjective story told and listened to) and an end (arriving at the wider social world). Certainly, not every story enters and has equal consequences in the public domain or community in which one belongs. A story's journey from the private to the public, according to Plummer, is often broken, especially when there are no visible others who identify the story as theirs or give it value and claim its legitimacy; or when these supportive visible others/audiences do not possess resources or social power to facilitate the telling of the story, and to make it significant for wider public attention (Plummer 1995: 129). By



contrast, stories whose times have come for their telling, Plummer argues, are those which attract a wider interpretative community of support and comparison, and, therefore, become not only personal matters but also issues of public concern. And it is in this successful story's journey from the private to the public that we, Plummer argues, also find a political and academic discourse on public issues/problems starting to emerge.

A particular way in which sexual problems are currently framed in political terms in Western societies is found in the emerging political discourse around sexual/intimate citizenship. According to Plummer, notions of sexual rights and responsibilities ultimately emerge out of this gradual generic process of sexual telling that involves: (1) the process that puts sexual stories into public circulation; (2) the process in which sexual stories invite others to take part in creating and discovering commonalities and identities; (3) the process whereby communication among different sexual stories is enabled; (4) the process whereby the act of sharing, affirming, and recognising stories helps us to create a new political understanding around our sexual lives; (5) and, therefore, to shape the rights and responsibilities developed within. As Plummer puts it:

Rights and responsibilities are not 'natural' or 'inalienable' but have to be invented through human activities, and built into the notions of communities, citizenship and identities. Rights and responsibilities depend upon a community of stories which make those same rights plausible and possible. They accrue to people whose identities flow out of the self-same communities. Thus it is only as lesbian and gay communities started to develop and women's movements gathered strength that stories around a new kind of citizenship became more and more plausible. The nature of our communities – the languages they use, the stories they harbour, the identities they construct, the moral/political codes they champion – move to the centre stage of political thinking (Plummer 1995: 150).

For Plummer, personal stories of sexual needs and sufferings, circulated in and through sexual communities and movements, and



now entering the wider political/public communities of discourse in a 'new' language of sexual rights, are key to the understanding of current politics of *sexual/intimate citizenship making* found in many western countries (see Plummer, 2003: 101). In analysing the recent political debates on the 'Civil Partnership' in the British parliament, it is possible to illustrate the usefulness of such claims, of seeing sexual citizenship as, in effect, shaped by and through the sexual stories people tell about their needs and rights.

Here, in the parliamentary debates on civil partnership in 2004, personal stories enter the debates by becoming the very grounds and warrants for political claims for legal recognition of same-sex relationships. For example, a story of an old man in Yorkshire who 'had devoted his life to his partner' and yet 'was denied hospital visiting rights' when his partner was seriously ill, and could only hear of his partner's death through his friends is told as a case that typifies 'the indignity, heartbreak and humiliation' that is unjustly suffered by members of same-sex couples in Britain (HL 22 April 2004, col. 403). Another story of a person called Chris, who has recently discovered that he has a cancer, and also found that 'in the event of his death, his partner would be forced to sell the home that they had shared for 25 years to pay death duties' is told by MP Charles Hendry who argues that the situation is 'barbaric' and 'inhumane' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 233). It is also notable that Jackie Smith, the Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, opens the second reading debates on the Civil Partnership Bill in the Commons by telling 'the personal stories of difficulties faced by same-sex couples', which she heard during the consultation on the Bill. These include: a story about a gay man who, on the death of his partner, was 'thrown out of his home by relatives of his partner who had had no contact with him for many years'; a story of another person who 'had to buy the couple's joint possessions from the parents of his deceased partner'; and a story of a woman who was



even 'kept away from her partner's funeral' (HC 2004, October 12, col. 174). These personal stories of difficulties, presented as cases that demonstrate 'the inhumane consequences of the invisibility of same-sex relationships' in Britain, Jackie Smith argues, evidently tell us why the society needs Civil Partnership to provide the same rights of legal recognition for same-sex couples as those currently available for heterosexual couples through marriage (HC 2004, October 12, col. 174-5, 179).

These are stories around gay/lesbian lives, heard in the parliamentary debates on Civil Partnership in 2004. They exemplify, if we follow Plummer's scheme of things, the ways in which stories of gay and lesbian lives, brought out of the private world into a public one, succeed in getting (hitherto regarded as) private sexual issues and troubles firmly on the moral/political agenda. Telling/hearing the story of someone's sufferings and needs in public realms not only raises a range of contested ethical and political issues for the public to recognise, but also provides ways in which such problems can be collectively dealt with. For stories, as Young also emphasises, have transformative power not only because (1) they can cross the boundary that separates our lives into the sphere of the private and the public, but also because (2) they, through their acts of transgressing, bring into conjunction different (and even opposing) standpoints and arguments, thereby enable democratic and inclusive communication.

Central to this process of telling sexual stories is, then, the emergence of politics around sexual/intimate citizenship – politics around recognition and respect of intimate/sexual rights and responsibilities. According to Plummer, this politics, emerging in and through concrete experiential stories people are telling about their sexual lives, bridges personal troubles with public issues, and is likely to make it possible for us to find (if any) common grounds or a common cause that may exist across our differences (Plummer,



2003: 146; Mills, 1959). Here, as I see it, the process in which private same-sex issues/problems become public sexual citizenship issues/problems is a result of the process of storytelling that involves the transformation of the personal into public. And at the heart of this process is the importance of dialogue among stories that creates 'webs of interconnected narratives', and which, in turn, makes 'grounded' moral/political project of intimate/sexual citizenship possible (Plummer, 2003: 98).

However, I argue that it is precisely at this point that this 'generic process of sexual storytelling, seen as being closely associated with the current emergence of intimate/sexual citizenship, may lose its analytical usefulness if we do not, at the same time, consider its relationship with what Foucault calls 'the process of problematization' (Foucault, 1985). Here, the process of problematization I am interested in is the process by which certain sexual behaviours or relationships become public problems (objects of social and political regulation and control), and certain personal stories of experience, in this process of problematization, are utilised into becoming problematized public/general facts and evidences upon which indisputable political arguments or incontestable factual/moral points are made at a given historical moment.<sup>14</sup>

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14. From a methodological point of view, Foucault's conception of 'the process of problematization' is concerned with the question of 'how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a problem' and 'the target of social regulation at a given moment' (Foucault, 1985: 115). According to Foucault, this question, at the same time, is closely linked to the practice of truth-telling operative within the power-relations, which organises, defines, treats 'something real' as a 'problem' at a given social and historical moment. Foucault writes:

When I say that I am studying the 'problematization' of madness, crime, or sexuality, it is not a way of denying the reality of such phenomena. On the contrary, I have tried to show that it was precisely some real existent in the world which was the target of social regulation at a given moment. The question I raise is this: How and why were very different things in the world gathered



Young also recognizes that storytelling, in the political process of problematization, can often be manipulative and even deceitful. She argues that:

Too often in politics, people wrongly generalize from stories. A congressperson tells the story of one welfare mother who spends her days watching television and drinking beer, thereby suggesting that such behavior is common. Narratives can create stereotypes as well as challenge them (Young, 2000: 78).

Expressing her concern over sexual storytelling, which has now become an important political strategy in accomplishing 'progressive legal change' regarding gay/lesbian issues in Western societies, Ruthann Robson, a leading lesbian legal theorist, adds further complexities and contradictions inherent in storytelling (Robson, 1997). While personal sexual stories, which reveal the particularity and complexity involved in personal sexual experience, can effectively undermine certain stereotypes constructed around sexual otherness, they can also, Robson argues, be equally oppressive and essentializing (Robson, 1997: 1416). For example, personal stories of being in a long-term, committed, and monogamous same-sex relationship, as used in political argument for same-sex marriage and/or registered partnerships, may effectively challenge the stereotypes of gays/lesbians of being essentially promiscuous or lacking responsibility. But stories that perform such political tasks as combating 'the "sex as lifestyle" stereotype' can, at the same time, have the effect of 'desexualizing' gays/lesbians/queers, and can be

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together, characterized, analyzed, and treated as, for example, 'mental illness'? What are the elements which are relevant for a given 'problematization'? And even if I won't say that what is characterized as 'schizophrenia' corresponds to something real in the world, this has nothing to do with idealism. For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an 'answer' to a concrete situation which is real (Foucault, 1985: 115).



used as an effective means of problematizing and othering those who do not fit into the norms built upon the institution of marriage (Robson 1997: 1422-3).

Other writers have sought to expand the paradoxical effects that narratives perform in political communication further, and to develop arguments about the relationship that stories have with issues of 'power', 'ideology' and 'exclusions' (McNay, 2003: 11). For instance, Peter Ehrenhaus's study of stories of Vietnam veterans' post-war experience in America demonstrates the extent to which stories' journeys from the private to the public are far from straightforward in as much as the relation between the two experiential domains is articulated by power relations. Ehrenhaus's discussion is centred around the ways in which Vietnam veteran's stories, once repressed and shunned in America as symbols of a nation's failure and humiliation, have now been re-storied into the public narrative, which is organized in terms of what Ehrenhaus calls, the 'therapeutic motif' – the motif that 'casts all issues and questions of relationship in matters related to Vietnam – be they personal, cultural, or political – in terms of healing and recovery' (Ehrenhaus, 1993: 81). To be sure, the construction of public therapeutic narrative into which personal stories of post-war experience are fed or translated provides a context whereby pains and traumas linked to Vietnam veterans' war experience are now being publicly recognised (see also McNay, 2003: 10-11). Yet, at the same time, this effectively disempowers the voice of Vietnam veterans as 'a voice of political opposition'. By positioning Vietnam veterans in terms of the language of 'psychological dysfunction, emotional fragility, healing, and personal redemption', the therapeutic public narrative, Ehrenhaus argues, 'creates a context that defines the warrior as cripple and muzzles the warrior as witness'; in other words, the therapeutic public narrative, which portrays Vietnam veterans as emotionally unstable and defective,



works to discount the voice of the veteran 'as a source of legitimate knowledge about the nature of contemporary warfare' (88, 89). And as a result, it subverts the possibility that stories of Vietnam veterans, reduced to stories of the recovery of the self, can effectively challenge the dominant American foreign policy rhetoric – the policy that advocates and mobilizes the use of state-sanctioned violence and destruction in the name of democracy and justice (78, 89).

Paradoxically, then, as Ehrenhaus notes:

Vietnam veterans now have a voice in the public space that they were once denied. The question, however, concerns the sanctioned nature of that voice and the circumstances of access to the public space. Marginalized voices often can and will be heard. But these public expressions occur in ways that defuse those voices, often by integrating them into the broader system of social relations from which they have been excluded. And integration involves locating those marginalized within the symbolic, social formations by which power makes (i.e., creates, imposes) sense (Ehrenhaus 1993: 88).

It is precisely this controversy over stories that brings me to the point that Young's attempt to incorporate the normative force of storytelling into her conception of 'communicative democracy' is problematic unless, as Young herself recognizes, we consider the underlying power relations that may condition and limit story's representation (or representability) and interpretation (or interpretability) of what exists as real or meaningful for members of political communities. Stories, as Young argues, may enable political communication among differently situated personal/private experience and perspectives, which, in turn, engender an enlarged public view of diverse, but interconnected human struggling and experience. Yet, stories are embedded in a complex social formation of both 'discursive' and 'non-discursive' conditions and power relations that structures the practice of storytelling and communication, and can, in effect, 'carry' – like reasoned arguments – 'silencing biases' against a plurality of perspectives or



reinforce the stereotypes they represent in maintaining their hold on truth (Nakagawa, 1993: 145; Young, 1993: 127). In such cases, stories reproduce and reconstruct the assumed social boundaries between us and them, or between private and public, often articulated as a conflict between truth and falsity.

Plummer's sociological interest in stories, on the other hand, certainly invites us to situate the process of storytelling within the intersubjective relations that shape our social, political and ethical lives. Yet, his idea of the 'generic process of sexual storytelling', which implies a progressive, uni-directional dynamic of storytelling from private to public, (1) shares with the normative (or depoliticized) understanding of storytelling the assumption that stories are the vehicle through which enlarged, negotiated citizenry perspectives can be introduced into politics, and (2) is, therefore, too simplified a model with which to inquire problematic aspects of story's journey from private to public (or from public to private) in the sexual citizenship making process. As already noted, the passage of stories from private to public involves not just a transition from non-recognition to recognition but a process of exclusion and problematisation whereby private stories, brought out into the public or in the process of becoming 'public narrative', can be effectively distorted, stereotyped, manipulated, modified, or even reprivatized.

From this point of view, the investigation, how sexual stories told in different social dimensions and levels are connected and constituted in the politics of sexual citizenship, is not simply about discerning how stories, in their generic process of sexual storytelling, constitute the part of the negotiated/interactive public meaning of sexual citizenship. It is, at the same time, about finding: (a) the very *conditions* upon which a (sexual) story's access to the public is authorized (or rejected); (b) the *ways* they are articulated (or disarticulated) as stories sexual citizenship: (c) and with what



*political effects* at a given historical moment.

In analysing the process by which stories of same-sex experience enter into a public and national political domain and make their case for the recognition of sexual/social justice in Britain, my critical reading of sexual stories told during the parliamentary debates, therefore, explores the following two conditions. To begin with, I examine the *conditions* of inclusion in which certain personal stories of same-sex experience become the part of 'our' public stories, being recognized and represented in the parliament, and increasingly articulated in terms of the language of citizenship and justice. Here, the questions being asked are: what are the socio-political and ethical conditions in which personal stories of same-sex experience get into circulation, and enter the public/political debate in Britain? Who tells stories or whose stories are told? What 'problems' do stories importantly tell us about? How are personal sexual stories publicly represented and contested in parliament? What moral and political effects do these stories have on political claims being increasingly made about sexual rights and responsibilities? In exploring these questions, I also examine the opposite but closely linked tendency – the conditions of exclusion and problematization. Here, I pay specific attention to the paradoxical condition whereby sexual stories may at once be 'included' as stories of sexual citizens and, at the same time, 'excluded' as stories of the sexual Other. But how are we to understand this seemingly paradoxical, ambivalent condition of sexual storytelling in the politics of sexual citizenship?

The answer, I suggest, needs to be found in story's circulation process whereby certain sexual stories are, in effect, lost in the chain of signification of sexual citizenship into which they are included; or conversely, we will find it in the process in which sexual stories are, in effect, included in the chain of signification of sexual citizenship from which they are excluded. In what follows, I contrast these

paradoxical conditions upon which stories are included (through exclusion) or excluded (through inclusion) in the domain of sexual citizenship politics in the U.K by examining stories of sexual citizens (or sexual others) circulated and represented in parliament in three different moments in time – during debates about the Sexual Offences Act in the 1960s, about Section 28 in the 1980s and about the Civil Partnership Act in the 2000s. Before I survey these three different moments in which stories have been dis/articulated into sexual citizenship, I discuss some methodological and analytical issues involved in political storytelling in parliament. The issues that I shall address here are closely linked to the particular organizational features of the British Parliament that impacts on the nature and the role of storytelling, to which I shall now turn.

### *4.3 Storytelling in Parliament*

#### **4.3.1 Merely Telling Stories?<sup>15</sup>**

Here, I ask the following questions: why do politicians, in their deliberative discussions in parliament, tell their own (or other's) personal experiential stories?; in what particular circumstances do they tell such stories, rather than make a non-storied form of causal argument?; in what ways do re/presented personal experiential stories in parliament shape the decision-making processes?; Or is storytelling relevant to the representational political practice at all?

Personal stories recounted in the deliberative discussions in parliament have received little, if any, attention from political

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15. This heading is borrowed from Kreiswirth's article on this subject (Kreiswirth, 2000).



researchers. And if they have, they have often been treated only as a ‘digression, example, or rhetorical ornament, something supplementary to the guiding armature of rational argument’, rather than being seen as a crucial part of deliberative discussions in parliament (Kreiswirth, 2000: 295). Part of the reason for this may be due to some implicit theoretical and political assumptions about the nature of parliamentary debate. The defining features of parliamentary debate rhetorically (or ideally) include its emphasis on rational argumentation, unimpeded by emotions or personal interests, and on politicians (MPs) participating not as individuals, but as representative agents who speak for the common good or impartial values (Cohen, 1989). Personal narrative, on the other hand, is, by its common understanding, ‘personal’ and ‘particular’ (see Dryzek, 2000: 68). Its language, as opposed to the language of the public sphere, is private. And, moreover, stories, with their embodied and subjective expressions, work towards persuasion not through appeal to reason or facts but through the use of emotional identifications or manipulations (Dryzek, 2000: 69; Miller, 2002: 221).

Such an assumed contrast between rational argumentation and storytelling is, however, mostly drawn without considering the institutional context within which political storytelling is situated – the ‘argumentative context of criticism and justification’ within which politicians engage in the business of telling/listening to stories (Abell, Stokoe, & Billig, 2004: 182). Stories, as Polletta argues, ‘are differently intelligible, salient, available, and authoritative depending on who tells them, when, for what purpose’ and, more importantly for our discussion, ‘in what institutional context’ (Polletta, 1998: 425). For example, our experience of being mugged can be storied differently if told to our family at home than to a judge in a court of law (Polletta, 1998: 425; Dijk, 1975: 288;



Robinson, 1981: 64).<sup>16</sup> This is because in the case of the latter, there are real limits imposed by ‘the structures of law’ and ‘the legal categories’ within which the story (treated as a ‘fact’ or ‘evidence’ by the law) is to be heard and dealt with (Conklin, 1997: 245; Graycar, 1996: 309). In other words, there are contextual or institutional rules governing storytelling, which limit (or enable) ways stories can be told, heard, and make sense (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 210-211).

Since the tellability and intelligibility of stories are largely *context-dependent* – the context often structured and enabled by specific institutional conditions – questions such as what stories ‘are’ or ‘do’ need to be answered by considering, as Kreiswirth argues, ‘where’ and ‘with what authority’ the storytelling, as part of social actions, is performed (Kreiswirth, 2000: 304; Austin, 1975: 139). And that being the case, the question involved in political storytelling is not, ‘how far does storytelling depart from aims and criteria of political talk in the parliament?’, but rather, ‘how responsive/reflexive is storytelling to its placing within the parliamentary argumentative context?’ This, of course, raises another question, that is: what is this ‘debate’ in parliament?

Van Der Valk defines a parliamentary debate as ‘a highly structured institutional and political speech-event whose main declared goal is to produce legal and policy instruments for the benefit of the nation’ (Van Der Valk, 2003: 316). On the one hand, the debate is highly structured by the adversarial and partisan nature of parliament’s structure, in which political actors, often depending on whether their parties are in opposition or in government, defend or oppose proposals of the government through

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16. As van Dijk, for example, remarks: ‘[In] telling about a bank robbery to our friends we do not usually give a precise description of the clothes or the car of the robber, information which we would give the police, if a description is required’ (Dijk, 1975: 288).



argumentation and counter-argumentation processes. On the other hand, the debate is *public* in nature: being broadcasted nationally and officially recorded in *Hansard*, MPs speak not only ‘to other politicians present in the debating chamber’, but also ‘to members of the public’ (Blackledge, 2005: 94). And as the representatives of the public, MPs are expected to engage in political debates with well-informed facts and reasonable opinion, pursuing the collective interests of the public over and above their personal or partisan interests.

The fact that parliamentary debate is highly confrontational/partisan and at the same time is public means that politicians are often caught in what Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards call ‘a dilemma of stake or interest’: any political argument that she or he makes in the debate may invite counter-arguments in which her or his claim can be discounted as merely ‘a product of stake or interest’ (Edwards, & Potter, 1992: 158). In contemporary multicultural (and perhaps also multi-sexual) western societies where humanitarian values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and fairness have become the new norms governing political discourse, the dilemma, as Van Dijk argues, appears particularly acute when it comes to talk about society’s minority groups. ‘Blaming’ a minority group in a debate, for example, can be discounted as merely a product of personal or political prejudice, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and etc; support, on the other hand, may be discounted as an attempt to promote partiality or ‘special treatment’ (see Dijk, 1997: 35; Brickell, 2001; Potter, 1996: 110)<sup>17</sup>

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17. For example, we find, in the debates on Section 28 during the late 1980s, the arguments of supporters of Section 28 in which gays were frequently blamed for the AIDS crisis were frequently discounted as being motivated by homophobia; the arguments of opponent of Section 28, by contrast, were accused of intentionally promoting homosexuality. We find, in the debates on the Civil Partnership Act, a similar way in which arguments and counter-arguments are organized in terms of issues of



One of the most familiar and forceful ways in which politicians manage the 'dilemma of stake or interest' is by making an argument that provides an account, that is both real and true – an account that is factual. A factual account, according to Edwards and Potter, is an account that is 'constructed to appear external' to the speaker, to be 'representations of features of an "out-there" world', rather than 'reflections' of speaker's own 'desires or concerns' (Edwards, & Potter, 1992: 160). Given that an account is successfully made and treated as 'factual', and, therefore, manages a politician's dilemma of stake, he or she accomplishes his or her individual and institutional accountability.

Such factual accounts could be offered in a number of different ways. Quoting opinion polls, using statistical data, citing news reports, and representing objective, neutral expert's knowledge are the most commonly found devices with which factual political claims are made in political debates. And with these, I add the use of storytelling to a form of factual accounting, deployed and organized to rebut a potential challenge to speaker's accountability in the parliament. I also suggest that the moralizing effects that factual storytelling produce make storytelling distinctive from other discursive forms, explaining for its prominence in political argumentation.

So let me ask the following questions, that is: in what ways do stories of personal experience appear to be factual in the political discourse – appear to be external to the storyteller?; and what

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interest: arguments made by those who supported the Government proposal for the introduction of registered civil partnership for same-sex couples were charged with having a compelling interest in weakening family values; the opponents' attempt to amend the Civil Partnership Bill, which would have extended the provisions of the Bill to include carers and family members, was discounted as an attempt to wreck the Bill.



moralizing effect do such factual stories produce? The discussion that follows answers these questions, to which I shall now turn.

#### **4.3.2 Telling a story: Telling (more than) a fact**

The uses of personal narratives in parliament are highly strategic. Personal narratives in the political discourse are mostly used to produce empirical evidence for arguments, and to establish tellers' credibility – credibility established through what Lisa Disch calls, 'the ontology of voice' (Disch, 2003).

The voice here I am talking about is the voice that appears to pre-exist within narration by which a story appears to tell itself. Or to put it another way, it is the voice which, divorced from the acts of telling, appears to be directly governed by the presence of 'what is there' or 'what demands to be shown' or experienced (Genette, 1980: 165). Here, the sequence of events, personally experienced or witnessed appear to be presented in the narrative form only because they happened: events, in other words, 'seem to speak for themselves' rather than being selected, configured, evaluated, or presented with interest by the storyteller (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 213). The voice, constructed in such a way, can bring the listeners into the story by drawing attention 'away' from the *telling* of the story, and 'onto' the *events* being reported, managing issues of the storyteller's 'potentially problematic stake and interest in events' (Potter, 1996: 166). And it is in this separation between 'the story' and 'the telling' (or between 'the event' and 'the representation') that the voice within narration, Disch argues, 'seductively' achieves credibility (Disch, 2003): it gives the story what Chambers calls 'airs of objectivity' (Chambers, 1984: 128 cited in Disch 2003).

In Chapter 6, I discuss in detail various ways in which politicians, by separating 'the event' they recount from their own

personal/partisan interest in 'storying', attempt to produce the voice that resists easy refutation. For the moment, however, I ponder more on the kind of this 'voice' produced through personal experiential narratives – the voice of experience.

The separation between 'the story' and 'the telling' in personal narratives – one of the main features of 'factual' storytelling in political discourse – rests on (as well as reinforces) the realistic 'fantasy' about what Scott calls, 'the evidence of experience' (Scott, 1991). The separation presupposes the prior existence of the 'the speaker "behind" representation' (Disch 2003) – a speaker who, by means of his or her access to the real/event through 'experience', can, nevertheless, become the legitimate teller/bearer of the story/voice. Regardless of its form, whether in first-person narration or third-person narration, such legitimate tellers found within narration, produce the factual effect in the political discourse beyond challenge or refutation: 'what could be truer', asks Scott, 'than a subject's own account [or vision] of what he or she has lived through [or has witnessed]?' (Scott 1991: 777). He or she, as Potter argues, 'can provide an impression of *being there* by sketching features which, although not substantial to the claim or argument, would have been apparent to someone who actually witnessed some event' (Potter 1996: 117, Italics are added). And to the extent that personal experience is storied in such a way that the story merely represents what was there (the real), seen, known, and felt (experienced) by the witness, it effectively avoids being subjected to validity testing or debate (Witten, 1993: 107). Or to put it another way, the storyteller effectively conceals his or her practice of narration behind the representation – the practice that selects, organizes, constructs and give meanings to experience through storytelling.

According to Scott, such use of personal experience as 'uncontestable evidence' and as the legitimate foundation for telling



‘the’ story generates another powerful evidence: it produces the ‘evidence for the fact of difference’ (Scott 1991: 777). In spelling out the process in which the ‘evidence of experience’ tends to become the ‘evidence for the fact of difference’, Scott argues:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or...[the politician] who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured...are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world (Scott 1991: 777).

Standing in for the ‘fact of difference’, the story of ‘personal’ experience is often strategically used by politicians to speak for the experience of a larger category to which the ‘person’ is seen to self-evidently belong. Here, the questionable danger, as pointed out by Polletta, is that ‘her’ story of experience, taken as uncontested evidence for the fact of difference, is ‘too easily seen as that of “women”, erasing difference within the group or experience; yet the story’s such “representativeness”, which is rarely problematized, is not often “specified” or “demonstrated” (Polletta, 1998: 425). If not specified or demonstrated, however, we still find a particular way in which story’s representativeness is customarily achieved in the political discourse – that is, generalization. In the positivistic narrative performance, generalization, Ewick and Silbey argue, ‘entails the presentation of specific events and characters as one of many similar cases which aggregate to some larger social reality (a reality which often destroys the particularity that constituted that narrative in the first place)’ (Ewick and Silbey 1995: 219). Here, to represent is to generalize; whereas, to this end, ‘the consensus across a range of different personal stories’ is to be invoked as a



‘warrant’ for the evidence (Potter 1996: 117). This tells us that the process in which the ‘evidence of experience’ becomes the evidence of Experience/Difference is not simply worked in isolation. Rather, story’s evidentiality linked to its representitiveness is likely to be met conjointly and collaboratively.

Later in this chapter, where I discuss the story data selected and analyzed for this Part 1, I return to the issue of joint storytelling in more detail and discuss, in particular, the way in which cross-narrative repetition is elicited for fact/evidence construction during parliamentary debates (see the section titled Data). Before I move to this, however, I want to briefly touch on another important effect produced in political narrative talk in parliament, which is closely connected to story’s factual effect – that is, its normalizing/moralizing effect.

The tendency of narratives of personal experience, presented as evidence, to naturalize socially constructed categories such as woman, man, white, black, disabled, heterosexual or homosexual hints at one efficacious way in which normality can be constituted through political storytelling. Being critical of the way in which appeals to women’s personal experience tend to treat as ‘transparent’ the identities of those whose experience are being told, Brady argues: ‘an uncritical reliance on experience as evidence constructs a type of fixed subjectivity. The use of experience as evidence rests upon assumptions that universalize the experience of one instead of exploring differences within and between subjects. The universalizing effect is the result of the transparency of gender’ – what a woman experienced is ‘taken as evidence’ of what women experienced (Brady, 1998: 39). Linked to the rhetorical power of (inevitable) causality found in positivistic narrativity, however, a story of what a woman has experienced presented as evidence can be worked powerfully to suggest, implicitly or explicitly, what women



ought to experience. But in what particular ways?

Telling a story involves more than a representation of events. Stories are, in fact, distinguished from other discursive forms by the very way in which events are represented – events are represented in an ‘orderly’, ‘consecutive’ manner, providing the sense of ‘a sequence of cause and effect’ (Abbott, 2002: 37). Such features of narrativity can be strategically used in political storytelling to increase the credibility of the storyteller. The order of ‘events’ that appears to speak for themselves in factual storytelling can suggest an inevitability of causality before the narration (representation), giving listeners ‘the impression that certain actions have consequences not only fitting but inevitable’ (Leith, & Myerson, 1989: 30). Within such narratives, Steph Lawler argues:

prior events seen inevitably to lead to later ones, and the end of the story is understood as the culmination and actualization of prior events. Significance is conferred on earlier events by what comes later. In this sense, narratives become naturalized as the episodes which make up the ‘plot’ appear inevitable, and even universal (Lawler, 2002: 246).

Yet it is in this act of plotting, through which the experience of a sequence of events appears significant and yet, at the same time, inevitable and universal, that White finds story’s ‘moralizing effect’ (White, 1980). Hayden White writes: ‘If every...story, however we define that familiar but conceptually elusive entity...endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence, then it seems possible to conclude that every... narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats’ (White 1980: 17-8). An event recounted in a story, as Ricoeur argues, is ‘more than an occurrence’ – ‘more than something that just happens’ (Ricoeur, 1991: 20). For, story has a plot which, by selecting/organizing happenings, actions, and moments into a meaningful episode linked



to story's conclusion, gives 'to reality' a particular 'odor of the ideal' (White 1980: 24). In other words, narrative emplotment enables every (factual) story, which seems to merely describes 'the way things are', to bear, implicitly or explicitly, the moral vision of 'the way that things ought to be' (Janangelo, 1999: 107). And in this way, story, as Hinchman and Hinchman argue, generally provides a 'foundation' for legal/political discourse that concerns the question of 'legality, legitimacy, and authority' (Hinchman, & Hinchman, 1997: xxvi). White writes:

Story forms...represent an armory of relational models by which what would otherwise be nothing but chains of mechanical cause and effects can be translated into moral terms...Story forms not only permit us to judge the moral significance of human projects, they also provide the means by which to judge them, even while we pretend to be merely describing them (White, 1981: 797).

To this, it is also relevant to point out the 'narrative embedding' (Bal & Tavor, 1981: 776) through which stories of/about personal experience are implicitly and explicitly linked to overarching legal/political discourse about the 'public' in parliament. In order to explain the term 'narrative embedding' that I am employing here, I also need to briefly discuss different 'levels' upon which narrativization occurs in the political discourse (Genette, 1980; Barthes & Duisit, 1975: 243).

In analysing ways in which narratives of personal experience, presented as evidence in political debates, reflect as well as construct overarching legal/political discourse about society in parliament, Epstein et al. (2000) find three different, yet closely interconnected, levels within which argumentation unfolds in story forms. There are:

[l]ittle narratives about particular persons or episodes. Characters are named and acquire exemplary status: as notorious sexual monsters, for instance, or as victims; as



sexual abusers and pedophiles in positions of trust in institutions; or as young gay men forced to take their own lives or 'go on the game'. Stories of a medium level tell of typical legal consequences: failing to reform the law or failing to draw 'a line in the moral sand' will destabilize society, or increase inequality, or make us uncompetitive in the global economy, for example. Such stories, in turn, anchor and draw meanings from narratives that are truly grand. These third level stories typically take the moral/social state and history of the nation as their object and explore dystopian or utopian futures and pasts. Here change or stasis in the law serves competing definitions of civilization or social progress (Epstein, Johnson, & Steinberg, 2000: 9).

What we find in political debates in parliament is the argumentation that unfolds in a complex story forms in which different story 'levels' become interwoven to produce embedded and embedding narratives. Politicians who undertake public-representational acts in parliament typically engage in constructing this what Gergen and Gergen call 'narratives within narratives' – narratives that unfold 'within an overarching narrative that include nonnarrative [argumentative] parts' (Gergen & Gergen, 2001: 171; Riessman, 1993: 51). According to Gergen and Gergen, the construction of 'narratives within narratives' is possible because there are 'no temporal parameters within which events must be related through narratives' (Gergen & Gergen, 2001: 171). They write:

[O]ne may attempt to relate events occurring over vast periods of time, or determine the relationship among events within a brief period...We may use the terms 'macro' and 'micro' to refer to the hypothetical or idealized ends of the temporal continuum within which events are related. Macronarratives refer to those events spanning broad periods of time while micronarratives relate events within brief durations...Given the capacity to relate events within different temporal perspectives, it becomes apparent that people often engage in the construction of nested narratives, or narratives within narratives...To the extent that consistency [or consensus] among [nested] narratives is sought, macronarratives acquire preeminent importance. Such narratives seem to lay the foundations within which other



narratives are constructed (Gergen & Gergen, 2001: 171-2).

Here, macronarratives (or overarching narratives), Gergen and Gergen argue, can act as 'frame narratives' – narratives that perform as frames for embedded narratives by offering foundations for them (Prince, 2003: 33). In political storytelling, this often means that: as much as narratives of personal experience, presented as incontestable evidence, provide foundations for the construction and evaluation of overarching political/legal narratives, these little narratives are themselves constructed and fashioned into evidence by those overarching political/legal narratives that embed (or emplot) them.

In Chapter 7 where I discuss parliamentary debates on the Civil Partnership Act in Britain, I take up this issue of 'narrative embedding' and discuss ways in which narratives of personal experience of same-sex relationships are told (embedded or emplotted) within some cultural narratives of marriage/citizenship prevailing in Britain. Here, the focus of my analysis is: (1) the ways in which dominant cultural/political stories of (heterosexual) marriage/citizenship provide resources and frameworks for 'storying' and 'evidencing' personal experience around same-sex relationships, and (2) how these 'storied' experience of same-sex relationships, presented as uncontestable evidence in political debates, appear to factually speak for the values of (homosexual) partnership/citizenship.

I make a final comment on the notion of 'narrative embedding'. As I have already pointed out, I employ the term, 'narrative embedding' to refer to the process in which narratives of personal experience are told within other narratives. And this embedding – the emplotment of a narrative within a narrative – can occur within a single narrative introduced by an individual storyteller, or be jointly performed by multiple storytellers who, implicitly or explicitly,



embed others' narratives within their own narratives. Joint-storytelling is, indeed, one of the main features of storytelling found in political debates in parliament, and it produces, as I shall argue in the chapters that follow, its own particular political effect. In Section 4.4, where I demonstrate the data selected, analysed and represented for this thesis, I introduce the notion, joint-storytelling, and discuss it in terms of 'narrative repetition' evoked in political debates in parliament. In Chapter 7, I mainly discuss the features of joint-storytelling found in parliamentary debates in relation to the practice of 'narrative embedding'.

In general, this Section 4.3 is written to provide the ground for more systematic analysis of political storytelling in the three chapters that follow. I shall now add a brief comment on the story on which this thesis is based, and explain the reason they demand a particular analytical attention.

## *4.4 Data*

### **4.4.1 Data Source**

My primary data source for this study is drawn from the following three parliamentary debates on homo/same-sex sexualities: the discussion of the Wolfenden report, and Sexual Offences Bill (December 1957 – July 1967); of the so-called Section 28 of the Local Government Bill (December 1986 – March 1988); and of the Civil Partnership Bill (Jan 2002 – Nov 2004). From these three series of parliamentary debates recorded in Hansard, I selected politicians' speeches that involve storytelling for a detailed narrative analysis.

#### **4.4.2 Data Selection**

Forms of narrative identified, analysed and represented in this chapter are sequences of past events being: (1) experienced, or witnessed by tellers themselves (MPs); or (2) represented or reported by speakers (MPs) who, though not participants to the events they are narrating, have heard of the events from others who have experienced or witnessed them. Such forms of narrative, which I identified and selected for analysis, range from (relatively) complete narratives to fragmented narratives – that is, from stories that connect events in a sequential order with a fairly clear beginning, middle, and end, to stories in which the ‘perceived sequence of connected events’ are rather unelaborated, incomplete, or unevaluated (Toolan, 1988: 8).

As a matter of fact, it should be pointed out from the outset that parliamentary debates, as Epstein argues, ‘rarely elaborate full-blown narratives in the ways that literary or cinematic texts frequently do’ (Epstein, Johnson, & Steinberg, 2000: 9). Stories told in parliament, when compared with literary kinds of narrative, are fragmented by virtue of being situated in the ongoing argumentative context whereby politicians’ speeches are routinely interrupted, questioned, challenged or supported. My representation of the data considers this particular ‘contextual’ feature of storytelling in parliament, which is briefly explained as below.

#### **4.4.3 Data re/presentation**

Argumentative stories identified in parliamentary debates share an important feature found in conversational stories: stories are ‘authored’ not only ‘by those who introduce them’, but also by the many participants in the debates who ‘ask questions, comment and otherwise overtly contribute to an evolving tale’ (Ochs, 1997: 185). This feature of joint-storytelling has received considerable scholarly



attention (Tannen, 1989; Goodwin, 1981; Dijk, 1987; Fludernik, 1996). 'Interactionally', van Dijk argues, such stories 'come about not just within a single turn of a single speaker'. As a form of situated discourse produced in interactive (argumentative) context, they rather 'tend to be constructed dialogically': when one speaker tells a story, the interlocutors 'may routinely interrupt to ask questions, to show surprise, to challenge the interestingness or relevance of the story, or to interpolate fragments of a story about his or her own experience' (Dijk, 1987: 63-4).

On the part of the storytellers, their act of telling occurring in adversarial, argumentative context means that they are subject to considerable restraints 'to meet' their story's 'reportability' and 'tellability' demands (Fludernik, 1996: 63): in other words, they need to successfully avoid opponent's potentially confrontational questions such as, *Is it true?* or '*So what?*' (Labov, 1972: 366). Yet, the fact that they should deliver the needed point of narrative within the ongoing dialogical dynamic (as well as within the given time limits) also means that their stories could often result in having an apparently 'fragmented' structure (Harris, 2001), or lacking necessary 'narrative information' (Genette, 1980: 162), necessitating listeners – especially empathetic listeners – to 'fill in the blanks' and 'complete the story' (Epstein, Johnson, & Steinberg, 2000: 9).

Indeed, as I shall illustrate below, argumentative stories told in parliamentary debates, which distinctively consist of partisan/ political interaction, generally involve multiple tellers. In other words, they, by shifting the role from being listeners to tellers/ knowers, tend to jointly meet the demands for story's reportability and tellability. Consider, for example, the following two extracts of *Example A* presented below. They both come from the House of Commons Debate on the Sexual Offences Act in 1967.

### **Example A**

Extracts from June 23, 1967 House of Commons Debates on the Sexual Offences Act

(Extract 1)

**Mr. Grant-Ferris:** Those of us who go about the West End of London and look occasionally in the windows where lists of this and that are publicly shown people wanting domestic help or flats or something of that kind know that there in many instances people are trying to promote homosexuality. I have watched the types of people who go and read these notices. It is not too difficult to see what lies behind them (HC, 23 June 1967, col. 2146).

(Extract 2)

**Sir C. Osborne:** This is a matter of procuring and publishing lists...I have one here listed as G. 80 in the publication. It says: "Likable young man, 24, would like to meet executives having premises in West End. Available mid-day, evenings" – he cannot be very hard working and producing much economically "Give address, phone number. All answered." [...] If it is circulated it gets from hand to hand, and what is to prevent its being sent among young people and young men? It is the kind of thing that leads to social evils and is tending to corrupt our national life (HC, 23 June 1967, col. 2149).

Here, what is lacking in Grant-Ferris's story is a detailed 'narrative representation' or 'narrative information' of what he sees (Genette, 1980: 162). The point of what he sees is rather vague. The lack of detail given about what '*these notices*' say, or '*the types* of people who go and read these notices' make it hard for listeners to accept the perceived vision he provides: contrary to what he claims, it is 'difficult' to find 'what lies behind' the 'types of people' who are interested in 'these notices'.

What makes Grant-Ferris a witness (rather than a mere speculator) to the event is Sir C. Osborne's description of an advertisement found in a publication. Here, Osborne, more or less, sees the same thing – a small advertisement that, he claims, promotes homosexuality, and the types of people who advertise or



read it. By explicitly stating what the advertisement says and what it means for the person who advertises or reads, however, Osborne provides an added context to the event Grant-Ferris witnessed, manufacturing consensus between what he read and what Grant-Ferris saw. His report, in other words, makes Grant-Ferris's telling of the event understandable and believable.

*Example A* shows a typical way in which 'joint-storytelling' in the parliament is performed through 'repetition'. The cross-narrative repetition performed in the parliament ranges from the same (or similar) event being (re)told by multiple tellers with different level of details to the tellers' repetition of a particular plot through which their varied storied events are configured into a series of resembled (meaningful) happenings. I shall take just one more example to indicate briefly something of this patterned narrative interaction – repetition – found in the House of Commons/Lords.

### ***Example B***

Extracts from June 24, 2004 House of Lords debates on Civil Partnership Bill (Extract 1, 2, 3) and from November 9, 2004 House of Commons debates on Civil Partnership (Extract 4).

(Extract 1)

***Baroness O'Cathain:*** The Bill [Civil Partnership Bill] sends out the message that long-term caring family relationships do not matter as much as same-sex relationships, irrespective of their duration. Ministers have argued that same-sex couples in long-term relationships ...were discriminated against in law and suffered serious hardship. However, the cases ...applying to same-sex couples also apply for the most part to family members who live together. Their position in terms of inheritance tax, joint assessment for income-related benefit and tenancy succession rights is essentially the same as for single-sex couples. The Bill provides legal remedy for same-sex couples, but not family members. A son caring for his widowed father who has Alzheimer's disease has to pay tax on his inheritance, despite the fact that he has given up his job to care for his father and could well be regarded as unemployable as a result. That could mean being forced to sell the family



house to pay the tax. *Most of us will know* of family members who share a house on a long-term basis – sons or daughters who live with their elderly parents, providing care and companionship; sisters who move in together after they are widowed and live out their old age together; nieces and nephews who give up well paid jobs to move in with aunts or uncles, to nurse them in long-term illnesses; and so on (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1364, Italics added).

(Extract 2)

**Lord St John of Fawsley:** *I know* of a case in your Lordships' House, for example, involving siblings. For many years a Peer had lived happily with his brother and sister, but on the death of his brother, he and his sister were obliged to sell the family home, which they did not want to do, and move into other accommodation which was not as satisfactory. This is a problem that should concern us and be seen as such (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1373, Italics added).

(Extract 3)

**Lord Kilcolooney:** I recently received a letter from a constituent in Killyleagh in County Down. That lady looked after a handicapped child for 14 years. She then went back to work. She then had to look after her mother for another 16 years. She then reached pension age and, instead of receiving a pension of £77.45 a week, she was reduced to £61.47 per week because she had failed to apply for attendance allowance while she cared for her handicapped child. She did so at her own time and expense; she applied for no grants or allowances. She was then discriminated against when she reached pension age (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1377-8).

(Extract 4)

**Mr. Leigh:** I have one [letter] here. The original was sent by a lady whose name and address I shall not reveal to the House, as she is an elderly spinster who wants to remain anonymous. The letter states: 'I live with my single brother and have done so since my mother died in ...1983. He had lived with her all his life. I retired from (work) to look after her as she was 85 and had cancer. She died within....months of my leaving. Stephen – that is [my] brother – really needed me to run the home...when my mother died I felt I should continue to live with him. I am now 79 and (Stephen) is 75'. That is a real case involving real people suffering real injustice [...] 'Stephen' and the elderly spinster will not be able to pass their advantage down the generations, so inheritance tax will be paid pretty soon for that 75-year-old man and 79-year-old woman (HC. 9



November 2004, col. 728-729).

The first extract of *Example B* comes from a speech made by the Conservative peer Baroness O’Cathain. In proposing an amendment to the Civil Partnership Bill on 24 June 2004 (Amendment No.3), she argued that the Bill, unless it was extended to include birth family members who had have lived together as adults on a long-term basis, was discriminatory: for ‘family members’, unlike same-sex couples, would be denied access to various tax-related advantages and benefits hitherto enjoyed only by married couples. The second and the third extracts are from the same parliamentary debate: they are stories that were told shortly after Baroness O’Cathain moved Amendment No.3. The fourth is an extract from the House of Commons debate held on the same subject on 9 November 2004.

Here, I am not going to analyse in detail the content of stories of this kind told during the debates on the Civil Partnership Bill – this subject will be fully discussed in Chapter 7 (See Section 7. 6). In terms of our discussion of the practice of joint-storytelling in parliament, my point of interest is rather the importance of narrative repetition for what Antaki and Leudar call ‘claim backing’ (Antaki & Leudar, 1990). ‘To back a claim’, Antaki and Leudar argue, is ‘to show how what one has said is tenable’, which, in turn, usually means to show how what one has said is ‘true’ or ‘true as described’ (Antaki & Leudar, 1990: 280). And *Example B* shows how this practice of ‘backing up’ is achieved in the political discourse through narrative repetition.

Stories (extract 2,3,4) presented in *Example B* tell of events which are independently witnessed by each storyteller. Yet, what brings these seemingly separate stories together is their shared plot – the plot that is, in effect, introduced by Baroness O’Cathain when she says: ‘[M]ost of us will know of family members’ who, ‘by

sharing a house on a long-term basis’, are ‘discriminated against in law’. Here, Baroness O’Cathain invites others to collaborate in (factual) consensus building, and her invitation is followed by a series of stories that repetitively and cumulatively add evidence, reinforcing Baroness O’Cathain’s argumentative position.

I discussed examples where stories, thrown into the adversarial, argumentative context, display a distinctive feature such as narrative repetition. Indeed, as narrative repetition is so common in political storytelling in the parliament, and being worked up to have its own important political effect, I paid particular attention to this group of repeated stories for my analysis. Repeated events or descriptions recounted by multiple tellers in the parliament invite counter-factual joint-storytelling and constitute an identifiable argumentative theme (or terrain). The kinds of stories I selectively re/present in this thesis are all part of a multiplicity of repeated stories I identified, and involve, therefore, multiple tellers. In other words, a story re/presented in this thesis is not a story, but a part of (repeated) stories told during the debates concerned.



## Chapter 5

# Stories of Sexual Strangers

### *5.1 The context of Silence*

The use of personal stories around same-sex experience in political debate is a recent phenomenon. During the 1950s and 1960s when the Sexual Offences Act was debated in Britain, personal stories of homosexual experience seldom appeared in parliamentary debate. Then homosexual acts between men were still a criminal offence; homosexual acts between women were regarded as almost non-existent. It was simply unlikely that homosexuals, during this period, could have their stories to tell (let alone their stories being heard and considered). Either they were not allowed to speak of their experience, or they (formally) did not exist.

Silenced stories of (male) homosexual experience, if not told, were sold, however<sup>18</sup>. What Moran calls 'sale of silence' was

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18. The 'homosexual/ity' is subsequently referred to in this chapter as the *male* homosexual/ity. See Section 5.7 of this chapter for the discussion of lesbian/ism absently presented during the debates on the Sexual Offences

frequently practised in the form of blackmailing homosexuals in which the blackmailers 'would offer to remain silent upon payment of money' (Moran 1996: 52). According to the Wolfenden Committee reports, there were '71 cases of blackmail reported to the police in England and Wales in the years 1950 to 1953', of which 32 were connected to homosexual offences (Wolfenden Report, para. 110). Perhaps more problematically, Lord Jowett states that nearly 95 per cent of the blackmail cases that he, as Attorney General, had to deal with during the 1950s were buggery-related cases (HL, vol. 187, 1953-4, col. 745). The extent of such blackmail was, then, generally seen as being closely linked to the state of the law that criminalised adult homosexual acts during this period. The Lord Archbishop of York, in a debate on homosexual offences in the House of Lords, for example, suggests that: 'the present law has positive evil effects in the particular opportunities for blackmail' – the opportunities to use silence for the purpose of obtaining money (HL, 12 May 1965, col. 122). Mr. Abse, in his introduction to the legislation to decriminalise adult homosexual acts in the House of Commons in 1962, also tells us the following story:

[T]his week I received a communication from a university lecturer who is doing sociological work. As seems to be the wont of so many who are doing this sort of work, he was cultivating local cafe society, in making a sociological study of cafe-delinquency. This study seems to have been fashionable recently. He found there a young man who had not done a stroke of work for seven years since leaving school, apart from a few months as a builders' labourer, but who was possessed of an expensive car in which, the investigator found, he was taking suitable good-looking young people to the West End with the specific object of ensnaring homosexual victims. Together with this group of apprentice blackmailers, this contemporary Fagin had lived for some years on the proceedings of his lamentable activities. Fortunately, the information supplied by the lecturer to the police led to the

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Act.



main blackmailer being imprisoned (HC, 9 March 1962, col. 846)

The story draws attention to the ways in which the commercial blackmail of homosexuals, the sale of silence, easily generates significant as well as regular income for blackmailers. While the main goal of the story is to provide the evidence of the prevalence of blackmailers who are specialised in extorting money from potential homosexuality-related victims, we also find that the story features a somewhat typical resolution of a crime story: an action taken directly against blackmailers (villains) by the lecturer (the protagonist) is successfully followed by the imprisonment of the main blackmailer. Some untold complications to this story, however, need to be mentioned, which the following example will illustrate:

A., aged 49, met B., aged 35, in a cinema. Afterwards they went to A's flat and committed buggery. For a period of about seven years B. visited A's flat regularly, and the men committed buggery together on each occasion. B. then commenced to demand money from A., from whom, in the course of about three months, he obtained some £40. A finally complained to the police. The facts were reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who advised that no action should be taken against B. for demanding money by menaces, but that both men should be charged with buggery. Both men were thereupon charged with two offences of buggery committed with each other, and, after pleading guilty, were sentenced to nine month's imprisonment. Neither man had any previous convictions, nor were any other offences taken into consideration (Wolfenden 1957: 40, para. 112).

The above case, extracted from police reports and presented in the Wolfenden report exemplifies the extent to which the detention of blackmailers was, for many buggery-related blackmail victims, not the end of the problem, but often only the beginning. Given that 'buggery' was criminalised, the police, rather than protecting the blackmail victim, frequently re-appropriated 'the blackmailer's accusation into their own', thereby making 'the blackmail victim a



victim twice over: once as the victim of blackmail and once as the victim of the law' (Moran 1996: 54). Often the police themselves, by 'acting as decoys or agents provocateurs' used blackmail as a means to entrap male homosexuals (HL, 23 May 1966, col. 1192). Plain clothed 'pretty policemen', loitering in public lavatories and preying upon homosexuals, were one of the well known policing techniques used to entrap homosexuals during this period (see Bartlett, 1998: 109). Successful entrapment, then, often ended up with a mass of prosecutions: those who were engaged in the crime, such as buggery, were being blackmailed by the police into naming other homosexuals with whom they were acquainted, and the series of accusations continued until no related, responsible party could be found (see HL, 12 May 1965, col. 77).

The close relationship found between the law and blackmail that criminalised and commercialised homosexual practices shows a particular way in which the expression of lived (male) homosexual experience was silenced during this period. Not only must one's homosexual experience, defined and instituted as 'buggery' or 'gross indecency', be closeted in order to avoid the law's punishment, but also its closeted silence, being potentially sellable and therefore punishable, should remain unspoken and unstoried. This, however, did not mean that silence, constituted through legitimate and commercial use of the law that criminalised homosexual practices, imposed absolute limits on 'storying' the homosexual and homosexuality during this period. Rather, it imposed limits on who could tell stories of the homosexual/homosexuality and how, thereby producing a particular politics of its representation. In what follows, I address the effects of silence of the homosexual/homosexuality during this period in more detail, paying particular attention to the ways in which stories of the homosexual/homosexuality are made to appear in the representational political practices of post-war Britain.



## *5.2 The Context of Uncertainty*

The silenced body, the homosexual, did not possess the capacity to speak of itself: its experience of homosexuality, which was criminalised and sellable, could not (and should not) be claimed as one's own 'real' experience. But, if homosexual experience was a taboo in the sense that it could not be claimed by someone as his/her own 'real' experience during this period, homosexuality, as the subject of knowledge, was not. Defined as a medical condition or a symptom of social deviance, the subject, homosexuality, was largely debated in parliament using terms and knowledge borrowed from a body of professions, who, as psychiatrists, doctors, judges, academics, politicians, or government officers, had worked on the problem of the homosexual/homosexuality during this period.

In order to understand how the homosexual/homosexuality was publicly spoken of and represented in parliament in such a silenced but, nevertheless, problematised context, it is necessary first to consider some of the difficulties encountered by those duly authorised speakers in addressing 'the truth' of homosexuality. Here, I am particularly interested in analysing some of the ways in which the practical difficulty (or even impossibility) of assuring facts regarding the truth/problem of the homosexual/homosexuality during this period encouraged some of those speaking subjects to use storytelling as a tactical means to validate their political claim.

Political storytelling, according to Iris Young, differs from other forms of storytelling by, first and foremost, its purpose: politicians tell a story not simply to reveal or share their experience with others, but to justify an argument they are making in an ongoing political discussion (Young, 2000: 72). But in what ways does storytelling help one to validate and justify one's political claim? Here, I shall attempt to answer this question by considering a specific contextual condition within which storytelling serves an important



argumentative function – the context of uncertainty.

A particular feature of the parliamentary debates on male homosexuality generated and informed by the Wolfenden report is of interest here. The Wolfenden Committee (the Home Office Departmental Committee on Prostitution and Homosexuality) was one of the official bodies authorised to speak of homosexuality during this period. Appointed by the British government in 1954 to investigate the law relating to homosexual offences in Britain, the committee published its recommendations in September 1957, and numerous debates on male homosexuality soon followed in both Houses of Parliament. For those who were authorised to speak of the problem of homosexual/homosexuality during this period, however, their task to seek ‘the truth’ was not easy, and rather encountered a number of difficulties – difficulties, in particular, in producing ‘facts’ or ‘evidences’ through which the homosexual/homosexuality could be rationally represented. The Earl of Huntingdon, for example, expresses his anxiety over uncertainty that surrounds the discussion on homosexuality in the parliament as follows:

My Lords, at this hour I do not intend to keep your Lordships long. Many speakers have exhausted the subject, which I feel is an extremely difficult and complicated one; and particularly is it difficult to get hold of the facts. I always think that before one attempts to base either an argument or a judgement one should try to be sure of one’s facts. I have talked with doctors who have been concerned with the treatment of homosexual patients, and also to psychologists who, understandably, do not want their names advertised, or to be quoted, and one still seems to be in a sort of morass when one tries to understand this subject. Take, for instance, the question of statistics. No one really knows how many male or female homosexuals there are (HL, 12 May 1965, col. 141).

For those who were authorised to speak of the homosexual/homosexuality, the practical impossibility of assuring facts regarding the homosexual/homosexuality was a frequently acknowledged ‘fact’ (see HC, 26 Nov. 1958, col. 371). Even numbers that could



illuminate the extent of the 'problem' of homosexuality in Britain were unknown. The Wolfenden Committee carefully abstained from quantifying the prevalence of homosexuality or homosexual behaviour in Britain, and only referred to some estimated figures constructed abroad: Dr. Kinsey's research estimated that 4 per cent. of adult white males in the United States of America were exclusively homosexual, while 37 per cent of total male population were behaviourally bisexual; official statistical sources in Sweden, by contrast, suggested that 1 per cent of the male population could be estimated as homosexual, and 4 per cent. had bisexual tendencies (Wolfenden Report, para 38-9). Often these figures were then arbitrarily used by individual members engaged in the parliamentary debate on homosexuality in Britain to estimate the British figure of homosexual incidence, which, nevertheless, generated no agreement about the size of the 'problem' that appeared to exist (Higgins, 1997:19).

The principle of discussion rhetorically embodied in parliament requires the speaking subject to meet certain standards of rational argumentation from which truth and justice are believed to emerge. A speaking subject, for example, must have a common interest in 'truth' and 'justice' and the expression of an opinion must be supported by reasoned argument, presumably based on good evidence presented as 'facts'. The absence of enough facts upon which to discuss the matter of homosexuality during 1950s and 1960s, however, meant that such norms of reasonableness were often challenged, and the technical avoidance of ambiguity around the homosexual/homosexuality was particularly difficult. Frustrated with uncertainties that structured the debates on the subject of homosexuality in parliament, though this did not prevent him from defining homosexuality as an abnormality requiring treatment, Lord James of Rusholme, for example, states that:



One of the difficulties, of course, in discussing it rationally is that we still know so little of the causes and treatment of homosexuality...We are still uncertain whether this is a condition which can be successfully treated in all cases or even in some or even in any (HL, 12 May, 1965, col. 108).

For those who were authorised to speak publicly of the homosexual/homosexuality, the problem arising from its unintelligibility and unpredictability, indeed, generated more questions than answers. Calling attention to the Wolfenden recommendation that homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should be removed from the sphere of criminal law, the Earl of Arran, for example, asks various questions that were frequently raised during the debates on homosexuality in parliament, reiterating his own answer, that is: 'no one knows'.

Can we accept that recommendation? Is it right or is it wrong that grown-up men with abnormal sexual desires who indulge their tastes together should be regarded as criminals and sent to prison? Let me put these questions, and attempt to answers. What is homosexuality? What causes it? Answer: No one knows. Many have theories, but no one knows. Some people call it a disease; some people call it a diversion from biological norm, others a weakness; others, quite simply, a vice. What is the cure? Again, my Lords no one knows. Some even doubt whether a cure exists, at least in the extreme cases....How many homosexuals are there in Britain? Again, no-one knows, but the best guess is somewhere between 500,000 and 1 million men (HL, 12 May 1965).

Statements such as this one illustrate the ways in which debates of homosexual/ homosexuality in the parliament proceeded within the context of uncertainty, imposing a limit on the possibility of its representation through the criminal law. What is of particular interest here is the many strategic considerations that go into their attempts to counter this uncertainty. On the one hand, the problem of 'not knowing' the homosexual/ homosexuality – which made it difficult to bring the homosexual bodies into the proper purview of the law – was, for many, the precise reason for supporting the



Wolfenden recommendations on homosexual law reform. It was largely believed that decriminalisation of adult homosexual acts in private would result in more homosexuals seeking help and treatment, enabling 'us' to find the solution for settling the problem of homosexuality (see, HC, 19 Dec. 1966, col. 1096; HL, 10 May 1966, col. 637; HC, 19 Dec. 1966, col. ). As Labour Party MP, Mr. Eric Moonman, stated:

From this debate and the previous one it is clear that there is a lack of information on the subject. Theories have been put forward as to whether homosexuality is a disease, a weakness or a vice. There is no consistent view. Similarly, we are not even sure of the exact figures for this country. We do not know how many men are afflicted in this way. In the debate in another place Lord Arran put the figure between 500,000 and one million, and other figures have been given tonight. There is a great uncertainty on the subject, running throughout our whole discussion, and that uncertainty makes it difficult to attempt any real understanding of a possible cure, or of a prevention of the problem. We are not even sure whether homosexuals are born or made. Lord Arran argued that they are born, but a distinguished doctor, Dr. West, said that this condition was the result of environment. It is vital to remove the criminal stigma if we are to obtain co-operation in research. It is legitimate to expect something worthwhile in terms of a possible cure or a prevention of the problem if we can channel the information – information which we do not have at the moment – but until we remove the criminal stigma it will not be possible to engage in worthwhile research (HC, 19 Dec 1966, col. 1126).

On the other hand, the difficulties of representing homosexual bodies (the problem of unintelligibility) and of finding scientifically agreed way of settling the problem of homosexuality (the problem of unpredictability) have another important significance. The context of uncertainty associated with the law that silenced homosexuality provided a condition whereby storytelling, as a political practice, permeated and ordered the representation of the homosexual/homosexuality during this period, producing particular visions of the truth and certainty regarding its existence and effects. In the



following section, the analysis will focus in more detail upon the way in which the practices of political storytelling in parliament during 1950s and 1960s both bring that context of uncertainty/silence into play, and, at the same time, challenge it, maintaining authority over the representation of the homosexual/homosexuality.

### *5.3 Stories of Foreign Homosexuals*

Often the justification of one's political claims require one to be able to demonstrate and explain foreseeable effects of the particular legislative change or policy-making that one supports or opposes. And it is precisely here, as Epstein et al argue, that we find political argument that takes a narrative form such as 'if A, then B, where B is a host of hopes or horrors' gaining important currency in the political debates (Epstein, Johnson, & Steinberg, 2000:9). Political storytelling in which the consequences of a particular legislative decision are narrativized has an important argumentative function. As a form of discourse that configures and organises events in a temporal/causal sequence, story provides a chronological and causal explanation of how a particular legislative decision is expected to turn out in the future, thereby enabling one to display reasoning for or against particular political decisions. Such a function of political storytelling is particularly pertinent to an argumentative schema that situates itself and is situated within the context of uncertainty/silence. Here, storytelling, as I shall show below, both serves as a means of making sense of 'the unintelligible' and renders its effects predictable.

To illustrate the matter under discussion, let us start with some examples of 'homosexual' stories told during the parliamentary debates on homosexual law reform in the 1950s and 1960s. Consider, for example, the following story told by MP. William



Shepherd (Conservative) during the second reading debate on the Sexual Offences Bill in 1966. In offering his reason for opposing the Bill that, if passed, would decriminalise homosexual activities between two adults in private, Mr. Shepherd tells us his own personal experience of encountering homosexuals abroad:

I like to see an occasional British victory and so I follow British grand prix motor racing, and for this purpose I went last year to Amsterdam. On the night before the race, with an architect friend of mine I went to a club in the centre of Amsterdam. Amsterdam is cited to the House as being one of those places where, as a result of a more generous and liberal outlook, there is a new and entirely acceptable pattern. In the club we were shown to a table where two people were already sitting. One was a rather odd looking man, but the other was even odder because he looked like a retired professional heavy-weight but he had on women's clothes, with plenty of furs and rings and powder, and he spoke in a terribly heavy voice. The show consisted, of course, of men impersonating women. It is an odd thing that homosexuals are supposed to dislike women yet they prefer entertainment where there is this impersonation. It always seems remarkable to me. When a new customer came in and sat a table or so away, he had with him a very young boy. I assure the House that when the young boy came in and sat down with the older man, the whole of the attention of audience in my immediate vicinity was deflected from the stage to assess the merits of the young boy. This is what happens in that enlightened city of Amsterdam and I say to the House right away that I do not want to see that sort of thing happening in this country (HC 11 February 1966, vol. 724. col. 818).

When personal stories of homosexuality, in the context of their silence, entered political debate, they often entered not as the personal stories of those who lived same-sex experience, but as stories of heterosexual MPs who accidentally encountered those who practiced homosexuality, and pictured the homosexual through their heterosexual lens. Mr. Shepherd's story is one such example.

For Mr. Shepherd, encountering homosexuals was a purely 'accidental' experience; he went to Holland only to see a British victory in grand prix motor racing, but accidentally encountered



sexual strangers who inhabit this foreign land. Such a way of telling a personal story, whereby the narratorial voice seeks to attain a clear distance from the event it experiences needs some comment.

From a point of silence, telling personal stories of encountering/knowing the homosexual/homosexuality involves, even for those who are in a position of authority, the danger associated with transgressing the boundaries of the (normalised) sexual order – the order that ‘average’, ‘normal’, and ‘decent’ people seldom experience crossing (HL, 10 May 1966, col. 633). As a response to such a danger, Mr. Shepherd, in breaking the silence regarding the homosexual/homosexuality, creates a clear distance between himself and the homosexual Other: his ‘accidental’ experience taken place in a ‘mundane’ ‘ordinary’ situation proves that his involvement in the problematic situation is nothing but a result of his ‘average’, ‘normal’, ‘decent’ masculine activity, serving as a demarcating identifier between himself and the problematic homosexual Other (see Dijk, 1987: 69).

From a point of uncertainty, Mr. Shepherd, through the distance he creates between the self and the homosexual Other, attains a degree of objectivity in the story he tells. His covert presence and non-involvement in the event produces a narratorial voice that is observant, investigative, and informative. Each sentence of his story seems to merely describe what is going on, presenting ‘facts’ about the homosexualised male body and its surface movement – its ‘gestures’, ‘utterances’, ‘interactions, and ‘social space’ (Moran, 1996: 136). In this way, his story, like the police practice of covert surveillance that effectively produces homosexuals in the context of their invisibility, builds a type of subject who performs homosexual acts.

(1) Here, homosexuality appears to mean, first and foremost, the role-playing (impersonation) that involves a violation of the



natural gender/sexual code, which is strictly associated with one's biological sex. This mysterious man with a ridiculously odd appearance and manner – e.g., the way he dresses, wears accessories and speaks – is anything but natural: he, like the man who plays a role of a woman in the show, is a performer with the visible, but nevertheless superficial, appearance of a woman. (2) Surrounding this odd man who impersonates a woman is the equally odd presence of those homosexuals who are fascinated by this queer performance of male homosexuality. Homosexuals, to Mr. Shepherd's examining gaze, now appear to be ultimately meaningless and absurd. They simply do not make sense: homosexuals are 'supposed to dislike women', and yet they express their bizarre interests in superficial/unnatural women as their sexual objects. (3) Yet, within their seemingly meaningless and unreasonable display of homosexual bodies, there, Mr. Shepherd finds, the sign of their moral wickedness. They are malign sexual others, containing within themselves a monstrous element, which, to his horror, is evidently shown by their mischievous bodily signs and gestures towards a young pretty boy.

The story ends by dramatising the option faced by Mr. Shepherd. Confronting the moral terror of sexual strangers, Mr. Shepherd portrays those homosexuals he encountered as exotic 'others', and wishes keep them at a permanent physical, spatial, and psychological distance from the Self, defined as British. After all, these sexual strangers remain foreign strangers, and here, in Britain, he does not yet see such strangers in sight. Or more correctly, he does not 'want to see that sort of thing happening in this country', expressing his wish not to recognise or acknowledge the sexual stranger before him as Self-as-Other. For many, however, the fact that homosexuals are 'foreign' sexual strangers does not neutralise their fear of homosexual others: they may well, by made being seen or heard, spill over the boundary that demarcates the



native and the foreign and become a threat to the natural national Self. As Dance, the Conservative MP, tells the story:

Here is an example, of which I know, which happened some years ago in the South of France, with disastrous effect on the lives of two young men. There were two old homosexuals living in the South of France, in oriental magnificence in a beautiful villa. For several years, although they were a bit of a joke, they caused no particular harm. Then they began to get tired of one another, and they sought for someone younger, more juvenile and fresh. As a result, they imported two unfortunate youths down to the South of France from London. These two youths led a life...to which they were entirely unaccustomed, a life of great luxury the like of which they had never been seen before. Time went on and, just as the two old "queers" had got bored with each other, they got bored with the two youths whom they had imported. So the youths had to go...What was the result? I know, because the case has been followed through, that they returned to London, to a drab life which they just could not tolerate because of the extravagance of the life which they had led the previous year, and so they became male prostitutes. From that they became drug addicts (HC 23 June 1967, 2188-2189).

Dance's story illustrates the disastrous consequences for those British youths who, as a result of coming into contact with 'foreign' homosexuals and having a relationship with them as a result, were afflicted with the serious moral and psychological damage. Similar to Shepherd's story, Dance's narrative links homosexuality to notions of 'externality': the homosexual represents a threatening outsider, an alien power, that, through the acts of seduction, can effectively turn insiders into 'strangers-to-ourselves' (Kristeva, 1991). Once again, homosexuality is portrayed as the antithesis of Britishness – a threat to the national 'We' defined against the foreign 'Other'.

Here, homosexuality is primarily seen as a matter of personal/ social interaction that involves the acts of 'seducing' and 'being seduced'. In spite of the radical externality of sexual strangeness, the story, therefore, invokes two things: fear and guilt. On the one hand, the story invokes fear around the capacity of the foreign homosexual



body, which, with its overwhelming force of seduction, can contaminate the British body politic (Phelan, 2001: 4). 'Foreign' homosexuals who are somewhere out there, simply following their strange nature and keeping it to themselves, cause 'no particular harm'. What really frightens 'us' is that they, through acts of seduction, are able to transgress what Rorty calls the 'natural cut'— a cut that naturally demarcates between us and them (Rorty, 1989: 192). The fear of foreign homosexuals is then reinforced by our own sense of inner weakness and guilt that the story exposes, which is contemporaneous with the acts of seduction itself. That is to say, there are those among 'us' who, by being morally weak and lacking self-control, may positively respond to the external force of seduction, thereby being subjected to homosexuality.

This one story, therefore, actually tells us two different stories of male homosexuals: the story of foreign homosexuals on the one hand, and British homosexuals (who are not homosexuals) on the other. The story splits the figure of foreign homosexuals into two: those who are ridiculous in their own alien home, but cause no particular harm to 'us'; and those who are threatening corrupters who, like evil aliens, can invade our society to destroy us. The story, by contrast, portrays British homosexuals as largely victims, who suffer from the tragic effects of their contacts with 'evil' foreign homosexuals. Telling about two 'unfortunate' British youths who are 'imported' and 'led' a life which they did not expect to have, the story describes their homosexual experience as something passively endured rather than actively pursued. We can, at most, blame them for their inaction against evil – a sign of their moral defect or a lack that amounts to their physical and mental contamination and addiction – which led to 'their ultimate downfall' (HL 10 May 1966, col. 631). Nevertheless, they are not fully responsible for their downfall. Rather homosexuality is something that can unfortunately



be fall some of 'us' – heterosexual 'us'.<sup>19</sup>

What representative work do the stories of foreign homosexuals perform for the problem of British homosexuals being in question in the parliament here? The stories of foreign homosexuals are figuratively performative in the sense of Butler's notion of performativity: by what it 'appears' to represent, it constitutes 'as an effect' the very boundaries among sexual aliens and sexual citizens within the British nation (Butler, 1991: 24). In other words, the story performs a symbolic/regulative work in imagining/defining the 'moral' boundary between those whom we can cast as sexual aliens and those whom we can accept as members of the British community – the distinction that I shall discuss in more detail in the next section.

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19. Stories of the fall of the individual body were often told in relation to stories of the fall of the civility of national body. Stories go back as far as the myth of the decline and the fall of the Roman Empire. For many, the danger of homosexuality to the national body, similar to its danger to the individual body, lies in its awesome power of seductiveness. For example, the Romans, it was argued, were increasingly seduced to prefer unnatural homosexual acts to the procreative heterosexual intercourse, which directly contributed to the society's collapse. Lord Saltoun struck a typically apocalyptic note on this score when he told the following story in the parliament: 'The Roman Empire...has fallen because Roman families ceased to produce children. At the end of the Republic it was a problem, and it went on in the Empire. The only people who had children were slaves: so much so that later on one man of no particular parts, who happened to be the only man that they could find of the Julian family, was made Emperor simply because he was a Julian. That fact shows that the Roman Empire fell because it ceased to produce Romans. I think it ceased to produce Romans, as anyone who has read Horace or Juvenal will know, because it ceased to be interested in the production of Romans' (HL, 10 May 1966, col. 625). This story, which was told during the debates on the Sexual Offences Act, was a familiar one. More than a century earlier, Edward Gibbon, in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, put a similar spin on the story of the Roman Emperors. According to Gibbon, homosexuality was so common in Rome that it was integrated wholly into the life of Roman Emperors: 'of the first fifteen emperors' Gibbon argues, 'Claudius was the only one whose taste in love was entirely correct,' that is being heterosexual (Gibbon, 2004: 121).



#### *5.4 The Paradox of Evil*

Here, I begin with a 'moral' fact which, unlike scientific facts, was not questioned, challenged or contested during the debates on the Sexual Offences Act: that is, a homosexual act is an evil act that brings in 'a radical reversal of the "natural" relationship' (Zizek, Wright, & Wright, 1999: 273). The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, argues that: 'I believe that homosexual acts are always wrong in the sense that they use in a wrong way human organs for which the right use is intercourse between men and women within marriage' (12 May 1965, col. 80). The 'evil' of the homosexual act is so self-evident in the fact that it is 'a perversion of a natural function', that we require no further proof or knowledge to validate our revulsion against it. As Sir C. Osborne comments: 'I know nothing or very little about what is called buggery, but from what I do know about it, I hate it and I dislike it' (HC, 11 Feb 1966, vol. 726, col. 829).

Yet, from Dance's story that tells two different stories of male homosexuality, one finds a familiar western narrative that is concerned with the 'paradox' of evil. According to Ricoeur, the history of western thought has incorporated two heterogeneous notions of evil: evil as suffering on the one hand, and evil as wrongdoing on the other; or to put it another way, evil that 'befalls us' versus evil that we actively commit and are, therefore, responsible for (Ricoeur, 1985: 636). While the former, Ricoeur argues, belongs to the category of lament, the latter is the subject of blame and is what makes us 'culprits'. As Ricoeur puts it:

There is blame where a human action held to be a violation of the prevailing code of conduct is declared guilty and worthy of being punished. There is lament where some suffering is undergone. We do not make it happen, it befalls us. Being an effect, it may be related to a variety of causes – the adversity of physical nature, illness, the loved ones, the perspective of our own mortality, affronts to our dignity, and so on. Lament,

therefore occurs as the opposite of blame; whereas blame make culprits of us, lament reveals us as victims (Ricoeur 1985: 636).

In spite of this stark moral dualism of lament/blame, Ricoeur, however, notes that these two categories of evil are, as a matter of fact, deeply 'intertwined' (Ricoeur 1985: 636). Their point of intersection can be found in the fact that we, as Kearney argues, 'can feel guilty for committing an evil act while simultaneously experiencing seduction, or invasion, by an overwhelming force outside of us' (Kearney, 2000: 107). In other words, there is a strange element of passivity in evildoing, which, Ricoeur argues, 'makes us feel ourselves to be victims in the very act that makes us guilty' (Ricoeur 1985: 636-7). Indeed, we find in the debates on the Sexual Offences Act, where the homosexual/homosexuality was frequently referred to as 'evil', a number of stories that plot 'passivity' into the experience of homosexuality, blurring the boundaries between lament/victim and blame/culprit. The stories that follow further reveal this boundary-blurring.

### *5.5 Tragedy: Homosexual/Heterosexual Victims*

On close scrutiny, one can find two different ways in which passivity in relation to homosexual experience is emplotted in the stories told during the debates on the Sexual Offences Act. On the one pole, we find stories of 'heterosexual' victims who are being 'picked up' and seduced by *evil/homosexuals*. On the other, there are stories of 'homosexual' victims who are being 'cursed' by *evil/homosexuality*. The story I am considering first is a case of the latter case. It is told by MP. Montgomery Hyde (Belfast, North) during the first Commons debate on the Wolfenden Report in 1958.

This is a man who was a consenting adult. He was convicted



some years ago on the evidence of his accomplice for an act committed in private and he received and underwent a sentence of imprisonment. On his release from prison he got a job as a clerk in a solicitor's office. He held that job for two or three years and then someone wrote to his employers, sending a cutting of the trial at which he was convicted, and the result was that he lost his job. This is what he wrote to me: 'I don't wish to pretend I'm good – but I am like many of the homosexuals, cursed with the thing from the beginning. God in heaven only knows the fights I have put up against it – and I'm sure I'm one of many – and have lost each time. It seems so utterly ridiculous for two men, who wish to live together in their own home, to be classed as criminals and 'sex maniacs'. I know men and women who have committed far, far worse acts than homosexuals look upon us as worse than if we were murderers. I do so want to try and make you people look upon this coming debate with kindness and sympathetic consideration and think 'There but for the grace of God go I'. It is all right for people to condemn us so much, but they have no idea of the life of fear and dread we live all the time, in case our friends find out or we are caught. I know I did, and I know the hell I lived in when the police came to me, and I'm still living in hell now! You seem to be 'cut off' from everything, and can get no employment. Just because I was cursed with the homosexual trait, I was no more able to get rid of it than a man could get rid of cancer. It's in you from birth – I feel sure of that. I have studied so many cases and men I have met. When you understand you feel terribly sorry' (HC, 26 Nov 1958, col. 394).

Let us consider a particular way in which homosexual suffering is emplotted in this story. The story emplots the source of homosexual suffering as 'being cursed', found to be present in an almost incomprehensible and inescapable twist of fate: from the story of the person who was 'cursed' with homosexuality 'from the beginning', and has 'lost each time' his fights against the enigma of homosexuality, we are left with the feeling that the problem of evil/homosexuality is not located in one's bad will, but in the violence of nature, which is beyond our control. And in this regard, the story reveals one distinctive aspect of the experience of homosexuality – the experience of utter passivity.

His sheer passivity in the face of 'being cursed' reveals the most



terrifying problem raised by evil/homosexuality, namely, the introduction of ambiguity into the principle of responsibility. He does not 'pretend' to be 'good', and yet he rejects being classed as a criminal (a subject of blame): 'it seems to be utterly ridiculous for two men, who wish to live together in their own home, to be classed as criminals'. He says he is condemnable, yet he demands that we acknowledge his homosexual experience – 'the life of fear and dread' – as suffering. The point of intersection between blame and lament within the evil/homosexuality here invites us to question the simple principle of responsibility – the principle based on the notion that 'to the doer belong his deeds' (Harris, 1881: 222). For if evil/homosexuality 'is something we as humans do, it is also done to us: something we inherit, something already there' (Kearney 2000: 108).

The paradox of evil/homosexuality, the story tells us, is: if he bears the guilt for being a fallen man, he, as a cursed 'victim' (and whose condition of existence, like those with cancer, is not yet curable in the present state of medical knowledge), does not bear the responsibility for his congenital fault. In other words, the story, by shifting the blame and responsibility away from the condition of being 'cursed', attempts to locate homosexuality 'beyond the realm of culpability' (Whisman, 1996: 15).

Yet, as I argue below, the passivity in relation to homosexuality can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to endow it with different meanings and to bring about different legal consequences. Speaking from clinical experience, Dr. Bennett, for example, tells a story about those 'picked-up' homosexuals for whom homosexuality is bound to remain curable:

[In] my attempts at practice in aid of the courts I have seen a fairly a number of homosexuals and I have been struck by the proportion of them who were adolescents who had been picked up. They were late developers, slow in maturing, uncertain of their sexual direction and they had been pushed into that direction. I found that it was remarkably easy to cure these



people with the aid of hormone treatment which has been already mentioned today. By reducing sexual tension of the individual, provided he is under suitable treatment, this treatment can so suppress it that a reorientation of ideas has time to take place so that when sexual desires are allowed on the cessation of treatment they take a more natural form. I am happy to say that if patients are suitably selected it seems that there is a good prospect of curing these men. That shows that we cannot regard homosexuals as hard and fast incurables nor as hereditary, congenital or even environmentally produced people who must have a separate way of life (HC, 26 Nov 1958, col. 448).

This story, as is the case with Dance's story, locates the problem of passivity regarding homosexual experience in the sphere of intersubjective human relationships within which homosexual suffering takes place: by telling of those adolescents who have been 'picked up' and 'pushed' into the condition of homosexuality by other homosexuals, the story places the blame for their suffering not on the violence of nature, but on the homosexual Other. And it is at this point we find the passivity, which leads to the paradox of evil/homosexuality, becomes the source of complaint against evil/homosexuals who commit a terror of homosexual 'defilement'.

According to Ricoeur, complaints of 'defilement' come with 'the demand for just punishment' (Ricoeur, 1967: 42). Here, just punishment in relation to homosexual defilement calls for two things: the recognition of the homosexual Other as guilty on the one hand, and the 'restoring the wronged body' to the state of normality on the other (Ricoeur, 1967: 29; Simms, 2003: 22). Those who are being approached and corrupted by the homosexual Other, in particular, have responsibilities to 'reorient' their sexual desire through seeking treatment. After all, for these passive homosexuals, who 'actively' participate in the process of decontamination and renormalisation, the treatment, Dr. Bennett says, is 'remarkably easy'.

From these two stories, we find that the paradox of evil does



not result in the collapse of narrative coherency regarding evil/homosexuality. Quite the opposite. The power of these stories lies in their moral force, which, through the rhetorical effect of the paradox of evil/homosexuality, creates new sets of oppositions within evil/homosexuality, reordering (rather than deconstructing) the dualism between the subject of lament and that of blame. Hence we can imagine, in the story of a cursed, self-contained, suffering homosexual, its ontological and behavioral opposite, a pleasure seeking and flaunting homosexual monster. In Dr. Benett's story of the 'picked up' (heterosexual) homosexual, we find its relational opposite, the corrupting and cursing homosexual Other. Here, in their different ways, stories of passive homosexuals/heterosexuals, who create the paradox of evil/homosexuality, resolves the paradox by reconstructing and reconstituting the subject of blame – that is, the homosexual Other who is cursing, flaunting, contagious, seductive and corrupting.

What this brief analysis of stories told during the Sexual Offences Act debates reveals is a particular effect that storytelling produces in parliament –the 'moralizing effect' (White, 1980). In what follows, I briefly discuss how these stories, which, in their different ways, work to construct the subject of 'moral' blame intersect with a 'penal' view of homosexuality offered by the Wolfenden Report. We find in the Wolfenden recommendations, which ultimately led to the passage of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967, the language of evil/sin permeating through its practical reasoning on the problem of the homosexual/homosexuality. After all, the strength of the Wolfenden Report does not lie in the 'scientific facts' it discovered or represented regarding the homosexual/homosexuality – an impossible task to accomplish in the context of uncertainty – but in finding 'moral facts' that provide a foundation for the il/legality of the homosexual/homosexuality. As the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury clearly states:



I would uphold the belief that just as fornication is always wrong so homosexual acts are always wrong. At the same time, wrong acts in this case as in others can have various degrees of culpability attached to them. In this case, there are not only degrees of culpability but also varieties of causes of the trouble and categories of the trouble, psychological and sociological. [...] It is the strength of the Wolfenden Report, I believe, that it emphasises the variety of states and causes, and refuses to label them all with a single clinical formula... There is a region where moral responsibility must certainly enter into the matter (HL 12 May 1965).

### *5.6 The Story of (Heterosexual) Victim-Citizen*

A modern discursive response to the question of evil/homosexuality eradicates (or, at least, attempts to eradicate) the problematic ambivalence (paradox) arising from its boundary-crossing between nativeness/foreignness, passivity/activity, lamentation/blame, and victimness/criminality. And here I discuss ways in which the Wolfenden Report, by making a clear distinction within evil/homosexuality between private-sin and public-evil attempts to eliminate the very conditions upon which the problem arises.

Dance's story, which positions (foreign) homosexuals as the personification of both being safe and dangerous (to us) – perhaps they are undecidedly both – discloses the problem of uncertainty that surrounds homosexuals' unsettling foreignness (to us). At the same time, the story reveals conditions in which such a problem of uncertainty arises: it arises not from the existence of (foreign) homosexuals per se, but from the non-existence of policed borders that could effectively separate sexual aliens from us. Indeed, this lack of control over sexual borders, as I shall briefly show below, was the main concern of the Wolfenden committee, which, with the distinctions it made between the privately closeted and publicly flaunting homosexual on the one hand, and between the seductive



homosexual and the seduced heterosexual on the other, attempted to introduce a machinery of policing into British sexual politics.

In the Wolfenden Report, we find interesting ways in which policing techniques in relation to homosexual behaviours were organised, producing multiple homosexual bodies differently articulated in the law. Here, two strategies pursued by the Committee can be identified. The first followed the representation of male homosexual bodies divided into two types: privately closeted versus publicly flaunting homosexual bodies. The second strategy was to link the publicly flaunting homosexual body to the identity of homosexual seducer and to find its other half in the identity of heterosexual victim. While the figure of privately closeted homosexuals found in the first strategic division helps the Wolfenden Committee to construct the figure of the homosexual seducer, it is the latter figure that is used as a device to mark opposingly what 'we' are not.

A particular way in which male homosexual acts are linked to the notion of criminal offence is of some interest here. Homosexual offences, in the Wolfenden Report, are defined as acts that involve homosexual seduction – homosexual acts that entail either a direct 'exploitation and corruption of others' or a display of homosexual affection in a space 'where members of the public may be likely to see and be offended by it' (Wolfenden Report, para. 13, 64). By exploiting, corrupting and offending, the homosexual seducer is the figure of a criminal offender: he, through the active acts of seduction, produces victims – seduced or offended male heterosexual victims.

To be seduced means to exist in relation to (as much as in opposition to) the seducer. In the Wolfenden Report, the victim and criminal, seduced and seducer, are unveiled as mutually dependent and exclusive. Defined as mutually dependent, the seduced victims



experience homosexuality only through the homosexual criminal-other. Defined as mutually exclusive, the seducer cannot be, at the same time, the seduced. Thus, the Wolfenden Committee, for example, rejects the possibility that homosexual seducers could be once victims themselves – the possibility that the victimness of the seduced becomes indistinguishable from its otherness: the criminality of the seducer. The Committee states: “We have, it is true, found that men charged with homosexual offences frequently plead that they were seduced in their youth, but we think that this plea is a rationalisation or an excuse, and that the offender was predisposed to homosexual behaviour before the ‘seduction’ took place” (Wolfenden Report, para. 99). At the same time, the Wolfenden Committee offers the following intriguing remarks on the implications of homosexual seduction on seduced young men. The passage in question reads:

One consequence of homosexual behaviour with young persons can....be serious and detrimental. Even where no resistance is offered or no physical harm ensues, there may be considerable damage to the moral and emotional development of the victim. For example, a boy or youth who is induced by means of gifts, whether in money or in kind, to participate in homosexual behaviour, may come to regard such behaviour as a source of easy money or as a means of enjoying material comforts or other pleasures beyond those which he could expect by decent behaviour, and we have encountered cases where this has happened. Indeed, it is our opinion that this sort of corruption is a more likely consequence than the possible conversion of the victim to a condition of homosexuality (Wolfenden Report, para.97).

By telling of the possible cause and the effect of homosexual seduction on its victim, the Wolfenden Committee here explicates the conditions in which a person can be identified as a victim. He is a victim if he was a heterosexual, and is not a homosexual. Not only are the homosexual offender (the seducer) and the victim (the seduced) declared as mutually exclusive, we also find that this



binary opposition works to define the state of being a victim as mutually exclusive from the state of being a homosexual. The victims of homosexual crime, in other words, are those who are seduced to homosexuality not because of their condition of homosexuality, but because of a variety of other human conditions (for example, the infirmities of young age, economic dependence and so on) that could affect heterosexual-us. And it is this 'us', the vulnerable non-homosexual victims defined as the public, whom, the Committee claims, the British law should be concerned to protect. As the Wolfenden Report puts it:

[The] function of the criminal law...as we see it, is to preserve public order and decency, to protect the citizen from what is offensive or injurious, and to provide sufficient safeguards against exploitation and corruption of others, particularly those who are specially vulnerable because they are young, weak in body or mind, inexperienced, or in a state of special physical, official or economic dependence (Wolfenden Report, para.13).

In finding the victim whose principle cause of suffering and corruption is the violence done to its body and mind by other seductive homosexuals, the Wolfenden Report reveals a structure of crime implicated in homosexual acts whereby a homosexual act committed by 'them' finds its other half in the homosexual acts suffered by 'us' (see Ricoeur, 636). At the same time, by finding reasons for being seduced homosexuals not in our innate homosexuality but in other human conditions that could affect 'us', the Wolfenden Report posits the problem of victims as the problem of the community – a community that is founded upon a shared risk of victimisation.

Linking the notion of crime-victimisation to that of citizenship, Allison Young argues that being a victim of a crime is being a citizen (Young, 1996a: 55). According to Young, crime provides a sense of belonging to the social body, which comes 'not from the fact that we are all criminals, but rather from the shared fact of victimization'



(ibid.). In other words, crime-victimization, when posited as our communal injury, constitutes the sense of 'we' – 'we', brought together through shared risk and trauma of the crime.

Not only does crime-victimisation, represented along the axis of sameness, bring 'us' together, it, Young argues, also assigns duties and responsibilities to 'us': if any of us could be a victim of a crime, then 'everyone has a part to play in the struggle against crime' (Young 1996: 56). In other words, everyone has a citizenry duty to resist the alienation of victimisation: to move from a position of passivity to an active agency striving for a self-recovery. As Young writes:

Passivity, for the victim, is initially unavoidable in that crime... happens to the individual, with all the force and randomness of circumstance. Agency can be regained, however, if the individual rejects such passivity and takes up a role in the prevention of crime. In this way, citizenship is acquired. As an active social agent...the citizen must participate in his de-victimization (Young 1996: 56).

Being an outlaw, however, the drama of 'his' de-victimisation turned instead to anguish and disheartenment. In pointing how an immanent threat of criminalisation dashes victims' hope of normalisation, Lord Bishop of Southwark, for example, tells the following long story:

As a parish priest for many years, I have been compelled to recognise that the existing law is unhelpful and defeats its own ends. The pastor has always to try to help people in all sorts of conditions – the sad, the bereaved, the depressives, the alcoholics, those who cannot face life, those who have lost their way, and of course the people who have got themselves into sexual difficulty, and among them homosexuals, men and women. As I have listened to their problems I have tried to help them, as any pastor does, to come to grips with life and to adjust themselves to society. In the case of women homosexuals, Lesbians, we have been able to talk to one another without the threat of the law hanging over us. With male homosexuals it has been different. In the first place, they have often been hesitant in coming forward, because they have



been afraid to disclose themselves, not quite sure what the reaction would be. Secondly, they have wondered what would happen if I was called upon to give evidence against them; and, in passing, I would say that this has only once happened to me, and I refused, of course, and would refuse in all circumstances. Even so I think it is most unfortunate that any attempt should ever be made to get a priest to break confidence on matters like this, when a homosexual comes to him with some great problem and wants the priest to help him face life. Thirdly, they worry because they inevitably wonder whether a careless word from myself or from somebody who may have seen them coming to my house might provide a clue, quite unintentionally, which could land them into difficulties with the police. In other words, the situation which confronts a pastor when dealing with male homosexuals – not female – is just about as difficult as it could be. He wants to help. He wants the man to face his problem reasonably and constructively. He wants to give him the confidence to contribute usefully to society: but the atmosphere is vitiated by a sense of fear.

Let me give two examples very shortly. The first, a very few years ago, was of a student, aged 19, when I was vicar of the University Church at Cambridge. He had a homosexual experience, I think probably only one, and regretted it. He came to see me. I was satisfied it was a passing phase, just part of the business of growing up, and I was certain he would overcome it and shortly find a girl and eventually get married. Unfortunately, just when everything seemed settled the police got to hear of his adventure. And this boy, who really was a brilliant physicist and perhaps could have done much for our country, committed suicide. The second was of a middle-aged man who had had homosexual experiences twenty years before. He had, I know, overcome his weaknesses and was doing most valuable social work on a housing estate. Alas! An unscrupulous blackmailer learned of his past and threatened to report him to the police. On the table of the room in which he gassed himself he left a note to the effect that, although he had done nothing in recent years of which he was ashamed or which could get him into trouble, he just could not face another inquisition.

These two examples from one's pastoral experience – and I could give several more – will explain why a pastor must want the law to be changed. *No matter how distasteful sexual irregularities may be, the person concerned, if he is to alter his ways, needs what? – compassion, understanding and help.* A priest, as you would expect, has to deal with every sort of



domestic sorrow, failure and sin – fornication, adultery, sadism, Lesbianism, broken homes, homosexuality. His task is made more difficult and sometimes impossible if he has to work under the shadow of the criminal law (HL, 12 May 1965, col. 153-155, Italics added).

Here, the Lord Bishop of Southwark tells the story of two male heterosexuals who, by being caught up in a regrettable past which has no future, commit suicide. It is clear from the story that their longing for acceptance and inclusion was bound to fail. Their quest for de-victimisation, in the face of an immanent and constant threat of criminalisation, was an impossibility. In the eyes of the existing law, homosexual acts, regardless of the contexts in which they occur, are all criminal acts, and those who actively pursue or are passively seduced to homosexuality are all simply the same – homosexual criminals.

Being fallen into ‘the they – criminals’ by the law that is concerned only with the presence of the their ‘past’, they are unable to be/act, and find that the only resolution possible is their death by suicide – a complete loss of their ‘present/future’ selves. Hence, we hear the story of this boy who would ‘shortly find a girl and eventually get married’, and ‘could have done much for our country’ found himself in a permanent homosexual trial of guilt and punishment – a trial that ultimately led him to commit suicide. The ‘married’ middle-aged man who overcame his ‘weakness’ and became an otherwise law-abiding citizen, realised his unrealisable dream of acceptance. He could never overcome his weakness.

The priest, an agent of conversion who constantly seeks to restore and normalise the wronged (heterosexual) bodies that fall prey to (homosexual) corruption, felt equally powerless before the force of the law. The law that fails to differentiate the subject of ‘lament’ from the subject of ‘blame’ hinders his ability to function as

the community's normalising/disciplinary agent. And his failure symbolises the failure of the law. Too preyed upon by unclassifiable and undefinable powers of sexual strangeness to be able to act, the law fails to reach its own positive objective: 'designing-engineering-gardening' a homogeneous national body (Bauman, 1991: 69). It fails to turn natives-turned-strangers to natives again, and to motivate 'us' to join in a collective fight against evil/otherness. Unable to act, the existing law, as Lord Bishop of Southwark states, 'defeats its own aims': instead of designing and gardening, it paralyses the national body, making double-victims of us all.

Here, the story that features the failed relationship between the priest (the agency for moral regulation) and his wronged, suffering hetero-homosexual sons, is, therefore, the story that tells of the failed relation between the state (the public agency of legal regulation) and its victimised-citizens. The priest's project of normalising, in order to be successful, must be coextensive with changing forms of the relationship between the state and its vulnerable citizens. In other words, it demands the state to re-articulate a role in its relationship to victimised/victimisable citizens, which is not dissimilar to the protective legal stance taken by the Wolfenden Report.

Two things should be noted here. On the one hand, the connection between the overall intent of this story and the idea of collective 'risk-sharing', which according to Giddens, lies behind the welfare thinking of the post-war British 'social' citizenship, is clear (Giddens, 1994b). Crucial to the development of the post-war British welfare state, Giddens argues, is a view of victim as citizen, and the recognition of the collective responsibility for the increased range of risks (including threats to body) to which citizens are exposed and by which they are victimized. Here, risk, being approached as a shared human condition rather than as fate, was something that



needed to be collectively dealt with and fought by members of society. It also demanded a role for the state in meeting risks encountered by victimised/victimisable citizens, by fostering institutional forms of prevention against risk-victimisation (Edwards, & Glover, 2001).

On the other hand, we are mindful here that the notion of victim as citizen operates as the boundary marker of inclusion and exclusion. It separates the risk-victims as citizens from the risk-producers as others/criminals. It sets the conditions upon which victims' inclusion is based: they are charged with the moral responsibilities and obligations of becoming active citizens; of participating in the process of their de-victimisation, and of engaging in the collective fight against harmful risk.

Indeed, the protective legal stance presented by the Wolfenden Report made this boundary of victim-citizenship coded in its moral/legal principle clear. It, as Hall argues, 'identif[ies] and separate[s] more sharply two areas of legal and moral practice – those of sin and crime, of immorality and illegality' (Hall, 1980: 11). By creating an opposition between these two areas, it 'clearly staked out a new relation between the two modes of moral regulation – the modalities of legal compulsion and of self-regulation' (Hall, 1980: 11-12; see also Weeks, 1986: 102-3)

At the heart of this distinction lies, as I discussed earlier, the binary opposition drawn between passive victims (who are seduced to homosexuality) and un-deserving active criminals (who publicly flaunt homosexuality): the former is defined as the object of moral regulation, while the latter is seen as that of legal regulation. And it is at this point that we find that the story told by the Lord Bishop of Southwark adds an important dimension to these two modalities of

regulation presented by the Wolfenden Report.

Here, his project of normalising is not represented as an opposing force to the regulative practice in a legal form. After all, his moralising project, the story suggests, is selectively aimed at those who are suffering or have suffered (heterosexual) victims (those who are, at the same time, striving for assimilation and normalisation), and its success, therefore, ultimately depends on a tightened form of legal/public control and penalty imposed against exploitive and corruptive homosexuals. In other words, the story is telling us that what Hall calls a 'double taxonomy' – that is, the legal compulsion and the self-regulation – is not, in effect, articulating contradictory forces, but is articulated in what Foucault calls 'a single strategy'; that is, 'a strategy for the rearrangement of power to *punish*, according to modalities that render it more regular, more effective, more constant and more detailed in its effect' (Foucault, 1978: 80 cited in Hall, 1980: 14, italics added). As MP Norman St. John-Stevas, in the Commons debate held in 19 December 1966, also acknowledges:

There are strong arguments in favour of the Bill [Sexual Offences Bill] on the ground that in fact it would promote public morality...By condemning and punishing effectively, as the Bill does, the corruption of minors, the exploitation of the weak, and those who abuse their positions of trust, far from weakening public morality, the Bill would strengthen it. There are those who oppose this change in the law because they fear that it would give approval to homosexuality. We have heard that argument from my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North. But, of course, it does nothing of the kind...If the Bill were passed, homosexuality would remain unlawful, although not criminal. *The Bill would create no recognized status of homosexuality. It would remain contrary to public policy. Homosexual relations would give rise to rights nor to duties* (HC, 19 Dec 1966, col. 1120-21, Italics are added).

As stated by John-Stevas, the Sexual Offences Act, which narrowly decriminalised consenting adult homosexual acts in private



in 1968 did not create 'the recognized status of homosexuality'. For example, ruling against a magazine called IT (International Times) for publishing homosexual contact ads in 1972, the Lords decision made it very clear that '[t]he 1967 Act merely exempted from criminal penalties but did not make it [homosexuality] legal in the full sense' (Weeks 1981: 274-5). What was recognized instead was: (1) the status of (male) homosexuality as immoral, which, in turn, enabled a tighter form of legal regulation of homosexuals; and (2) an ambiguous citizenship status for heterosexual-victim citizens – ambiguous in the sense that their citizenship status is conditioned upon their becoming de-victimised/de-victimisable heterosexual citizens. In the next chapter where I analyse stories told during the debates on Section 28 of the Local Government Act, I discuss how this view of the 'victim as citizen' became prominent again in a changed British political context in the 1980s. But before I move on to this topic, I discuss untold stories of lesbian/ism, which were silenced/represented in different ways from the stories of (male) homosexuality during this period.

### *5.7 The Absent Presence of Lesbian/ism*

Why is the so-called 'the vice between women' – lesbianism – not framed in terms of a political discourse of illegality? Why did lesbianism, unlike (male) homosexuality, not emerge as a question of crime and punishment? Surely, there were a few occasions on which the question of the criminalisation of 'acts of gross indecency between women' surfaced in the British parliament (Faraday, 1988: 12-3). Yet, female homosexual acts have constantly escaped criminalisation by British law (see Waites, 2002: 326-7) But why?

Lesbianism was rarely discussed during the debates on the



Sexual Offences Act. But, when it was discussed, it was with regard to this question, 'why not lesbianism?', the word, 'lesbianism', was spoken of in relation to 'homosexuality', and entered the debates during the 1950s and 1960s. In questioning the law's underlying 'logic' or 'ethic' by which male homosexual/ity is marked as the object of criminalisation but lesbianism is not, MP. Douglas Jay (Labour), for example, asks:

If anyone really seriously contends that private acts of this kind [homosexual acts] between consenting adults in private do harm to society....how can one possibly argue that these acts do so while....lesbianism do not? Surely there cannot be any logic or any ethic in that distinction (HC 29 June 1960, col. 1489).

Jay's seemingly 'logical' question presupposes his belief that the law needs to be amended to give a parity of treatment to male and female homosexual acts. While the question was not subject to extended discussion during the debate, the problem of the law's illogicality was, nevertheless, acknowledged by MP. Roy Jenkins (Labour). In providing his own answer to Jay's question, Jenkins argues:

The difficulty, as I understand it, and a certain genuine difficulty which arises in the minds of some hon. members is that we wish that the Labouchere amendment was not there. Of course, it creates an illogical position between homosexuality and Lesbianism. We wish that it was not there, but it is there and there is a difficulty about removing it lest it be thought that in doing so this House was proclaiming that homosexuality is a good thing (HC, 29 June 1960, col. 1508).<sup>20</sup>

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20. The Labouchere Amendment was introduced by Henry Labouchere and was inserted into the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 as Section II. The Act reads: 'Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency shall be guilty of misdemeanour, and being convicted shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.' The law, which made nearly all male



His response at best opens up rather than answers to the question, however. At best, it calls attention to the fact that the representation of male homosexual acts through the practices of the criminal law is, as Moran points out, 'neither necessary nor inevitable, but more a contingent and idiosyncratic practice' (Moran, 1996: 13). However, the illogic unfolding here is not, I argue, simply the states of contingency and idiosyncrasy. Another important legislative event, which took place in 1921, makes clear that this what Jenkins calls 'illogical position between male homosexuality and lesbianism' is actively sought and promoted in Britain rather than a result of a mere contingency.

During the report stage of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill in 1921, a Scottish Tory MP, Frederick Macquisten, introduced a new clause into the Criminal Law Amendment Bill which states that: 'Any act of gross indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanour and punishable in the same manner as any such act committed by male persons under...the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885' (HC, 4 Augst 1921, col. 1799). While the supporters of the clause argued that it would equalise treatment of male and female homosexuals, the clause was, nevertheless, rejected on the grounds that it would only serve to spread lesbianism by publicly acknowledging and advertising it. For example, Lieutenant Moore-Brabazon suggests that:

There are only three ways of dealing with perverts. The first is the death sentence. That has been tried in old times, and, though drastic, it does do what is required – that is, stamp them out. The second is to look upon them frankly as lunatics, and lock them up for the rest of their lives. This is a very satisfactory way also. It gets rid of them. The third way is to leave them entirely alone, not notice them, not advertise them.

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homosexual acts illegal under the term, 'acts of gross indecency', remained unaltered until 1967.



That is the method that has been adopted in England for many hundred years, and I believe that it is the best method now, because these cases are self-extminating.....and consequently they do not spread or do very much harm to society at large. There is this last reason why I would urge the House to leave this question alone and drop this Clause. To adopt a Clause of this kind would do harm by introducing into the minds of perfectly innocent people the most revolting thoughts and because of that I ask the introducers of this Clause to withdraw it (HC, 4 August 1921, col. 1805-6).<sup>21</sup>

Here, it is important to note a way in which silence was distinctively imposed on 'lesbianism'. In the case of (male) homosexuality, silence was imposed as a form of oppression during this period, which, as Butler similarly finds in the context of U.S. politics, worked through 'acts of overt prohibition' (Butler, 1991: 20). Yet, if (male) homosexuality was overtly marked as an 'objects of prohibition' and silenced by the law, the lesbian/ism was 'not even produced....as a prohibited object'; lesbians were '(un)subjects' of silence, who were to be 'neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law' (Butler 1991: 20).<sup>22</sup> Butler writes:

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21. The Earl of Desart, in the House of Lords debate, expresses a similar concern with regard to the Clause. According to Desart, the Clause, if enacted, would bring the most 'appalling' consequences, because:

It would be made public to thousands of people that there was this offence; that there was such a horror. It would be widely read....I am sure that a prosecution would really be a very great public danger. Is there any necessity for it? How many people does one suppose really are so vile, so unbalanced, so neurotic, so decadent as to this? You may say there are a number of them, but it would be, at most, an extremely small minority, and you are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamed of it (HL, 15 August 1921, col. 573).

22. It is also on this point that Rosi Braidotti, in her critique of Trevor Hope's essay, *Melancholic modernity*, points out an asymmetry between male homosexuality and lesbianism:

I do not think the position of the lesbian and the gay man are....in



Lesbianism is not explicitly prohibited in part because it has not even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable, the grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable. How, then, to 'be' a lesbian in a political context in which the lesbian does not exist? That is, in a political discourse that wages its violence against lesbianism in part by excluding lesbianism from discourse itself? (Butler 1991: 20).

Yet, lesbianism, framed as being unheard, un-thought and undreamed, is an effect of particular discourse – the discourse that marks 'lesbianism' as 'self-exterminating'. Precisely because, Lieutenant Moore-Brabazon argues, it does not 'spread' as it is self-contained, it does not pose any danger to society. Or, to put it another way, it was precisely this way of thinking of and imagining 'lesbianism' (the way the lesbian/ism is), which promoted unthinkability and unimaginability of lesbianism (the way the lesbian/ism should be). Contrary to what Butler observes, I am, therefore, interested in this particular 'grid of cultural intelligibility' that regulates the unreal and the unnameable.

The discourse that marks lesbianism as 'self-exterminating' is closely linked to the discourse of 'natural' sexual difference. Consider, for example, the following extract of a conversation between two Labour MPs during the debates on the Sexual Offences Act:

**Mr. Fred Bellenger:** I believe that humanity would eventually revert to an animal existence if this cult [homosexuality] were so allowed to spread that, as in ancient Greece, it overwhelmed

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any way symmetrical, though they both may be equally involved in and committed to the task of redesigning sexuality. The invisibility of the lesbian as other of the other is of a different conceptual and qualitative order....Whereas the gay man needs to deconstruct a representation of the homosexual as the phobic other, the lesbian must move, symbolically, from unrepresentability into some sort of representation. The problems may appear analogous, but they are quite different (Braidotti, 1994: 203).



the community at large.

**Mr. William Wells:** 'Does my right hon. Friend think that there is any difference in the respect between male and female homosexuality? If he thinks there is no difference, why is there difference in the law?

**Mr. Fred Bellenger:** I will leave that to my hon. and learned Friend to explain. I know something about homosexuality, having served with the Army in two world wars, *but I know nothing or practically nothing...about lesbianism.* My hon. and learned Friend can enlighten the House on that (HC, 26 Nov. 1958, col. 417-418, italics added).

If Bellenger, in (not)answering to Wells' question, tells the unthinkability and unimaginability of lesbianism – he says he knows 'nothing or practically nothing....about lesbianism' – Mr. Thomas Iremonger (Conservative), in another debate on the Sexual Offences Act, provides a 'sociological' answer to the question of why nobody knows or hears of the 'problem' with regard to lesbianism.

There is...a certain sociological logic in taking a different view of lesbianism. I would be prepared to accept the argument that the personality and nature of women are distinguishable from personality and nature of men – because of the strength of their sexual initiatives and drives – and that the effect in society of lesbian women is not so potent as that of homosexual men. Nobody knows or hears of women being corrupted on a large scale by lesbian women, where as I do not think that even the most doughty champion of the Bill would deny that many male homosexuals are of the proselytizing type (HC, 19 December 1966, col. 1104-5).

In his discovery of a socio-biological logic, which bounds 'natural passivity' with women/femininity on the one hand, and erotic/sexual agency with man/masculinity on the other, we find that 'lesbian' appears as un-subject of (homo)sexuality. Here, lesbianism appears, as Jagose argues, to fall 'outside sexuality's visual field', because her womanness/femininity, defined as natural passivity, 'cannot register, except as a negativity, within a model of desire imagined always as phallogentric' (Jagose, 2002: 2).



In these 'phallogentric models of sexuality' (Jackson, 1995: 19), a lesbian's gendered specificity is set against her sexual specificity: Bellenger's socio-biological logic, in other words, is precisely the logic that works to erase lesbian sexuality.

In this erasure of lesbian sexuality, which lies at the heart of the presence of lesbianism, we find that her 'legality' is paradoxically ensured by her 'legal invisibility'. Another insight into the way this absent presence of lesbianism is expressed in the political discourse is to be found in the following two statements made by MP. Shepherd. In debates which took place on two different occasions (in 1958 and 1966), Shepherd made sense of 'lesbianism' by way of its comparison with '(male) homosexuality' and argued:

**(Extract 1)**

**Mr. Shepherd:** Most homosexual associations are promiscuous. If I may add a word of explanation for the benefit of the hon. Member, that is one of the reasons why I would deal with lesbianism on a different basis...

**Mr. Ronald Bell:** They are both homosexual.

**Mr. Shepherd:** My hon. Friend says they are both homosexual, but it has been the custom to talk of the male association as homosexual and of the female as lesbian; and I think this makes for clarity. One of the dangers in homosexuality for a man is in his old age. It is true that one can survive with it when one is younger, but the constant search for new contacts is degrading and many men who start on this path of homosexuality end in their later years hanging about public lavatories, where they are apprehended by the police. If a man can be diverted from homosexual practices he – and there is a very wide field for diversion – will become a better and happier citizen (HC, 26 November 1958, col. 428).

**(Extract 2)**

I want now to turn to a second point and deal for a moment with lesbianism because many hon. members ask why there should be a law against male homosexual conduct and not against such conduct between females. There are very valid



reasons why that should be so. Nearly all the objections which I think that I can rightly bring against homosexual conduct, which I will deal with in a moment, are not applicable to lesbianism. Lesbians do not cause physical damage by their acts. They are not proselytisers as homosexuals are and, on the whole, they find it agreeable and acceptable to live together for long periods of time. I am not defending lesbianism, but I think that it is at any rate open to far less social objection than is homosexuality (11 Feb, 1966, col. 816).

Shepherd's statement is of particular interest, as lesbianism is made sense of through its non-proximity to 'homosexuality'. In fact, the positioning of lesbianism within Shepherd's argument is structured by reference to a series of binary oppositions that separate the lesbian/ism from the homosexual/ity: the private as opposed to the public, harmless versus dangerous, being closeted in contradiction to proselytising, and sexually passive rather than active. And it is by way of this comparison, Shepherd makes sense of homosexuality: homosexuality as criminality is what lesbianism is not.

Such a way in which lesbian/ism is invoked in the debates on the Sexual Offences Act indicates that something more than 'unthinkability' and 'unintelligibility' of the lesbian/ism was at hand. Let us bring this point into sharper focus.

In a similar vein to Butler's reasoning, Moran (1996) argues that the discursive inclusion of the (male)homosexual body into the system of criminal law as against the law has had a significant political implication: by framing the (male) homosexual/ity as an 'object of the law', it has played an important role in imagining and politicising the male (homosexual) body 'as a subject in law with a capacity to act in law' (Moran, 1996: 13). By contrast, the discursive force in which lesbian/ism appears as un-object of law produces a condition in which the lesbian disappears as a subject in law. As



Moran argues:

[T]he homosexual as an embodied object of law is implicated in the production of the homosexual as an embodied subject of law. As an embodied subject of law it has been possible to resort to 'homosexual' in order to claim rights, to demand the recognition and enforcement of duties, to seek the recognition and respect of interests. Thus homosexual and gay rights are not only remote from but also have a certain proximity to those criminal practices through which this male body of law has been so obsessively produced. The silence and indifference of the criminal law to genital relations between women have produced a certain invisibility and thereby made it more difficult to achieve a presentation in law of the embodied genital female as an autonomous subject with a capacity to act in law. Thereby the recognition of legal subjectivity in general and the representation of their rights, interests and duties in particular has been made more problematic (Moran, 1996: 13-4).

True, lesbian/ism, as Moran argues, was, first and foremost, imagined by the law as the object of 'silence and indifference'. But more is at stake in this discursive silencing: it was *presented* as *absence*; its absence was *spoken* in order to be *unspoken*; and *indifference* paid to lesbianism in law produced its very *difference* from homosexuality.

Here, neither present nor absent, lesbian/ism does not belong to the domain of ontology – something that simply to be or not-to-be. Rather, its rhetorical absence 'haunts' its presence (or its rhetorical presence 'haunts' its absence), producing a ghostly effect, which belongs to the dimension of what Derrida calls, 'performative interpretation'; that is, 'of an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets' (Derrida, 1994: 51). In this 'performative form of the call' (1994: 103), lesbian/ism, *imagined and thought* of as 'self-exterminating', explains what lesbian/ism is (or should be) – that is, of being *unimaginable and unthinkable*. Its *unintelligibility*, the effects of the 'the grid of cultural *intelligibility*' through which the passivity that claims to characterise female sexuality is naturalised, explains



why lesbian/ism is (to be) passive, de-sexualised, privatised, and closeted. And its (enforced) *invisibility*, framed in opposition to the problematic *visibility* linked to homosexuality is what, paradoxically, guarantees its invisibility (non-criminality) in law.

Here, if, as Jagose argues, there has been a ‘persistent configuration of the lesbian as an epistemological opacity’(Jagose, 2002), this epistemological opacity performatively constitutes the lesbian/ism as a figure – a figure that is marked by the logic of natural gender difference, and at the same time marks the boundary between the legal and illegal expression of homosexuality. What is at stake here is a double ‘interpellation’ (or performative interpellation): interpellated as a passive gendered subject, ‘she’ is interpellated as (and, at the same time, interpellating) a closeted/private/harmless/docile homosexual subject (see Althusser, 1979).

Both interpellations are important in understanding ways in which stories of ‘gays and lesbians’ have subsequently entered the public discourse in Britain.

On the one hand, we find a continuing political rhetoric that renders lesbian sexuality invisible/private and, therefore, non-threatening. On the other hand, the discourse of homosexuality that produced the non-criminal and criminal homosexual bodies in the 1960s was itself in change, contributing, in part, to the construction of what Smith calls, the ‘good homosexual’ (closeted/invisible/private homosexuals) against the ‘dangerous queer’ (seducing and flaunting homosexuals) (Smith, 1994: 297). Taken together, we find that lesbianism, presented in the 1960s as being invisible and private and were, therefore, made sense of through its non-proximity to ‘homosexuality’, has become increasingly understood through its proximity to ‘good-homosexuality’. Speaking of the Bill he introduced in the House of Lords in December 1986, which later became Section



28 of the Local Government Act, the Earl of Halsbury, for example, stated that there are two different categories of homosexuals. First, there are 'responsible homosexuals' who, according to the Lord Halsbury 'would no more molest little boys than a responsible heterosexual would molest little girls, or go down the streets soliciting strangers, or reject stabilised relationships for promiscuity.' The Bill 'does not concern itself with them'. What the Bill was aimed at are those 'sick' homosexuals who are exhibitionistic, promiscuous, proselytising homosexuals, acting as 'reservoirs of venereal diseases of all kinds' (HL, 18 December 1986, col. 310). His division of 'good' and 'bad' homosexuals is then followed by a familiar rhetoric of lesbian invisibility linked to its legitimacy. Lesbianism, according to Halsbury, is not a problem because:

They do not molest little girls. They do not indulge in disgusting and unnatural practices like buggery. They are not wildly promiscuous and do not spread venereal disease (HL, 18 December 1986, col. 310).

During the parliamentary debates on Section 28 in which legitimate and illegitimate forms of homosexuality were extensively discussed, it was, Smith argues, usually this 'responsible homosexual category' within which lesbian-ness appeared and was located (Smith, 1992: 207). And it is this side of respectable homosexuals, gender-indifferent stories of good 'gays and lesbians', as I shall show in Chapter 6 and 7, are increasingly told. It is to these stories I shall now turn.

## Chapter 6

# The Evidence Game

### *6.1 Meeting 'strangers within'*

Those who had had early encounters with homosexuals and whose stories of 'encountering' were told during the debates on the Sexual Offences Act were those who, as psychiatrists, doctors, judges, academics, priests, politicians, or government officers, had to work on the problem of the homosexual/ity. For those ordinary/normal members of the society, however, their experiences of encountering homosexuals were (to be) extremely rare, as Lord Ferrier, during the House of Lords debates on the Sexual Offences Bill in 1966, tells the story:

I think it is safe to say that this particular form of misdemeanour seldom crosses the path of the average man. Ordinary, decent people are not involved in this sort of thing. I have an old friend who served for more than thirty years in one of our largest industrial undertakings. For many years he was in the personnel department, managing upwards of 10,000 persons. He tells me that only once in the years when he was in the personnel department, and indeed, in the years he was



in the company, did he ever come across trouble over a homosexual in the employment of the undertaking. I believe that the incidence of homosexuality in our society has hitherto been greatly exaggerated (HL, 10 May 1966, col. 634).

For ordinary/decent 'us' to see and meet 'them', unless intended, are (to be) extremely limited and unwonted. Ferrier's story tells us that 'they' are not within our reach, and the chances of 'us' having an unsolicited encounter with 'them' are, henceforth, very slim. What also follows from the story is the implication that if any of ordinary and decent 'us' encounters with homosexuals, there must be some good 'innocent' reasons – good enough to display the fact that there is no reasons 'we' meet 'them'. The meeting is (to be) neither planned nor intended, as there is no relational connection between us and them that can lead to the meeting.

I discussed a story told by MP. Shepherd in chapter 5. I discussed, in particular, ways in which Shepherd, in telling his own story about coming across foreign homosexuals in Holland, sought to attain a clear distance between himself and the event – the encounter – he experienced. He began his story by describing the encounter as an unexpected and unnecessary encounter; he only encountered homosexuals by accident on his way to follow British grand prix motor racing held in Amsterdam. In seeking to describe the homosexuals he encountered, he carefully manipulated narrative distance/detachment between himself and 'them' he described: they were seen, while he did not want to see them; their voices were heard, while he was not hearing them; their fixed gaze at a young boy made their true selves known to him, while he did not want to know them. After the encounter, he regretted the meeting itself: he hoped he would not see them again. The event (the encounter), in other words, remained (or should remain) insignificant and inconsequential for him.

Shepherd's story was not a story of 'meeting', but a story of what Bauman calls 'mismeeting' (Bauman, 1993: 156). According to Bauman, mismeeting is 'not quite a meeting' in the sense that the narrator's 'conscious contact' with the other – or 'a conduct' that could be recognised by the other as a conscious contact – is 'studiously avoided' (Bauman, 1993: 154). Here, a mismeeting, Bauman argues, is a technique of 'non-engagement' – a technique that arises out of an effort to maintain a distance/detachment between the self and the other. This effort to maintain a distance, associated with 'aversion and antipathy' against strangers, turns encounters to 'events without prehistory (no one anticipates that strangers will be there)' as well as to events without 'a cause of further events' (Bauman, 1993: 156-7). Mismeeting, in other words, leaves the event of meeting to remain 'outside the causal chain of [social] events', enabling us to dissociate ourselves from the meeting we experience (Bauman, 1993: 156).

Yet, I also need to point out here that Shepherd's 'mismeeting' is, at the same time, more than an act of technique. For Shepherd, it was precisely a condition of meeting. On the one hand, they were not whom he should meet 'then': under the circumstances where homosexuality was defined as criminality during 1960s, disengagement was the only legally permissible form of engagement available to him. On the other hand, they were not whom he might encounter 'here' in Britain: they, as 'foreign' homosexuals who were 'fixed within a certain spatial circle – or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries' were outside of his physical/cognitive/social contact or engagement (Simmel, 1971: 143). Shepherd's mismeeting was then a particular mode of 'meeting'. Rather than an incidental 'mis-meeting', it has its own temporal and spatial dimension of 'the' meeting, legally conditioned, socially structured, and interactionally de/situated.



If the meeting with homosexuals was (to be), as Ferrier states, initially novel to ordinary/decent members of 'our' society, which, in turn, provided the conditions for a mismeeting, stories told during the parliamentary debates on Section 28 of the Local Government Act recount the event – the meeting – differently.

Our encountering them has now become unavoidable; for the settings in which our encounters take place are our familiar/local domains. They include our children's bedroom, home, the school, the library, a local conference on the family, a public meeting, and the street. This is the sphere of engagement in which we could not mis-meet them. We no longer incidentally encounter them in a 'foreign' land. Instead we are faced with them here and everywhere.

Since 'they' are here and now in 'our' present field of life experience, the 'meeting' has not only become surprisingly real, but also strangely familiar. And it is from this kind of meeting with the homosexual, described as real and familiar, that we find 'our' personal stories as 'evidence' to the event of 'meeting' emerge in the parliament.

In this chapter, I discuss some important ways in which stories of 'meeting' with homosexuals were told during the debates on Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1986-8. My particular focus of analysis is on the ways stories of 'our' personal experience (whether the experience of storytellers themselves or others), told in the form of 'true' stories of 'meeting' and presented as supporting evidence in the parliamentary debate, elude epistemological challenge in certain ways: although a story of 'our' personal experience told in the debate invites a 'their' counter-story that challenges its truth-claim, it, at the same time, successfully pre-empted such a challenge. But how?

## 6.2 *Stories of Jenny and Section 28*

Section 28 was originally proposed by Lord Harlsbury and tabled as a Private Member's Bill in the House of Lords in 1986. The measure, which was entitled 'An act to refrain local authorities from promoting homosexuality', aimed at preventing local authorities and maintained schools from promoting homosexuality 'as a pretended family relationship'. Harlsbury's Bill, which was favourably passed the House of Lords and went to the House of Commons, nevertheless, fell when the 1987 general election was called. Following Thatcher's third re-election, however, the Bill was reintroduced to the House of Commons by Conservative MP David Wilshire and Dame Jill Knight as an amendment to the Local Government Bill, and passed into law on 24 May 1988. The key provisions of Section 28 of the Local Government Act state that: 'A local authority shall not (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.

Section 28 was introduced following a political controversy in which local authorities, controlled by the so-called 'loony left', were alleged to be spending 'taxpayers money' on promoting homosexuality. A great deal of controversy surrounded some gay literature made available in school libraries, which were run by the Labour-controlled ILEA (Inner London Education Authority). One of them was *The Milkman's On His Way*, a story about a young boy, Ewan, who gradually comes to terms with his homosexuality through his social/sexual encounters (Meredith, 1992: 72). This 'odious' book, according to Jill Knight, who introduced Section 28 in 1987, 'explicitly described homosexual intercourse and, indeed, glorified it, encouraging youngsters to believe that it was better than any other sexual way of life' (HL, 1 Feb 1988, col. 931; HL, 6 Dec



1999, col. 1102). Much attention also focused on a photostory book called *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, which depicts the daily life of a five-year-old named Jenny, who lives with her father and his male partner. Described by the newspapers as a 'vile book' (the Sun, 6 May, 1986) and a 'gay pornbook' (Today, 7 May, 1986), as it contains 'pictures of Jenny on a bed with two queers' (Sunday Mirror, 4 May, 1986), the book galvanised a political action, and directly influenced the insertion of the wording, 'pretended family relationship' into Section 28 (b).

Within the debate around Section 28, such books were used as the basis of the furore. For our encounters with 'them' now appear to involve more than the 'surprise' of being faced by 'them'; they rather involve the fear associated with the threat of violence proximate to us. Here, for example, is a book that begins a story about a child with two gay men: 'Jenny is a little girl. Martin is Jenny's dad and Eric is Martin's lover. They all live happily together'. It describes the 'relationships' among them as happy relationships found in 'togetherness', which is familiar to those of 'our' family life. The truth about Jenny, however, is to be found elsewhere – from a photograph of a scene in which Jenny is having a breakfast in bed with 'her naked father on one side and his naked lover on the other' (HL, 6 Dec 1999, col. 1103). As Mars-Jones argues, 'in spite of evidence of their own eyes – the yawns, the tray, the dolls, the lack of physical contact', this picture of breakfast in bed was seen as nothing but an 'orgy' (Mars-Jones, : 40). This image of breakfast, described as 'pornographic, obscene or otherwise offensive' (Today, 18 September) involves, in Lord Campbell's words, 'a direct attack on the heterosexual family life' – an attack on our 'basic unit' of belonging upon which 'our' moral community is built (HL, 18 December 1986,

col. 313).<sup>23</sup>

‘When an other is perceived as threatening’, Angelika Bammer argues, ‘it is precisely...for the degree to which this other seems not just “different” but – uncannily – strangely familiar, even, one might say “same”. The resulting dilemma is how to respond to this threat in a way that removes this other(ness) without undoing one’s self in the process’ (Bammer, 1995: 47). I find that the question is to be posed the other way around, however; for the ‘threat’ being perceived by the presence of the ‘familiarity’ of an other, is already an effect of recognition of the ‘familiarity’ as otherness/difference. Or to put it another way, if we are being threatened by the presence of the familiarity of an other, it is because we *already* know what this ‘familiarity’ of an other is: at best, it is a imitation; at worst it is a dangerous pretension.

For the supporters of Section 28, the immediate political question to be asked was not, therefore, how to meet the homosexual who appeared to be ‘strangely familiar’ or ‘same’. The question was rather: why do we face with this familiarity of the sexual other here and now? If a mis-meeting was a mode of ‘meeting the homosexual other’ within the unfamiliar in the past, this new mode of ‘meeting the homosexual other’ within the familiar in the

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23. If a little girl who lives with two gay fathers is described as ‘phonographic’ and ‘obscene’, a child who lives with two lesbian mothers is seen as lacking a role model within the family. As Baroness Faithfull, Lady Abernethy, in the debate on the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill amendment in 1990 argues: ‘Children learn primarily from example, by copying what they see. It is by example that a boy learns how to be a responsible husband and father and how to treat his own children in turn. It is by example that a girl learns how to be a wife, from seeing how her mother cares for her father. So the father is enormously important, if only as a role model...It is for [these] reasons that the Committee may consider that lesbian couples should not be eligible to receive AID or in vitro fertilization services’ (HL, 6 February 1990, col. 788-9).



present, in other words, raises a political question that is: what made this new culture of encounter possible? Certainly, the very notion of the '*promotion*' of homosexuality, which entered and haunted the debates on Section 28 during the late 1980s in Britain is partly about answering this question, which I shall discuss in Section 6.5.

### *6.3 Stranger-danger*

Confronting the 'familiarity' of an other is dangerous and threatening, not because 'they' are, as Bauman argues, 'undecidables' who militate against the 'either/or', but because 'some of us' may misrecognise 'them' as 'us'. At least, this was what lay behind the thinking of those who introduced and supported Section 28 (Bauman, 1991: 56).<sup>24</sup>

Here, the notion 'stranger danger' offers interesting insights

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24. Bauman's figure of 'the stranger', I find, can be differentiated into two distinct categories. On the one hand, Bauman argues that the stranger is neither 'friend'(us) nor 'enemy'(them), but 'may be both': 'we do not know, and have no way of knowing, which is the case' (Bauman, 1991: 55). Here, the danger associated with the stranger is the terror of 'indetermination' the stranger brings into us - that is, the horror of unknowing the stranger who is, in principle, the unfamiliar or undecidable. On the other hand, Bauman, in another passage, suggests that it is precisely in the way the stranger is known to us as other, but is known to refuse the distinction between us and them, that stranger-danger is produced. In particular, it is, Bauman argues, when the other 'refuses to remain confined to the "far away" land, but 'claims a right' to be here with us as a friend (as if he/she is a friend), that the other becomes (or is made to become) the stranger - becomes the imminent threat of danger to us (59). Here, the danger associated with the stranger is not the horror of 'unknowing'. It is, rather, precisely the effect of 'knowing' the other - the other who is known to pretend as friends/us, thereby making us (or some of us) fail to know. These two different facets of the stranger, which Bauman fails to distinguish, is, then, closely linked to the political discourse that divides 'us' - those of us who 'know' and those who 'do not know' (and should, therefore, learn to know) the stranger-danger.



into the nature of the threat perceived by the presence of the homosexual other who exhibits familiarity. According to Moran and Skeggs, the stranger who 'personifies danger in the phrase "stranger danger"' is a figure that embodies 'proximity, as well as remoteness (distance)': 'it is not the remote dangerous other...that the phrase "stranger danger" necessarily refers to, but also the one who is intimate (known)' (Moran, & Skeggs, 2004: 149).

Drawing on Bauman's conception of 'the stranger', Gail Mason specifies what this paradox of proximity/remoteness of an other entails (Mason, 2005). The stranger, in Bauman's words, is a figure that is 'physically close' to us, and yet remains 'spiritually remote' from us: the stranger is someone who 'comes into the life-world and settles here', and yet is 'uninvited' (Bauman 59-60). It is when these uninvited, unwelcome strangers enter into our home, take their place, and make demand for our responsibility and respect that we feel threatened by them. This is, as Mason argues, because 'such outsiders continue to embody otherness (their difference precludes them from ever becoming true friends), but they are no longer at a sufficiently safe distance to enable a coherent separation between insiders and outsiders' (Mason, 2005: 589). They are known and recognized outsiders (rather than unknown and anonymous undecidables); yet they demand their rights to be here, refuse to acknowledge the fact that they are uninvited, compelling us to accept what is unacceptable, and even parody us to the extent that we are troubled in distinguishing insiders from outsiders. This, according to Mason, explains why hate associated with fear and danger felt for strangers is 'directed, not simply toward all...outsiders, but disproportionately towards those who are seen to challenge the established order of things' (Mason, 2005: 590).

What is of particular interest here is the way in which the figure, 'stranger danger', who dangerously parody us to the extent



that we have difficulty in differentiating 'us' from 'them', splits 'we' into risk-governing versus risk-exposed (vulnerable) bodies: those who can read wisely the signs of remoteness/otherness in the apparent proximity/sameness of an other, and those who are lacking in knowledge of an other, and are, therefore, incompetent in reading the borderlines of inside and outside.

Children, in particular, are figured as bodies who are most endangered and at risk from 'the proximity of strangers' (Ahmed, 2000: 34). Precisely because they are lacking in knowledge of 'the dangers of the wider social (implicitly adult) world', they are innocent, and yet always being 'at risk' and potentially vulnerable (Jackson, Scott, & Backett-Milburn, 1998: 691).<sup>25</sup> And this is how the image of what Higonnet and Albinson call 'the naturally innocent child body – what one might term the Romantic Child' – begets our fear of 'loss' (Higonnet & Albinson, 1997: 122). As Anne Higonnet argues:

[T]he image of the Romantic child replaces what we have lost, or what we fear to lose. Every sweetly sunny, innocently cute Romantic child image stows away a dark side: a threat of loss...defined as the opposite of adult sexuality, childhood innocence...runs the danger of becoming alluringly opposite, enticingly off-limits. Innocence suggests violation (Higonnet, 1998: 28-29, 38 quoted from Moran, 2001: 75).

Embedded in the image of the Romantic child is the fear of 'loss' – the loss of our nation's 'future' imagined through the innocence and purity of our 'past', our children. The unwelcome entry of the stranger into our life-world, which disrupts the natural continuity of our past with the future, is, then, often symbolised as

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25. For studies that have analysed discourses of children as innocent (especially sexually innocent), see Corteen and Scaraton, 1997; Jackson, 1982; Jackson et al., 1998; Robinson, 2002; Griffin, 1993; Frankham, 2006.



the death of our children: '[t]he image of the Romantic child', Higonet writes, is an image that is 'haunted by death' (Higonet, 1998: 30).

Debates surrounding Section 28 were, indeed, 'haunted by [the] death' of our children, that is, the death of our nation's future citizens. Supporters of Section 28, for example, frequently equated positive images of homosexuality taught at school – 'converting' children to homosexuality – with our death from AIDS (see Seidman, 1988: 192). As the Conservative MP. Jill Knight states:

[L]ittle children being perverted, diverted or converted from normal family life to a lifestyle which is desperately dangerous for society and extremely dangerous for them. Any venereologist will say that syphilis, gonorrhoea and genital herpes are characteristically infections of homosexuals. If that were not enough, we now have the terror of AIDS. Very few hon. Members fail to appreciate the seriousness of the danger that AIDS presents to the whole of our society, yet some of that which is being taught to children in our schools would undoubtedly lead to a great spread of AIDS (HC, 8 May 1987, col. 998).

Yet, the death that haunted the Romantic child – the child who served as a powerful political icon during the Section 28 debates – was more than the death haunted by AIDS. It was also the death of dreams for the 'natural' child – the 'heterosexual' child who would grow naturally into adulthood, get married, and have children. Associating the death of the natural child with the 'the death in a generation', the then Minister for local Government, Rhodes Boyson, argues:

The Bill opposes the positive images of lesbianism and homosexuality, as though they were alternative ways of life that should be shown to all children in schools. Those images imply that one can say to children that they can live in a family with a mother and father, but there is an alternative way of life which is just as reputable, in which one lives with a person of one's own sex, and the two are equal. That could undermine



the basis of our society. The vast majority of parents, irrespective of how they voted yesterday or of how they will vote in a general election, feel intensely about this matter. One could say that the positive promotion of the images of lesbianism and male homosexuality as though they are equivalent to family life could bring death in one generation. I am not referring to AIDS. I am talking about death in a generation, because there is no future in it – it is the end of creation. Any society that is concerned for its future in every way and for its continuation must have a clear view about what it is doing' (HC, 8 May 1987, col. 1002-3).

It is from this point of view that 'the figure of the child' – the embodiment of innocence and naturalness linked to our past and future – becomes, as Ahmed argues, a matter deserving our collective 'responsibility' (Ahmed, 2000: 35). It is our responsibility to protect the children; for they, being vulnerable to becoming victims of strangers, are in need of 'good' adult knowledge and protection – the knowledge embodied in the ideal figure of a parent (see Gittins, 1998).

Here, the ideal parents are those who know what is in 'the best interests of our children'. They are, in Ahmed's words, the wise knowers/citizens: by being 'bound to Law and duty through the demands of parenthood', they embody the 'collective knowledge about what is, "safe, harmless, trustworthy" and what is "bad, dangerous, and hostile"' for our children (Ahmed, 2000: 34). Acting as wise arbiters of our children's access to knowledge, parents guide our children into developing a good sense of risk assessment; what they can (or cannot) eat, where they should (or should not) go, whom they can (or cannot) talk to or trust, and how to (or not to) encounter a stranger. It is, in other words, through the parent's knowledge and power that our innocently vulnerable (or vulnerably innocent) children are (to be) protected from all forms/types of the stranger-danger.

From this point of view, it is relevant here to highlight two different stories of our 'meeting' the homosexual/ity told by supporters of Section 28 in parliament: the stories of 'our' children who are vulnerable to encountering homosexuals on the one hand; and the stories of parents who, as wise knowers of the stranger-danger, confront homosexuals to protect our children on the other. Together, these stories of children and parents constitute a story of the (heterosexual) family being attacked, and I shall discuss this in more detail in the next section.

#### *6.4. Stories of 'vulnerable' Children*

How vulnerable are children to homosexuality? Here, the conservative MP. Greenway (Earling, North), speaking as an ex-teacher in the parliamentary debate on Section 28 in 1987, provided his answer to the question, which preoccupied many of those who supported Section 28.

**Mr. Greenway:** 'Children are vulnerable. I taught in schools for 23 years and saw that children are vulnerable at various ages. They are totally and continuously vulnerable between the ages of 5 and 12, and they continue to be vulnerable, sometimes to adulthood from the age of 13 years, as we know. It is essential that children are protected. I do not believe that the House would ever say that children should not be protected, and I know that Opposition Members will agree with that....I am certain that all hon. Members would agree that children should be protected'

**Mr. Banks:** From what?

**Mr. Greenway:** From any insidious and dangerous influences, such as homosexuality (15 December 1987, col. 910).

But what exactly does this statement, 'children are totally and



continuously vulnerable to homosexuality' entail? One particular way in which this question was framed in parliament was in terms of a discussion as to whether homosexuals can be made. Dame Jill Knight (Conservative), for example, in insisting that 'little children' can be easily 'diverted', 'perverted', and 'converted' to a homosexual lifestyle – can be made into homosexuals – presented the following story:

I remember the occasion many years ago when we were first presented with a Bill on homosexuality and the rights of homosexuals. The debate was joined as to whether homosexuals were born or made. An elderly gentleman who had been a colonel in the Indian army told me that it was his belief that homosexuals were made if enough influence was exerted upon them. He said that in the hill country and in parts of Poona, when he was in the Indian army, drummer boys used to be sent out from England – they were often orphans – and sent up to the forward areas to the regiments. He said – I have never forgotten this – that not one of those children had a chance. They all ended up as homosexuals because of the life they were forced to lead. I find it outrageous that little children should have been perverted in that way (HC, 8 May 1987, col. 998).

The story does not explicitly specify the kinds of lifestyle drummer boys were 'forced to lead', thereby being 'perverted' into homosexuality. Although the story clearly points to the conclusion that little children, if enough influence is exerted upon them, can be made into homosexuals, the nature of this 'influence' remains, at best, suggestive. Of the particular interest here, however, is the apocalyptic tone of the voice in which the event of 'perversion' is described. By telling us that 'not one of those children', who were sent out from England to the regiments in India, 'had a chance' for survival ('they all ended up as homosexuals'), the story, embedded within her larger narrative of *homosexuality = AIDS = death*, invokes a felt recognition of urgency in the face of the possible death of our children.



The story of drummer boys was the story of orphan children – children who had no adult family members to protect them, and were, therefore, exposed to great risk of damage by ‘stranger danger’. For children who were safely at home (in England), cared for and protected by their parents and other trustful adult members of the community, their vulnerability to homosexuality was not a vulnerability, but remained an innocent curiosity. As Lord Halsbury, in recounting his childhood experience, tells the following story:

Schoolboy homosexuality starts as post-pubertal curiosity. I discussed it with my parents before I ever went to public school. I discussed it with my outgoing headmaster of my prep school. I discussed it again with my tutor at Eton. As an older boy, a captain of the house, I was expected to collaborate with my headmaster and housemaster in discouraging it wherever I could. Why was I always warned against it! It was simply because a habit once started may become a permanency and can only lead to unhappiness in later life (HL, 18 December 1986).

For Halsbury, his experience of keeping away from the ‘stranger danger’ was simultaneously the experience of coming close to his parents and teachers. It was, at the same time, a learned experience, the result of a constant discussion between himself and his parents and teachers about his ‘vulnerability’. Here, his vulnerability to homosexuality was not a negative experience. Quite the opposite: his ‘learned’ vulnerability was precisely what kept him away from the stranger-danger, that is from developing a permanent homosexual habit, which would only lead him to ‘unhappiness in later life’. But what if, as the story implicitly asks, this constant discussion between himself and his parents and teachers were missing in his experience? Or, what if his vulnerability, rather than keeping him away from the stranger danger, made him get close to it? For he could only turn away from the stranger-danger after ‘learning’ – learning what/who the object of distance and phobia is (and what/who the object of proximity and safety is). But what if his



learning process is being distorted, corrupted, and contaminated by the proximity of strangers?

Children's vulnerability, which raises these number of chilling questions, becomes, as supporters of Section 28 tell in parliament, the part of the 'true' stories of parents who fear the 'loss' of their children. It is to these stories I shall now turn.

### *6.5 Stories of Parents in Haringey*

Here, in the parliamentary debates on Section 28, we find detailed, and repetitively told events such as: 'children under two have had access to gay and lesbian books in Lambeth play centres (HC 9 March 1988, col.377)'; the book, *The Milkman's on his Way*, 'was taken out from a public library by a 15-year-old girl (HL 1 Feb 1988, col.879)'; a Video called *How to become a lesbian in 35 minutes* was shown, under the sponsorship of Haringey council, 'to mentally handicapped girls, of whom one was aged 18, one was aged 16, and the others were much younger (HC 8 May 1987, col. 997)'; or schools in Ealing were invited by council's education committee 'to put on their notice boards invitations to children to ring gay and lesbian lines' (HC 15 Dec 1987, col.1002).

These were the events which were plotted by supporters of Section 28 in the form of stories and were presented as evidence that homosexuality was 'intentionally promoted' by the Labour controlled local authority with 'real' or 'possible' damaging consequences and moral effects on children.

As we have seen from the stories of 'vulnerable' children told by supporters of Section 28 (see Section 6.5), children, who are most vulnerable to the encounter with the homosexual/ity, are the least



knowers of the danger associated the homosexual/ity. And their vulnerability to the homosexual/ity, if unfelt and unrecognised by children, is to be 'learned': they need to learn 'true' stories about homosexuals in the encounter told by their 'loved' 'knowledgeable' other, their parents.

Here, the encounter with homosexuals, experienced by parents in the present, evidently tells, supporters of Section 28 argue, the kinds of danger children could be faced with in their future. Consider, for example, the following story told by Baroness Cox. When the Local Government Act 1986 (Amendment) Bill entitled 'an act to refrain local authorities from promoting homosexuality' was first debated in the House of Lords in 1986, she told the following story:

One of the most deeply disturbing features about the whole of this [policy that promotes positive images of lesbian and gay men] is the kind of teaching materials and books which are being recommended and which are available in teachers resource units and in children's sections of public libraries. One which has already been referred to by some noble Lords, which is called "A Playbook for Kids about Sex", is written for very young children. Another book, which is recommended or mentioned in ILEA's publications and which is available in the children's section of Haringey libraries is called "The Milkman's on his Way" I shall not shock your Lordships with quotations from it but it describes in very explicit detail intercourse between a 16 year old boy and his adult, male, homosexual lover. It is material such as this that is causing enormous offence and concern to parents and members of the public. I urge your Lordships to look at it...because I think it explains why parents are so very upset. It will also help to explain why in places such as Haringey children as young as four or five are going home from school, and asking their parents whether their friends are gay or lesbian. I have mentioned the parents of Haringey....because they have been subjected to gross intimidation in ways which are totally unacceptable. When parents have attended council meetings they have been harassed, spat upon, had eggs thrown at them and have even been urinated upon. They have been denied the right to put their views. After one meeting they were followed home and during the night their cars were vandalised. They have received



numerous abusive phone calls including death threats and what I think are the most ominous of all death threats – death threats to their children. They have been told that the callers know where their children attend school and they will “get” their children. [...] It is because of the kind of brutal intimidation to which these parents have been subjected that this Bill [Local Government Act 1986 (Amendment) Bill] is necessary’ (HL 18 December 1986, col. 321).

Here, Baroness Cox tells a story about the kind of social and spatial encounters the parents of Haringey have now faced with the (could-be) homosexuals. Here, the encounter is described as essentially problematic, involving incidents of violence and threats. Children’s parents of Haringey were ‘harassed’, ‘spat upon’, ‘had eggs thrown’ at them, and ‘have been urinated upon’. They were ‘denied’ the right to express their views at the local Council meeting. They were ‘followed’ and their cars were ‘vandalised’. They encountered with menacing phone calls at home and ‘death threats to their children’. The story does not explicitly name or identify the perpetrators of these acts. They remain anonymous and unspecified. Yet, the story clearly marks those bodies that could be identified as being interested in ‘promoting homosexuality’, the homosexuals, as signs of danger. These homosexuals, encountered by the parents of Haringey, assaulted and threatened them ruthlessly, and would even violently take their children’s lives.

The story, by contrast, presents parents of Haringey as those who are only interested in protecting children’s interests. Parents were ‘upset’ and attended the local council meeting only because they were concerned with their children’s well-being. Described as ‘courageous’ in ‘protecting’ children’s innocence, they were seen as good and positive (HC, 18 December 1986, col. 320). Being good and positive, their confrontation with ‘bad’ and ‘negative’ was necessary; but their defensive act of ‘meeting’ the ‘militant’ homosexuals, the story suggests, also made the parents of Haringey vulnerable. They

themselves faced the danger of being victims of confrontation and violence.

Cox's story portrays parents of Haringey as total victims. Interestingly, the story does not tell us what happened 'after' to these (could be) homosexuals who perpetrated violence on parents in Haringey. The story, as Dijk typically finds in stories of minorities, 'has only one Resolution category' (Dijk, 1993b: 135) – 'this Bill [Local Government Act 1986 (Amendment) Bill] is necessary'. Apart from this, the story conveys a sense of 'lack of resolution'. We are left with the impression that the parents in Haringey could not do much about the acts of violence and threats perpetrated against them. Solutions were neither 'attempted' nor 'focused upon' within the story (Dijk, 1993a: 112). The event (the encounter) is left as an essentially problematic predicament.

What I am interested in here is not whether the story of the parents of Haringey being urinated upon, of their cars being vandalised, and of their children being abused with death threats, are true, as claimed by Baroness Cox, but in the role played by such storytelling in making 'general' (moral) truth claims in the context of political storytelling.

Emplotted as an 'unresolved' problematic event, this violent encounter, which took place between parents of Haringey and the (could-be) homosexuals, can give rise to concern, not just about the event itself, but also about the possibility of its problematic recurrence. Although the event, experienced and witnessed by parents of Haringey, is a threatening event in itself, this 'particular' event, if told as part of repeated events of problematic encounters, informs 'the general', producing the very figure of the homosexual as 'stranger danger'.



## *6.6 The Evidence Game I: 'Stranger Danger'*

According to Teun A. van Dijk, stories of personal 'experience' that provide detailed information about subjective experiences of particular events are often used as 'supporting evidences' in an argumentative schema for the following reason: they are difficult to challenge because the weight of these evidences are 'epistemological' (Dijk, 1993b: 126). Personal stories which speak under the authority of experience and which are offered as evidences, effectively evade a challenge to their truth claims. They are often taken as self-evident and transparent; for they, as Dijk argues, suggest that 'the events told about are a reliable source of knowledge, because they represent a lived, personal experience', and that an argumentative conclusion drawn from these evidences is, therefore, not 'biased' but simply reveals unassailable 'facts' (Dijk, 1993b: 126). Hence, if a negative statement or argument about sexual minorities, such as homosexuals are 'exhibitionist', 'promiscuous', and 'act as reservoirs of venereal diseases of all kinds' (HL 18 Dec 1986: col.310) may be heard and criticized as homophobic, negative personal stories about the meeting with sexual minorities, which confirm to such a negative statement, are often not; for they are presented as merely expressing 'the facts' as witnessed and experienced by people directly involved in concrete events (Dijk, 1993b: 140).

Note here though that 'the facts', unless they are repeatedly experienced and jointly told by several other storytellers, remain as 'particular' facts. In order to make general truth claims, a personal story presented in the form of evidence needs to be a part of the public story and facts to be the 'common' facts. In other words, the facts dramatized in particular events in relation to particular characters are to be the one typical example of 'the facts' found in many other events regarding similarly related characters. To present



itself as universal, rather than particular, same or similar personal stories must be, therefore, found across as many different individual contexts as possible. And this, in the political evidence game, is often done in the form of replication and repetition of a particular personal story being used as 'the' evidence, creating stereotypic personal/public stories of experiences/facts.

Indeed, the potent truth claiming in support of Section 28, for example, is not only organized around personal stories of particular experiences that elide epistemological challenges or testing, but also around repetition of stories that effectively homogenize those particular experiences. It is not, therefore, difficult to find other personal stories in which events, characters, actions and their consequences are arranged and configured in a remarkably similar way to the story told by Baroness Cox. The following story told by Dame Jill Knight who initiated the clause known as Section 28 into the Local Government Bill in 1987 is one such examples. In the House of Commons debate in March 1988, Jill Knight tells her own personal stories in support of Section 28:

There is no doubt that children have been subjected to a most unhappy, unfair and wrong promotion campaign to try to turn them into supporters of homosexuality. If anyone doubts that, why did the children's parents complain? When those parents complained, why were they subjected to such vicious treatment? [...] I cannot think it right that parents who complained about what was being done to their children at school should have been kicked and spat upon. If their children had not been treated in the way that I have described, the parents would not have complained. [...] I have also been astonished at the degree of viciousness that I have encountered, as one who initiated the clause. My secretary has been abused, and has been the butt of the most appalling campaign of pornographic telephone calls. At 2.20 one morning, she was woken by someone who objected to the clause, and was subjected to a torrent of pornographic abuse. That is not the way to conduct a proper argument, but it tells us quite a lot about the kind of people who have been taking part in the opposition to the clause [...] I have been strongly



supportive of the attempt to protect children, and no amount of abuse – or having my car vandalised, which has also happened – will stop me protecting them, and protecting the family unit. This I shall do, against all opposition. The family unit is under attack: there is no doubt of that (HC 9 March 1988 col. 386-7).

In this story told by Dame Jill Knight, the then conservative Member of Parliament for Birmingham Edgbastone, we find a repetitive story of children's parents who, when they complained about the promotion of homosexuality, were viciously attacked by 'militant homosexuals'. An almost identical story of her own is then added as a way to support the evidence further: when she initiated the clause, Section 28, her secretary, like the parents of Haringey, received abusive telephone calls at night, and her own car was vandalised. Since specific, her story, like any other personal stories of experiences, makes particular as well as implicit truth claims in relation to causality: for the story actors who are involved, contexts in which actions occur, and the consequences of actions are all dramatized in a particular personal setting. Nevertheless, her story, familiar as being told and retold in the parliamentary debate with similar plots and episodes, is effective in producing general facts for those who agree with her argument: homosexuals who seek to promote their sexuality are indeed aggressive, assertive and dangerous, threatening 'the overwhelming majority of the people' (HC 9 March 1988, col.407).

What is interesting here is the particular ways in which her story is, nevertheless, challenged by those who oppose her truth claim. For example, Joan Lestor, Labour MP, argues that:

The hon. Member for Edgbaston [Dame Jill Knight] said that she had been the subject of a great deal of abuse, as had her secretary. She said that her car had been vandalised. What was the point of saying all that, unless she was saying that homosexuals and others who disagreed with her were doing those things to her? My car was vandalised last week, but I do

not go around accusing people who hold an opposite view of mine of doing it (Joan Lestor HC 9 March 1988, col. 412).

Here, Joan Lestor strongly hints that a close relationship might be found between the relevance of the story told by Dame Jill Knight and the storyteller's own prejudice on homosexuality. Nevertheless, this does not (and cannot) completely falsify the story, in the sense that it does not falsify the evidence contained within the story. Here, the evidence of experience that tells us what 'really' happened to MP. Dame Jill Knight and her secretary remains intact, while the presumption that links the events to her argumentative conclusion (that is, she and her secretary were abused by those who opposed the clause), shielded from testing or proving, is further supported by the facts/evidences found in similar stories of experiences told in the debate and repeated in her story – that is, the experiences of parents who are kicked and spat upon when they complain against the promotion of homosexuality campaign at school.

If the story of personal experience, (re)presented as evidence, provides, in such a way, a powerfully persuasive claim to truth and validity, there, nevertheless, arises an equally persuasive and powerful way in which the story is challenged and contested, if not falsified, in the parliamentary debate. This challenge, as I shall discuss in the next section, is found in stories of counter-experiences told as a means to offer counter-evidences in support of counter-argument. The series of personal stories introduced in the next section are presented as counter-evidence, demonstrating the fact that a campaign to promote homosexuality did not (and could not) exist.



### *6.7 The Evidence Game II: 'Stranger Victim'*

In terms of the Section 28 opposers' discourse, it was, first and foremost, the 'myth' of the promotion of homosexuality, which was questioned and challenged. In rejecting the accusation that the Labour party was responsible for the promotion of homosexuality, Labour's senior representative, John Cunningham, for example, made it clear that: 'it is not and never has been the responsibility or the duty of a local authority or a local education authority to promote homosexuality, and it has never been Labour party policy that they should do so, either' (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 1021). According to MP. Chris Smith, the alleged 'loony left' campaign to promote homosexuality did not, in fact, exist; for homosexuality could not be promoted by a local authority any more than heterosexuality ever could be. As Smith puts it:

We are what we are. It is impossible to force or encourage someone into a different sexuality from that which pertains to them. What is needed is not to be involved in changing, persuading, forcing, encouraging people into different sexualities. What is important is to enable people to understand the sexuality that they have, and that cannot be changed (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 1007).

Repeatedly affirming the immutability of sexual orientations, Liberal Party MP Simon Hughes, in the 1987 Section 28 debates similarly argued that: 'Homosexuals do not happen as a result of campaigns for their promotion, just as heterosexuals are not suddenly brought into active heterosexuality by having a campaign on their behalf' (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 992). If promotion were effective, 'everyone' MP Mark Fisher (Labour) commented, 'would be heterosexual'; for 'the overwhelming mass of material in our culture, media, advertising and family lives promotes heterosexuality' (HC, 9 March 1988, col. 397). Yet, the fact that everyone, in spite of 'all-persuasive and all-pervasive culture of heterosexuality', is not



heterosexual makes it clear that homosexuality cannot be promoted: homosexuals, MP Joan Ruddock (Labour) argues, 'have struggled habitually to become heterosexuals', but they did 'not succeed, of course' (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 1003).

From this point of view, a number of counter stories were told in the 1987-88 Section 28 debates, which gave evidence to the 'fact' that homosexuality was not (and could not) be promoted. Consider, for example, the following story told by the Viscount of Falkland. Recollecting his childhood and school days, the Viscount of Falkland, recounts:

I went through what is called the public school system which, in the eyes of some foreigners, quite incorrectly is supposed to be a hotbed of homosexuality. I must say that I did not see a great deal of it...Nobody has ever promoted to me, or sold to me, the idea that I should be a homosexual or a heterosexual. I seem to remember that when I was about seven years old I had vague stirrings of attraction to the opposite sex that have not left me in the 45-odd years that have ensued. But nobody promoted these ideas to me. It is an absurd idea that one can go into a classroom, to a meeting, or on a holiday course, or whatever, and that someone can make attractive the idea that one can change the drift of one's own sexuality (HL, 1 Feb 1988, col. 867-8).

In this story, the Viscount of Falkland implicitly challenges the dominant view of children as both 'deemed incapable of self-expression' and 'immune to sexuality' (Foucault, 1980: 42). Although no one has intentionally promoted the idea of 'heterosexuality' to him, he was still able to feel 'stirrings of attraction to the opposite sex' as early as when he was about 7 years old, and this attraction to the opposite sex, which he had in his early childhood, has remained with him intact ever since. What follows logically from what he experienced is that his sexual drive, as he finds it, is not the product of 'nurture' but of 'nature'. It was naturally there to be felt and discovered, rather than to be learned or



to be promoted. Fears about the promotion of homosexuality are not, therefore, well founded.

For those who transgresses the boundaries of heterosexuality, the fact that no one has promoted 'heterosexuality' or 'homosexuality', as the Viscount of Falkland claims, is recalled differently, however. Consider, for example, the following letter read out in the House of Commons by MP. Simon Hughes on 9 March 1988. In this letter, a young lesbian of 19 years reveals her own story of childhood, and tells:

As a young lesbian of 19 years, I can recall only too well the problems I faced during early adolescence and the prejudice and hysteria I was confronted with when I 'came out' at 15. I was hounded at school; I had people spitting at me, people trying to ride their bikes into me, etc. I never went out as people kept threatening to beat me up. I left home, and came to London when I was 16, but even now my sister is teased and victimised because I am a lesbian. There is no way this should have happened to me, and, what is worse, is that some friends of mine, had even worse happen to them. I got off 'lightly'. Measures need to be taken to combat this prejudice, and some local councils had begun to do this within education and by aiding lesbian and gay groups, etc, with money and resources – money and resources that as rate-payers we are entitled to. This education is not promotion of homosexuality, it is only a presentation of it in a fair, unprejudiced way – no one can be turned gay by it, the same way we cannot be taught to be straight. But the word promotion is open to interpretation by the courts and this is very dangerous...Many people are going through what I did and this must be stopped. If this Bill is passed it will be another blow to us and a serious violation of our human rights (HC, 9 March 1988, col. 388).

Here, we hear stories of a young lesbian of 19 years who describes her childhood lived in the context of homophobic violence and physical abuse. Her story, in particular, recounts her experience of encountering 'people' when she 'came out' as a lesbian at 15, and the pain of exclusion and violence she has consequently experienced in her daily lives.



Being a lesbian teenager, the home and school were no longer safe places. She was 'hounded at school', had people 'spitting at' her, and 'threatening' to beat her up. As a result, she had to give up her 'home': she had to conceal herself at a safe distance from the constant and increasing violence inflicted on her.

She was a stranger to the innocently vulnerable, and asexually heterosexual children. Being a stranger to innocently asexual (and, therefore, vulnerably heterosexual) children, she was violently forced to unlearn the unnatural knowledge she had acquired, only to realise that it was not learned (or promoted) in the first place: 'No one', she claims, 'can be turned gay by it [education], the same way we cannot be taught to be straight'. Knowing her homosexuality was just a 'natural' part of growing up, which she could not learn, unlearn or relearn.

From this point of view, her story, like the story of the Viscount of Falkland, contends that one's sexuality is innocently and naturally fixed. Yet, at the same time, her story brings an important counter interpretation to 'childhood vulnerability'. It was, as she tells it, not the presence of positive image, but an absence of it through which to voice her 'innocent' 'natural' homosexuality, that left her exposed to great danger and violence. Her story, in other words, explicitly questions what it means to be a 'vulnerable' child in a society where an 'asexually innocent' child is always defined as a hetero-'sexual' child.

So what does it mean to be a 'vulnerable homosexual' child in a society where an innocently, naturally, asexually vulnerable child is always defined as a heterosexual child? She said, she 'got off lightly', but some of her friends 'had even worse happen to them'. In referring to a survey carried out by the Gay Teenage Group in early 1980s, MP. Ken Livingstone (Labour), for example, describes the



harsh realities gay teenagers, who live in London, have faced. He reveals that, in this survey of more than 400 gay and lesbian teenagers between the ages of 15 and 21:

[T]hree out of five had been verbally abused, that one in five had been beaten up, that one in 12 had been sent to a psychiatrist, that one in 10 had been thrown out of their homes because of their sexuality and that one in 10 had been sent to a doctor in the hope that the doctor would cure them (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 1101).

Yet, the most 'horrifying' fact he found was that 'one in five' of them 'had attempted to commit suicide because of the anguish, loneliness and despair that they felt'. Here, he adds the following story, which was told by a gay teenager who attempted a suicide:

I remember an incident in the third year when some lad asked me if I was queer. I denied it of course and I immediately withdrew into my shell even further. I tried suicide with a bottle of pills a couple of nights later. It didn't work of course. It just made me ill for about a week. Nobody realised what I'd done and I didn't tell them (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 1012).

Presenting this story and the results of the survey as the evidence, Livingstone argues: 'the survey showed that children who were homosexual felt that they had had no assistance at school. So talk of promotion is nonsense' (HC, 15 December 1987, col. 1012). But where does this 'nonsense' come from? The nonsense, according to MP. Simon Hughes, is 'founded on prejudice' – the prejudice that one can be persuaded to be a homosexual, or one can, by the same reasoning, promote homosexuality. In the House of Commons debate on Section 28 held on 9 March 1988, Simon Hughes presents a story recounted by a parent of a gay child to support his claim:

The letter is from a parent of a gay child from Sheffield, written in January this year: "I have a daughter who is gay and I believe suffered unnecessarily from the pretence that such do not exist. I had always thought that what took place between



fully consenting adults in private should not be against the law, but I had not expected it to touch my own life at all closely. I lean to the view that homosexuals are born and not made because her upbringing doesn't seem to have been different from that of my three other children all of whom are heterosexual. In passing I note that my other daughter is left-handed and fortunate in having escaped persecution for that (HC, 9 March 1988, col. 388).

This story, which was told from the point of view of a parent, reinforces the notion that one's sexuality is inherently fixed, and biologically determined rather than a relational construct, culturally, politically, institutionally or inter-subjectively promoted or promotable. In Section 6.3, I discussed a particular way in which 'the figure of the child' is constructed as the (sexually) innocent and vulnerable, best protected by wiser and responsible parents (a 'nurturing' mother and a 'disciplining' father) (Corteen, & Scraton, 1997: 82). Yet, not all parents are, as Goldson argues, considered as wise and responsible parents: there are also bad or failed parents who, by being unreasonable, incompetent, naive, or irresponsible, leave children under the sick or evil influence of stranger-danger (Goldson, 1997: 24).

In a context where a range of political anxieties concerned with the promotion of homosexuality are expressed, parents of gay children are, at best, the parents who failed to protect their children. At worst, they may themselves be guilty of raising children in 'strange' ways. In the above story told by a parent of a gay child from Sheffield, we, therefore, find ways in which the parent, in explaining her daughter's homosexuality, first gives an account of herself (or himself) as an ordinary and 'straight' parent. To avoid any possible accusation of being a failed or bad parent, the parent, for example, tells how the discovery of daughter's homosexuality troubled her/his own life. The parent could not even believe that such people exist, and has suffered from shock as well as shame. Yet, the parent, at



the same time, recounts the pain and hurt felt in response to the daughter's gayness as 'unnecessary' pretence or prejudice. As long as the parent remembers, 'her upbringing doesn't seem to have been different from that of...three other children all of whom are heterosexual'. Without doubt, the daughter has not been brought up to be gay. She has not 'became' a lesbian. Rather, like the other child who is left-handed, she has been 'always that way' (de Lauretis, 1994: xlv).

This story of the parent of a gay child told during the Section 28 debates, together with the other counter-stories I have analysed so far in this Section, offers plausible counter-evidence about what happened: the promotion of homosexuality did not exist because it could not exist. But there is something more in this counter-storytelling that calls for our attention. What is of particular interest here is the way in which stories that deny the political 'accusation' of promoting homosexuality produce the possibility of homosexual subjects who are not promotable. In other word, it is the way stories of accusation, presented as 'evidence', bound up with the production/emergence of the counter-factual (or the counter-causal) subject that interests me here.

The parent whose daughter is 'gay' ends the story by comparing her with the other daughter who is born left-handed: while the latter is 'fortunate in having escaped persecution' for being left-handed, the former is not: the former, in the eyes of the parent, is a persecuted body – the body that emerges as being responsible for deeds she has not committed.

Here, her responsibility, as we have seen from the story of a young lesbian of 19 years, emerges as an effect of demands made upon her by the Other who persecutes her. In horrified response to persecution, as Butler argues, 'I offer myself as an "I" and try to

reconstruct my deeds, showing that the deed attributed to me was or was not, in fact, among them' – 'I am either owning up to myself as the cause of such an action, qualifying my causative contribution, or defending myself against the attribution, perhaps locating the cause elsewhere' (Butler, 2005: 11). In response to persecution, I, in other words, give an account of myself as a subject being responsible/ accountable for 'me' which emerged through persecution.

What is important to note here, however, is the 'belatedness' of my response to the Other. This Other to whom I give account of myself as an "I" is 'the first one on the scene, not signalled, unparalleled' – the one who, through persecution, 'assigns me before I designate him [sic]' (Levinas, 1998: 87). In this traumatic encounter, it is, in other words, 'me' who is called into question, susceptible to persecution, and 'I' am compelled to respond to the other's persecution without first being able to ask myself: 'where does he get his right to command?'(87).

Being 'already late and guilty for being late' (ibid.), the very language, Butler argues, by which 'I give account of myself' – the language by which I make myself 'intelligible' to both myself and to the Other – are 'not', therefore, my 'making' (Butler, 2005: 21; Levinas, 1998: 87). We can, for example, find that the kinds of accounts given in the form of stories, such as those which I have analysed in this section, accept the accuser's telling that the promotion of homosexuality has a causal relation to this 'normative heterosexual' other's trouble and suffering. And, being asked if 'me' was responsible for this suffering, I emerge as a counter-causal subject who cannot be the cause of the suffering in question: I cannot be the cause of the suffering, because my homosexuality, which is the result from an inborn trait or an immutable condition, cannot be promotable.



Here, it is important to note that the terms by which I emerge as a self accounting/narrating subject is not my own; it is, rather, a particular 'product' of my relation to this Other. Yet, it is, nevertheless, a production that involves the production of 'truth': in this particular instance, it is a production of 'truth' about 'me' from the start (from my birth), suggesting my innate, fixed identity.

Within the debates on Section 28, what also followed from this causal story of immutable homosexual identity/orientation was the claim for equality on the basis of an authentic and unchangeable sexual difference. If, as Currah argues, the homosexual identity/orientation is fixed rather than a choice or a lifestyle, the quest for 'equal rights for protection' under the broad civil-rights/citizenship framework is 'legitimate'; for 'discrimination on the basis of a trait perceived as an unchangeable characteristic is unfair' (Currah, 1994: 58). As MP. Hughes, based on personal testimonies he read in the parliament during the debate on Section 28, argues:

Those people said that in their earlier years they had been exposed to heterosexual advertising and that it had not changed them in the slightest...[T]he evidence...shows that people who discover that they have a homosexual orientation have no ability to do anything about it or believe that they have no ability to do anything about it. Therefore, promoting that condition is a logical inconsistency. Of course one can promote activity, but promoting a psychological state is probably impossible. It certainly could not be promoted by a local authority....I believe that the issue is whether people of different sexuality should be given the same facilities by their local council: the same education, the same information and the same support as anybody else. It seems a matter of simple civil liberties and human rights that they should' (HC, 9 March 1988, col. 390).

But what kinds of rights are promoted here? Or, to put it another way, how has one become the homosexual body that 'has' rights here?



The 'rights' promoted here are not the 'rights to promote homosexuality'. Quite the opposite. The 'natural' homosexual body emerged in response to the accusation made upon 'the body that promotes homosexuality' was the body that 'will not' and 'cannot' promote homosexuality: the 'rights to promote homosexuality' should not, therefore, be the 'rights of the homosexuals'. Paradoxically, what should still remain 'a legitimate object of discrimination' within this emerging homosexual rights discourse is, then, the 'practices' or 'identities' that (are seen to) promote homosexuality (Currah, 1994: 58). In other words, the distinction between what Smith calls 'the good homosexual' (the 'self-limiting' and 'fixed' homosexuals) and 'the dangerous queer' (the 'subversive', 'unfixed' 'proselytizing', and 'promoting' homosexuals), which was basic to the homophobic discourse among Conservatives who supported Section 28, is reinforced rather than challenged (Smith, 1994: 205).

We perhaps need to note here that the Conservative Earl of Halsbury, in introducing his Private Member's Bill in the House in 1986 (which eventually came to be known as Section 28) clearly stated that the measure did not aim at 'responsible' homosexuals, but at 'sick' ones who showed 'symptoms' of 'exhibitionism' and 'promiscuity'; of 'proselytising' and 'boasting' homosexual achievements (HL, 18 December 1986, col. 310). These 'sick' homosexuals, he added, 'persuade[d] other people that their way of life' was 'the good one', and acted as 'reservoirs' for venereal disease. In another debate on Section 28, the Earl of Halsbury, by reading a letter he received from a (responsible) male homosexual, then added the homosexual's own understanding of a situation:

I want to say how fed up I am with my fellow homosexuals. They have brought it upon themselves, their unpopularity. They are too promiscuous, too aggressive and exhibitionist. I cannot stand the sight of them. I wish they would keep



themselves to themselves...I cannot help what I am but I can help what I do (HL, 1 February 1988, col. 875, Italics added).

Two things need to be noted here. First, this statement, 'I cannot help what I am but I can help what I do', reveals a particular way in which signs of 'nature' work in relation to homosexual bodies. Here, nature exercises absolute control over the way I can possibly 'be', but it does not control what I can possibly 'do' – I can keep my homosexuality to myself. Yet, this logic whereby (having the natural rights) to 'be' a homosexual, and to 'do' promote homosexuality is constructed as mutually exclusive is that of the homosexual/ity. On 'not one occasion', as Cooper and Herman observe, 'did a parliamentarian call into question the promotion of heterosexuality' during the debates on Section 28 (Cooper & Herman, 1991: 65). Rather, the compulsory presumption of heterosexuality, implicit in conservative approaches to sexuality, made the concept of (heterosexual) nature be actively promoted, enforced, and naturalised.

There is, therefore, a troubling paradox in relation to the politics of sexuality, which is here based on the notion of 'nature'. As Ahmed argues, the newly emerged idea of 'sexual orientation' as naturally fixed and immutable 'does not position the figures of the homosexual and heterosexual in a relation of equivalence' (Ahmed, 2006: 69). While homosexuality is naturalised as a matter of fixed sexual orientation, it can only be a deviant/peculiar natural condition, which is to be contained, and never to be promoted: the very nature that both unquestionably 'is', and is 'to be' promoted as the normative nature is heterosexuality. As Stevi Jackson has also aptly noted:

Those who endorse biological and genetic theories assume that lesbians and gays constitute a permanent, more or less stable, natural minority. To campaign for equal rights on this basis is misguided. Homosexuality is not a natural difference that has



become stigmatised through some irrational prejudice, but a category that only exists in relation to normative heterosexuality. It cannot be equal to heterosexuality: it is necessarily in opposition to it. Positing sexuality as immutable obscures the hierarchical ordering of heterosexuality and homosexuality within which the latter is constructed as the deviant category in relation to the former. This deviance is not accidental, but serves to define the boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality (Jackson, 1998: 73).

Secondly, the statement, 'I cannot help what I am but I can help what I do' reveals that the homosexual subject that emerges as 'having' the rights to be the homosexual is a subject that knows how to govern and discipline its body – its needs, desires and actions – and how, therefore, to relate its body to others. In this way, the subject who emerges as having the rights to 'be' the homosexual is the subject that has, at the same time, the rights to 'do' homosexuality – the rights that are fundamentally linked with (governing/disciplining) responsibilities of the 'doing'.

Having said this, the next chapter discusses ways in which these particular 'identity based' rights claims, that emerged during the Section 28 debates, both effect and contribute to the formation of what Richardson calls 'relationship based' rights claims in Britain – claims that seek the rights to 'do' same-sex relationships in the form of civil partnership (Richardson, 2000a: 126). Weeks points out that there has been a recent shift in gay and lesbian politics in the U.K: 'from an assertion of identity and presence to a claim for full recognition of same-sex partnership rights (Weeks, 2004: 159). Weeks links this changes occurring in gay and lesbian politics to much wider social changes such as 'a weakening of the dominance of the traditional notions of family and kinship' and the diverse patterns of intimate relationships emerging therefrom (ibid.). While I agree with Weeks that the particular ways in which same-sex relationships have become the objects recognition and respect



reflects, in part, changes in sexual politics in Britain, this is also closely tied to, rather than a shift from, the identity based rights claims previously emerged within the discursive context that privileged heterosexuality.

## Chapter 7

# Stories of Doing 'Being' Family

### *7.1 Introduction*

In the previous two chapters, I discussed ways in which the fact/ideal of life in Britain, including the reproduction of life, was seen as being threatened by the presence of the homosexual/ity. The homosexual/ity 'was' regarded as a 'threat' – a threat to children, the family, reproductive relations, and the very survival of the nation – which to be, therefore, contained, and never to be promoted (Richardson, 2000b: 78-9).

By contrast, stories that we hear during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act no longer depict the life of gay men and lesbians as a threat to the nation. It is, rather, represented as a fact/reality of 'modern Britain' in which some of 'us', as Jacqui Smith states, make the decision 'to share their home, their finances and



the care of their children or of older relatives' as same-sex couples. It is, she argues, a 'modern' form of British life that deserves to be treated with respect and equality, and to be recognised by the state as a family. Giving rights in the form of rights to same-sex couples is 'a natural progression' towards an 'inclusive' British society (HC, 12 October, 2004, col. 174).

But as I shall ask in this chapter, how do the forms of lesbian and gay life, seen as a threat to the nation in the 1980s, now come to signify a fact of 'our' life? What kinds of common/national facts of life are 'we' – homosexuals and heterosexuals – now thought of as sharing, and perhaps more importantly, for what?

This chapter, which begins with these questions focuses on the ways in which politicians, in telling stories of daily lives of gays and lesbians, construct stories of the 'new' Britain. I shall discuss, in particular, how these stories that tell of the 'newness' of modern Britain, at the same time, makes use of deep cultural memories of naturalised and traditional forms of British life represented as the 'English wedding', producing the 'new' in its most recognized, familiar form (Section 7.5).

With this in mind, I first begin this chapter by providing some background information on the Civil Partnership Act (Section 7.2). A detailed analysis of stories of gay/lesbian 'partnerships' – stories of 'alternative families' – told during its debates follows in sections 7.3 and 7.4. Here, a particular focus is placed on the ways in which politicians, in telling the stories of same-sex 'couples', employ a way of identifying them as 'normal couples' that deserve our public recognition: typical characteristics of normal same-sex 'couples', identified and constructed as constituting 'families' are 'just like' married couples except for their 'non-heterosexuality'. Subsequent sections then follow the complex and contradictory ways in which

this concept of 'same-sex couples' was played out and contested during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act (7.6 & 7.7). I draw out its political implications in Section 7.8.

## *7.2 The Civil Partnership Act I*

The Civil Partnership Act 2004, which was first introduced in the House of Lords on 30 March 2004 as an attempt to create a new legal status of civil partnership for same-sex couples, became law on 18 November 2004, and came into effect on 5 December 2005.

The Act's precursor was Lord Lester's Civil Partnership Bill, introduced to the House of Lords on 9 January 2002. Prepared in collaboration with Stonewall, the Bill, as stated in its explanatory note, was 'designed to remedy the lack of protection for cohabiting couples (whether of opposite or same sex) in English law and to give them the opportunity to register a civil partnership'. After the Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Lords, however, Lord Lester withdrew his Bill; he agreed not to take the Bill further so as to give the Government time to conduct a major review of the issue.

On 6 December 2002, Barbara Roche, the then Minister for Social Exclusion and Equalities, announced that the Government found that there were a 'clear and strong' (*The independent*, 6 December 2002) case for allowing same-sex couples the chance to register their relationships, and would, therefore, set out its plans 'to bring law and practice into line with the reality of people's lives' (Conway & Fairbairn, 2004: 10). The government's proposal for a civil partnership registration scheme was then published in 2003 under the title, *Civil Partnership: A framework for the legal recognition of same-sex couples*. In the forward, Jacqui Smith, the then Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, stated that:



Today there are thousands of same-sex couples living in stable and committed relationships. These relationships span many years with couples looking after each other, caring for their loved ones and actively participating in society; in fact, living in exactly the same way as any other family. They are our families, our friends, our colleagues and our neighbours. Yet the law rarely recognizes their relationships (Women & Equality Unit, 2003).

The Government proposed to create a new legal status of civil registered partnership, which would be 'open only to same-sex couples and not to opposite sex couples' (2003: 18). It was claimed that unmarried, heterosexual couples already had 'the opportunity of obtaining legal (and socially recognized) status for their relationship by entering into a marriage' – the opportunity not available to same-sex partners who could not marry (2003: 18).

After a consultation period of three months, the government's intention to introduce a Civil Partnership Bill was then announced in the Queens Speech in December 2003, and the Bill was finally introduced into the House of Lords on 30 March 2004. According to the Women & Equality Unit of the DTI (the Department of Trade and Industry), the main provisions in the Civil Partnership Bill include: responsibility to provide reasonable maintenance for civil partners and children of the family; full recognition for the purposes of life assurance; ability to succeed to tenancy rights; social security and pension benefits; and ability to gain parental responsibility for their civil partner's children (DTI, 2004). In Announcing the Bill, Jacqui Smith adds:

Same-sex couples often face a range of unnecessary problems in their everyday lives because of a lack of legal recognition of their relationships. The Civil Partnership Bill aims to eradicate this by providing same-sex couples with the opportunity to gain recognition of their relationship for the first time. It shows that we really value the diversity of the society we live in (Ibid.).

Jacqui Smith's statement demonstrates the extent to which the

Civil Partnership Bill was proposed with direct reference to the 'family'. Same-sex couples who live 'exactly the same way as any other family' face 'unnecessary problems in their everyday lives because of a lack of legal recognition of their relationships'. The law, therefore, must afford some measure of positive recognition and equal respect to the same-sex couple/family relations, granting them legal rights and entitlements parallel to those given to 'any other family' (Women & Equality Unit, 2003a).

In what follows, I discuss how stories of everyday reality of same-sex intimate life told during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act are, in part, structured around the provision of evidence to support these claims. To say that same-sex couples 'live exactly the same way as any other family' is to suggest that there exists a commonly recognized way of 'doing family', which, in turn, is to be legally recognized and validated as 'the' family (or families). But in what ways do same-sex intimate lives confirm to the way 'we' do family (or families)?

### *7.3 Real Stories of Real People*

In reading Parliamentary debates on the Civil Partnership Act in Britain, one may immediately find qualitatively different ways in which stories of (or about) gays and lesbians enter the debate in the 2000s. While stories about homosexuals were recounted in the debate in the 1960s and 1980s, they were stories in which gays and lesbians remained as nameless and unspecified individuals, beings of doubtful roots and existence. This, in turn, allowed what Johnson calls 'a fantastical image of sexual perverts' to prevail in the debates whereby homosexuals appear as threatening 'phantoms' upon whom the fear and prejudice could be easily projected (Johnson, 2004: 38).



By contrast, most of gays and lesbians appearing in stories told during the debates on Civil Partnership have their names – recognisably British names that validate their national origin. We, for example, hear stories about: a gay man calls Rex and his partner John; a lesbian woman, Alison Brown, who works as a Thames Valley police officer; John who is buying a car with his long-term male partner; a gay couple, Dick and Ben who are both in their 70s and have endured the general prejudice against gay community; Paul and James who jointly owned their house; Kate, a lesbian woman, who had a history of depression and was cared by her partner, Jo; and a gay man, Andrew whose partner has recently died.

The power of these personal names revealed in stories consists mostly in representing the real, as they point to actual persons living in Britain. At the same time, it tells us that their stories, presented as ‘real-life examples of real people’ are no longer stories of those remain in the closet, but those who are publicly identifiable and nameable as gays and lesbians (HC, 12 Oct, 2004, col. 184). In other words, they appear ‘visible’ and as such they are made ‘real’.

Here, they are visible in stories not as outsiders, strangers or enemies of the nation, but as those who are family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues, or fellow citizens. While maintaining a clear distance between the self and the homosexual other was the norm for those who tell stories about homosexuals during the 1960s, representative storytellers in the parliament now tell stories of gays and lesbians as a welcoming part of their interactive personal/community lives.

Lord Goodhard, for example, tells about his wife’s uncle who, as a gay man, was loyal to the public as much as loving to his male partner (HL, 25 January 2002, col. 1733). Barbara Roche, a Labour

MP, recounts a story about a friend who is in a long-standing lesbian relationship and whom she met at her another friend's wedding seven years ago (HC, 12 October, 2004, col. 191). MP. Jane Griffiths (Labour) tells a story of her neighbour, a gay couple, whose troubles she knows as she lives in the same area that they inhabit (HC, 12 October, 2004, col. 205). And Lord Alli, during the Second Reading debate on the Civil Partnerships Bill introduced by Lord Lester on 9 January 2002, tells a story of his colleague, the late Lord Montague of Oxford (the Labour life peer) who 'had been in a relationship for 30 years with a very kind and distinguished gentleman' (HL, 25 January 2002, col. 1697).

As much as these stories are about real and visible gay men and lesbian women with whom, as Anne McGuire (the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland) states, 'we live and work' in Britain, we find events and actions unfolded in stories are 'ordinary' situations and part of everyday life activities such as going to the hospital, attending a wedding or a funeral, having a haircut, meeting neighbours or friends, paying tax, being ill, sharing a house and caring for a loving intimate partner (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col. 247). Not only are gays and lesbians real and visible, they are also ordinary and normal, living in the same context as many British heterosexuals. Yet, their apparently ordinary lives do not simply follow the 'normal' course of life events, as their stories soon identify serious troubles and difficulties they have to face. What kinds of troubles and difficulties are we talking about here?

## *7.4 Real Stories of Real 'Couples'*

### **7.4.1 Stories of gay/lesbian 'couples'**

Here, the experience of troubles and difficulties recounted



during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act involves the experience of 'lack': the lack of legal recognition given to their intimate relationships. As Baroness Scotland of Asthal puts it:

[S]ame-sex couples are unable to marry and cannot gain legal recognition of their relationships. The lack of legal recognition means that same-sex couples face many difficult issues as they seek to organise their lives together (HL, 22 April, 2004, col. 387).

Let me offer some of the examples of troubles that stories of gay/lesbian 'couples' told during the debates recount. To begin with, there is John whose story is told by MP. Jane Griffiths (Labour):

### **Story 1**

John has been in a relationship for seven years and is buying a car with his partner. That is a normal thing to do – couples do that all the time. The model comes with a year's free insurance but, under the scheme, it applies only to what are described as 'normal' couples, so John and his partner must decide which of them can be insured for free – the other will have to pay (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col. 205).

The everyday context here is 'buying a car', and the teller draws on the notion of 'normality' to emphasise that the commonality of this practice of 'buying a car' is ironically a contentious issue for same-sex couples. Buying a car with your partner is what people in a long-term, committed couple relationships would do 'all the time': the story tells us that this is shared knowledge. Yet, being a 'couple' and being recognised as a 'couple' are, in practice, two separate things. While some 'couples' are highly visible and given public recognition, same-sex 'couples' fail to be treated as (normal) couples. This, Jane Griffiths argues, is 'wrong'. The enduring and committed couple relationships, whether heterosexual or gay relationships, deserve to be treated with the same respect (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col.

204).

Some same-sex couples who have supported each other financially throughout their lives and shared their home together often find no way of gaining pension rights and inheritance tax exemption. Take, for example, following two stories.

### **Story 2**

Rex is 76. His partner, John, died after they had spent 45 years together. Their house was in both names and John left everything to Rex in his will. Rex faced a huge tax bill in order to be able to stay in his own home. He also lost John's pension. Had he been married to a woman for just one day, no tax would have been payable, and Rex would have had a survivor's pension (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col. 183).

### **Story 3**

The story concerns a homosexual couple, Paul and James, who lived together for 30 years...They could not have married even if they wanted to and could not even put their relationship on anything but an illicit level. That, to a great or lesser extent, is true of all homosexual couples. Paul died suddenly, aged 63. He had earned a large salary; James, a small one. They jointly owned their house but as its value far exceeds the exemption threshold of 242,000 pounds, James faces a large bill for inheritance tax which may mean the loss of his home. Matters would be very different were he a surviving husband (HL, 25 Jan 2002, col. 1707-8).

Rex's and James's experience tells us the extent to which the lack of legal recognition of same-sex relationships create particular issues of hardship and vulnerability for same-sex couples, especially when their loved ones die. Marriage gives access to a set of material benefits and legal privileges to married people. In the event of the spouse's death, for example, the surviving spouse is entitled to pension benefits as well as to inheritance rights over the estate of her/his deceased partner. And since a spouse is always accepted as



next of kin, s/he will be able legally to register the death of her/his spouse, and organise the funeral.

The position of same-sex couples, as the stories of Rex and James show, are significantly different. The 'lack' of legal recognition of same-sex relationships, which is experienced by same-sex couples as the 'inability' to get married, means that they often have their shared house lost to inheritance tax, and have no means of establishing status as next of kin in the event of the death of one partner (HC Standing Committee 'D', 19 October 2004, col. 008). Given that same-sex intimate relationships are seen as non-relationships, the loss involved in same-sex relationships is a non-loss – a loss that is not counted as the loss, or a loss that should not be displayed as the loss (see Ahmed, 2004: 156). For example, Baroness Gould of Potternewton tells the following story:

#### **Story 4**

A gay couple in Yorkshire had been together for over 40 years and both partners were in their 70s. The union was never accepted by the family of the elder partner. On his admission to hospital with cancer, his life-long partner was denied visiting rights and heard about his declining health and ultimate death from friends. The family refused his request to attend the funeral and the ultimate humiliation was being evicted from their joint home with no keepsakes and only his memories of their happy years together. I cannot think of any worse treatment of an old man who had devoted his life to his partner (HL, 22 April 2004, col. 403).

The story recounts the pain, anxiety, and humiliation experienced by a gay couple who had been together for 40 years. However committed and long-term their relationship may be, the rights of same-sex partners to care for each other at times of illness and to grieve the 'loss' of the loved one is simply denied by the deceased partner's 'family'. For the bereaved gay man, it is, as the



story reveals, the 'loss' of a 'life-long partner' to whom he 'devoted his life'. Yet, it is not a 'loss' he can publicly mourn at the funeral, as he is not supported in this grief: he is, in Doka's words, a 'disenfranchised' mourner (Doka, 1989).

According to Doka, a grief that is 'not, or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported' is a 'disenfranchised grief' (Doka, 1989: 4). Disenfranchised grief is the grief of 'loss' in which the 'loss' is not recognised as 'loss' (or the griever is not recognised as griever) and is found in relationships that are not recognised by society as significant ties. A society that does not recognise the ways in which same-sex partners have given their 'lived' relationship meaning and significance, does not recognise the suffering and pain resulting from the 'death' of the relationship. In the eyes of the family and society that never accepted the union, there never was a relationship to be lost or mourned. As MP. Chris Bryant (Labour) also saw it:

When I was curate in High Wycombe, I used to visit patients in the local hospital. It was not uncommon to meet people who had been prevented by the parents of their partner even from visiting the person whom they loved and had lived with for many years. This was at the time when HIV/AIDS was new and many people did not have much understanding of it. Many parents blamed the illness on their son's partner. I am glad to say that the world has moved on for many families, but still that injustice exists. The injustice is compounded if there is a death. The bereaved partner is often excluded from the funeral arrangements. I have conducted countless funerals that the partner was not even allowed to attend, and many at which the partner was forced to sit right at the back and not take part, and no mention was made of the relationship. Sometimes the bereaved partner had to have separate ceremonies, because the families took precedence over the partner. That was caused by bigotry in many cases, and it led to injustice that was allowed by the law (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col. 225-6).

Our 'culture', which does not recognise the death of homosexual-relationships, is a culture that perhaps recognises the



death of relationship (or promiscuity as it is alleged) 'from the start' (Ahmed, 2004: 156; Nunokawa, 1991: 319). Homosexual relationships/lifestyles/promiscuity that are identified as purposeful resistance to the family values, and displaced into the signs of AIDS=gay disease=death, are perhaps always 'already dead, dying, or endangered registers', subject to extinction (Nunokawa, 1991: 311). As Simon Watney, in analysing media portrayals of AIDS in Britain during 1980s, also observes: 'the spectacle of AIDS calmly and constantly entertains the possible prospect of the death of all....gay men from AIDS ...without the slightest flicker of concern, regret, or grief' (Watney, 1987 quoted from Nunokawa, 1991: 311).

If someone who had lost a homosexual partners was prevented from grieving publicly in Britain, this, according to Chris Bryant, was caused by bigotry', however. Those who blamed homosexual 'lifestyles' for AIDS equated homosexuality with promiscuity: they said 'same-sex couples could not love one another' – being 'couples' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 225). This, Bryant argues, is wrong. There are same-sex couples we know, who 'have lived together for many years, in sickness and in health, and have provided one another, and sometimes children in their care, with the kind of love and support from which many other families could learn much' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 225). The 'fact of loving homosexual relationships' has been the 'fact of life' for many gays and lesbians in the U.K (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 230).

But what does it mean to speak of the 'fact' here?; for, as I shall argue in the next section, it is clear from stories told above that the 'fact of loving/losing homosexual relationships', in order to be presented/claimed as 'fact', requires to be recognised as 'fact' in the first place. As it is asked by Butler, 'if you've *actually* lost the lover who was never recognized to be your lover, then did you *really* lose that person?' (Butler, 2002: 25) Can this love/loss be a 'fact'? Or if



this 'fact', as Bryant argues, was not recognised as a 'fact' in the past, but is now awaiting our recognition in the present, how does it become a 'fact'?

#### **7.4.2 Stories of 'normal' couples**

Stories of same-sex couples told during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act (7.4.1) inform us two things. On the one hand, they tell us that one's experience of 'loss' does not necessarily mean that one is entitled to experience that 'loss'. One can, for example, encounter an event like the 'disenfranchised loss' of a life-long partner, and feel wronged and humiliated. However, the question is whether s/he, in the eyes of the other, has an entitlement (or rights) to feel wronged and humiliated here (see Sacks, 1995: 242-248).

On the other hand, stories reveal us that it is the 'normal (heterosexual, married) couple' who have the entitlements/rights. We are, for example, told that: if had Rex 'been married to a woman for just one day' he 'would have had a survivor's pension' (Story 2); or were James 'a surviving husband', he would not have lost his home to inheritance tax (Story 3). MP. Charles Henry (Conservative), in recounting his marriage, also tells us that:

When I got married, like everyone else who has got married, I became eligible for certain rights and entitlements and, to go with that, certain responsibilities as well. So when one of us dies, the surviving spouse is entitled to inherit the family home and the family assets without being subjected to inheritance tax. We can benefit from the other one's pension contributions, particularly in the circumstances of death. For those people who live in social housing, the tenancy would transfer automatically from one to the other without any question of whether that was right. Marriage also brings with it certain entitlements that are so self-evident that it is not possible to conceive of the position being otherwise. For example, in the event of one spouse being injured in an accident, the other is



entitled to give their opinion on what should happen and what is the appropriate medical treatment; they are entitled to visit their spouse in hospital without anyone being able to say, 'You shouldn't be here – you're not entitled'. A spouse can act as an active next of kin: my wife and I have to fill in a form for our children at school saying who should be called in the event of an accident, and we name each other as next of kin. That, to me, is so self-evidently right that it is inconceivable that it could be done in any other way' (HC, 12 Oct 2004, col. 230; Italics added)

The story formulates the entitlements/rights that he, as a married man, has in relation to various events such as 'having exemption from inheritance tax', 'gaining pension rights', 'acting as a next of kin', or 'visiting a spouse in hospital' as 'our' shared experience/knowledge. As a married heterosexual man, he has entitlements/rights to experience such events in a way that same-sex couples do not. His entitlements/rights is something that is taken for granted and accepted by everybody: if you are married, and visiting your spouse in hospital, no one, claims Henry, would say, 'You shouldn't be here – you're not entitled'.

Being a normal – married, heterosexual – couple carries a set of entitlements/rights: this is presented as the 'common sense' of a society, the 'very bounds of the thinkable' (Eagleton 1991: 58). In Henry's own words, those rights that he, as married man, enjoy is 'so self-evidently right' that 'it is not possible to conceive of the position being otherwise'. Now, it is within this very boundary of what is thinkable, we find that politicians, in telling the stories of same-sex couples, use certain kinds of typical descriptions (used to describe 'the normal – heterosexual, married' – couple) to construct the 'normal – same-sex – couple' who should have the equivalent entitlements/rights. The point is discussed in more detail below (7.4.3).

### **7.4.3 Stories of ‘families’**

From the story of John and his partner (Story 1), Rex and John (Story 2), Paul and James (Story 3), and a gay couple in Yorkshire (Story 4), we find that politicians, in telling the fact that they are a normal ‘couple’ or a ‘union’ – which, nevertheless, is not recognised as such in society – employ ways of identifying them as a normal ‘couple’.

Stories, for example, invariably start in the same way: X and Y lived together for Z years, emphasising their life-long commitment, monogamy and cohabitation. The commitment they have made to each other, as described in stories, is a ‘for richer for poorer’, ‘in sickness and in health’, ‘to love and to cherish’, ‘till death do us part’ kind of commitment – a ‘marriage-like’ commitment. And for many, this marriage like ‘living together’, which is premised on ‘the gravity of the financial and emotional responsibilities of supporting and caring’ (HL, 25 Jan 2002, col. 1706) for each other, is what makes same-sex bonds indistinguishable from those found in heterosexual union (at least in its ideal practice): in Lord Lester of Herne Hill’s words, for example, a homosexual relationship ‘is no more a pretended family relationship than is a caring, sharing and loving relationship between two heterosexuals who live together in a stable, long-term relationship’ (HL, 25 Jan 2002, col. 1692). There, he argues, is growing evidence that shows: ‘same-sex partners are as capable as heterosexual spouses of forming intimate, permanent, committed, monogamous, loyal and enduring relationships, of furnishing emotional and spiritual support; and of providing physical care, financial support and assistance in running the common household’ (HL, 25 Jan 2002, col. 1692).

In Chapter 6, I discussed the ways in which the increased acceptance/promotion of homosexual ‘lifestyle’ was seen to pose a



direct challenge to the traditional family life, as David Wilshire, who introduced Section 28 in the Committee Stage of the Local Government Bill 1987-8, puts it: 'Homosexuality is being promoted at the ratepayers' expense, and the traditional family as we know it is under attack' (Letter to the *Guardian*, 12 December 1987). Here, the family as we know it, which was seen as 'under attack', was the 'natural' family unit founded on the heterosexual couple – 'a reproductive, biological pairing' between one man and one woman – and their dependent children (Fineman, 1995: 145). The heterosexual family (heterosexual coupledness), legally privileged through marriage and idealised as the natural habitat for the life of children (the life of future national citizens), was presented as vulnerable to inherently dangerous and promiscuous homosexual lifestyles/perversion/seduction/corruption.

Returning to stories told during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act, we find that: (1) family 'practice/performance', rather than the (married heterosexual) family 'form/structure' is emphasised as the central qualification for what constitutes a valid family relationship. At the same time, it is, as I shall argue further in the next section: (2) a particular way of 'doing' family – doing the same as what marriage already does – through which the boundaries and implications of 'being' in 'families' are increasingly drawn in parliament.

Significantly, these two arguments (1 and 2), combined together, introduce and constitute a paradoxical status of (traditional/modern) family in Britain, that is: 'the family as we know it' is both changed and unchanged. While the family we know it is changed in the sense that the traditional 'a married couple with two children' family form/structure is no longer the central determinant of what a family is, the family 'performative values' related to marriage still constitutes a key element in defining what 'today's



family/families' is/are. As Alan Duncan (Conservative) states:

Today's families come in many shapes and sizes and people face many challenges. Marriage breaks up, parents remarry and the structure of the family changes. Many families no longer fit perfectly into the traditional two-parents-and-2.4-children framework, but are extended families in which there has been remarriage and same-sex relationships. The latter are increasingly acknowledged and accepted, even by grandparents, who 25 years ago would have found such relationships abhorrent. No one suggests that the absence of traditional arrangements within those new family units has led to the absence of bonds of loyalty, commitment and support that hold families together. Despite the difficulties of modern life those values have shown a reassuring durability (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 186).

Here, the family is presented as having no unified or permanent 'form': today's family life is 'diverse', and no longer fit into the idealised, traditional (nuclear) family form. The family, Lord Lester claims, 'has changed dramatically and continues to change' (HL, 25 Jan 2002, col. 1693). The rising divorce rate, increases in remarriage, the existence of single parenthood, delayed marriage and the emergence of gay and lesbian partnerships all contribute to the emergence of 'new family units', which, according to Duncan, have been increasingly acknowledged and accepted as 'families' in our society.

This change, which has hitherto often been interpreted as a sign of 'family breakdown', does not, however, necessarily mean that we experience the decline in 'performative values' of family life. Quite the opposite. While the 'structure' of the family relationships is evidently changing, Duncan argues, there exists an enduring continuity in the way we 'do' family. The 'family we know it', which is both changed and unchanged, is both a category of the past/tradition and present/modern.

The 'fact' that 'families are changing', which was repeatedly



presented by politicians during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act, is accompanied by claims that the law should reflect today's changed family patterns, and allow those same-sex couples, who choose to 'do' family, to gain legal recognition of their relationship (HL, 22 April 2004, col. 388). Extending rights and legal protection to 'stable, long-term, committed' same-sex couple relationships, it was argued, would not change ('undermine' or 'weaken') our ideas of family life (HC, 12 October, 2004, col. 175). This is because: 'what the Bill [Civil Partnership Bill] does', according to Duncan, 'is recognise what already is' (HC 12 October 2004, col. 187). Gay couples are 'a fact of life...in our country', and the recognition of stable, committed same-sex couple relationships is 'a way of protecting the family in changed times' (HC 12 October 2004, col. 184). Rather than undermining the family life, the Bill, Jacqui Smith argues, recognises the 'realities of modern Britain' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 175).

From this point of view, one might conclude that the Civil Partnership Act simply recognises same-sex couple relationships, which 'already exist' as a changed fact in (modern) Britain: 'the couple made itself what it is'; and 'all that the public and the state need to do is assent to this *fait accompli*' (Halley, 2001: 99). Yet, it is more correct to say that the very sense of the 'change' that deserves our recognition is generated through the projection of 'continuity' – the continuity of 'the traditional family life we know it'. If the idealised heterosexual coupling sanctioned by marriage 'may be becoming increasingly less typical' today, it is, nevertheless, a continuing ideal (a looking glass) through which today's same-sex relationships are examined (reflected) and recognised (Gavigan, 1992: 605). In the next section, I discuss the point in more detail (7.5).

### 7.5 *A wedding*<sup>26</sup>

In creating 'the nation's people' out of difference, modern national narratives, Bhabha argues, engage with a kind of 'double narrative movement': the 'pedagogical' on the one hand, and the 'performative' on the other (Bhabha, 1990: 299). The pedagogical narrative, according to Bhabha, constructs the nation and national identity through an appeal to the 'tradition of the people' – the tradition (the 'totality of social institutions and practices') that teaches the nation and national identity as 'immemorial' and 'timeless' (Leoussi, 2001: 249). The performative narrative, on the other hand, 'erases' the 'pedagogic', and instead creates 'the people' as 'subjects' of the nation – the subjects who turns 'the scraps, patches and rags of daily life' into 'the signs of a coherent national culture', renewing and reinventing the nation and national identity at every moment/location of their living (Bhabha, 1990: 297; Allen, 1995: 615). The people, according to Bhabha, are then 'the articulation of a doubling of the national address' (300). We 'are', as bearers or carriers of the tradition, what we 'were' ('the people' in the past), and what we are told as we are – the 'object' of narrating the nation by national pedagogues. Yet, we are, at the same time, the 'subjects' of the nation who, by performing a modern national life in the present, are actively involved in the process of retelling/ recreating its signs and traditions. Within this double movement between the narratives of pedagogy and the performative, we, then, have:

a contested cultural territory where the people ....[are] thought in a double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a

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26. The approach taken in this section 7.5 has been influenced by Allen's excellent discussion of 'heterosexuality's pedagogical narrative' at a number of points. See Allen, D. (1995). Homosexuality and Narrative. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41(3-4), 609-634.



nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process....In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (Bhabha, 1990: 297).

Bhabha's discussion of ambivalence involved in national narratives is useful in understanding a tension existing within the narratives of 'the British family' found in the debates on the Civil Partnership Act. There is a tension between the pedagogical and the performative in the narrative address of 'the British family', which, in turn, is linked to its double temporality. On the one hand, there is the 'pedagogical narrative' of the British family, which emphasises the pre-given, traditional, eternal image of the family associated with the institution of marriage. On the other hand, there is the 'performative narrative' that emphasises the daily re-creation and invention of families, disturbing the temporality of the pedagogical narrative of the British family. A particular way in which this tension is expressed and resolved in stories told during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act can be illustrated in the following story, told by Barbara Roche (Labour).

Seven years ago, I went to a beautiful summer wedding with my husband and daughter. I love weddings – it is like seeing a Shakespeare play performed with a different cast – and attend them with great anticipation. On that lovely day, we were all very pleased for the happy couple. Like anyone who is married, I remembered my own wedding, now some 27 years ago, and recalled the emotions, the commitment and the shared responsibilities that I embraced on that occasion. I turned to a friend who was sitting beside me at the ceremony and talked about that. She is in a long-standing lesbian relationship. We



were all enjoying the lovely occasion, but she told me that the possibility of a commitment to her long-standing partner in which rights and responsibilities were exchanged was not open to her. That made a great impression on me, and I discussed it with my family and friends afterwards. I vowed that if I ever had the opportunity to do something about it, I would. I was therefore pleased to have had the opportunity in December 2002, when I was a Minister, to say that Civil Partnerships for same-sex couples were a good thing. Before I made that announcement, there was a great deal of nervousness in government about what would happen, how people would react and what they would say. Would the heavens fall in? However, I made the announcement and that did not happen – life went on as before, and society did not appear to have suffered any disruption. Almost as soon as I made the announcement, my offices in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and in my constituency received many messages of support from people who had been in same-sex relationships for years. They loved and cared for one another in sickness and in health, but had never had the opportunity to register their relationship and enjoy the rights that many of us take for granted [...] Make no mistake – we are doing something of fundamental significance for equality and the society in which I want my daughter to grow up [...] I believe that we are doing something very important ...that other parliamentarians will look back on in future years, and say, “I wish I could have been here then.” Our parliament has grown up, our country is growing up and we truly are striving for a society that is equal and in which there is social justice (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 191-2)

The story, which is told by MP. Barbara Roche (Labour) during the second reading debate on the Civil Partnership Bill in 2004, depicts the British wedding as a continuous and timeless ritual that people in Britain replicate and perform. The English wedding, according to Barbara Roche, is like a ‘Shakespeare play’, performed and re-performed with ‘a different cast’ over time: it is what she performed in the past and her friend is now performing after her. And the script of the ‘wedding’, as she recalls, remains very much the same: the wedding is a joyful public event in which couples make ‘commitment’ and embrace ‘shared responsibilities’, which is recognised, in turn, by the British law. Here, in telling the story of her friend’s wedding, Roche tells how her past memories of wedding



continue to live effectively in the present. It is through the shared form of living found in the tradition, wedding, that she could connect herself to her friend, and her past to the present.

Yet, her story soon finds the presence of another 'friend' at the wedding, who disrupts this overall picture of continuity and unity. This is a friend who is in a long-term lesbian relationship. In spite of her wish to be a part of the 'cast', she is not allowed to follow this timeless sort of script that 'we' share: 'the possibility of a commitment to her long-standing partner in which rights and responsibilities were exchanged was not open to her.' The story, then, deals with Roche's reactions to this unjust treatment of same-sex couples. She declared, 'I vowed that if I ever had the opportunity to do something about it, I would', and this made her eventually to respond to the goodness of civil Partnerships in 2002.

The announcement of the plan to introduce civil partnership legislation, contrary to what others had expected, did not bring any upset to people's lives: 'life went on as before, and society did not appear to have suffered any disruption,' For civil partnership legislation simply recognises what is already familiar. What Roche sees in civil partnership is the mirror image of the wedding: it gives same-sex couples who 'loved and cared for one another in sickness and in health' the opportunity to embrace the commitment and shared responsibilities for each other. And with this mirroring, she turns the presence of discontinuity and disunity into a progressive ideal of continuity and unity – into a coherent but, at the same time, progressive national culture. Her story tells us that the recognition of same-sex couples does not change our life. It rather signifies the growth of our ability (or 'will') to recognise their similarity with us.

Now, I discuss some of the complexities involved in this mirroring. In Section 7.4., I discussed particular ways in which

politicians, in telling performative narratives of gay men and women living as 'family', both erase and save 'the British family as we know it'. Here, the continuity of 'the traditional British family we know it', as those who oppose the Bill subtly reveal during the debates, is maintained through a circular argument: 'the present family life' is seen to be a continuation of 'the traditional family life we know it', which is, nevertheless, itself a construction of the present – a construction of the way 'the' traditional family life is redefined in the present.

Roche's story follows a similar circular process: what Roche sees in civil partnership registration is the mirror image of the wedding – the continuation of what she performed 27 years ago. Yet this mirroring is the result of the construction of 'the wedding' in the present – a construction of the way she remembers her wedding in the present (not as the union between one man and one woman, but as the union of two people who exchange rights and responsibilities).

Now, something, we may note, is lost in this mirroring, however. This (perhaps) 'new' configuration of the wedding (or the new configuration of 'the traditional family we know it') provides a new framework for thinking about same-sex relationships. The fact of 'their' living arrangement appears not to be 'new'; it appears to be consistent with the way 'we' do wedding/family in the present. Yet, the image of same-sex couples constructed as just-like married/marriageable couples is followed by a certain loss. If not, why, we may ask, 'civil partnership' and not 'same-sex marriage'? Or is civil partnership, as it is often thought of, marriage in all but name?

From this point of view, I discuss some of the complexities and ambivalence involved in the Civil Partnership Bill (Section 7.6); and how this ambivalence invites stories that challenge the heart of the 'construction' that what constitutes a real (married-like) 'couple' is



what (supporters of the Civil partnership Act argue) it does (Section 7.7).

## *7.6 Civil Partnership Act II*

Although the civil partnership status, Women & Equality Unit states, 'is not the same thing as gay marriage' (Women & Equality Unit, 2006), it has clearly been designed to be close to marriage. As Jacqui Smith, the then Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, announced during the Second Reading debate on the Civil Partnership Bill:

We seek to create a parallel but different legal relationship that mirrors as fully as possible the rights and responsibilities enjoyed by those who can marry, and that uses civil marriage as a template for the processes, rights and responsibilities that go with civil partnership (HC, 9 November 2004, col. 776).

Indeed, a registered same-sex partnership, in 'legal terms', is more or less marriage in all but name (Auchmuty, 2004: 102). According to Baroness O'Cathain, the Civil Partnership Bill almost exactly copied the legal provisions available to married couples to the extent that it creates 'a parody of marriage for homosexual couples' (HL, 22 April. 2004, col. 406). She argues:

This is a gay marriage Bill in all but name...Like marriage, those within the prohibited degrees of relationship by consanguinity or affinity are not able to enter. Like marriage, the relationship will have a legal status. No one in an existing marriage or civil partnership will be able to enter into a partnership until the previous relationship is legally dissolved. it is just a mirror image. Like marriage, during the existence of the legal relationship, the two partners will be treated jointly for income-related benefits and for state pensions, and they will be able to gain parental responsibility for each other's children. They will also be recognised for immigration purpose. Like marriage, civil partnerships can only be ended by a court order, which is granted on the same grounds as most divorces: irretrievable breakdown. Like marriage, on dissolution, the



courts will consider arrangements for property division, residence arrangements and contact arrangements with children. Like marriage, on the death of one partner, the other will have the rights to register the death and to claim a survivor pension, eligibility for bereavement benefits and for compensation for fatal accidents or criminal injuries. Also, they will have recognition under inheritance and intestacy rules to tenancy succession rights – real problems for many. The Bill may not use the word ‘marriage’, but the Government have gone to great lengths to ensure that, in almost every other way, it is identical (HL, 22 April. 2004, col. 406).

If the Civil Partnership Bill, a Government bill, was introduced in the parliament with the intention to grant same-sex couples substantially the same rights as heterosexual married couples, the Government had, nevertheless, explicitly denied that civil partnership was ‘gay marriage’. The Government’s consultation document on civil partnership, for example, sternly insisted that: ‘It is a matter of public record that the Government has no plans to introduce same-sex marriage’ (Women & Equality Unit, 2003a: 13). As Jacqui Smith, during the Second Reading debate on the Civil Partnership Bill in the House of Commons, also announced: ‘The whole point...is that civil partnership is not civil marriage, for a variety of reasons, such as the traditions and history – religious and otherwise – that accompany marriage’ (HC 19 November 2004, col. 776).

According to Stychin, this can be read as a strategy ‘on the part of the government’ to secure partnership rights for same-sex couples with less political controversy (Stychin, 2005). Yet, this is more than a strategy. In the course of debates in the House of Lords in 2004, Lord Filkin, Constitutional Affairs Minister, made clear that the government position on this issue was not a result of a mere strategy. As Filkin stated: ‘the concept of same-sex marriage is a contradiction in terms, which is why our position is utterly clear; we are against it, and do not intend to promote it or allow it to take



place' (11, Feb. 2004, col. 1094-5).

As it has been defined and understood in the common law since 1866, marriage, as Lord Goodhart argues, has been 'the union of one man with one woman voluntarily entered into...to the exclusion of all others' (HL, 24 June 2004, col.1355). Contrary to the notion of 'the family', seen as to be expanded to include various forms of 'families' existing in modern Britain, marriage is more or less defined in terms of 'what it always has been and will be' – it is a union of man and woman – and this definition is 'not' challenged during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act.

Seen as a timeless institution that involves the union of man and woman, what marriage (uniquely) 'does' is also defined in terms of what it (uniquely) always has been 'doing'. Its 'doing', as it is repeatedly argued by those who oppose the Bill in particular, distinctively involves the procreation and the raising of children within the family, and is, therefore, the foundational building block of society. As Baroness Wilcox argues:

Marriage involves a publicly declared commitment. It has an inter-generational role in linking former generations and future generations. It is the environment where shared values and support are best transmitted. Above all - Little mentioned in the Bill - marriage has children at its heart (25 Jan 2002, col. 1699).

Now, the Civil Partnership Act, which almost exactly copies the legal provisions available to married couples, can be, indeed, seen as the gay marriage Act in all but name: 'a good deal of the 429 pages of the Act', as Washington and Alexander note, 'consists of provisions which are copied more or less directly from the statutes that regulate married heterosexual family life (Washington & Alexander, 2005). Yet, there are discernible difference between marriage and Civil Partnership, which, according to the supporters

of the Civil Partnership Act, make the concept of same-sex marriage contradictory in terms. This difference is reflected in the fact that, in contrast to marriage, there is 'no mention of sex in the Civil Partnership' (Barker, 2006: 241).

The heterosexual family founded on marriage is what Fineman calls 'the sexual family': the sexual connection between a man and woman, which is (potentially) linked to procreation, is an essential element of the couple relationship called marriage (Fineman, 1995: 145). This is paralleled in law. In Britain, marriage involves legally established expectations of sexual activity and sexual exclusivity between a groom/husband and a bride/wife. Section 12 (a) and (b) of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, for example, states that a marriage which has not been consummated due to the incapacity of either spouse or to the wilful refusal of one to consummate it is grounds to nullify the marriage. Sexual exclusivity is also made essential to marriage: amongst the five matrimonial offences listed as grounds for divorce, adultery is placed first (Section 1 (2)(a)).

By contrast, there is no requirement of consummation for the validity of civil partnership. Nor is adultery a ground for dissolution. According to The Women and Equality Unit publication, *Responses to Civil Partnership*, adultery or consummation only 'has a specific meaning within the context of heterosexual relationships', and it is therefore, not 'desirable to read this across to same-sex civil partnerships' (Women & Equality Unit, 2003b: 36-7).

Interestingly, the absence of these two concepts, for the supporters of the Civil Partnership Act, are precisely what make civil partnerships as something 'distinct', 'separate from' and 'not related to marriage' (HL, 17 Nov 2004, col. 1464). For example, when Lord Tebbit, during the debates on the Civil Partnership Bill, demanded a clear explanation from Baroness Scotland of Asthal for the difference



between civil partnerships and civil marriage, she states:

[O]ne of the major differences is, of course, consummation. For a marriage to be valid, it has to be consummated by one man and one woman...There is no provision for consummation in the Civil Partnership Bill. We do not look at the nature of the sexual relationship that enters into the civil partnership. It is totally different in nature (HL 17 November 2004, col. 1479)

A similar point is made in relation to adultery. Baroness Scotland, in another House of Lords debate on the Civil Partnership Bill, argues:

It is right to say that the Bill is silent on the nature of the sexual relationship that exists between the couple, save to require that they must be of the same sex. We have not replicated in the Bill the grounds of adultery...There is no adultery in it' (HL 10 May 2004, col. GC19).

There is an important thing to note hear. As Barker argues, the fact that adultery and non-consummation are omitted as grounds for dissolution of civil partnerships does not mean that the Bill, therefore, gives recognition to non-monogamous and non-sexual relationships; for the Bill includes the concept of 'unreasonable behaviour' under which such matters could be dealt with (See Barker 2006). The government, in response to the consultation prior to the Civil Partnership Act, granted that: 'The absence of any sexual activity within a relationship might be evidence of unreasonable behaviour leading to the irretrievable breakdown of a civil partnership, if brought about by the conduct of one of the parties' (Women and Equality Unit, 2003b: 37). A similar statement is made in relation to the matter of sexual infidelity. The conduct of a civil partner who is 'sexually unfaithful' could be included under the unreasonable behaviour ground for dissolution (ibid.: 36).

However, what constitutes an un/reasonable behaviour here is still open to parties who enter civil partnership and would, therefore,

'have the capacity to tell of their reasonable expectation of what that relationship would entail' (HL, 10 May 2004, col. GC 19). As it is also made clear by the government's consultation document, whether 'sexual infidelity' or 'the absence of any sexual activity' amounted to unreasonable behaviour upon which dissolution proceedings could be grounded would be 'a matter for individual dissolution proceedings' (Women & Equality Unit, 2003b: 36).

From this point of view, it is clear that neither sexual exclusivity nor sexual activity are, in legal terms, essential in the creation of a civil partnership under the Bill. And this, according to the supporters of the Bill, should not be regarded as a negative gap between marriage and the civil partnership, but as reflecting what civil partnership is fundamentally about. As Baroness Scotland of Asthal argues:

The Bill is not about the sexual content of the marriage; it is about the quality of the relationship of two people of the same gender who enter a registered partnership. A clear distinction is made between a marriage and the estate that we are now offering to same-sex couples by way of registration. They are different. We have tried to make that absolutely clear. Civil partnership is not marriage, but it is a recognition of a relationship which has value (HL 10 May 2004, col. GC19).

Yet, it is precisely at this point we come to the question being raised by those who denounce the Civil Partnership Bill as a discriminatory Bill. The extent to which the Civil Partnership Bill is not about 'the sexual content of the marriage' but about 'the quality' of the relationship that has family value, the exclusion from the Bill family members (such as siblings or other close relations) – who 'do' family but 'cannot marry', and therefore face similar problems as same-sex couples – is discriminatory. It is to these stories I shall now turn.



## *7.7 Stories of families II*

If the need for the Civil Partnership Bill, as Baroness Scotland of Asthal argues, derives from the fact that same-sex couples who 'do' family are unable to marry, and therefore experience the specific problems, such as being dispossessed of a family home because of inheritance tax, the Conservative peer, Baroness O'Cathain, is certain that the Civil partnership Bill should be extended to those birth family members who also 'cannot marry' and face similar problems as same-sex couples do (HL, 24 Jun 2004, col. 1358; HL, 18 November 2004, col. 1455). As Baroness O'Cathain argues:

Ministers have argued that same-sex couples in long-term relationships...were discriminated against in law and suffered serious hardship. However, the cases ...applying to same-sex couples also apply for the most part to family members who live together. Their position in terms of inheritance tax, joint assessment for income-related benefit and tenancy succession rights is essentially the same as for single-sex couples. The Bill provides legal remedy for same-sex couples, but not family members. A son caring for his widowed father who has Alzheimer's disease has to pay tax on his inheritance, despite the fact that he has given up his job to care for his father and could well be regarded as unemployable as a result. That could mean being forced to sell the family house to pay the tax. Most of us will know of family members who share a house on a long-term basis – sons or daughters who live with their elderly parents, providing care and companionship; sisters who move in together after they are widowed and live out their old age together; nieces and nephews who give up well paid jobs to move in with aunts or uncles, to nurse them in long-term illnesses; and so on (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1364).

Indeed, many politicians, during the debates on the Civil Partnership Bill, told, and were told, stories of birth family members – siblings and family carers – who had supported each other, shared their home together, and shown sacrificial love and commitment; and yet, as they were unable to marry, had to experience the similar hardship and pain as same-sex couples (24 Jun 2004, col. 1366). Consider, for example, the following three



stories told during the debates:

I know of a case in your Lordships' House, for example, involving siblings. For many years a Peer had lived happily with his brother and sister, but on the death of his brother, he and his sister were obliged to sell the family home, which they did not want to do, and move into other accommodation which was not as satisfactory. This is a problem that should concern us (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1373).

I have one [letter] here. The original was sent by a lady whose name and address I shall not reveal to the House, as she is an elderly spinster who wants to remain anonymous. The letter states: 'I live with my single brother and have done so since my mother died in...1983. He had lived with her all his life. I retired from work to look after her as she was 85 and had cancer. She died within...moths of my leaving. Stephen – that is [my] brother – really needed me to run the home...When my mother died I felt I should continue to live with him. I am now 79 and Stephen is 75.' That is a real case involving real people suffering real injustice [...] 'Stephen' and the elderly spinster will not be able to pass their advantage down the generations, so inheritance tax will be paid pretty soon for that 75-year-old man and 79-year-old woman (HC, 9 November 2004, col. 728-9).

I recently received a letter from a constituent in Killyleagh in County Down. That lady looked after a handicapped child for 14 years. She then went back to work. She then had to look after her mother for another 16 years. She then reached pension age and instead of receiving a pension of £77.45 a week, she was reduced to £61.47 per week because she had failed to apply for attendance allowance while she cared for her handicapped child. She did so at her own time and expense; she applied for no grants or allowances. She was then discriminated against when she reached pension age. Under the Bill, a person in a same-sex partnership would not be discriminated against. Ordinary people will lose out under the Bill [the Civil Partnership Bill] if enacted. More than 90 per cent of the people of the United Kingdom will be discriminated against if the Bill becomes law (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1377-8).

These are some of those stories told by politicians who denounced the Civil Partnership Bill as discriminatory. These are stories of the 'people' who, according to Lord Tebbit, 'have no opportunity to marry, whose commitment to each other is at least as



great as that of any who would qualify under the Bill as drafted, and who would suffer similar disadvantages, hurt and discrimination as if they were not related in any way' (HL, 10 May 2004, col. GC34).

Yet, their difficult circumstances of 'doing' family are not addressed in the Civil Partnership Bill. In calling the Civil Partnership Bill as a 'cruel Bill' and 'an unfair discriminatory Bill', Lord Tebbit argues:

[T]he central argument of this Bill is that same-sex couples would be prohibited entering into marriage so there should be something for them. The Bill provides it. What about those who are still prohibited; for example, a mother and a daughter? Why should they not be able to register a partnership in order that they may benefit from the same tax concessions as would be granted in this case? There is no way in which the mother and daughter can achieve those advantages. Nor can brothers, nor sisters, nor father and son. Those are all expressly excluded. They are all brushed aside. They are a difference that does not matter, because the Bill remedies one inequality. By so doing, it creates an another enormous inequality (HL, 10 May 2004, col. 13GC).

For many, the Civil Partnership Bill, described as a discriminatory Bill, undermines 'the traditional family as we know it' to the extent that: it 'ignores traditional family relationships in the way it distributes benefits' (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1371); and privileges 'chosen families' over (and against) 'committed birth families' (HL, 24 June 2004, 1378). What is particularly interesting here is the way in which politicians, by telling the fact that family members – siblings and carers – are 'just like' same-sex couples who deserve our public recognition, use same kinds of descriptions employed to describe (married-like) same-sex couples (see Section 7.4.3.). Baroness Wilcox, for examples states:

Unmarried siblings who share a long commitment to each other and share the home together for many long years – dare I say, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health? They cannot marry. They are bound by love and fate not to be able to do so. No society would ever allow that they should. But they are surely just as capable of making and practising the same vow as others who wish to become civil partners (HL, 12 May 2004,



col. GC 117).

In Section 7.4, I discussed ways in which the ‘family practice’ rather than the formal status of relationship has been emphasised as the defining feature of what constitutes the valid (marriage-like) couple/family relationships. It is, as I argued earlier, a particular way of ‘doing’ family – ‘doing’ here defined in terms of caring, sharing, cohabiting, loving and fulfilling mutual responsibilities – through which both boundaries and implications of being in families are drawn in the parliament. The purpose of the Civil Partnership Bill, as it is explained, is to give (married-like) same-sex couples who ‘do’ family (but are unable to marry) legal rights and entitlements parallel to those given to married couples. Just and equal treatment for same-sex relationships, it is argued, would resolve many difficult issues same-sex couples face in everyday life, which many married couples take for granted.

Those who denounce the Civil Partnership Bill as a discriminatory Bill, however, argue that the kinds of ‘doing family’, which supporters of the Civil Partnership Bill find in same-sex relationships, is commonplace in many interdependent, committed (birth) family relationships. If the legal status of the same-sex relationship, recognised by the Civil Partnership Bill, is not marriage, the exclusion of (birth) family members from the Bill is not justifiable. This, in turn, leads to another related argument, that is: should civil partnership be available to (birth) family members and close relatives, ‘we must remove its similarities with marriage’ (HL, 10 May 2004, col. GC54). For example, there is no ‘reason for the Bill to imitate the civil marriage ceremony’ as it is, Baroness O’Cathain argues, obvious that ‘two sisters would feel uncomfortable going through a kind of marriage ceremony in order to get legal recognition for their co-dependent relationship’ (Ibid.).



By contrast, if the Civil Partnership Bill is the same-sex 'marriage' Bill (in all but name), then the Bill, they argue, undermines the institution of marriage: 'marriage is no longer unique' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 203). The unique place of marriage in the law derives from what it uniquely 'does': it uniquely involves the procreation and the raising of the children within the family, and is, as such, the foundational building block of society. Not only does the Civil Partnership Bill, if it is the same-sex marriage Bill, strikes at this most basic aspect of what marriage 'is' and 'does', it also takes away from marriage its unique status as a protected institution in British society.

Here, the heart of the argument is that: what married couples 'do' is what same-sex couples 'do not' (or 'cannot'); and what marriage 'does' is the opposite of what civil partnership 'does'. The 'doing' family within marriage, according to those who oppose the Bill, involves more than what same-sex couples 'do': it involves 'natural' sexual practices between one man and one woman, closely linked, in turn, to the creation of natural home for nation's children. By contrast, the Civil Partnership Bill, Lord Maginnis of Drumglass argues, 'deals with couples who want to indulge...in a relationship which most likely involves unnatural sexual practices' (HL, 24 June 2004, col. 1371). The Bill, by sending out the message that the homo-'sexual' and hetero-'sexual' couple relationships are equally valid, devalues marriage, and 'will encourage the proliferation of homosexuality' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 217).

What is of particular interest here is the ways in which such arguments are challenged (or not challenged) by the supporters of the Civil Partnership Bill. Generally speaking, those who supported the Civil Partnership Bill did *not* challenge the normative definition of 'sex' linked to heterosexuality and marriage practices. Nor was there any challenge to the way marriage is uniquely valued in

society. Throughout the debates, supporters of the Civil Partnership Act repeatedly affirmed that marriage is ‘the surest foundation for raising children’ in society, and we, therefore, ‘should not do anything to undermine the institution of marriage’ (HC, 9 November 2004, col. 761). From here, they, nevertheless, went to great lengths to argue that the Civil Partnership Bill was not a gay marriage Bill, and would not, therefore, undermine the institution of marriage. The point is discussed in more detail in the next section.

### *7.8 Having it both ways?*

Those who support the Civil Partnership Act, as I show in section 7.6, were careful to insist that the legislation was not about recognising lesbian and gay ‘sex’, and the absence of sex in the Civil Partnership Act was what makes civil partnership different from and ‘not related to’ marriage (HL, 17 November 2004, col. 1464). According to Barker, ‘the absence of sex’ in the Civil Partnership Bill could, as it is often argued, be said to indicate ‘a shift from recognition of relationships’ based on their similarity to a ‘conjugal’, sexual relationship, ‘towards much more functional criteria and pragmatic concerns for legally recognising relationships’ (Barker, 2006: 244). Yet, this interpretation of the Act, as Barker himself rightly notes, is clearly not unproblematic.

Bounded by same rights and responsibilities that marriage has today, a registered civil partnership is intended to be ‘permanent’ as well as ‘exclusive’ (Women and Equality Unit, 2003: 19). Civil partnerships could be ended only by a formal, court-based process, and this is felt to be ‘in keeping with the serious nature of the responsibilities that civil partners have towards each other’ (HL, 22 April, 2004, col. 390). Couples entering into a civil partnership will be able to hold a ceremony to celebrate: it was often this symbolic



significance of the civil partnership, rather than the advantages civil partnerships may bring to those who enter partnerships, that are emphasised as the main cause behind the Bill. As Lord Alli, the youngest and first openly gay peer in parliament, reveals his own personal interest in the Civil Partnership Act as follows:

I have been with my partner for 22 years. In fact, next month we celebrate 23 years together. This legislation [the Civil Partnership Act] might allow us to benefit from what straight couples up and down the country can do. We can if we wish register our union, not because of the fiscal benefits, important as they may be, and not only because of the protections that we wish to give each other, but because we want our partnership recognised by the state and elevated above friendships or close acquaintances. We would do it because we loved each other and we wanted...a lifelong relationship. The Bill is about that, recognising the special different status of committed, loving same-sex relationships and giving them legal protection on that basis (HL 22 April 2004, col. 409).

If the Civil Partnership Bill, as Baroness Scotland of Asthal argues, is 'not about the sexual content of the marriage...[but] about the quality of the relationship of two people of the same gender who enter a registered partnership' (HL 10 May 2004, col. GC19), this 'quality' of the relationship, intended to be 'exclusive', 'intimate', 'permanent', 'loving', 'committed' and 'above friendships', is certainly analogous to a conjugal relationship – the relationship that is seen to have sexual elements at its heart.

Throughout the debates on the Civil Partnership Act, we, indeed, find an assumption, which was explicitly and implicitly made by those who supported the Bill, that is: civil partnerships are same-sex/'sexual' relationships that will be entered into by those who are 'sexually oriented towards the same-sex' (Stychin, 2005: 554; HL 22 April. 2004, col. 396). People who are gay, according to Duncan, 'are never going to enter into a heterosexual marriage' (HC 12 October 2004, col. 203). And this is because, 'the sexual orientation towards



the same sex' is what 'people are born with': it, in other words, 'cannot be changed' (HL, 22 April. 2004, col. 395). When the supporters of the Civil Partnership Act spoke of the need for civil partnership, a separate but a parallel institution to marriage, they were precisely relying on this logic of sexual difference. As Duncan argues:

They [Civil partnership and marriage] are separate institutions for different groups of people. Gay men and lesbians are different precisely because of who they love, so the formal recognition of that love will itself create differences. One can therefore argue strongly that the Bill does not undermine or compete with marriage. After all, we are not exactly fishing in the same pool (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 184)

The category of the same-sex partnership, sexually essentialised in this way, provided an important means to justify the need for the Bill: If same-sex/'sexual' relationship is 'simply a fact of life' that we have to come to terms with, we must certainly be 'more in favour of stable homosexual relationships than those that are not'. (see HC, 12 October 2004, col. 217; HC 12 October 2004, col. 231; HL 22 April 2004, col. 427; HL 22 April 2004, col. 398; HC, 12 October, col. 217). Or, it was said that 'we cannot have both ways' (HC, 9 November 2004, col. 756). We cannot both 'complain' that gay and lesbian partnerships are inherently unstable, promiscuous, and transitory, and yet, 'when the opportunity for civil registration comes along – giving people the chance to declare their commitment, with the welter of rights and responsibilities that flow from that commitment – say that those people should not have that right to declare their commitment' (HC, 9 November 2004, col. 756). Rather than facing this dilemma, it is argued that we need to support the Government's attempt 'to encourage long-term stable relationships as being more in the interests of society as a whole than a culture of transient or promiscuous relationships' (HL, 22 April 2004, col. 398). After all, the aim of the Bill, it was argued, is not to undermine



marriage, but is about (and should be about) 'promoting' fully committed, stable same-sex relationships, as it is 'preferable':

It is preferable for a homosexual lifestyle to be lived within the context of a single committed relationship and recognised as such. This is not 'marriage', nor do I think it claims to be. God gave us that wonderful sacrament as the building-block for society, ordained for the procreation of children and nurturing them; as a remedy against sin; and for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have in the other, both in prosperity and in adversity. However, for the safety and harmony of society, I believe that some legal protection should be sought to support those loving monogamous relationships and to protect them better in age and sickness and in death (HL, 25 January 2002, col. 1699).

From what has been discussed so far, it becomes clear that civil partnerships are 'about' gay and lesbian 'sexual' relationships. Yet it is, at the same time, is 'not about' gay and lesbian sexual relationships. Or to put it another way, it is 'not about' 'recognising' gay and lesbian 'sex' as a valid family practice; it is about recognising and promoting long-term, monogamous, and 'de-sexualised' relationships as preferable/recognisable/valid same-sex relationships.

The 'doing sex' defined as a valid family practice is that of heterosexual married couples – heterosexual intercourse. In the case of same-sex couples relationships, 'doing sex' should be made irrelevant, invisible and unrecognisable in order for same-sex couples to appear/recognisable as normal couples who 'do family'. This is why stories of 'just-like-married' same-sex couples, which I analysed in Section 7.4, are entirely silent on gay and lesbian 'sex' (or 'no sex'). Here, gay/lesbian couples are just like (heterosexual) 'us' insofar as 'they' are de-sexualised – insofar as 'they' are capable of living the same way as 'we' do family (and yet, fail to live the same way 'we' do 'family/sex')(DTI, 2004). And this particular way in which gay/lesbian couples become the real and normal couples

deserving our recognition explains why it invites stories about family members who will be allegedly be disadvantaged by the Civil Partnership Act.

Indeed, it is this unstoried gay/lesbian sex which allowed for stories of gay/lesbian relationships to be heard in the parliament as stories of 'us'. We are told as having been on 'a long journey' – a journey from 'beliefs and habits' that were 'hostile to gay relationships' to an approach that recognises 'the validity of the wish of our friends and our friends' children who happen to be gay to enshrine their loving and faithful in law' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 246). But this journey is marked by a consistent disavowal of gay/lesbian sex: if, in the past, stories gay/lesbian sex were told as stories of sexual perversion and seduction, they are only becoming untellable/unspeakable to the extent that the law now enshrines 'the' sex as 'heterosex' ('the only heterosex'), so nonheterosexual sex disappears (Brook, 2000: 150). We are told that we are 'grown up' (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 192). And the Civil Partnership Act is said to be one of the 'final steps' of 'our' journey – the journey towards tolerant, equal, just, modern British society (HC, 12 October 2004, col. 246). Yet, 'we' must have forgotten to remember that the end of 'our' journey is not really the end of the journey. As 'our' 'told' stories is always faced with the challenge of 'untold' stories of the other, the end of our journey is inseparably bound up with the beginning of the journey of the other. Where the journey ends is still an unsettled question.



## Conclusion

I am a 'foreigner', a person deemed to be other than a British citizen. My foreignness is articulated most explicitly in U.K. immigration law, but also subtly in my daily life through differences I find in language, thinking, gestures, emotional expressions, and even in tastes of food. Categorised as a foreigner, I am an outsider and an alien who does not have any legitimate relation to this society. For my interrupted eight years of staying in Britain as an overseas student, I have constantly struggled with patterns of thought, emotion and behaviour I have found difficult to understand, experiencing a radical separateness in relation to others. Since I started research on issues around 'sexual citizenship' in Britain, I have, therefore, constantly asked myself a question: how can I, as a foreigner, write about British sexual citizenship – about their experience as 'sexual citizens?'

In his *The Value of Narrativity*, Hayden White argues that story is 'a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted' (White, 1980: 6). And to the extent that story functions

as a metacode, 'a panglobal fact of culture', it provides a particular solution for the issue of translatability between cultures, the problem of knowing/telling the world/lives of others.

My experience of listening to/reading western sexual stories, nevertheless, problematises and complicates the very notion of translatability. While Western sexual stories offered me the capacity to imagine myself in the place of others, stories I heard and read by no means provided a simple solution for the problem of knowing/telling the world/lives of others. Rather the space opened up to the experience of otherness, the space I am invited to visit through stories is marked by contradictions. And part of the reason is because storytelling is never neutral, but is intrinsically political.

My research was initially focused on personal stories people tell about their experiences of belonging/exclusion as gays and lesbians in Britain. With the passing of the Civil Partnership Bill in 2004, I was, in particular, interested in hearing stories of what this civil partnership might mean (or not mean) for them and for their intimate/couple/family relationships.

I interviewed 14 lesbian women in late 2004 and early 2005. In a number of different ways, the people whom I interviewed drew and crossed the boundaries between what they identified as our 'commonness' and 'difference'. For some women, the fact that I was a lesbian was important, and our 'commonness', they said, clearly affected their decision to take part in my research. Others, especially older lesbians, very much identified the story I told them – being a 'lesbian' without a name in South Korea – with their own experiences in the past in Britain, and were willing to talk about their stories by comparing and contrasting theirs with mine. In many cases, they tried to both generalise and contextualise their stories as much as possible, so as to help me to understand the country-specific (and



personal-specific) context of their experiences, which could be very different from mine, and they often asked me questions about my own personal views on their stories – whether theirs are very much different from or similar to stories I heard in South Korea. Stories were, therefore, often told by articulating experiences that are shared by others. Yet, they, at the same time, made it clear that their personal stories were just part of many ‘different’ stories I could hear in Britain, and I should not, therefore, over-generalise their stories as ‘the’ lesbian story in Britain. They were willing to tell other ‘different’ women’s stories they heard or knew as much as their own, and although the boundaries drawn between their stories and other women’s stories they deemed ‘different’ were often crossed, acknowledging that other ‘different’ stories exist and were often be ‘excluded’ were an important parts of the story telling/listening during the interview.

It was when I was preparing for a conference paper on Lesbian Citizenship in Britain that I first read parliamentary debates on the Civil Partnership Act. I read through the debates in early 2005. Admittedly, I was surprised to find that many personal stories of same-sex experiences, extensively told and heard in the debates, were justly recognised as ‘our’ stories. Yet, stories were proliferating in particular ways. Many ‘personal’ stories were repeated stories of ‘one’ particular story – many stories were reducible to the ‘one’ story. And this ‘one’ story, presented as evidence for a political claim, was told as if it could represent all other stories. But in this ‘one Story’ (or ‘all’ stories), I found that many ‘stories’ I heard during the interview remained ‘private’ stories, unable to negotiate the difference between ‘our’ stories and ‘my’ experience. ‘Stories’ seemed to have been ‘lost’ in their translation to become the ‘Story’.

With this experience of reading the parliamentary debates in 2005, I decided to include parliamentary stories as part of my

research. I originally intended to compare and contrast stories I was told during the interviews and stories I read from the debates. I was interested in analysing the ways in which personal stories I was told during the interviews were un/told during the debates, and thus name and reveal 'the loss'. Yet, as the analysis of parliamentary stories has subsequently become my main focus of analysis, I decided not to do so: I decided to deal with this 'loss' in a rather different way.

My thesis deals with the 'conditions' and 'context' upon which this loss has taken place in the political sphere, in parliament; and the ways in which we can both theorise and analyse the loss by examining political storytelling practices themselves.

In Chapter 4, for example, I argued that there are particular contextual and institutional rules that govern storytelling in parliament, which both limit and enable ways in which personal stories can be told and heard. Stories in parliament, I argued, are mostly told to produce empirical evidence – to produce irrefutable 'facts' of experience – and have, therefore, a tendency to universalise 'the' experience of one instead exploring or validating differences within the experience or between experiences.

Such institutional features of storytelling in parliament are then analysed in terms of three different social/historical contexts in which sexual stories enter the parliamentary debates. In Chapter 5, I discussed ways in which the context of silence and uncertainty, closely associated with the law that criminalised (male) homosexual acts during 1960s, placed limits on who could tell personal experiential stories of/about the homosexual/homosexuality and how, producing particular versions of the 'truth' regarding the homosexual, the homosexual divided into the 'homosexual-criminal'



and the 'heterosexual-victim'.

Stories about homosexuals told during the debates on the Sexual Offences Act in the 1960s were mostly told, as I have shown in Chapter 5, by heterosexual MPs who either had accidentally met 'them' in the past, or had to work on the problem of homosexuality. By contrast, in chapter 6 and 7, I discussed ways in which 'personal stories of homosexual experience' have gradually (and increasingly) entered the political debates, and been represented as personal 'true' stories of experiences (Chapter 6) and 'our' stories in the parliament (Chapter 7).

The focus of my analysis here was on the ways in which they entered the debates as 'the evidence of experience'. In the context whereby the very notion of 'promotion' of homosexuality haunted the political debates on Section 28 during the late 1980s, I found problematic ways in which personal stories of homosexual experience had to enter the debates, offering counter-evidence to the effect that homosexuality can 'never' be promoted (Chapter 6). In the face of an accusation that the recognition of same-sex couple relationships in the form of civil partnerships could 'undermine' or 'weaken' marriage, we are told stories of same-sex couples who are simply 'just-like' married couples. Stories presented as uncontested evidence as such in parliament then serve to foreclose the possibility of telling stories otherwise: practically no stories that countered the promotion of 'heterosexuality' or 'marriage' were told, nor could they be heard.

Here, in analyzing stories recounted in the parliamentary debates on same-sex sexualities, I attempted to show both the problematic aspects and the effects of political storytelling involved in the making of sexual citizenship in Britain. One of the underlying issues at stake in the relationship between storytelling and sexual

citizenship is that: if personal storytelling is significant in the process of recognition of injustice and suffering of sexual minorities, what is recognized is dependent on where stories are told and listened to, and how stories travel between different locations of their re/production. And this, I suggest, requires us to rethink more critically the thesis of 'stories of intimate/sexual citizenship' currently mobilized in Britain, which I discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, I explored the ways in which contemporary academic discussions around 'stories of sexual/intimate citizenship' have been organized, in part, as an attempt to configure sexual/intimate citizenship beyond the dilemmas facing postmodern and counter storytelling perspectives. As I reviewed in Chapter 2, both postmodern and marginal approaches to stories celebrate 'narrative's turn' in social sciences: stories are advocated either as authentic voices of experience on the part of the marginal; or as transgressive voices that challenge any privileged claims to foundational/universal truth (see Chapter 2). In their different ways, postmodern and marginal storytelling perspectives make stories significant in the struggle against injustice; but they do so by failing to recognise stories as intersubjective communicative 'actions' (Plummer, 1995: 20).

Storytelling, as Plummer rightly argues, is not simply a matter of representation: stories are not simply about experiential voices/representations of the margins or 'transgressive' critical practices that resist any consensual representations of the real. Rather, stories, as a mode of communication, involve actively intervening in and constructing shared, intersubjective meanings of our lives, which, according to Plummer, makes an 'inclusive' project of intimate/sexual citizenship possible (see Chapter 3). Let me elaborate this point in more detail. The point in discussion is closely linked to the question it asks, that is: 'what' does a story do? Or, to



put the question another way, 'what' do we do with stories?

What does a story do? A story, as I discussed in Chapter 4, links a series of events (happenings) in a specific order – with a beginning, middle, and end (see Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997: xvi). A particular ways in which the series of events are recounted is called emplotment (see Chapter 4). Ricoeur conceptualizes 'emplotment' as 'the synthesis of the heterogeneous', in which various heterogeneous elements (such as agents, actions, occurrences and moments) scattered in time and space are composed together to 'redescribe' reality (Kearney, 1998: 242). Here, emplotment is what makes the events meaningful. Without emplotment, Francesca Polletta argues, 'events would be mere occurrences, discontinuous and separate moments, rather than episodes in an unfolding story' (Polletta, 1998: 421). Through emplotment, a series of events are selected, connected in time and through causality, and organized into a relational whole that attributes causal/moral significance to events and their heterogeneous elements. And in this way, a story, rather than a mere representations of events, does 'convey the meaning of events': it is, in other words, an interpretative, moral construct (Davis, 2002: 12).

Moreover, stories are 'joint' communicative constructs. Storytelling acts involve, as I discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, 'someone telling someone else that something happened' – it entails inter-subjective 'joint actions' that involve both the storyteller and audiences/readers (see Ken Plummer, 1995: 20). Stories, in other words, are shared social activities in which tellers and listeners/readers constitute a significant feature of the narrative situation: my story, in order to convey meanings for my experience, needs to communicate with stories of others; and by inviting audiences/readers of my story to consider particular experiential contexts

through emotional and imaginative involvements, it, in turn, creates experiences for others (see Chapter 2).

Now, in calling for a politics of intimate/sexual citizenship that involves this intersubjective process of story-telling/listening, Plummer argues that stories of intimate citizenship is the ‘most appropriate model of communication when it comes to the clarification of ethics and moralities and the settling of conflicts’ (Plummer, 2003: 101). This is because the kinds of questions we are now facing in relation to intimate issues are not abstract philosophical questions, but the common questions of ‘living everyday life’ (Plummer, 2001: 248). From the stories people tell about their intimate lives, we can learn how people, in their daily lives, confront moral issues, deal with them, and make choices and decisions. Further, stories that reveal differently situated everyday moralities may help us to understand ethics in terms of specific experiential context; to recognize pluralistic forms of life; to imagine new ways of forming intimacies; and to, therefore, develop a new public language of rights and responsibilities in relation to social intimacies (see Chapter 3 and 4).

I am sympathetic with this progressive ideal of ‘stories of intimate/sexual citizenship’ – the ideal that sees sexual citizenship as being shaped by and through the stories people tell about their sexual/intimate experiences, needs and rights. Yet, seeing stories and storytelling as intersubjective activities that involves ‘someone telling someone else that something happened’ also means that we need to take ‘questions of power’ associated with storytelling practices seriously (Benett and Royale, 1995: 59).

In chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which Plummer, by asking the question ‘when’, addresses the relationship that stories have with issues of power. Stories, according to Plummer ‘have their



times': stories whose time has come are those that have entered the 'culture of public problems' – 'the political spectacle' – and those that have, therefore, successfully transformed matters of the personal into the public, the political (Plummer, 1995: 129). Yet, as I argued throughout this thesis, the way power relations interplay with stories – the ways in which private narratives of 'I' become integrated into public narratives of 'We' – does not only involve the question of 'when', but also the question of 'where' and 'how'. In other words, in addition to the question of 'what' and 'when', we need to address the question: where are stories, as 'our' stories, being told and listened to and how do recognized 'our' stories 'here' relate to 'their' unrecognized stories told 'there' (or to the production of 'their' stories)?

Considering the question of where and how leads us to think about stories' circulation process, locating storytelling within interactive personal/social/institutional networks and power relations whereby stories are part of the circulating stories, flowing from (or flowing into) other contexts and levels with important 'political effects'. And this returns my attention to many personal stories I heard during the interviews – the often complex ways in which they bridged and challenged 'I' and 'we', and the 'loss' that they revealed and countered against 'circulating' public narratives about 'us' (or 'them') through storytelling. In this thesis, by putting the question of 'where' into the analysis of storytelling practices, I made a small contribution to the analysis of personal stories around the intimate/sexual and their relationship to the public narratives of 'we'; but I have focused exclusively upon stories told within one specific institutional contexts of retelling, parliament. There, I find, is much more to be done. Perhaps future research might focus on the very circulation process of sexual citizenship stories by examining the process of dis/connections among stories told in

various levels and contexts. It might give equal treatment to personal stories told within different personal/community networks; to the way in which the stories of 'we' were negotiated on the basis of individual experience at a personal/community level; and compare and contrast with personal stories told by their counterparts in the official public sphere, the parliament. At least, this is my intention after this thesis.



# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for in the citations of Parliamentary Debates.

**HC** = United Kingdom Parliamentary Debates ('Hansard'), House of Commons.

**HL** = United Kingdom Parliamentary Debates ('Hansard'), House of Lords.

**Col** = Column

**Citations are by dates and column numbers.**

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