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An international comparative study of attitudes towards socio-economic inequality

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

How teachers think about inequality in terms of what they aspire to and how they defend their views is surprisingly similar in the three study countries, Kenya, Mexico and the UK, despite their different positions in the world economic order. I attribute this to the near global hegemony of neoliberal logics concerning what is seen as being desirable and how things work. What differ are the terms in which inequality is defined and the form that critiques of inequality take. In particular, questions of respect and inferiority / superiority are verbalised in the middle and poorer countries and not in the richer country. The most important message to come from this work is that in thinking about inequality at the world level, it is important to talk about inequality with people from different points in the world, rather than concerning ourselves mainly with what the rich think of the poor or what the poor think of the poor. Through better understanding the experiences and constructions of world inequality according to people differentially positioned within this inequality, we can more fruitfully learn about the nature of what these findings, and those of many others, illustrate to be a very damaging situation. These findings suggest that the energy for change is least likely to come from richer countries as the more powerful critiques often stem from people living where they see and experience more challenging aspects of world inequality.

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This thesis contributes a little to what has come before. We do not achieve things alone but working with other people and sharing ideas, this point has been made by others (Gandhi, 2005; Dorling, 2010b). As even what is sole authored is collaborative, I am sincerely grateful to others for their support. Of course this thesis is not only made better thanks to them, but also made possible. Primarily, my PhD supervisors Danny Dorling and Peter Jackson have been encouraging, supportive and critical in good measure. One participant exclaimed: “God, you must be the luckiest student on earth to have those two.”

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Glossary

AIDS. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Cartogram. A map in which area is used to represent data, bigger territories represent more of the mapped variable. See: www.worldmapper.org

Discourse. The way of representing something with words or images, recognising the partial nature of these representations as they silence some aspects and highlight others, and framing processes, events or other things in ways which influence understandings of these.

Dfid. United Kingdom government Department for International Development; established in 1997 to replace the Overseas Development Administration which had been part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. See: www.dfid.gov.uk

ESRC. Economic and Social Research Council of the UK Government; this research was largely funded by the ESRC. See: www.esrc.ac.uk

HIV. Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

IMF. International Monetary Fund; began in 1945 after being thought up at the Bretton Woods meeting about international economic co-operation in 1944. See: www.imf.org

Inequality. An uneven distribution of something. Göran Therborn identified three types of inequality: (i) *vital inequality* which is differences in life expectancy, (ii) *existential inequality* which is differences in the respect and recognition that people are treated with, and (iii) *resource and material inequality* (Therborn, 2009, p.109-110). There is often overlap between these types of inequality: those with fewer material resources often also receive less respect and live shorter lives. The type of inequality that is most frequently measured is inequality of incomes. For more discussion see section 1.3

LEDC. Less economically developed country.

MDGs. Millennium Development Goals; eight goals to end poverty, create global partnership, and to improve health, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. The MDGs were established in 2000 with the aim of meeting them by 2015. See: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

MEDC. More economically developed country.

NAFTA. North American Free Trade Agreement; between Canada, the United States and Mexico, to eliminate barriers to trade between these countries. NAFTA came into effect in 1994. See: www.naftanow.org

PPP. Purchasing power parity. PPP aims to equalize or make comparable the buying power of currencies to indicate how much can be bought in the country in which money is earned. PPP is calculated by pricing comparable baskets of basic goods across countries. For international financial comparisons PPP is a commonly used alternative to exchange rates.

UN. United Nations; founded in 1945 to maintain peace and security between countries, and to improve social progress and human rights. See: www.un.org

US\$. United States dollar.

WHO. World Health Organisation; the part of the United Nations responsible for health, also founded in 1945. See: www.who.int

In quotations

CAPITALISATION. Indicates emphasis and often louder volume.

Italicisation. Shows soft or quiet speech.

(Round brackets). Provides additional information about the quotation.

[Square brackets]. Shows interruption or short comments within longer comment by main speaker.

“In my mind I now put this wretched corner beside our cities: skyscrapers versus mud walls and grass thatch; tarmac highways, international airports and gambling casinos versus cattle-paths and gossip before sunset. Our erstwhile masters had left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre was swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scaggier as one moved away from the centre. There is a story of dwarf-like Gumbas who lived long, long before the Manjiri generation, before the iron age in Kenya, and whose heads were over-huge and so sat precariously on the rest of the body. Whenever a Gumba fell, so goes the legend, he could not lift himself without aid from the outside.”

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1977/2005, p.58

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1. Introduction

Once upon a time a group of children were living a content and idyllic life when an adult showed them they could have more, and they became greedy. They wanted the sun to be constant and there to be no clouds, so the sun was nailed above their island and the clouds were scared off to beyond the horizon. They did not realise that children on the other side of the planet would be living in darkness as the clouds blocked out the moon and starlight. The children on the other side of the planet were cold and hungry; the plants were dying because they had no sun. It was hard to persuade the island children to release the sun and let the clouds drift freely around the planet again. Some thought it would be easier to send food packages and blankets, and keep the sun for themselves (from Magnason, 2003).

The story above highlights the connections between actions and consequences around the planet, our relationality, how individualistic behaviour can worsen the lives of others, and the difficulty of imagining the lives of people in distant places. Socio-economic inequality has similar dimensions, and the ways in which it is interpreted and understood have profound influences on whether inequality is seen as deplorable, necessary, or desirable. The stories we tell ourselves and others about inequality reflect and recreate inequality in terms of rationality and ethics. Socio-economic inequalities, despite being variously narrated, have grave ethical problems as well as being detrimental to societies (Sutcliffe, 2005; Therborn, 2006, p.4; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Stories affect behaviour and politics, which alter the shape of the world.

World inequality is an immense topic, to which many literatures contribute. Inequalities of money, health, freedom to travel, education, and other aspects have distinct spatial distributions (Dorling et al., 2008). The human and social causes and consequences involve the large and at times nebulous issues of neoliberalism, globalisation, international trade and debt, development, colonialism, post-colonialism, and human nature. Trends and patterns splinter into local contexts that are many and varied, which can fragment broad

understandings. Although the magnitude of this topic is daunting, it is pressing because of the detrimental but controllable effects (Pogge, 2008b); it is also fascinating in the possible diversity of interpretations that make sense of something that is so large and multifaceted.

I have distilled these themes to focus specifically on how inequality is understood, represented, justified and challenged in three countries arrayed along an axis of affluence: Kenya, Mexico and the UK. Given the primary focus on *world* inequality, these countries were identified according to their differing positions within international inequality, rather than due to having differing levels of national inequality. Findings from these countries are complemented by an analysis of a 44-country attitude survey, which investigates attitudes to world issues in different countries. The international comparative nature of this research is premised on a broad approach to world inequality, aiming to contribute to understandings of inequality by investigating attitudes and discourses arising from differing positions within world inequality.

Thinking at the world scale, pinned down to several points within the world, avoids isolating countries and cutting across connections. Recent geographical research avoids this by following objects as they move between places, thus highlighting connectivity between apparently distant places (Cook, 2006; Franz and Hassler, 2010). When it comes to people and the discourses they adopt as they construct their realities and struggle to express these, they do so “with points of view, interests, and principles of vision determined by the position they occupy” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.2). Thus investigating some of these different positions within the whole can deepen understanding of that whole. The views expressed in aiming to describe world inequality tell us as much about the position of the speaker as the subject of the conversation, as with the views of the Orient from the Occident¹ (Said, 1978/1995). The interconnections between

¹ For Western Europe and particularly France and Britain (the *Occident*), the *Orient* is one of the most recurring images of the other. The *Orient* refers broadly to the Middle East and Asia. *Orientalism*, the European discourse on

people and economies around the world and their mutually constituting identities, make the planet an appropriate scale at which to study inequality.

The ubiquity and variation of neoliberal thinking and challenges can be addressed by working within and between countries. Whilst some argue that the 'general' features of neoliberalism are neither consistent nor universal (Castree, 2007, p.7), others have stressed the similarities of processes that occur in very different times and places. English paupers of the 1790s have counterparts amongst the Cairo slum dwellers and Bolivian peasants of the 1990s, with similar ethical and economic issues of human needs being posed by all (Watts, 2000, p.138-9). This tension between local realities and the influence of global forces is smoothed by Cindi Katz, who explains this in terms of "a local that is constitutively global but whose engagements with various global imperatives are the material forms and practices of situated knowledge" (Katz, 2001 p.1214). Understanding local perspectives as situated within global imperatives enables researchers to consider the ubiquity of discourses that surround the forces that drive world inequalities and their local forms.

World maps showing variations between countries can help us to conceptualise local variation within global trends. It was through working on a mapping project, *Worldmapper*, that I developed an interest in the way in which people around the world understand the inequalities represented by the maps that we made. These maps were cartograms, where territories are resized to represent the variable of interest: the bigger the territory the more of the mapped variable is found there, see Figure 1. Of further interest is the way that these world cartograms, which may seem intuitive, are read and interpreted around the world.

the *Orient*, contains ideas of European superiority, imperialism and racism. This discourse "has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world." (Said, 1978/1995, p.1-12, quote from p.12).

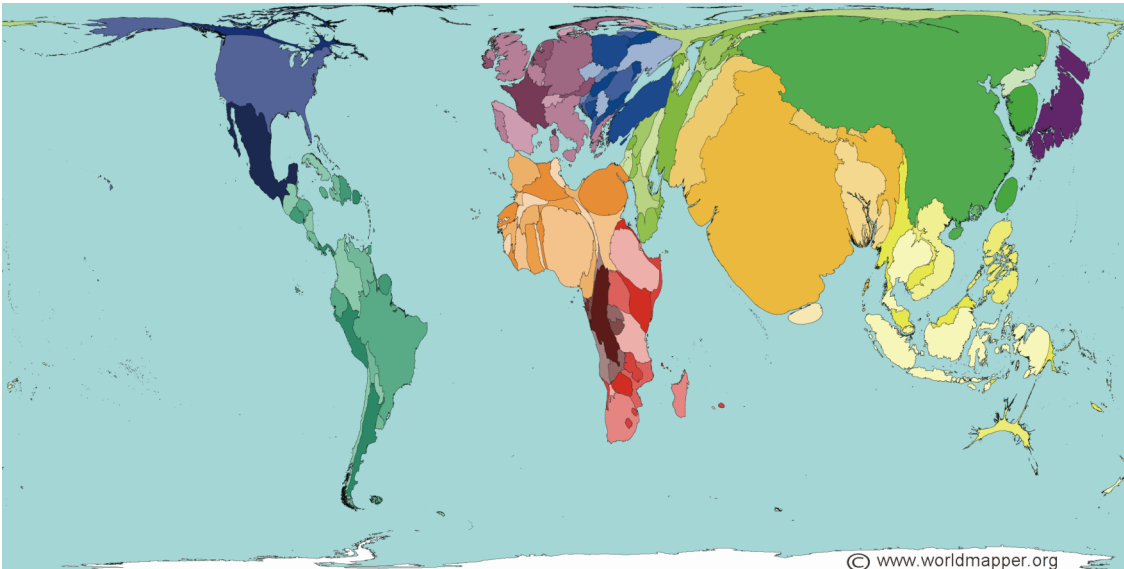


Figure 1: World population cartogram (2002)

Maps of the world can assist us in imagining the world, albeit a world that is divided up into grids of knowledge, and is thus rendered knowable in a particular way (Foucault, 1977/1991). Part of my research addresses the ways in which maps can help us to understand world inequalities, and how they are read from different points within the inequalities represented. This focus moves away from more common interrogations of the silences and partiality of maps as images (Harley, 1992; Monmonier, 1996) to consider more broadly the context in which maps are read, and how they constrain and enable our interactions. Such research into the role of documents is an expanding field (Rapley, 2007/2009, p.89-90). Visual representations have the potential to be radical tools of communication that redefine the world and which share information, and so enhance understandings of the nature and extent of inequality (see Appendix 6 for other world visualisations). However there remains the risk that such representations reify world inequality so that we expect bad things to happen in poorer places because we are bombarded with imagery of that (Sontag, 2003).

Nevertheless, there is clear evidence from many social movements and campaign groups, as well as in the formulations of the Millennium Development Goals, that the extremes of world inequality and the neoliberal forces behind rising inequalities are not universally accepted (e.g. Dembélé, 2007; García, 2007; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). In particular, poverty, a facet of

inequality, has been described as being the world's most ruthless killer (Gordon, 2009, p.109). As Indian economist Jayati Ghosh comments, "We have clearly crossed the limits of what is 'acceptable' inequality in most societies, and future policies will have to reverse this trend ... unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are now deeply entrenched in the richer countries and are aspired to in developing ones." (Ghosh, 2010, no page number). The notion of 'acceptable' inequality is examined in this thesis, as well as what might be considered unacceptable about inequality. The thesis also unpacks other elements of Ghosh's words, examining how aspirations bolster inequality, and considering the sort of rethinking that might support policies to tackle 'unacceptable' inequalities.

It is now a common refrain that global problems need global solutions. This has also been called for in social policy to counteract the pressure that neoliberal beliefs and practices place on welfare states to cut public expenditure and reduce regulations that protect workers and the environment (George and Wilding, 2009, p.28). Yet the economic orthodoxy of the Washington Consensus, since 1990, involves capital liberalization, free trade, market deregulation and flexible exchange rates, which have weakened national and global public institutions. In this case global policy has exacerbated the problem, leading to shallow social integration and a "pitifully thin" commitment to social justice, despite international interconnectedness (Held, 2009, p.325-6). So far these approaches have failed to generate fair outcomes and decrease poverty (McIlwaine, 2002, p.99; Oyugi, 2006, p.9; Gordon, 2009, p.92; Held, 2009, p.325).

The role of policy in exacerbating world inequalities is not the failure of policy *per se*, but of a particular ideology. A more just social policy approach might include: a Tobin tax on currency exchange to be spent on poverty alleviation, or basic incomes which are universally guaranteed and sufficient to live on (Purdy, 2007; Christensen, 2009; Deacon, 2009, p.431). Another suggestion is a global resource dividend, where states share profits from natural resources with the global poor who have an inalienable stake in these finite resources (Pogge, 2008b, p.202). Thus it not a lack of scientific know-how or insufficient money,

but the absence of political will that means poverty is not eliminated (Gordon, 2009, p.109). Political will is something that can, sometimes, be altered by public pressure and rethinking inequality. David Harvey argues that “we have a duty to change our mode of thinking ... it's not going to revolutionize anything but nevertheless it's a necessary condition for some revolutionary change to occur” (Harvey, 2010a, no page number).

Later in this chapter I detail the position and contribution of this research in relation to existing literatures; more broadly others have identified this area as being interesting, important and under-researched. A recent review of attitudes towards economic inequality in the UK found that we know relatively little about public attitudes towards inequality and redistribution, and proposed that future research focuses “more on people’s underlying values, the discourses they draw on and how they understand concepts such as inequality and redistribution” (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007 p.x & 42). This research does that, though focusing at the world rather than country level. Further, this research into how people around the world perceive inequality responds to the idea that we *should* undertake research that helps our readers and ourselves “vividly to appreciate the lives that others live partly because of us” (Cook, 2006, p.660). The findings presented here give fresh insight into how people positioned differently regard the system that we all constitute. I hope this work also responds appropriately to the observation that there is a urgent need for researchers to challenge ‘business as usual’ (Castree et al., 2010, p.3).

Research into reading maps representing inequality also responds to research gaps identified by others. The role of documents in our everyday life is reasonably under-researched (Rapley, 2007/2009, p.87); as noted earlier there is often a greater focus on a map itself than the way people interact with it. Further, and more specifically in response to a paper presenting Worldmapper cartograms to francophone cartographers (Barford, 2008), it was commented that it is hard to know the value of cartograms (distorted maps) when studies of their interpretation are not carried out amongst very different publics. Of course cartograms are attractive, said the response, but what is their added value and

how will they advance our understanding of the world? (Eckert et al., 2008, p.5-6). It is precisely this issue that I address in the mapping chapter (4), which also offers a response to the question: “would attitudes be different if people were better informed?” (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007, p.41).

The remainder of this extended introduction states my main findings, introduces six research questions, and addresses the place of this research within wider literatures. Of these literatures I discuss the measurement and extent of inequality, as well as the reasons for framing inequality as a social wrong. Larger themes are introduced, which include the limitations to conventional ways of perceiving and representing the world. I address the influence of globalisation and neoliberalism on contemporary inequalities, as these are an important aspect of the context of this research. The role of public attitudes and discourse about inequality is also discussed, alongside a presentation of what some of these attitudes and discourses are. This research is positioned within a concern for ethics and responsibility, a current theme within human geography. Each substantive chapter includes an extended literature summary to introduce literatures specific to it, so that related research and thinking are presented alongside my own work on a theme. I also provide country profiles of Kenya, Mexico and the UK to offer some historical, political and social context. Lastly I outline the chapters that follow.

1.1 Summary of findings

Discourses tend to simplify inequality to ease understanding. However they do more than simplify; some information is highlighted whilst other information is suppressed. Verbal descriptions of inequalities may use metaphors, which carry implicit ideologies about society. The metaphor of a ladder or rope suggests that hierarchy reflects individuals’ characteristics and implies the possibility of social mobility (Therborn, 2006; Krieger, 2008). However metaphors are not fixed, they are renegotiated as understandings of society alter: the ladder or rope metaphor is transformed to there being “no ladder to rise”, thus challenging the ideology of the original metaphor. This development in meaning builds on pre-existing knowledge about the metaphor; similarly

familiarity with world maps helps readers to interpret novel cartographic representations of inequality.

The reading of world maps (cartograms) showing inequality, although these *appear* to be intuitive, requires some knowledge of the world map and benefits from an appreciation of the data shown. If the map form and data are too unfamiliar this is alienating for the reader. For a map to have an impact, to surprise or shock with new information, the reader should be required to step outside their comfort zone. To leave the comfort zone is for the reader to be exposed to some new material or idea, whether it be having the Southern Hemisphere at the top of a map or altering the sizes of countries. However if there is too much unfamiliar information this can be overwhelming and disorientating for the reader, who may then not engage with the map at all. Other pre-existing knowledge, about geography, history, politics, and economics is also used when interpreting maps. When people read maps collectively, maps can become a catalyst for sharing ideas and discussing the causes and consequences of the distributions that are shown.

When asked about the biggest threats to the world, the threats identified were generally local and so, in this context, *the world* appears to be the respondents' tangible, lived realities and wider regions; not the planet. However, research participants' geographical imaginations were more planetary when thinking about *world inequality*, often using a binary framing of the world such as poor/rich, developing/developed, and South/North. These binary categories could become reified, yet participants report debating their applicability to various examples with their pupils. These categorisations shrink the world into two groups; another *rescaling* to understand inequalities is to scale-up the ethics of the small scale such as responsibility for others. This playing with scale facilitates an ethical and emotional discussion about world inequality, something often discouraged by the 'economic rationality' commonly applied to such topics. The quotation below illustrates how an emotional engagement with inequality can form part of a critique of inequality, yet how socio-economic distance can undermine this.

“But I do have moments when I think ‘god, this is, I cannot live with this is awful, how can this be’, you know. And then obviously you do, you’re not actually affected by it, and I think maybe I’m just being a middle class white woman having a little bit of a worry, and then I’ll buy something fairtrade and it will be ok. But you know I do feel it personally to be quite difficult.”

(UK 5, urban private school)

Similar discourses in support of inequality can be found in Kenya, Mexico and the UK: inequality is described by many as a motivating force that is necessary, inevitable, and natural. However, when it comes to challenging inequality there is greater divergence between countries. Mexican and Kenyan participants described a division of respect: the rich assume a superior position and the poor internalise their treatment as inferior. In the UK there was at times an implicit sense of superiority, however this was not recognised by participants. It was the norm amongst UK participants to express discomfort about world inequality, and to convey their confidence in international aid mechanisms to address this. A major exception is Alison, a retired British teacher and strong, eloquent voice against inequality. She plays a central role in my discussion about alternative discourses on inequality.

“You know there’s a level at which I want to resist the talk that goes, you know, ‘look at us, aren’t we so wealthy, aren’t we well off, compared to all these other people who are poor,’ because, because I think we are badly off. We are badly off because we have more than others. [Yes!] Inequality is BAD for human beings. It’s bad for their life to have more than others. It’s not that we are better off, we could only be described as better off if we thought that success means having more than the next person. Which I don’t. I, I, the problem is the gap. That’s what I see, the problem is the gap.”

(Alison, retired urban teacher)

1.2 Research questions

The questions presented here address the themes of how we understand, represent, justify, and challenge inequality, which I later identify as a ‘social wrong’. The questions stem from advice for a systematic consideration of the discursive construction of social wrongs, outlined by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 2009, p.167). These four stages are (i) focus upon a social wrong in its semiotic aspect; (ii) identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong; (iii)

consider whether the social order *needs* the social wrong; and lastly (iv) identify possible ways past the obstacles. Below I list my research questions, noting to which chapter they refer.

Question 1. What are the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world? (Chapter 3)

Question 2. What are the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality? (Chapter 4)

Question 3: What are the discursive obstacles to addressing socio-economic inequality? (Chapter 5)

Question 4: In what ways does inequality fracture society? (Chapter 6)

Question 5: How is inequality perceived to be necessary and at what point does inequality-as-necessary reach a limit of acceptability? (Chapter 6)

Question 6: In what ways is inequality challenged in everyday life? (Chapter 7)

Inequality can be framed in various ways, which alter with what is meant by *inequality* and the stresses and silences on its particular facets. When understandings are interrupted by maps that show some contours of contemporary world inequality, how these maps are responded to informs us about how new information about inequality interacts with pre-existing knowledge. It is not simply the definitions ascribed to inequality that determine approaches to this, but also how inequality is activated in wider discussion about the world. Inequality can be portrayed as necessary and desirable in ways that prevent a debate about alternatives. Despite these blocks some problems of inequality, particularly human suffering and a lack of respect, are identified as unacceptable by most research participants. Other strands of discourse take a stronger stance against inequality by framing inequality in a more holistic, historicised and emotionally engaged manner. This response is associated with a greater imperative to do something to alter social reality.

Analysing the work that different discursive approaches to inequality perform, even through their distinct contexts which are engaged in global capitalism, contributes to understandings of how ideas shape and reflect social realities as well as showing possibilities for change.

1.3 On inequality

Measuring inequality

There are three main types of inequality identified by Göran Therborn. Vital inequality is inequality in life expectancy. Existential inequality concerns differences in respect and recognition. Lastly, there are inequalities in the distribution of material goods and resources (Therborn, 2009, p.109-110). The former and latter are easiest to measure; income distribution is the most commonly measured inequality. When thinking in terms of inequality around the world there are three main ways in which this is calculated: (i) international inequality compares mean average incomes between nations; (ii) population weighted international inequality takes into account population size because (for example populous China getting richer has a particularly strong effect on income distribution); (iii) lastly world inequality does not compare countries but people, so takes into account the extremes of earnings around the world (Milanovic, 2005, p.7-11). World inequality shows greater differences, as the richest and poorest are not averaged out, as they can be with international measures.

Once the choice of measuring international or world inequality has been made, there are various ways in which to calculate inequality, of which there are also three main approaches: (i) the Gini coefficient; (ii) comparing the earnings of the top 10% of earners to the bottom 10%; and (iii) comparing the top 20% to bottom 20%. These measures can also be applied to the distribution of wealth (Sutcliffe, 2005, p.6-7), which is often more unequally distributed than income. The Gini co-efficient measures income inequality on a scale of 0 to 1 which measures the magnitude of the gap between actual income distribution and an equal distribution: 0 is “perfect” equality as everyone has the same earnings and 1 is mathematically “perfect” inequality, for example where one person

receives 100% of total earnings and everyone else receives 0%; country and world Gini co-efficients never come close to these extremes. Comparing earnings of the richest and poorest deciles (10%) or quintiles (20%) of the population produces a ratio of earnings of the rich to the poor. Comparing the richest and poorest deciles by definition produces larger ratios than comparing quintiles. The different measures of economic inequality, different types of inequality and multiple scales on which to measure it can add ambiguity to debates about how inequalities are changing.

A simple international comparison, between countries, gave a ratio of 30:1 of income of the richest 10% of countries to poorest 10% in 1997. A world comparison, of individuals, shows greater inequalities of 63:1. Both measures show increases in inequalities leading up to 1997 (Sutcliffe, 2005, p.8). Comparing the income of the top 20% to bottom 20% of people also shows divergence: in the 1960s the wealthiest fifth earned 30 times more than the poorest fifth. The equivalent figure for the early 2000s is 80 times more (Gordon, 2004, p.6).

The currency in which international or world inequality is measured influences apparent trends in inequality. When the average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in poorer countries is measured as a proportion of that of advanced countries using exchange rates (known as 'Monetarily Effective Purchasing Power'), inequality appears to be increasing. Comparing the buying power within the country where money is earned (or 'Purchasing Power Parity' [PPP]) shows inequality to be reducing. However excluding China from the PPP comparison again alters the picture from steadily increasing to generally decreasing equality (Freeman, 2009, p.1431-2). Thus inequality measures are sensitive to measurement decisions. Put more simply, inequalities in the cost of chickens using local currency are decreasing (PPP), whilst inequalities are increasing in iPods whose costs are based on exchange rates.

An over-reliance on economic data is critiqued as an insufficient reflection of human life, not providing a general sense how 'well' or 'badly' people fare. It is also critiqued as not reflecting how people evaluate their own lives in terms of "an overall sense of well-being." (United Nations Development Programme,

1990, p.14). The Human Development Index (HDI) aims to show human development using income, education and life expectancy measures as proxies for 'development' in a broader sense. Each indicator is associated with other social characteristics, so could indirectly inform us about these, for example longevity is linked to good health and nutrition. Amartya Sen, who was involved in devising the HDI, suggests that income figures miss the point because income does not directly relate to freedoms. He suggests that considering how free people are to live their lives would be more fruitful than comparing income statistics (Sen, 1999, p.18). However in operationalising this idea, the HDI measure tends towards convergence as both literacy and life expectancy have natural maxima, of 100% and roughly 85 years (Sutcliffe, 2005, images 118 and 120). If used to consider inequality HDI would show the world becoming increasingly equal. A new multidimensional poverty measure, with 10 variables including water, electricity and sanitation, was announced in July 2010. This will be included in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report (Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative, 2010).

Given the contingencies outlined above, question 1 gives insight into how people being measured themselves understand the meaning of the word *inequality* by considering *the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world*. Further, question 2 considers *the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality*. This question enables a reflection on how world data, mapped to visually represent inequality, are interpreted by some of the people whose lives they describe.

Inequality in the world

According to sociologist Göran Therborn there are four mechanisms that produce inequality: 1. Distantiation, where some pull ahead and others fall behind. 2. Exclusion, where barriers prevent certain people from accessing elements of 'the good life'. 3. Hierarchy, where society and organisations are structured so that some have high status and pay and others are ordered below them. 4. Exploitation, is when wealth is taken by the rich from the subjugation of the poor (Therborn, 2009, p.110). Normally a combination of these can be observed, and I would argue that there is overlap as those who are excluded

may well be exploited, and hierarchical organisations encourage distantiating as those who are paid more can save or invest and receive returns on this money. These mechanisms are relevant at world, national and local levels.

Whilst in a territorial sense distances have shrunk, income and vital distances are increasing at the world and often country level (Therborn, 2009, p.111-2). These observations are not unconnected, as capitalism has pulled parts of the world closer together whilst remunerating people differently for the labour they perform. In its drive to control more and more social wealth, capital transforms the world; inequalities are geographical expressions of the contradictions of capitalism played out at a variety of spatial scales (Smith, 1984/1990, p.4-7). Research carried out over 200 years shows that most poverty has structural causes (Gordon, 2004, p.15); this includes 500 years of net wealth transfers from the poor to rich world (Monbiot, 2003, p.20). Due to this interconnection, viewing the world not as separate societies with parallel histories, but 'parts of a whole reflecting that whole' (Wallerstein, 1975, p.16), can enable us to better understand contemporary inequality in the world.

The contradiction between increased interconnections between many parts of the world and simultaneous socio-economic distancing, pointed out by Göran Therborn, provides an intriguing tension in how people understand and explain this process and their positions within it. Question 1 considers how inequality and the world are constructed, and taps into this tension between proximity and distance. Question 2 also addresses this in the sense that maps illustrating inequality are presented as a means of communicating over the distances between people in the world. Question 4 queries how inequality fractures society, thus interrogating the form of such socio-economic distancing. Asking how we understand world inequality thus taps into various issues about how we define, interpret, explain and access information about the world. Inequality is a useful and holistic concept to think with because it recognises that everyone is involved in this distribution. Poverty, in contrast, has been more widely studied and it is easier to distance oneself from. For example, in Sri Lanka, poverty is seen as located in a particular segment of society which those who are not poor and those who study poverty consider themselves to be separate from (Yapa,

1998, p.100). It is still possible, but a little more difficult, to think like this about inequality.

Inequality as a social wrong

Norman Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis rests on critiquing a *social wrong*; this underpins the research questions of this thesis. It is widely argued that contemporary levels of inequality are unacceptable (e.g. Freire, 1970/1990; Roy, 1999; Sutcliffe, 2005; Amin, 2006b; Ghosh, 2008a; Dorling, 2010b). However there is not consensus and some resist the idea that inequality is a problem and prefer to identify poverty as *the problem*, which has resulted in debate (e.g. Jen et al., 2009a; Jen et al., 2009b; Dorling and Barford, 2009; Barford et al., 2009). I recognise poverty as a problem; the existence of poverty in the context of an unequal society or world where extreme wealth can also be found indicates that poverty is unnecessary because there is enough to go round. We could even be encouraged by inequality because its presence means that we can do something about poverty as there is wealth to redistribute (Pogge, 2008b). In setting out the ways in which inequality has been identified as a social wrong, I position this thesis to approach inequality as a problem. There are two main objections to inequality: that the impacts are detrimental and that it is ethically wrong.

There are many practical arguments against inequality, stating that equality enables a fuller use of human resources, creates a larger market for goods, and reduces costs of managing society such as policing costs (Sutcliffe, 2005, p.4-5; Wacquant, 2010). The negative outcomes of inequality or benefits of greater equality are detailed in the recent book: 'The Spirit Level' (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). This study makes an international comparison of 23 richer countries and a sub-national comparison of 50 states in the United States, based on the ratio of earnings of the top 20% to the bottom 20% and the prevalence of various issues. Societies that are less equal fare less well on a broad range of social problems, including child well-being, trust, mental illness, drug abuse, life expectancy, infant deaths, obesity, numeracy and literacy, teen pregnancies and teen abortions, homicide, imprisonment, social mobility, innovation, and recycling. Among the reasons for this difference are how

society operates, what values are held, and how people value one another (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2006, 2009). To return to the question of whether poverty or inequality is the problem, the authors argue that:

“Average standards cease to matter, but whether you are doing better or worse than other people, where you come in the social pecking order, continues to be important – for health, happiness, and for a large array of social problems.” (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.13)

The damage of inequality to society, contrary to popular belief, extends throughout society. It is not only the poor that suffer from inequality; partly because the extent to which these social problems increase with inequality is so great that their prevalence exceeds the size of poorer segments of society. In his book ‘Affluenza’ Oliver James documents some negative outcomes of being rich, which include depression and paranoia. Living unequally as a rich person means you may feel threatened by others who have less, and feel depressed due to searching for fulfilment in objects of social status and how others respond to these, rather than in engaging in genuinely enjoyable activities (James, 2007). In the context of this discussion about the damaging effects of inequality, it should be noted that calls for greater equality do not equate to an imposition of homogeneity or conformity. Instead, historically this has been a call for equal civil and political rights, and distribution according to need (Sutcliffe, 2005, p.2).

Bob Sutcliffe emphasises that redistribution is desirable as a question of social justice independent of consequences (Sutcliffe, 2005, p.4-5). However Thomas Pogge takes a Rawlsian approach, arguing that we have negative duties (responsibility to stop something) not to cause harm; this is a moral objection which stems more directly from the impacts of inequality (Pogge, 2008b). More broadly a ‘golden rule’ of treating others as you would like to be treated is found in almost all major ethico-religious traditions (Lee and Smith, 2004, p.5). When extended to the issue of inequality, where some have considerably less than others, live shorter lives and are less respected, this golden rule can be interpreted as the basis of a moral objection to inequality in the vital, material and existential senses.

Moralities are constructed through geographically articulated interaction², and this occurs in our current context of uneven development (Lee and Smith, 2004, p.7). Thus the moral issues surrounding inequality partly stem from its contemporary form and interpretations of this. David Smith argues that equalisation is a matter of social justice, yet acknowledges that this view reflects some particularities of the world, including gross inequalities, residual egalitarian sentiment, and wider faith in grand projects for human betterment (Smith, 2000, p.155). These particularities are reflected in the argument that global justice should just be an extension of justice at the level of particular societies. This should therefore include institutional arrangements that improve the life chances of those who are worst off (Van Parijs, 2009, p.3). Moral and responsible geographies are further discussed towards the end of section 1.4.

1.4 Key theoretical and empirical ideas

Here I introduce key academic debates that pertain to the study of public understandings of international inequalities. This is complemented by the introduction of literature that is specifically relevant at the beginning of each chapter; as such the literature is positioned where it is most relevant. Here I address discussion about thinking at a global scale, and what enables and limits the ways in which we construct the world in our minds. Then I move to discussions about the processes and ideologies that structure the contemporary world; these processes simultaneously connect people around the world whilst distancing us by producing inequality. How these inequalities are understood and represented influences reality, and people might be predisposed to hold particular views given their situations. Lastly I engage with discussion about geographies of responsibility and morality.

² Lee and Smith explain: "Moralities are profoundly geographical products of the uneven development of social relations among people and between people and nature. Such differentiations, the distinctions that they both reflect and induce, and the tensions that are created through them, together constitute the very source of moralities." (2004, p.7).

Research into climate change provides an interesting comparison, as climate change is also a worldwide issue that requires action. How we imagine global problems has a psychological aspect. Future and distant problems associated with climate change are seen as worse than the immediate and proximate impacts, which diminishes a sense of personal responsibility (Uzzell, 2000). Elsewhere colleagues and I argue that focusing on climate change performs the same jump by focusing largely on something that will happen, and ignoring the current disaster of inequality (Dorling et al., 2007). Both issues require holistic thinking to break with current assumptions about the virtues of productivity and growth, combined with a rethinking of our priorities and their consequences (Levitas, 2007, p.301). Further, inequality and climate change are linked because greater inequality exacerbates environmental problems (Hughes, 2010b). It is paradoxical that those who are poorest in an unequal society are also most vulnerable to the negative outcomes of climate change, despite producing very small proportions of greenhouse gases emissions.

My theoretical stance stems from a recognition and objection to the injustices described above. I have sympathy for a Marxist stance in the sense that I understand that social groups and countries are often, though not necessarily, positioned in competition with one another. Capitalist forces of production, society and consciousness are in tension with one another because the division of labour means that whilst certain individuals experience more enjoyment and consumption, many others experience more labour and production (Marx, 1844-1911, p.92). This contrasts with a functionalist perspective with its emphasis on how society is working (Durkheim, 1933/1949). Whilst recognising the importance of cultural and discriminatory inequality I share Pierre Bourdieu's concern that we should not be distracted from material inequalities (Bourdieu, 2002, p.5).

Thinking globally

The challenge of and need to think globally are topics of current discussion and importance. Wealth differences present one obstacle to thinking globally, and about the rest of one's own society. Being wealthy affects perceptions and

sentiments, and reduces sensitivity to the indignities of poverty from which many people are isolated. The wealthy are prone to judge their wealth as being deserved and in the national interest (Pogge, 2008a; Pogge, 2008b, p.4; Rowlingson and Connor, forthcoming); to them poverty is imagined in abstract, idealized or generalized ways to the extent it is *misperceived* (Reis and Moore, 2005b, p.18). Denial of the severity of poverty by the rich is done by othering, something which is easier when the poor and rich have different religious or racial attributes (Swaan, 2005, p.193). Figure 2 shows how in Britain the richer one is, the less likely one is to recognise one's own true position within a national income distribution. Generally people think they are worse off than they really are. The difficulties in perceiving society holistically are amplified when thinking about the whole world, and this pertains to questions 1 and 4: *What are the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world? And in what ways does inequality fracture society?*

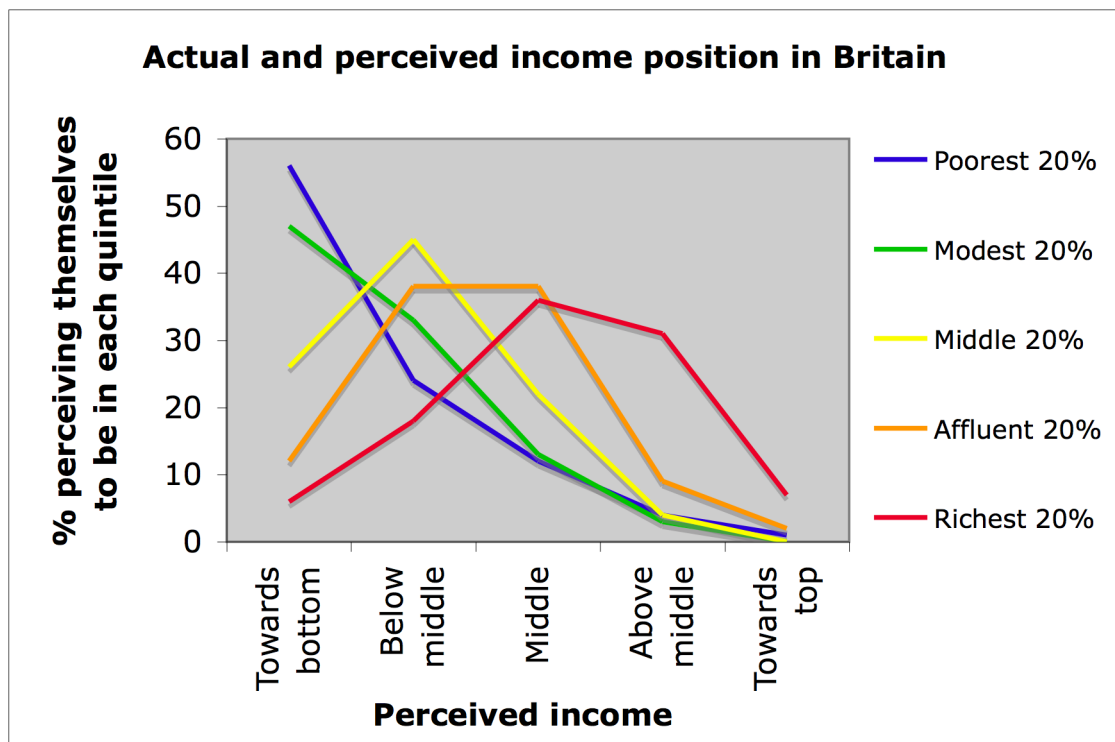


Figure 2: Actual and perceived income position in Britain

Data source: Lansley, 2009, p.29

The bubbles of our imagined worlds can however be stretched, and question 2 addresses one way in which this could occur: *What are the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality?* It is argued that with communication and information stretching around the world, our empathy could expand with it, were it not suppressed through socialisation. Such expansion has occurred throughout history from smaller groups, to religious groups, to nation states (Rifkin, 2010). A South African Xhosa proverb – *umuntu gumuntu ngabantu* – a person is a person through persons – also acknowledges the importance of society and interaction (Shutte 1993 in Smith, 2000, p.169), and how that interaction constitutes our identity (Raghuram et al., 2009, p.9-10; Therborn, 2009, p.111-2). An advantage of thinking globally, pushing the boundaries to imagined worlds, is that it extends the boundaries of our awareness which influences the ways in which global inequality and other international issues might be conceptualised and discussed. For example, thinking globally about the causes of poverty can overcome ‘explanatory nationalism’ (Pogge, 2008b, p.17), and could lead to solutions being conceptualised at the global level in contrast to assumptions that whilst globalisation causes social exclusion this must be solved at the local or community level (Cameron and Palan, 2004 p.143). Thinking globally in this way is an aspect of question 6: *In what ways is inequality challenged in everyday life?*

A barrier to thinking globally is the paucity of conceptual tools we use. Unstated claims to universality are a limitation to the thinking of many academics working in richer countries (Raghuram and Madge, 2006, p.280). Often sociological concepts are developed in the metropole and then applied elsewhere, as has been the case in Australia (Connell, 2008). This is not helped by the difficulties of sharing research outside the metropole, for example Ethiopian and Kenyan geographers have trouble accessing one another’s work; a database of African geographical research has been proposed in response (Obando, 2008, p.2 & 10). The dominance of concepts developed in these richer countries is critiqued, one Mexican academic calls for the *unlearning* of the “baggage of social science”, then for social science to be redefined with other foci, along

other planes, and following other intellectual paths to find new views and explanations (Rojas, 2008a, p.14).

Social particularities of the United States have been generalised to the whole planet, and these are notions with which we argue rather than notions that we argue about. These ideas have been de-particularised and have unfortunately become universal common sense (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.41-2). Despite the adoption of shared common sense, it is recommended that we are wary of the hasty and uncritical application of neoliberalism-as-rationality to Africa, where political and economic processes appear to create a liberal-style separation of the state and market rather than neoliberal integration of the market into the state (Ferguson, 2010, p.173). One proposal is to emphasise the co-production of knowledge, so comparison between places becomes a learning and knowledge-building activity. This requires an awareness of the histories of comparative thought and how they are part of knowledge production (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010, p.122). Thus, in acknowledging the positivist position that concepts can travel compared to the relativist stance that these should be grounded in their context (Hantrais, 2009, p.90-1), I recognise that some concepts are more transportable and more transported than others. Question 1 addresses how the concept of inequality travels and this thesis is concerned with the wider context of global ideologies and what has been called an American social doxa³ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.42). The whole thesis considers the way in which logics surrounding inequality bear similarities despite their differing contexts.

Globalisation and neoliberalism

The way in which the world is organised, partly by international institutions and their prevailing logics, has a strong influence on the extent of inequality and how it changes. These logics conceptualise inequality in particular ways. Here I outline some of the wide-ranging thinking about the nature of globalisation and

³ A doxa is that which appears self-evident, the unquestioned truths, including what is thinkable and saying and what is so obvious it is not stated.

neoliberalism as the context that produces and sustains inequalities. We cannot critique our way out of neoliberalism, but can at least consider whether our research reveals something of how we are entangled in neoliberal processes (Sundberg, 2007, p.270). Nor are the current crisis conditions alone enough for us to escape the neoliberal mindset, despite the extra pressure that crisis exerts on the system. This is because the world system produced by neoliberal logics is very deeply embedded in the form of heavily privatised, globally integrated, and socially segregated capitalism we live in the UK and United States (Peck et al., 2010, p.110). One suggestion to challenge the neoliberal momentum is the explicit adoption of utopian thinking, to rethink priorities and break with current assumptions about the necessity of productivity and growth (Levitas, 2007, p.301).

Globalisation has been described as 'the signature dish of capitalism'. It is a system of production and reproduction supported by uneven development at many spatial scales, which started in Europe over 500 years ago (Katz, 2001, p.1213). However, this increased interconnectedness is accompanied by shallow integration and a "pitifully thin" commitment to social justice (Held, 2009, p.325). Social exclusion of segments of society is seen to be a consequence of globalisation, however it is not generally interpreted as evidence of a defect of globalisation itself (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.140 & 146). This is accompanied by a myth that the world is becoming homogenized by global capital (Taylor, 2004, p.132), a myth which obscures the uneven nature of globalisation. This unevenness is exacerbated as states are put in competition against each other with their varying levels of economic, political and military power. Globalisation raises policy questions to a supranational level, leading to questions of how to regulate global capital (Deacon et al., 2009, p.23); these policy discussions largely follow neoliberal logics.

Neoliberalism could be seen as being a post-globalisation term, because it denaturalises globalisation by drawing attention to its ideology and politics (Peck et al., 2010, p.97). To clarify, liberalism expresses a divide between the state and the market, evident when structural adjustment programmes removed tariffs, deregulated currency markets, and privatised in general during the

1980s. Neoliberalism introduces market practices into the state, in the UK and United States the new 'responsible citizen' rationally responds to incentives provided (Ferguson, 2010, p.172-3). Others however have defined neoliberalism as the theory that well-being can be best achieved through free markets, free trade and private property rights (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.2), which could be applied to both instances described above. For the purpose of this thesis I adopt David Harvey's definition.

This research considers how citizens respond to inequality given the wider logics of neoliberalism within which they live, in considering questions 3, 4 and 5: *What are the discursive obstacles to addressing socio-economic inequality? In what ways does inequality fracture society? And how is inequality perceived to be necessary and at what point does inequality-as-necessary reach a limit of acceptability?* This is particularly interesting given that it is argued that the general characteristics of neoliberalism are neither consistent nor universal (Castree, 2007, p.7).

Public attitudes and discourses

Several studies have considered attitudes towards inequality and explanations for that distribution. In the UK, over the past 20 years a large majority has reported that the income gap is too large; 73% held this opinion in 2004 (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007, p.x). A study in Florida revealed a racial aspect to explanations: white respondents were more likely to blame black individuals for their poverty, e.g. lack of motivation, whilst Hispanic poverty was blamed on the social structure, e.g. lack of chance in education (McDonald, 2001, p.569-570). At the global level there are competing paradigms about whether inequality is caused by globalisation. The Bretton Woods paradigm considers that globalisation favours 'integration and progress', whilst the UN paradigm sees globalisation as 'a multiplier of inequalities' (Thérien, 1999, p.725). Western policies play an important role in the politics of other states and often cite traditionalism as the main cause of poverty, which absolves others from responsibility (Nabudere, 1997). These differing conceptions of inequality, which vary based on who is speaking and who is spoken about, illustrate the

diverse geographies of understandings of inequality. Question 1 addresses this: *What are the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world?*

The powerful discourses and logics of globalisation and neoliberalism referred to above do not occur in isolation, but require *passeurs* or carriers for this largely unidirectional movement of ideas (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.46). Some even argue that resistance against institutions that directly and explicitly promote globalisation misses the point because the process is driven by more diffuse and mundane forces (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.82). Discourses of globalisation perform various roles, as could discourses around inequality: informatively representing; misrepresenting and mystifying; rhetorically justifying and legitimising; distributing ideologies; and even generating imaginary alternatives which if hegemonised could lead to social change (Fairclough, 2006 p.165). Thus the particular way in which inequality is represented discursively influences responses to it (Rowlingson, 2010). This understanding of the ways in which discourse, as carried by citizens as well as large organisations, represents inequality and encourages approval or dissent is the basis for this thesis and underpins all six research questions.

It is important to recognise the social import of discourse whilst avoiding reducing social life to discourse (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999/2004, p.6). Discourse matters because public opinion influences the ease with which redistributive policies are accepted. For example in Britain, norms of entitlement to high incomes and wealth often override thinking about how this money was obtained and what it is used for (Bamfield and Horton, 2009, p.19). The changing of narratives is complicated by resources having been invested in our understandings of reality (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.159); however norms and values are not permanent obstacles to addressing inequalities and do change with time. The recent financial crisis and resultant rethinking has led to some alterations: for example there is more widespread questioning of the value of economic growth (Radice, 2010, p.41-2). Changes to discourse and representations can have wider impacts because these “are guides to action and forces of change in themselves, stimulating and constraining the entire

gamut of human emotion, from happiness to despair, from violence to love”. (Cameron and Palan, 2004 p.66).

Holding an opinion does not necessarily result in its public expression, as perceived distribution of public opinion influences individuals’ willingness to express their own opinions on a particular issue (Scheufele and Eveland, 2001, p.27). Nevertheless, people with strong political preferences who feel they hold a minority view have been found to increase the public expression of their opinion (*ibid.*, p.36). However some opinions are more implicit, and biases are often expressed and engaged with subconsciously. Bourdieu and Wacquant identify several ways this might occur: *groupisme* where the state’s categories are canonized through general usage; populism which distracts from an analysis of mechanisms of dominations by celebrating those who dominate; and moralism where an endless debate about identity blocks a necessary analysis of materialism (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2000/2002, p.445-6). An example of *groupisme* is the North-South distinction which was popularized by the 1980 Brandt Report on Survival and International Development (Slater, 1997, p.633).

Views on inequality can affect daily behaviour which can influence the social reality: “A domiciled person who attributes homelessness to an aversion to work might therefore be less likely to rent housing to or hire homeless people – rating them a poor risk – than would someone who holds a structural outlook.” (Lee et al., 1992, p.536). These beliefs can also affect policy attitudes; in the United States certain demographic factors predict preferences for intervention to tackle homelessness. These include being a woman, Democrat, political liberal or moderate, or resident of a community perceived to have a homeless population (*ibid.*, p.535 & 545). Beliefs about society may be of particular influence when they are held by elites who control the material, symbolic and political resources of a country. In Bangladesh elites gave little support for a welfare state, positing that this is something for rich countries. Instead they preferred to tackle poverty through trickle-down or targeted programmes (Reis and Moore, 2005b p.19). Attitudes and discourses matter because they enable particular debates and policy possibilities, and they are transferred and recreated by the public as well

as by institutions. In this thesis I aim to contribute an international comparison to consider variation and similarities in public approaches to inequality.

Moral and responsible geographies

In the 1990s there was a moral turn within British geography, inherited from earlier radicalism (Smith, 2000, p.5). Geography contributes detailed and contextualised ethics to moral discussions, adding the substance of “real people in actual situations” to the abstractions of moral philosophy (*ibid.*, p.53). Further, moralities are constructed through geographically articulated interaction and exist in the context of uneven development. As such it is interesting to see how the moral and immoral are defined and practised across time and space (Lee and Smith, 2004 p.7). This comes up in the variety of responses to inequality that are garnered by this research. David Smith engages with inequality as a problem of moral geography, citing the ‘difference principle’ as a possible moral defence for inequality, where inequality is acceptable when the least advantaged receive the greatest benefit (Smith, 2000, p.149). Smith notes that if we broaden the principle of equality to the whole world there will be little left for local indulgences or what some consider to be needed for a good life. He notes that alternative conceptions of the good life are needed to replace possessive materialism (*ibid.*, p.150-1 & 169).

Smith continues, arguing that too much emphasis on identity erodes a sense of “human sameness” which can be the basis for moral equality (*ibid.*, p.137-8). Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant also argue that overly focusing on identity is distracting and that a little materialism would not go amiss (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2000/2002, p.445-6; Bourdieu, 2002, p.5). These ideas of similarity and difference, combined with the Keynesian-Westphalian⁴ framing of justice

⁴ The Keynesian-Westphalian frame of justice takes the nation state as the unit of justice and citizens as the subjects. *Keynesian* points to the national level steering of economies facilitated by the Bretton Woods agreements. *Westphalian* refers to the political distinction between domestic and international space. Keynesian-Westphalian ideas of justice are now being challenged as our lives “routinely overflow territorial boundaries” and we are

being conducted at the state level (Fraser, 2007, p.252; Fraser, 2009), when played out spatially result in two moral prejudices. These are (i) the persistence of severe poverty abroad does not require our moral attention, and (ii) there is nothing seriously wrong about world poverty with regard to our conduct, policies, and the global economic institutions we forge (Pogge, 2008b, p.5). A feeling of lesser responsibility the greater the distance has been described as a Russian doll geography of responsibility (Massey, 2004). Here distance is the combination of the physical and conceptual. This distancing seems to disrupt what has been described as the 'golden rule' of virtually all major ethico-religious traditions: treat others as you would like to be treated (Lee and Smith, 2004 p.5).

Smith presents social justice as equalisation, a choice that stems from contemporary particularities of huge inequalities, residual egalitarian sentiment, and belief in projects for human betterment (Smith, 2000, p.155). How we position ourselves as social actors and make sense of the world influences our understanding of the conditions of social life which need to be changed (Uzzell and Rätzzel, 2009, p.341); the limits to what might happen are altered by what is thought to be normal or common sense (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.152). As such, based on Rousseau's concept of democratic community to current communitarianism⁵, the more material inequality there is, the more social distancing and the less thinkable group harmony and collective responsibility will be. By contrast, the more similar people's lives are, the more likely they are to recognise their similar needs and common humanity (Smith, 2000, p.174-5). Of the high inequality in South Africa, Smith commented: "To challenge this requires a development ethics in which those with more wealth and power not just accept having less, but welcome this as a means to a better quality of life ..." (*ibid.*, p.170).

more vulnerable to transnational forces (Fraser, 2009, p.12-14, quotation from p.13).

⁵ Communitarianism recognises that people are shaped by their communities, and balances the needs of individuals with the needs of the community.

In the early 2000s ethical issues in geography have been phrased in terms of *postcolonial responsibility*. This recognises that we are implicated in one another's presents, which challenges the idea of the 'distant other'; remembers the past to avoid forgetting or misremembering, which undermine responsibility; and challenges the colonial centre to decentre the nature and direction of responsibility (Raghuram et al., 2009, p.9-10). Postcolonial responsibility has implications for academic work, especially as the theorising of northern academics often suffers from an unstated claim to universality (Raghuram and Madge, 2006, p.280), which is part of a metropolitan mindset. Sensitivity to the way our embodied positionality affects the context, and often the content, of academic writing helps us to write responsibly (Noxolo, 2009, p.61). Postcolonial responsibility means an ongoing or 'stitched in' approach to research and writing, acknowledging the partial, embedded, political and messy nature of this work (*ibid.*, p.61; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010, p.115 & 122). Yet Geographers' attention to responsibility goes beyond academic work, noting that political possibilities for reshaping relations exist even in the aftermath of disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Clark et al., 2006, p.258).

Bringing a moral, responsible and geographical lens to my research questions enables the consideration of inequality as an ethical problem and probes geographical understandings of inequality. Ethical framings of national boundaries equating to the extent of responsibility are challenged by globalisation, and a new framing of ethical commitments to "all-affected" by a process seems a good alternative (Fraser, 2007, p.252-262). As the postcolonial approach outlined above suggests, it is not just the well-off who have responsibility to the poor, but everyone is mutually responsible (after Spivak, 2008, p.21).

1.5 Country profiles

Here I give a necessarily brief introduction to the three countries in which this research was undertaken: Kenya, Mexico and the UK. The countries were selected for their different economic, geographical and cultural situations and their neoliberal politics and economics. During the 1980s and 1990s, private enterprise strategy and Kenyan capitalists' roles as agents of foreign capital

were thought to have made Kenya an exception to sub-Saharan African poverty (Himbara, 1994, p.2, p.18). Similarly, in 1985 it was decided that Mexico would sign the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which meant opening the economy and removing state subsidies. This was followed by further liberalisation or ‘*Salinisation*’ under President Carlos Salinas (Hamnet, 2006, p.20, 271, 275-6). This privatization in the 1990s enabled the Mexican Carlos Slim Helú to enter the ranks of the world’s richest people (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.17). Under Margaret Thatcher the UK altered from a social democratic state, then comparable to Sweden, to one of increased service privatization (*ibid.*, p.71).

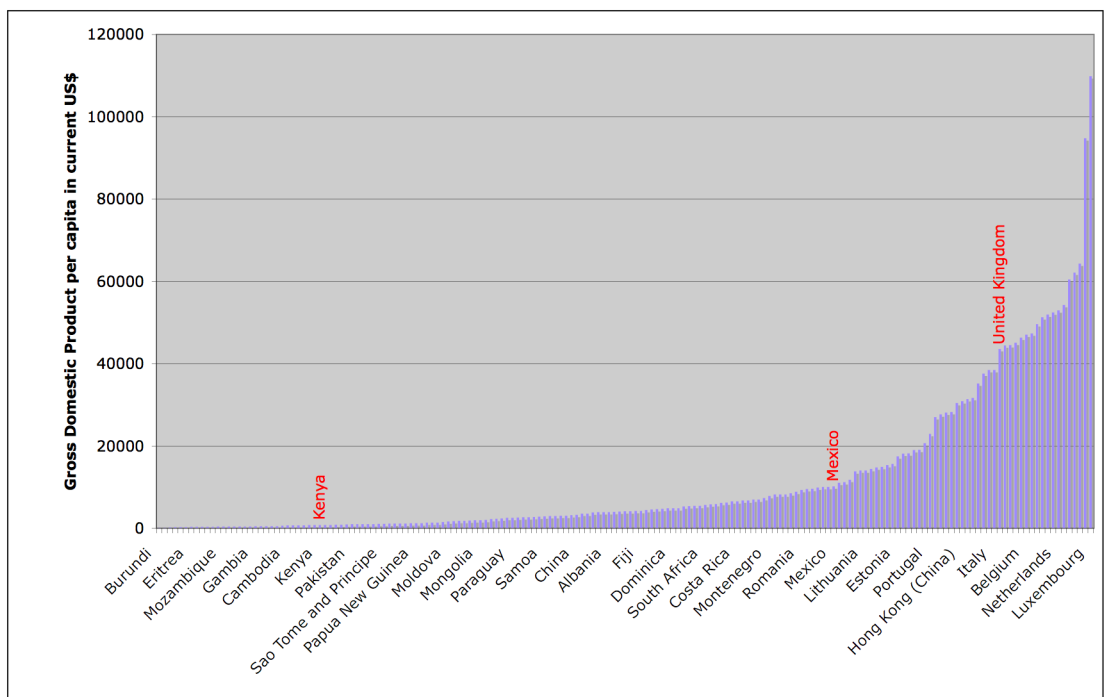


Figure 3: Gross Domestic Product per capita (2008)

Data source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2009.

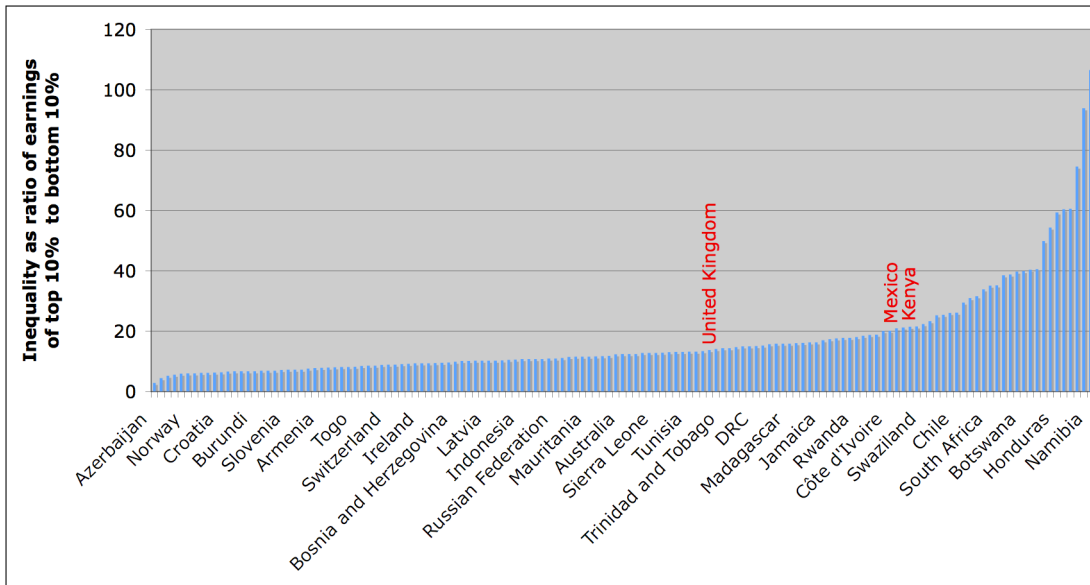


Figure 4: Inequality within countries (most recent year, 1992-2007)

Data source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2009.

As Figure 3 illustrates, these three countries occupy distinct positions in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita earnings: of the three Kenya is relatively low, Mexico is in the middle and the UK is high. GDP is not directly equivalent to average earnings. Figure 4 shows these countries have relatively high inequality compared to the median of all countries measured. Mexico and Kenya have relatively high and very similar ratings of inequality, and only a few rich countries are more unequal than the UK. Thus these countries are, to some extent, standardised according to national inequality. Further basic information is in Table 1. I prioritise international over national inequality because this research is primarily focused on world inequality.

Research context can be framed on varying scales, from the macro, through meso, to micro, and include politics, institutions and culture (Hantrais, 2009, p.91-93). Above these countries are positioned in terms of the macro context. Each country also connects to a regional identity with its distinct cultures, politics and institutions. In Kenya being *African* taps into pan-Africanism (wa Thiong'o, 2009, p.25), Mexico and the rest of Latin America are set in contradistinction to the United States along linguistic, economic and political lines (Paz, 1972/2005, p.251). The UK is half-heartedly part of European

economic and political consolidation. Yet these countries stand out from their region, Kenya as *the* East African hub; Mexico and the UK stand out due to their close but dissimilar relationships with the United States. Given that values and attitudes are not formed in social and cultural vacuums, the wider context is of interest. Values and attitudes are “embedded, nurtured and emerge from a social context, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and environmental settings, resulting in specific everyday cultures” (Uzzell and Rätzzel, 2009 p.341). The profiles that follow give some insight into recent trends, dimensions of national inequality, and the place of these countries in the world.

	Kenya	Mexico	UK
Population (est. July 2010) ^a	39,002,772	111,211,789	61,113,205
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (in current US\$ millions, 2008) ^b	30,355	1,088,130	2,674,060
GDP per capita (in current US\$ millions, 2008) ^b	783	10,232	43,541
Top 10% to bottom 10% income ratio ^b	21.3	21.0	13.8
GINI coefficient ^b	47.7	48.1	36.0
INCOME DISTRIBUTION			
% income of lowest 20% ^{bc}	4.7	3.8	6.0
% income of second 20% ^{bc}	8.8	8.1	10.8
% income of middle 20% ^{bc}	13.3	12.4	15.9
% income of fourth 20% ^{bc}	20.3	19.2	23.0
% income of highest 20% ^{bc}	53.0	56.4	44.2

Table 1: Basic national statistics

Sources: ^a Central Intelligence Agency, 2010, World Factbook; ^b World Bank, 2009, World Development Indicators (income distribution data for Kenya refer to 2005 and for Mexico to 2008); ^c Dorling, 2010b, p.341 provided by S. Abdallah of the New Economics Foundation, 2008 (UK data refer to 2005/6).

Kenya

Kenya, like many other countries, has a recent colonial history that ended with independence in 1963. Colonialism is characterized as dismemberment by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Society was dismembered when the African elite began to see itself as separate from the rest (wa Thiong'o, 2009, p.2-3). Separation of Kenyan people from their land and its reallocation by the invading English nobility constitutes another dismemberment: Lord Delamere bought 100,000 acres for a penny each; Lord Francis Scott bought an adjoining 350,000 acres. The large profits of such plantations relied on low wages and harsh working conditions (Rodney, 1972/2001, p.151-4). Colonialism is also characterized by misunderstandings. Today's tribalism is argued to stem from colonial attempts to understand and document a fixed African society that didn't exist. One colonial fiction, which informed subsequent policy, was that the Maasai and Kikuyu tribes hated one another. In fact these groups intermarry, trade and share aspects of culture and language (Reader, 1997, p.609-10).

African languages were damaged during colonialism, which, given the role of language in communication and remembrance, is considered to be another dismemberment (wa Thiong'o, 2009). When the diaspora was created through slavery, slaves were forbidden to speak their own languages. On continental Africa, African languages were starved as new concepts were explained in European languages. This reinforced connections to Europe, and distanced African concepts and culture (wa Thiong'o, 2009, 12-14). These linguistic adjustments continued after independence, with English being one of the two official languages of Kenya, alongside Kiswahili, which is another language of trade and domination. After independence there continued to be an international dimension to political power as politically cooperative and economically pliant leaders were supported internationally. Independence has been described as simply a "change of guards" (Maathai, 2009, p.30).

Kenya, again like other countries, is subjected to the 'democracy deficit'⁶ of contemporary global governance, whilst apparently polycentric development conceals the more monocentric character of neoliberal globalisation. This requires liberalisation, de-regulation, privatisation and reduction of state presence, in line with criteria delineated in Washington and Brussels (Oyugi, 2006, p.6 & 30). There has been increased collective resistance within African countries, which shows a disillusionment with neoliberal 'solutions' (Dembélé, 2007, p.111-2). Yet Kenya has perhaps engaged more closely than others with global capital. Kenya is noted for its private enterprise strategy and Kenyan capitalists' roles as agents of foreign capital during the 1980s and 1990s (Himbara, 1994, p.2 & 18). Consequently Kenya has generally been seen by Westerners as a 'tame' and 'user-friendly' African destination (Wrong, 2009, p.313). However the success of one country over others can threaten regionalism due to concern that the most dominant country will reap most benefits; in the East African Community this is Kenya. Yet stronger regional ties can create unity against outside pressures (Arnold, 2005, p.953), and this is the hope for the East Africa Common Market between Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, which began in June 2010.

Despite Kenya's strong image compared with what have been described as 'dysfunctional neighbours'⁷, the violence following the December 2007 election resulted in more than 1200 deaths and the displacement of 350,000 people (IRIN, 2010). This violence was aggravated by leaders, who pre-armed people

⁶ There are various aspects of global governance that contribute to its democracy deficit. Many international negotiations take place outside a truly multi-lateral context, instead operating on a basis of informal transgovernmentalism. Also, institutional inefficiency and consent engineering during public consultations undermine democracy (Oyugi, 2006, p.30).

⁷ Countries neighbouring Kenya are: Uganda which suffered brutal postcolonial rule by Idi Amin and Milton Obote; Rwanda experienced a genocide of almost a million people; long civil wars occurred in Sudan; Ethiopia experienced famines; and in Somalia warlords have considerable power (Wrong, 2009, p.9).

and reasserted tribal divides⁸ and suspicion. This response was an expression of frustration with recent politics following the initial euphoria at the election in 2002 of Mwai Kibaki, who led the National Rainbow Coalition. The ensuing frustration led to the revival of some social movements and the initiation of the Orange Democratic Movement which originally campaigned against a new version of the constitution – the Wako draft constitution (Matanga, 2007, p.115-7). Another frustration is corruption, which Kibaki had pledged to overcome, prior to he himself overseeing complex frauds stealing government money. Corruption is endemic and during the 1990s Kenya was repeatedly at the bottom of Transparency International corruption ratings, just above Nigeria which also suffers from corrupt leaders (Achebe, 1983/1984; Wrong, 2009, p.11).

Illicit financial flows and corrupt practices should be understood in their international context: Europe plays a role in facilitating and encouraging these. London, for example, is a major centre for money laundering and the British government has resisted attempts of the Nigerian Federal Government to recuperate money stolen by the Abacha family (Brown and Cloke, 2007, p.307 & 317). Corruption in Kenya is also connected to policies and interaction with other countries, particularly the UK which was home to the some of the fictional businesses awarded contracts by the Kibaki government (see Wrong, 2009). Whilst there is corruption in most countries, in Kenya corruption appears to be particularly prevalent amongst some politicians, as well as being an everyday experience with bribes payable for many small daily tasks.

Inequality is controversial and an emotional topic, so in Kenya is seen to be surrounded by a 'conspiracy of silence' (Okello, 2004, p.vii). The top 30% of income groups account for roughly 70% of all income and expenditure. Whilst inequality in Kenya is described in Figure 2 in quintiles, looking at deciles gives

⁸ The tribal nature of politics, which stems from colonial rule, was such that when Jaramogi Oginga Odinga tried to establish a radical socialist party support was not broadly from the working classes but instead from the rich and poor of his tribe, the Luo (Reader, 1997, p.626-7).

finer grain information: the top 10% households receive 42% of total income, the bottom 10% control less than 1%. Income differences are reflected in spending: for every 1 shilling spent by the poorest decile, the richest spend 52 shillings. There is a strong spatial dimension to inequality in Kenya: Nairobi, the Rift Valley, and Nyanza have the greatest income inequalities, whereas North Eastern Province, one of the poorer areas is more equal than others with a Gini coefficient of 0.439 (Society for International Development, 2004, p. 5 & 13). Kenya is less equal than Tanzania, with the ratio of earnings of the top 10% to bottom 10% being 21.3 and 8.9 respectively (World Bank, 2009), which reflects their divergent post-colonial trajectories, with Kenya taking a capitalist approach in contrast to *Mwalimu*⁹ Julius Nyerere's African Socialism.

Kenyan society is often framed in developmental terms. For example one professor in a Kenyan university describes social and political issues as "general problems of society's development" (Matanga, 2007, p.114); the same issues of unemployment or poverty are framed differently in countries considering themselves to be 'developed'. The developmental mindset and the receipt of foreign aid has led to some manipulation by external partners whose involvement is premised on the international community's assumption that Africa cannot solve its problems alone, to the extent that more expatriates now work in independent Africa than those who administered the territory during colonial times (Arnold, 2005, p.940-3). A different framing of aid is adopted by 'postcolonial donors', who emphasise the mutual opportunity of South-South aid (Mawdsley, unpublished, p.10). Challenging the apparently unchangeable truth that Africa is poor, Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai points out that Africa is rich in natural resources and must protect its wealth; it should demand that money received as kickbacks be returned (Maathai, 2009, p.74-5 & 91-93).

⁹ Julius Nyerere originally trained as a teacher and so is respectfully referred to as *Mwalimu*, which means teacher in Kiswahili.

Mexico

Until the 1980s Mexico had been an anomaly within Latin America due to its early revolution and the setting up of a state party system which had almost consensus support from the population from the 1930s to 1980s (Almeyra, 2007 p.52). The 1980s marked a neoliberal turning point for many countries and Mexico is no exception (Harvey, 2005/2009). Banks and state enterprises (except for oil and electricity) were privatised, then bought up mainly by transnational companies, thanks to the globalisation of international finance capital. The Mexican government was taken over by entrepreneurs or their representatives. For example, President Vicente Fox, in power 2000-2006, was previously president of Coca Cola Mexico (Almeyra, 2007 p.52). Political and business elites, like their counterparts elsewhere, excuse reductions in workers' wages and poor working conditions as the "unstoppable nature of globalisation" (Willis, 2002, p.142).

The introduction of neoliberal logics resulted in a widening of the gap between poor and rich Mexicans. The period 1987-1994 saw 21 new billionaires in Mexico whilst the minimum wage lost 40% of its value. The wealth of Carlos Slim Helú, the on-off richest man in the world, is worth 43% of the annual income of all Mexicans. Whilst Slim benefited directly by buying up previously state-owned enterprises, minimum wages were kept low despite productivity increases (Dawson, 2006, p.44 & 120-1; Harvey, 2010b). Mexico's ratio of earnings of the richest 10% to the poorest 10% being 21 makes it more equal than Bolivia (93.9) and Brazil (40.6), both of which have governments that, like others in the region, are actively addressing inequality in what are described as Bolivarian movements (World Bank, 2009; Stone, 2010).

Economic inequalities within Mexico have spatial and social dimensions. These overlap as the southern states of Mexico are generally poorer and contain more indigenous people, who are generally poorer, living there. This is sometimes expressed in terms of a conceptual divide between the indigenous and non-indigenous people along social lines as well as in terms of physical appearance (Howard, 2002 p.61). The internal differences within Mexico have been

expressed in the Northern Mexican saying: “The North works, the Center thinks, and the South sleeps”. In some ways the Northerners see themselves as better connected to those across the border than to the rest of Mexico (Dawson, 2006, p.19). This impression is reinforced by the poverty and malnutrition of southern Mexico and the 1.2 million people, in 2000, who were employed in maquiladora¹⁰ factories which are concentrated along the border with the United States (Willis, 2002, p.141). Maquiladoras are mainly staffed by women and gender is another social dimension of inequalities within Mexico. Developers in the border city of Ciudad Juárez have framed Mexican women’s character as the cause the city’s problems in the context of failed development promises of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Wright, 2001, p.95; Wright, 2010). This is an example of how globalisation is framed as something to be adapted to, and responsibility for associated problems is attributed locally (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.140).

One way in which inequalities are responded to is through the formal political process. In the 2006 elections Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who presented a challenge to racism and the accumulation of wealth by a few, won most votes. However his opponents fraudulently changed the votes, and so President Felipe Calderón replaced President Vicente Fox, both from the *Partido de Acción Nacional* which is described as ultra-clerical, entrepreneurial and pro-imperialist. This resulted in massive peaceful protests (Almeyra, 2007 p.54; Rojas, 2008b, p.12), in contrast to the violent responses to election fraud in Kenya. Vote buying, pressing for media cover and manipulations of the electoral process also occurred in the 1994 general election (Dawson, 2006, p.64). The emigration of over a million workers a year can be seen as a passive sign of protest (Almeyra, 2007 p.53).

Another response has been from the Zapatistas, named after Emiliano Zapata, a leader of the 1910 Mexican revolution (Morales, 2006). The Zapatista Army

¹⁰ Maquiladoras are factories which locate based on reduced tariffs and low wages, with materials often imported for manufacturing then re-exported.

of National Liberation was announced on the day that NAFTA came into effect in 1994, saying “enough is enough” (Dawson, 2006, p.46). The Zapatistas present an alternative, autonomous approach and use capitalist market networks without becoming subordinated to their logic. Their approach also aims to transform the codes and mechanisms of dominant ideology by re-valuing popular knowledge and culture (Rojas, 2008a, p.13). There were violent attempts by paramilitaries to ‘unmask’¹¹ the Zapatistas during the 1990s, yet they were increasingly supported by the international left given their challenge to globalisation and declarations of human, women’s, and indigenous rights (Dawson, 2006, p,158-9).

Mexico, in its diversity, is a place where global capital ‘touches down’ (Yeates, 2009, p.52). Much recent social and economic history is influenced by international agreements and neoliberal logics *touching down* in particular positions where the local context presents particular opportunities for neoliberal capitalism. The low wages, reasonable infrastructure and proximity to the United States, for instance, have been reasons for locating maquiladora factories there (Willis, 2002 p.139). This Northern neighbour is one in which Mexico has been interested since the 18th century: “First with a mixture of curiosity and disdain; later on with an admiration and enthusiasm that were soon tinged with fear and envy.” (Paz, 1979/2005, P.357). The United States is also involved in Mexican affairs; Carlos Slim funded the import of a new aggressive penal system devised in New York by the Giuliani brothers and aggressively exported to Latin America and Europe. However, locals may well block these plans that aim to eliminate street vendors, something which is almost impossible due to their sheer numbers, and the politicians’ need of the workers’ votes (Wacquant, 2010).

¹¹ Zapatistas often wear a red bandana covering the lower half of their faces.

United Kingdom

The industrial revolution is said to have altered the entire civil society, changing parts of England and Scotland into technologically advanced, highly productive, increasingly urban, manufacturing centres. Cottage industries were replaced by factories accompanied by the growth of a proletariat, for example in the first 30 years of the 1800s many cities and towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire doubled in size, and an infrastructure of the 'finest roadways', railways and canals was built largely by private enterprise (Engels, 1892/2008, p.1-15). Manchester is recognised as the centre of the industrial revolution, whose pioneering industrial activities were a prototype for other industrial cities. Manchester was also home to political activism and reform movements responding to some of the impacts of industrialism (Douglas et al., 2002, p.236). Like Kenya and Mexico, the United Kingdom's (UK) past is entwined with that of other countries and England's place at the first industrial nation of the nineteenth century is argued to arise from its disproportionately large share of the Atlantic basin market where English-manufactured products could be sold (Inikori, 2007, p.78).

Privileged access to the markets and resources of other countries remained a facet of British history during colonial times. At its height the area of the British Empire was roughly 125 times larger than Britain (Davies, 1997, p.1068). Even by the mid-nineteenth century Britain had amassed "vast colonial possessions" and occupied "a monopolist position in the world market". British imperialism was observed to split workers' movements and instil opportunism amongst them (Lenin, 1917/1963, Chapter 8). After slave trading was banned by the House of Commons in 1807, there was a shift to exploiting African labour in situ rather than moving people elsewhere to work. The trading companies paid very little as African farmers had their own *shambas* (fields) for subsistence farming (Rodney, 1972/2001, p.156-8). As well as amassing national wealth for Britain and deficit elsewhere, British colonial rule had other moral deficits:

"... exploitation such as the slave trade and the indentured labour traffic; cases of acquisitive aggression such as the opium wars and the rape of Matabeleland; acts of vandalism such as the burning of the Chinese

emperor's summer palace in Beijing and the destruction of the Mahdi's tomb at Omdurman; squalid fiascos such as the Jameson raid and the Suez invasion; crimes such as the use of dum-dum bullets and poison gas against "uncivilised tribes" (Churchill's phrase); massacres such as occurred at Amritsar in 1919, Batang Kali in Malaya in 1948 (the "British My Lai") and Hola camp in Kenya in 1959." (Brendon, 2007, no page number)

After World War II, and with its declining empire, Britain was a country whose identity was disintegrating although many Britons retained illusions of sovereignty and self-sufficiency given that they did not suffer defeat in that war (Davies, 1997, p.1074 & 1085). Despite the decline of empire, many African countries remained tied to former colonial powers due to their own shortages of trained personnel and poor infrastructure, which enabled the West to continue to control African economies (Arnold, 2005, p.940). In fact British governments have justified giving aid because it can be used to Britain's advantage. The 1997 UK White Paper *Eliminating World Poverty* gives the impression that aid is given simply in return for improving the lives of others, however Britain gains a lot from this relationship and "cannot afford to be squeezed out of the third world" because its first world status rests on such relationships and the trade opportunities that development creates (Noxolo, 2004; Noxolo, 2006, p.263-4). The UK Department for International Development (DfID) is a strong advocate for globalisation, and under New Labour DfID pushed for an extreme form of liberalisation (Arnold, 2005, p.948).

The UK's international connections and commitments have separated it from closer European neighbours. Commitments to the Commonwealth and the United States have caused tension for the UK with the rest of Europe. The UK was blocked by Charles de Gaulle from having a close relationship and associated economic benefits with both Europe and the United States. It was only after de Gaulle's death that the UK joined the European Economic Community (Davies, 1997, p.1075 & 1085). Other aspects of the UK that make it stand out from Europe include not having a Christian democratic tradition similar to those of other countries, and the British Labour party differing from European socialism (*ibid.*, p.1071-2). Today the UK is half-heartedly European, retaining the Pound Sterling and opting out from the Shengen Agreement whilst

being a member state of the European Union. The UK has retained a strong relationship with the United States; both have high levels of inequality compared to most other richer countries (World Bank, 2009). This connection is demonstrated in the welcoming of policy evangelism of the Manhattan Institute, who in exporting a proactive and expensive penal wing used the UK as the “Trojan horse” and “acclimatisation chamber” within Europe (Wacquant, 2010).

World War II was a great leveller, possibly accelerating the process that began in the 1930s, with life in the UK becoming more egalitarian. When Labour came to power in 1945 they established a strong welfare state, with the economy balanced between the public and private sectors (Davies, 1997, p.1074-7). Later, during the 1970s and 80s, massive social upheavals transformed and polarized social and economic structures, especially under Margaret Thatcher, and the prosperity of ‘enterprise culture’ was accompanied by inner-city decay (Davies, 1997, p.1075; Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.134). As in Kenya and Mexico there is a spatial pattern to inequality within the UK¹². The South-East is pulling away from the rest in terms of higher house prices, higher levels of education, lower unemployment, and longer life expectancies (Dorling, 2008).

Inequality has become an issue of increased public debate in Britain, particularly in the run up to the 2010 General Election, although much discussion about inequality focuses on social mobility and equality of opportunity rather than outcome (Barford, 2010). The Conservative party plans for public sector pay to have a ratio no greater than 20:1; it is argued that such ratios should be extended to the private sector (Lister, forthcoming). The British Social Attitudes Survey shows levels of income inequality in Britain were thought to be too large by over 70% of people during the period 1983-2004 (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007, p.10). Yet it is generally poverty that is seen as the problem in a way that wealth is not; however since the financial crisis of 2008 there has been increased critique of wealth inequalities (Dorling, 2010b,

¹² The UK has a devolved administration and this research was only undertaken in England.

p.222; Rowlingson and Connor, forthcoming). With reference to wealth and the maintenance of hereditary privilege, the UK maintains a national monarchy, shared by Kenya, and the monarch appears on coins as far away as Canada and New Zealand. This attests to the UK's wide influence and misplaced historically rooted sense of superiority which implicates it in relationships with many other countries, meaning that there is no single major relationship as with Mexico and the United States or Kenya and the UK.

1.6 Thesis structure

The methodology (chapter 2) presents the rationale for the approach adopted, and details the data collection and analysis techniques used. In providing a deeper insight into the production and treatment of the material presented in this thesis, I hope to alert the reader to the limitations as well as the strengths of this method. Working with quantitative and qualitative data has presented challenges of integrating findings, but adds scope for understanding the wider context into which the discussion group research fits.

The structure of the substantive chapters of this thesis draws upon Fairclough's formulation of Bhaskar's (1986) 'explanatory critique' (Fairclough, 2009, p.167). This recommends the four stages of analysis listed below, to consider the discursive treatment of a social wrong. Section 1.3 identifies why inequality can be interpreted to be a social wrong.

Stage 1: Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect.

Stage 2: Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong.

Stage 3: Consider whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong.

Stage 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles.

These stages roughly equate to chapters, except that stage one is split into two chapters, the first focusing on words and the second on maps as semiotic forms of inequality. Each chapter includes a literature summary, which complements the broader literature summary (section 1.4) by introducing specific debates that pertain to those particular findings. These self-contained thematic chapters integrate findings, interpretation and discussion so that the reader need not skip back and forth between chapters.

Spoken discourse about inequality is the subject of chapter 3, which details ways in which inequality and the world are conceived. This short chapter presents constructions of inequality; the metaphors and stereotypes used to represent inequality vary, for example, inequality may be described as many struggling to support the few – or alternatively few successful people supporting many. These techniques of simplification obscure some aspects of inequality whilst highlighting others. This chapter also addresses how people conceive of the world, in particular by addressing the world as the extent of one's awareness, which usually does not extend to the entire globe.

Chapter 4 introduces novel world maps that depict those earning over US\$ 200 and under US\$ 2 a day (purchasing power parity). The maps were made as part of the Worldmapper project aiming to share more widely United Nations data that describe the world, with people around the world. Whilst the meaning of maps is a popular topic of research, this chapter focuses on how audiences interpret those maps in Kenya, Mexico and the UK. This chapter shows the difficulties experienced in reading these cartograms, but also focuses on the way that maps can elicit discussion about the world and in particular draw attention to inequality.

Discursive and attitudinal obstacles to addressing inequality are identified in chapter 5. These obstacles are split into two parts, one is affirmative support for the existing social order and the other is its defence. I show a widespread aspiration to improve one's lot, concern with social mobility rather than social change, and optimism for the future, which discourages talk of change. That inequality is presented as unproblematic, 'not my responsibility', the only viable option, and created by natural forces also serves to block discussion about change. These obstacles present some of the norms and beliefs about the nature of society that collectively discourage movement towards greater equality.

Chapter 6 questions the extent to which inequality is presented as a necessity for our existing social order, and how it fractures society to the extent that we may have systematically limited empathy for and awareness of others in

society. Some participants argue that inequality is necessary for society to function. However even supporters of inequality see extreme poverty and associated powerlessness as unacceptable aspects that should be addressed. Thus whilst inequality “functions” for some, what this functioning is doing has reached some moral limits.

Overcoming obstacles to inequality is described in chapter 7. These ideas were generated from the discussion groups, and thus respond to the need for wider, more inclusive debates about issues that face us all. Reframing the terms of debate is one way in which a more critical discussion can take place: thinking holistically, responsibly, systemically, historically, morally, and emotionally. When combined these can move away from the narrow thinking that there is no alternative. Ways of bringing change into daily life form the second part of this chapter, and include charitable giving, respectful interaction, involvement in change, and thinking in terms of utopias. Together this shows that there are many small ways in which inequality is contested alongside more organised movements against inequality.

The conclusion recapitulates the major findings of this research and, reflecting on the implications of these findings, considers national and international policy approaches to inequality. This consideration acknowledges the importance of public support for policy and also the flexibility of discourse. The framing and interpretation of inequalities has important implications for social reality; possibly the most efficient way to address inequalities is through policy change. As such, international public discourses that critique inequality of outcome and call for positive alternatives play a key role in instigating change.

2. Research methods

2.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methods and explains the choices made in this research. I begin with a statement of my research questions, then discuss some of the ethical issues that arise when researching inequality. I go on to describe the primary data collection and analysis. First I consider the qualitative research process and analysis, which forms the bulk of the empirical material presented here. Secondly I describe the quantitative analysis undertaken. This is a much briefer account given that I was using secondary data and the analyses presented here are descriptive statistics. To reiterate, the research questions that these methods address are:

Question 1. *What are the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world?*

Question 2. *What are the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality?*

Question 3: *What are the discursive obstacles to addressing socio-economic inequality?*

Question 4: *In what ways does inequality fracture society?*

Question 5: *How is inequality perceived to be necessary and at what point does inequality-as-necessary reach a limit of acceptability?*

Question 6: *In what ways is inequality challenged in everyday life?*

2.2 Ethics and positionality

This work is motivated by an ethical stance against inequality and poverty, based on evidence that current inequality is damaging for societies. My aim is to uncover discourses and attitudes towards inequality, in order to understand

how these challenge and reinforce unjust socio-economic arrangements: an unequal distribution of goods, respect, rights, responsibility and money between people, collectively termed *capabilities* (Sen, 1999). This research exists in the context of the global inequalities that it seeks to challenge, and amongst the neoliberal processes which we are all subjected to and implicated in (Sundberg, 2007, p.270). I have moved freely around the globe, benefiting from exchange rates that are favourable for people paid in sterling with over £50,000 of UK Government money being spent on this research. It is recommended that such opportunities be used with a concern for equity and aim to challenge unequal power relations (Skelton, 2001, p.96). We are warned to be careful about reproducing divisions and hierarchies in the 'comparative manoeuvre' that is research; this applies to our planning, data collection, analysis and writing (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010, p.118).

It has been noted that formal research ethics do not always tap into some of the more important ethical issues, such as encouraging researchers to be caring and committed (Kobayashi, 2001, p.60). When thinking in terms of wider ethics of the consequences of my actions as opposed to standard ethical procedure – different questions arise. Teachers from poorer countries could have found me insensitive by asking about poverty. Yet to extend mutual understanding it is necessary to ask people their opinions and listen, which is respectful. Further, participants often enjoy discussion group research (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.117) and I certainly did. The teachers readily engaged with no obvious resentment towards me. Nevertheless, in Kenya and Mexico there was surprise at my age and occupation: in both countries PhD students are usually over 30 years old and have their own families (I was 26-27 and had no children). This observation, and what follows, acknowledge that identities do not exist in isolation but are relational between the researched and researcher (Rose, 1997, p.315; Figure 5).

Identity changes with social context. Within the UK my accent gives away my middle-class background and often misleads people to think I come from the South-East of England. People can quickly be placed, socially and geographically, based on their accents; working in Scotland it was joked that

Gillian Rose was from Radio 4 which she suspected was due to her middle-class English accent (Rose, 1997, p.306). Whilst British participants could use accent to place me, accent is largely irrelevant to Mexicans and Kenyans who are less sensitised to these differences and who identify other differences. It is common for research students to contrast with research participants in some ways (e.g. Skelton, 2001, p90-91). In Mexico my accent was still part of my identity, as an entertaining and haughty alternative to one of many possible United States accents. On leaving the UK my Britishness became a more significant part of my identity. Like others (*ibid.*, p.94), in discussion groups I tried to disassociate myself from British politics, immigration laws and trade policies. Yet it is inescapable that inequalities infiltrate this research, existing between researcher and researched (Mercer et al., 2003, p.432), as we are all positioned within the wider inequalities I research.

On first sight I was assumed to be a *Gringo* in Mexico, due to my physical appearance, but being British may have freed me from negative stereotypes of United States Americans whose holiday homes have overrun towns such as Chapala in Jalisco. The UK's own foreign policy and ties to the United States, particularly the recent Iraq war, mean that internationally the UK is also not necessarily endowed with positive associations. In Kenya I was a *Muzungu*, which is partly racial and partly economic category. Expected *muzungu* behaviour involves visiting national parks that Kenyans rarely visit, footing the bill for Kenyan friends, and a very warm welcome. Another female British geographer, working in Nicaragua, found that being a *Chela*, a female Westerner, came with expectations of sexual availability. This influenced her personal life and research, as men were especially helpful (Cupples, 2002, p.386). My work was not influenced in quite the same way, given my research being within schools and my friendships being with families during fieldwork. Wearing a fake wedding ring when travelling alone validated my claims of non-availability. Thus whilst certainly being stereotyped, I attempted to manage facets of my identity whilst recognising that we cannot fully understand, control or redistribute power (Rose, 1997, p.319).

My research is contextualised in relationships of unequal power, particularly when historical relationships are taken into consideration. It is worth noting that, particularly in Kenya, my being white and from the former colonising country can affect how Kenyans interact with me. When Tracy Skelton undertook her PhD research in the Monserratian post-colonial context, she worried that people might feel obliged to participate in British-based research “out of an encultured sense of deference”, or feel disinclined to “because we represent a very negative and exploitative past” (Skelton, 2001, p.89). Contemporary and historically-rooted power imbalances have some influence on the nature of research participation. As such it was suggested by Laura Nader that we should “always study up” social hierarchies, because *they* can defend themselves; further Jean Comaroff warns that research about the poor may be used against them (Comaroff, 2008). This research is self-consciously situated in the social middle ground of teachers. Working with teachers, often respected members of society who do one of the most important jobs, I could be seen to be following Laura Nader’s advice.



Figure 5: Researcher positionality

Permission to use this photograph was granted.

As I am engaged in and affected by this research process, I am noting the chronology of some of the many influences on my own opinions. I come from an educated, white, politically left-wing, middle-class family. I am female and undertook this PhD work aged 25-28 years old. Whilst there is a danger of pigeon-holing myself using these social categories, given that we all occupy many more than 6 groups (Uzzell and Rätzkel, 2009, p.346), this section gives some information about me to help the reader understand more about the research relationships and what my relational identity could have been. By the same token Figure 5 shows me talking with some participants, I detail some characteristics of the research groups as individuals in Appendix 1, and I summarise the group identity when discussing the findings. This is at best a partial situating of the research (Rose, 1997, p.318).

Given that we are all entangled in the reality we investigate, we are perhaps obliged to make explicit the nature of our own political engagements and agendas (Sundberg, 2007, p.270). My parents work in caring, person-centred jobs: a special-needs teacher and a social worker. They are also politically active, in the sense of engaging with formal politics as well as resistance in the form of being active members of groups including the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Amnesty and Greenpeace. Growing up with their concern for other people meant that I grew up with an awareness of and concern about social problems, a critique of their causes, and faith in the idea that we could do something about it. Working on the worldmapper project amplified my awareness of the extent of world inequalities, as I wrote about maps showing hundreds of ways that people in some countries are worse off than those elsewhere. This background predisposed me to this research topic, encouraged my criticism of inequality and attitude that it can change, and bolsters my hope that this research contributes to wider critiques.

The co-operation of 100 participants has made this research possible; to reciprocate I provided refreshments for participants and offered to speak to their classes. In the UK I gave formal presentations to some Sixth Form groups; in Mexico I taught a double period of geography to 'pay' for the teachers' participation. Otherwise, in Kenya and Mexico I addressed classes in a less

formal manner as a school visitor, talking about the UK and answering their questions. This extra time spent in the schools was of interest to me as a researcher, and I was welcomed by students and teachers. Many participants requested to learn the findings, I will distribute a research summary for this purpose. Thus I was able to thank teachers in an appropriate fashion and without monetary payment. However I almost paid one Kenyan group, a participant requested “sitting allowance, talking allowance and listening allowance”, but the Head Teacher intervened and refused payment. A more usual greeting in Kenya was that “in Africa a visitor is a blessing”.

The principle of avoiding harm to participants is broadly accepted (Kobayashi, 2001, p60; Skelton, 2001, p.97)¹³. However, a topic being upsetting does not mean that it should be avoided as emotional reactions can signify importance or unresolved status. Emotional distress is an inherent part of life, and totally avoiding it would produce an incomplete view of human existence. Those who did talk emotionally about this topic may have found it therapeutic to publicly air their opinions and the forum of discussion group can facilitate consciousness-raising (Kneale, 2001, p.145). Given that many groups were pre-existing, conversational themes and emotional reactions may be revisited at a later date. Nevertheless it is necessary to know how to deal with unexpected emotional harm (Kobayashi, 2001, p.66); this can be managed by discussion group participants who know one another and by the facilitator. Whilst endeavouring not to cause harm, I argue that some expression of negative emotions representing harm caused at another time may be unavoidable as discussion brings up these topics, and may be important for social research into real life.

This research design, data gathering, analysis and reporting is informed by the recommendations of the University of Sheffield’s ‘University Research Ethics Committee’. Primary data is gathered in discussion groups with ‘freely and voluntarily’ given informed consent. I combined into a single sheet the guidance

¹³ Researchers have an explicit ethical requirement to avoid causing harm to participants. Little is said about the environmental and therefore ultimate human impact of international research.

and outlines provided in the University of Sheffield's 'standard information sheet' and 'standard consent form' (see Appendix 4)¹⁴. Another pillar of accepted ethics is: "Anonymity is essential and must be guaranteed." (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.128). However, it is not possible to guarantee this in a group where the participants know one another. What participants say after the group is beyond my control and knowledge; in my experience researchers often care much more about anonymity than do participants. The attitudes survey analysis uses secondary data, which is already anonymised and published on the Internet, so there are no immediate ethical concerns other than clearly stating the source and accurately reporting methods.

Research visas were necessary to work in Kenya and Mexico. The Kenyan research visa cost US\$400 for a period up to 4 years, although I used it for under 2 months. In Kenya and Mexico I needed an institutional affiliation: *The Kenya Institute of Education* and the *Instituto de Geografía* at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* supported my research visa applications.

2.3 Mixing methods

Existing research on inequality employs quantitative and qualitative methods. Economic inequality is usually described quantitatively, making it reasonably comparable across space. Public understandings of inequality are regularly subjected to surveys and quantitative analysis, resulting in models explaining the structural reasons behind people's beliefs (e.g. Amiel et al., 1999; Hadler, 2005). Similarly, qualitative research has contributed to understandings of inequality by detailing the concepts and constructs surrounding this morally challenging issue (e.g. Chakravarti, 1986; Reis and Moore, 2005a). These methods are also productively combined, such as in a 'Survey of Attitudes Towards Overseas Development' (Bowles, 1978, p.7-8) which engaged members of the British public in discussion groups and a questionnaire issued

¹⁴ I included two survey questions from the Pew Survey to allow the possibility of linking survey and discussion group data. As I did not use these in the thesis presented here this remains a minor footnote.

to a random sample of 908 adults. As both quantitative and qualitative focused research engages with inequality, I combine these approaches to address my research questions.

There are several reasons for mixing methods, including *triangulation* of results, *complementarity* as each method adds something different, *initiation and development* where findings from one method influence future research questions and methods, and *expansion* through extra richness and detail from mixing methods (Greene et al., 1989; Rossman and Wilson, 1994, p.315-6; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p.16). Here, mixing discussion group and surveys is chosen due to *complementarity*, they access different types of information at different spatial scales. The Pew Survey includes tens of thousands of respondents from 44 countries. What information is generated is somewhat pre-determined by multiple-response questions. The discussion groups involved 100 people, recording opinions and how these are expressed. This *complementarity* leads to *expansion* as detailed and varied information is generated. My simultaneous use of these methods did not greatly facilitate methodological developments, however analysis was enriched by the juxtaposition of these data.

Mixing methods brings challenges. Typically an expert research team would jointly undertake mixed methods research. As a doctoral student I undertook both methods, giving me an overview of the whole process although inevitably resulting in less time being devoted to either of the methods than had I just used one. This also sidesteps some difficulties (and many advantages) of group work, which could include lack of respect for other techniques and a lack of collegiality (Rossman and Wilson, 1994, p.325).

It is argued that “Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism.” (Bourdieu, 1992/1980, p.25). This divide is revealed in the question of epistemological consistency when mixing quantitative and qualitative methods, although mixing methods has occurred since at least 1900, before such an ‘incompatibility thesis’ was devised (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p.5). There are several possible reactions to this thesis:

(i) work with both paradigms dialectically, using the tensions between them to develop ideas, (ii) develop a new paradigm that incorporates both, (iii) simply and pragmatically fit methods to one's research questions, or (iv) use a concept-driven approach to establish theoretical and conceptual compatibility between methods and topic. A practical approach is recommended in place of subscribing to a formalised paradigm, as our 'naturalized paradigms' combine elements of other paradigms (Greene and Caracelli, 2003, p.99). In response to Bourdieu, this pragmatism overrides the artificial divide between quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

To expand this argument for the compatibility of mixing methods, it can be useful to conceive of methods falling along a continuum of quantitative to qualitative. Both have a similar aim of accessing the social world beyond the researcher. Along the continuum exist methods exhibiting 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' aspects, such as content analysis, case study approaches and observational work. All methodologies require the choice of a topic, a way to record it, and an analytical approach. Variation arises in the net chosen to catch information and understandings of what that catch shows: these vary within and between more quantitative and more qualitative methods. For example qualitative studies aim to represent participants' *truth spaces* whereas surveys aim to be representative (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003, p.369-370).

Analysis of discussion group and survey data, detailed in the following sections, was concurrent. The results from different sources and methods can be used to expand in two senses, (i) horizontally in the sense of the generalisability of survey findings, (ii) vertically with the depth of discussion group findings. It is recommended that the research purpose should inform the balance and integration of methods (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003, p.378). As such discourse analysis provides most of the empirical evidence, with survey analysis complementing, broadening, and adding to this.

2.4 Discussion groups and qualitative analysis

Selecting research locations

The aim in identifying research locations was to maximise diversity, particularly in relation to the countries' positions in the world economy and their geographical location. It is the correspondence between economic position and attitudes towards inequalities that is the research focus. This is of interest because one's position in society influences what other parts of society one is aware of (Reis and Moore, 2005b). Diversity of geographical location, the countries being in different continents, was important to me because of the cultural and sometimes linguistic affiliations that come with this (see Anderson, 1991; see section 1.5). Supposedly a wider variety of attitudes can be found using a wider sample and this logic of maximising diversity extends to the selection of teachers with varying teaching experience, who taught at schools attended by students from various backgrounds, and in cities and the countryside. It was also necessary that research countries feature in the Pew Survey to facilitate the integration of quantitative and qualitative data.

Given the importance of practical considerations of support and gatekeepers, identifying key people to assist me with my research guided country selection. In the UK contacting teachers was facilitated by colleagues at the University of Sheffield and the Geographical Association (GA), a UK-based professional association for Geography Teachers. Due to ease of contact, fewer logistical concerns and lower costs, the UK was selected for my sample. I was greatly assisted by the GA in contacting people abroad; an intern emailed all non-UK members which resulted in many offers of participation.

I was offered considerable assistance from two fellow geographers: Martin Ortiz and Kevin Cook who, with their friends and families, were able to help me in Mexico and Kenya respectively. I was also offered assistance from an Indian Head Mistress working in Kerala, but was unable to work in India due to time and money limitations. Kenya and Mexico were chosen because, with the UK, they fit the criteria of diverse economic situations and geographical locations. Martin Ortiz and Kevin Cook introduced me to schools, helped with logistics like

accommodation and involved me in their social lives. This made for a very rewarding and efficient research. This research benefited from the prioritisation of practicalities and significant preparation. A final practical consideration was personal safety, which limited me from working in some of the most disrupted countries.

Language

Learning languages for fieldwork can deepen understandings of different perspectives and increase cultural sensitivity (Watson, 2004, p.60). It is also considerate given that people usually prefer to speak in their own language (Hennick, 2007, p.30), and of practical value where English is not spoken. I studied Spanish for 18 months before going to Mexico. It was recommended that someone assist me with running discussion groups, so in my first Kenyan and Mexican groups a friend from that country accompanied me. However I preferred to run discussion groups myself, which kept things practically and financially simpler as I did not need to train or pay someone else. Thus I was closely involved in data production and could ask my own supplementary questions. Whilst my listening in Spanish caught most of the discussion, I could not follow some segments of speech. I have since checked with Mexican friends to translate some words and phrases. I was glad to facilitate the discussion groups myself and knowing some Spanish reduces the hermeneutical gap¹⁵ between participants and myself.

I spent 3 months learning Kiswahili prior to undertaking fieldwork in Kenya. The language of secondary education in Kenya is English, and Kiswahili is the other national language. These are spoken alongside tribal languages and Sheng, which mixes Kiswahili and English. The Kenyan groups were conducted in English, although some comments were in other languages and Kiswahili words

¹⁵ A hermeneutical gap is the space between a message and its interpretation, or the sign and the signified. Such gaps may be exaggerated through communication across cultures as ways of interpreting signs differ. The etymology of the term comes from the Greek messenger God, Hermes.

were often used in mainly English sentences. As such learning Kiswahili assisted my comprehension and gave me insight into East Africa before starting my research. It was also entertaining for others when I spoke Kiswahili, and symbolic that I learned an East African language, at times adopting the role of the one who had difficulty talking rather than always obliging others to use English which positions me as the British English expert. The appreciation of foreigners learning one's own language was expressed in my first day at the Institute of Kiswahili and Modern Languages, where the Director said: "finally, the British want to learn something from us!"

As well as wanting to learn something from Kenyan and Mexican people, learning some Spanish and Kiswahili gave me an insight into the constructions used and the difficulties of mapping the meaning from one language onto another (Twyman et al., 1999, p.320). In the case of Mexican Spanish I translated into British English. Kenyan participants put their meaning into English for me, which contrasts with the easiest way of communicating, talking in a shared tribal language described in English as 'short-waving'. The discussion guides were translated into Spanish, with assistance, so that when moderating I did not need to translate and question simultaneously (after advice of Hennick, 2007, p.30; see Appendix 3).

Pilot study

The initial research design involved roughly 40 interviews amongst teachers in Kenya, India, Mexico and the United Kingdom. The rationale for this was that interviews would allow me to explore people's understandings and feelings towards inequality in depth. To pilot this research I contacted 8 recently qualified Geography teachers working near to Sheffield, 4 of whom were interviewed. Overall I found that interviews were not suitable for my research questions. Whilst I had hoped interviewees would choose their terms of discussion it came across that neither of us was precisely sure what to talk about, so interaction was sometimes awkward and vague. Part of this awkwardness could be because interviewees were not accustomed to talking about inequalities. Similarly I asked the interviewees to peruse the maps and

graphs and then comment, which was also too undirected for a one-to-one interaction.

As a result of the limited success of these interviews, discussion groups were piloted and selected as a more appropriate method. I performed two pilot discussion groups with trainee maths teachers. By chance one group was all female and the other all male. The female group were all British and the male group included mainly British people but also an East Asian man and two African men, which allowed some sort of piloting in a cross-cultural context. These pilot groups convinced me of the suitability of discussion groups because discussion quickly developed from my open-ended questions; participants were ready to challenge one another so many ideas, opinions and experiences were shared. An energetic group dynamic maintained the momentum of discussion.

Discussion groups

Discussion groups proved to be a valuable research method compared to the interviews, suiting my research interest in how inequalities are framed socially. The group setting invites discussion in contrast to the more researcher directed question-answer format of an interview. Secondly, discussion groups accommodate the broad nature of my questions, intended to reduce the researcher influence and encourage people to talk in their own terms. This made the group more interesting for me as new ideas readily arose and the group dynamic was enjoyable. This method also emphasises a sense of locality (Holbrook and Jackson, 1996, p.139), which is particularly interesting for geographical fieldwork concerned with spatial variation.

Discussion groups are closer to natural social situations than interviews, with the benefit of being directed around researcher defined topics. This method generates group-level information in a way that individual-focused interviews cannot (Hennick, 2007, p.12), which is argued to “better reflect the social nature of human knowledge than a summation of individual narratives extracted in interviews” (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.115). This discussion also allows for a freer definition of important topics and reduces the researcher’s influence because discussion is more easily sustained (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.117).

A discussion group was a one-off meeting with teachers, lasting roughly 90 minutes. This contrasts with intensive groups, which involve longer sessions or multiple meetings. For example Jacqueline Burgess' research into fear combined discussion groups with participant observation, which took 3-6 hours (Burgess, 1996, p.132; for another example see Kneale, 2001, p.136-8). A 90 minute time commitment allowed me to run more groups and reduced the participants' commitment, which made recruitment easier. Whilst one-off groups may not cover a topic in great depth or record opinions altering over time (Holbrook and Jackson, 1996, p.141), they do provide a view of how that group of people at that time collectively reflect on the question of inequality.

I now describe the discussion group format. In my introduction it was only necessary to gloss what the research is about, confidentiality, audio recording and what it will be used for as the informed consent form covered these issues (Appendix 4). This was useful given that groups were often squeezed between participants' other commitments. As such checking an appropriate duration of the group before starting and punctuality were necessary (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.128; Hennick, 2007). This precludes unexpected early departures, allows the researcher to manage the time and cover all the questions, and shows a respect for participants' other commitments. I also stated some guidelines for the discussion before starting (Hennick, 2007), as it is easier to ask people to talk one at a time from the outset, and asking after the conversation has split can sound like a reprimand.

I constructed a discussion guide of 7 questions, observing advice about running 'international' discussion groups (Hennick, 2007). Conversation followed a particular order, starting with what inequality means, in order to begin the discussion simply and develop a working definition. There was often a moment of quiet after this first question as people gathered their thoughts. Next I asked whether they were aware of inequalities at the world scale, in a partially successful attempt to broaden discussion from a local focus. This was followed by asking about the causes of inequality, then enquiring as to the importance of inequality as an issue. I introduced some maps and graphs to the discussion (see below), and asked about the good and bad aspects of inequality. To round

up the discussion and retreat from more serious themes, participants were asked to comment on how frequently they discuss inequality, hopefully ending the group on a positive note (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.128). This final question gave a sense of how much the discourses that arose in the groups extend into their daily lives. The discussion guides, in English and Spanish, are in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

I ran these groups alone, although others suggest that researchers should work with a discussion facilitator (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.119), or that a facilitator manages the discussion whilst a participant observer talks and make notes (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.130). For reasons of cost, logistics, and minimising total group sizes I facilitated these groups myself. This reduced the distance between the participants and researcher, particularly when I could answer questions about the U.K. and my opinions. This reinforced the informality of the group and established rapport. At times it was hard to avoid male dominance of conversations, yet mixed groups better reflect the society from where they come (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.119), and so fit my aim of documenting social articulations of inequalities.

A debrief immediately after the group is recommended (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.130); in the absence of a co-researcher I settled for making notes about the group dynamic, themes that arose, and details about the school context. I also evaluated the method and used this time for general reflection on the wider project. Often it was impossible to make notes immediately due to the logistics of transport and not wishing to further impose on the school.

Halfway through the group two maps are briefly explained and then discussed amongst the group. Following that, two graphs are introduced and discussed in the same manner. The analysis in this thesis focuses on the maps rather than graphs. The images are intended to have a dual role: (i) to analyse their legibility and legitimacy i.e. potential for information communication, and (ii) as a visual vignette, prompting conversation as a reaction to the image. The images were explained, then A3 laminated copies were handed around the group accompanied by the question "Please can you comment on how useful you think these maps are as communication tools?" and "what works and what

doesn't work about these maps?" The images were presented in pairs, firstly maps of 'people earning below \$2 a day' (Figure 6) and 'people earning over \$200 a day' (Figure 7) that were integrated into posters containing supplementary information (see: Appendix 5); followed by graphs of 'income of the world population' (Figure 8) and 'trade flows' between world regions (Figure 9).

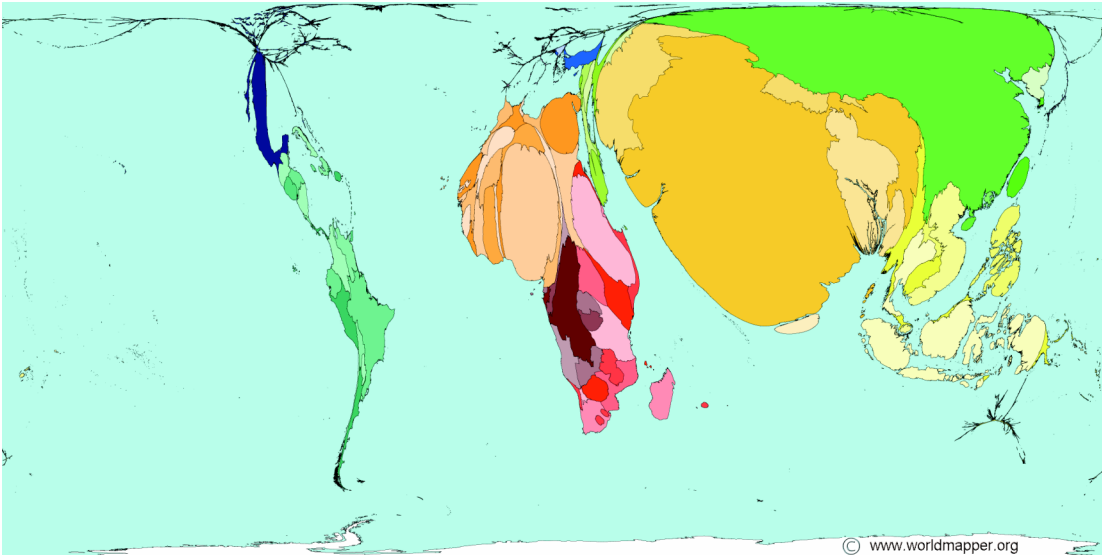


Figure 6: People living on under PPP US\$ 2 a day (2002)

Source: www.worldmapper.org. Data source: United Nations Development Programme, 2004.

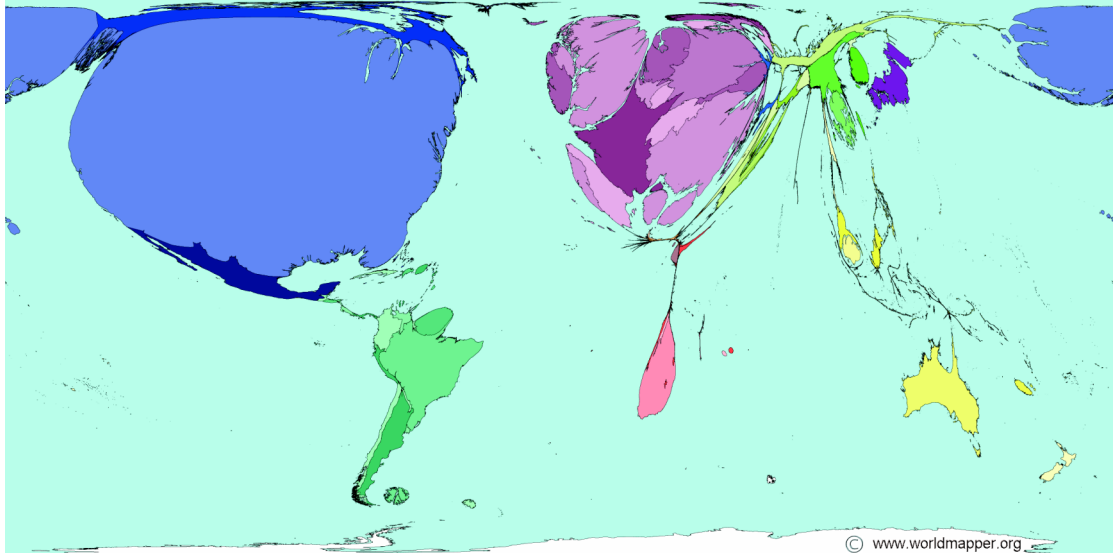


Figure 7: People living on over PPP US\$ 200 a day (2002)

For source information see Figure 6.

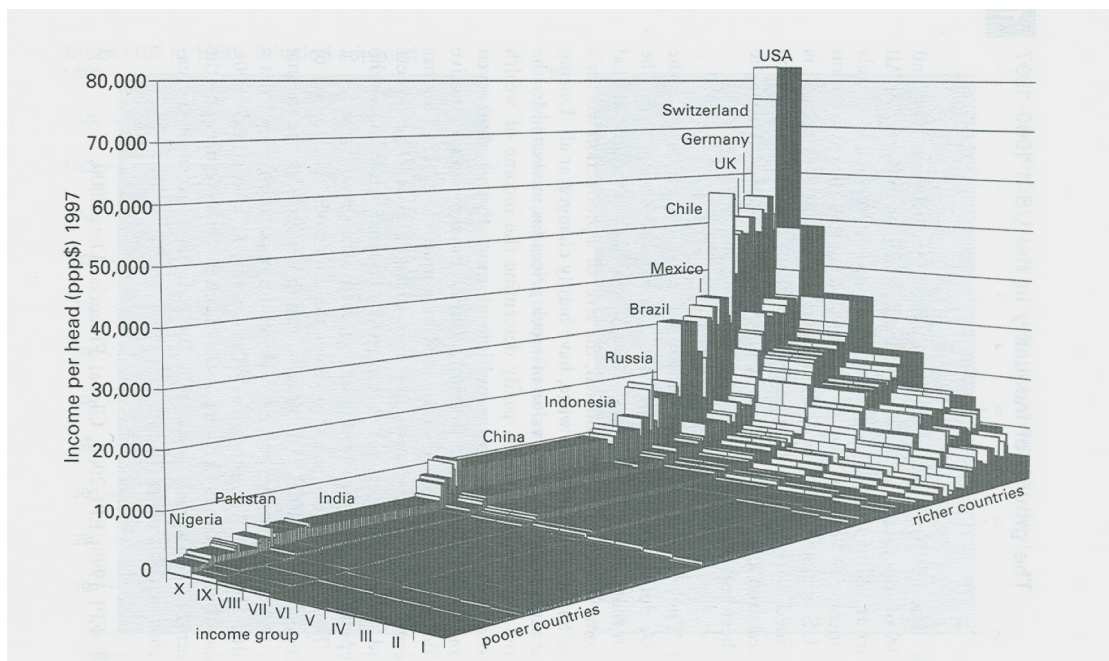


Figure 8: World income distribution by nation and deciles

Source: Sutcliffe, 2005, image 17. Data source: World Bank 1999.

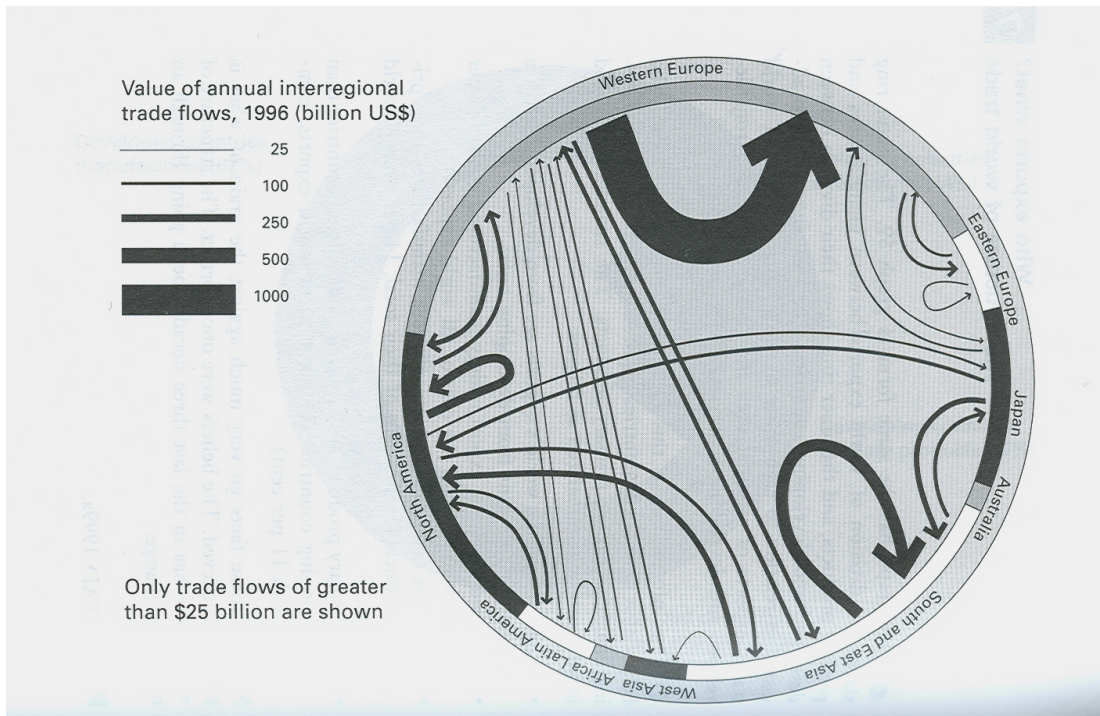


Figure 9: The directions of world trade

Source: Sutcliffe, 2005, image 71. Data source: International Monetary Fund, 1996.

These images show inequality in different ways. The maps, or cartograms, are resized so that area represents variables other than land area. In Figure 6 the countries with the most people earning over \$200 a day are largest, those with very few people earning over \$200 shrink accordingly. The reverse occurs in Figure 7, where countries expand if many people live on under US\$ a day. Thus the maps contrast where very high and very low earners live. This is done using a density-equalising algorithm (Dorling et al., 2006), explained as follows:

“To create a cartogram the population or other density function of interest is treated as a diffusing fluid, which spreads out from the areas where it is initially most dense into areas of lower density. As a simple analogy, imagine a bottle of ink emptied into a swimming pool: the ink is initially densest at the point where it is added to the water but over time will spread out until ultimately it is distributed uniformly throughout the pool.” (Dorling et al., 2006, p.4)

The graphs were sourced from Bob Sutcliffe’s ‘100 ways of seeing an unequal world’, of which I used the English and Spanish versions (Sutcliffe, 1998, 2005). Given their different publication dates the English and Spanish graphs used

data from different years, Figure 8 presents data published in 1999 and 2003 respectively, Figure 9 shows 1996 and 2003. These images were included primarily to complement the maps as other visualisations of world data. Comparisons between these images could be used to reveal preferences for particular visual conventions. Figure 8 presents a break down of earnings within and between countries (the maps just allow comparison between countries). This presents the entire world population, sizing the width of bars according to country population. Figure 9 shows flows of money to represent world trade, (movement is not captured by static cartograms). The graphs and maps visualise different information in different ways, but all pertaining to issues of income and wealth distributions at the world level.

Recruitment and setting

Teachers were identified as being an interesting group to study for three main reasons. Firstly they are responsible for educating children, so have some influence on pupils' sensitivities and awareness. One teacher referred specifically to her role of teaching children to be responsible citizens (see below). Choosing geography and social science teachers, mainly from secondary schools because that is where teachers specialise, meant participants' teaching touches on global issues and inequality. Whilst this research is not concerned with the education process, teachers are interesting participants because of their wider roles in society. Educational institutions play "a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the structure of social space, ... [so have] become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions" (Bourdieu, 1996, p.5).

Secondly, teachers are selected as citizens who interact with a range of people and deal with inequalities between their students on a daily basis. Thus teachers are citizens with a heightened awareness of national inequalities, and the variety between groups allows reports of differing lifestyles. Whilst the 'global social dialogues' of social movements and international institutions are well documented (Yeates, 2009, p.48), it is revealing to consider the views of

those who have not been identified because of their pre-existing active role in international decision making. Nevertheless, teachers are also active citizens: 70,000 teachers on strike brought Oaxaca, Mexico, to a standstill in 2006 (Almeyra, 2007 p.54).

Thirdly, participants having occupation as a basic similarity, a control variable, renders findings more comparable between countries. Some ways that teachers might differ from others is that some systems of formal education have a tendency to make people more economically conservative and morally liberal (Weakliem, 2002, p.153). Selecting teachers also controls for interest and motivation to some extent, as suggested when selecting students for other research (Uzzell, 2000, p.311). Another control is that most people who agree to participate do so altruistically (Skelton, 2001, p.91), so are a self-selecting group. One teacher reflected:

“... ultimately you are teaching for exams and grades, but you’re also teaching them for a wider world in which that inequality will exist, and it will change if they have a different mindset, and maybe that’s the beginning of that, so I always like it when they say that, because I think right, I suppose that’s the act of a responsible citizen.”

(UK 5, urban private school)

Teachers are a heterogeneous group, yet they share certain characteristics so the discourses they use may be somehow distinctive from those of others. There is considerable variation in teachers’ professional experiences. At the national level in Kenya 7% of the GDP is spent on education, in Mexico it is 4.8% and in the UK it is 5.6%. The expected number of years to be spent in education for each country are: 10 in Kenya, 14 in Mexico, and 16 in the UK (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). The social backgrounds of those who become teachers influences the image of the profession, as does the standpoint of the viewer. In the former Soviet Union for example, rural female school leavers of the Novosibirsk region, unlike their male and urban female counterparts, ranked teaching very highly (Hoyle, 1987, p.614-5). Similarly, in Mexico I was told that rural teachers are more respected than urban teachers. Many UK teachers have recently been undermined by Prime Minister David Cameron’s suggestion that those with third class degrees should not receive funding for their teacher training (Watt, 2010), which implies that they are not

good teachers. The social backgrounds of teachers varies in time and space; in the USA the lowest and highest classes are somewhat underrepresented amongst teachers (Hoyle, 1987, p.617-8); in contrast the Tanzanian and Ghanaian independence leaders, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, were both formerly teachers.

There is also variation in what is taught, despite this being influenced by the curriculum which is generally “equal and equivalent” nationally, private schools have greater flexibility and are less regulated (Roskam, 2009, p.1-3). This influences teacher awareness and the discourses that they are exposed to and contribute to. Curricula also change with time and during the 20th century the UK geography curriculum has shifted from a focus on place, physical science and social studies, to a *sense of* place, the world, and the environment (Zhang and Foskett, 2003; Morgan, 2006). The curriculum of the UK has influence beyond its borders, with UK and Australian school books with their foreign concepts being taught from in the Solomon Islands (Dufty, 1993, p.172). Curricula and school books can be highly ideological and used to indoctrinate pupils, an extreme example being in Franco’s Spain (Pinto, 2004, p.665); this may also influence teachers views or at least what they choose to express. The teachers in the Mexico 2 group were critical of the government’s emphasis on literacy and numeracy at the expense of history and geography, arguing that it was meeting the needs of the economy but not producing critical citizens.

Rural-urban and public-private differences influence teacher experiences. Particularly in rural areas of poorer countries there may be a lack of electricity, teacher housing and medical care, combined with poor school buildings, minimal teacher support, book shortages, pupils tired from walking long distances to get to work, and schooling interrupted by harvest times (Iredale, 1993, p.18). Thus rural and urban teachers will be aware of divergent forms of inequality in their daily lives. A state-private divide exists in education systems in low to high income countries (Roskam, 2009, p.1-3). Since the 1990s Mexico has opened its education system to the private sector under pressure from the World Bank and its own government to reduce “non-productive expenditure”, so from almost 0% attending private schools, by 1999 private

institutions catered for 13.4% of lower secondary and 21.4% of upper secondary pupils (Delgado-Ramos and Saxe-Fernández, 2009, p.37 & 41; also see Marchant, 2005). In the UK the conservative governments from 1979-1997 framed parents and pupils as consumers of education, and consumer choice was facilitated by the SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) (Hill et al., 2009, p.117-120). This has led to pressure for good results over meeting pupils' needs.

Whilst I have not detailed all the variation amongst teachers, and between teachers and other citizens of the study countries, I hope to have highlighted the significant international variation within teaching experiences, teacher backgrounds, and curricula. Whilst the international comparability of this research is enhanced by only selecting teachers as participants, it remains open to identifying considerable variation in discursive approaches.



Figure 10: A Mexican discussion group

Permission to use this photograph was granted.

Group sizes departed from the standard number of discussion group participants which is often in double figures (e.g. Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.116; Hennick, 2007), instead groups ranged from 2 to 8 people, with 4 being the ideal number. Small group sizes allow more time for each person to speak, so people feel more valued, and reduce the likelihood of simultaneous conversations that are hard to manage and audio record. Group size influences duration: the largest group, 8 people, took over 2 ½ hours (Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers). Smaller groups also allow for a good dynamic due to more inter-personal interaction and genuine discussion (see Figure 10).

Pragmatically smaller groups are convenient: it is easier to recruit sufficient participants and to gain head teachers' approval. Nevertheless it can be prudent to invite a couple more people than necessary due to non-attendance.

There are advantages to recruiting people who know one another: anxiety about involvement is reduced, it can be easier to join the conversation, familiar company allows cross-checking of details, and being comfortable in a group encourages the challenging and confirming each others' views (i.e. discussion which is the aim). It also facilitates the telling of shared stories (Holbrook and Jackson, 1996, p.139). Other benefits are pre-existing rapport and reduction of non-attendance. The highest non-attendance was at a conference where participants did not know one another and fewer than ¼ of volunteers showed up. However pre-existing groups come with pre-existing hierarchies, and the more powerful are generally more vocal. In Mexico 7 (small rural school) the headmistress spoke a lot whilst the male teaching assistant was virtually silent. On meeting, strangers can quickly develop hierarchies, e.g. in UK 3 (mixed group) the man undermined the woman using bored sighs and negative comments. Although it is also recommended that hierarchies should be avoided (Hennick, 2007), which is manageable to some extent, these groups take place in hierarchical societies and inequalities of respect are reproduced even when being discussed.

In each country I recruited teachers, mainly of geography and social sciences, but also including other specialisms. These teachers had varying experience from being trainee teachers to retirees; they worked in towns and cities as well as rural areas, in schools serving richer and poorer students, and in government and private schools. Group dates and locations are tabulated in Appendix 1 with details of participant age, gender, and subject. It is much easier to recruit people who already know one another and usually meet in the location of the discussion group (Holbrook and Jackson, 1996, p.138). I approached schools either with little information, with the recommendation of someone to contact or in the company of a gatekeeper, or sometimes schools were contacted on my behalf. Having a personal connection within the school helped to avoid suspicion and be welcomed, and even just to get a response.

Finding an appropriate time took negotiation and I often visited schools in advance to arrange the group.

In Mexico and the UK getting a group of busy teachers together is challenging. In Mexico typically teachers work in two schools, one for the morning session and another for the afternoon session, and they are only obliged to be in school for the hours they teach. In Kenya it was easier to arrange groups as schools were generally open and willing to assist me. In particular Kenya 4 (a rural Catholic boys boarding school) was not aware of my research or ready for my arrival, contrary to my expectations. In the space of one hour 5 teachers were found to participate. This welcome and support could be attributed to unequal power relations, or understood as willingness to welcome a visitor. Two Kenyan groups were arranged through a connection with a British lady whose friends were particularly helpful because I know her.

Social networking is very effective for recruiting participants; it was much harder to work with people who had no previous connection to me. In the UK I was able to draw on the assistance of the Geographical Association, a Faculty of Education, family and colleagues' contacts. Even a tenuous connection was enough to get a positive response. I was disappointed to have to use social networking because I hoped responses would be judged based on the merits of my research rather than on my connections.

In Mexico recruitment was facilitated through contacts working in education in some capacity in both of the cities that I visited. It was by following their advice and meeting with people they already knew, that I arranged most discussion groups. This also included some visits to schools, where I could see the context in which these teachers work, meet students, and participate in some classes and observe others. If my Mexican contacts did not personally know someone in that school, they mentioned names of possible mutual acquaintances and explained a little about my work in an enthusiastic way.

Most schools or teachers contacted were willing to help; several refused by not responding or for particular reasons. In Mexico and Kenya some schools declined involvement because of internal political issues; in every country some

refused because the teachers could not spare the time. In Mexico I was refused once because there were too few social science teachers, and another time the school required more formal evidence of my affiliations. Similarly, in the UK many schools were unable to be involved in this research project, which was most often communicated by non-responses to my requests.

The number of groups was based on my aim to talk to teachers from a range of schools, with different experiences, not to find a representative sample. I aimed to run 6 groups per country, but was able to conduct 9 groups in Kenya, 8 in Mexico and 7 in the UK: 24 groups in total. My decision to stop was the result of the groups yielding less and less new information and having accessed a wide range of participants. The decision to stop at 24 groups was also influenced by running out of time and money. Conducting 24 groups is in line with the number of groups other researchers run; another study used 20 groups (Jackson, 2001, p.201).

The setting of a group is important because it determines how easy it is for participants to attend and also affects the ambience. Most groups took place within the school, because this made it very easy for participants to attend and meant groups could be run during the school day. As is general practice, I provided refreshments for participants, which creates a relaxed atmosphere (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.127). I was careful to select snacks that participants could eat during the discussion, avoiding noisier snacks like packeted crisps. Eating can help people feel comfortable when they are not talking, as food can be a prop to show lack of interest. Food can also make the group more of a special occasion (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.120).

Recording and transcription

On the advice of a sound engineer I purchased a Zoom H2 recorder. This is adaptable to different recording situations. It has an inbuilt multi-directional microphone and stereo recording where the levels of the recording in each direction can be adjusted relative to one another after making the recording, and with the ability to adjust the microphone gain and the recording level.

There is also an option to set the recording level to readjust itself according to the changing noise level during the recording (Zoom Corporation, no date).

The transcriptions treat the group as an entity rather than specifying which individual was speaking at each time. This format was adopted because this research is about what is said rather than categorising individuals and their opinions; however at times I specify whether a man or woman is speaking and identify Alison whose words are central to chapter 7. This avoids essentialising people by several characteristics, and recognises meaning and knowledge as transindividual phenomena (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.118). Identifying the individual speaking, known as a running order (Bedford and Burgess, 2001), would have provided finer detail than required. Similarly, the words spoken (or their English translation) and how they were said was recorded, however the length of pauses and other fine-grained information as necessary for a conversation analysis approach were not needed. I noted time data to allow a quick retrieval of speech in the audio recording, giving access to the richness of information contained in a sound recording, and allowing for double-checking.

Discourse analysis

The aim of discourse analysis is “to explain what is being done in the discourse and how this is accomplished” (Wood and Kroger, 2000, p.95). To analyse discussion group data in a discourse analysis tradition I follow recommendations of focusing on *what* words allow the speaker to do, *how* some topics are prioritised, and consider the grammar and word choices (Wood and Kroger, 2000, p.92-95). Specifically, I have read and re-read transcripts with the following sensitivities in mind: whether interviewees position themselves (and others) as active or passive; the terms they use to talk about inequalities and synonyms used for inequality; which particular inequalities are most important, and how does the nature of these inequalities relate to the interviewee’s stated view of inequalities; and how do interviewees rationalise themselves and preserve their social desirability when speaking about what either they or I consider to be contentious issues.

It is always impossible to approach this data without preconceived ideas. However in undertaking the analysis I endeavoured to work with *emic* or *in vivo* themes arising from the data and some subtitles and concepts in this thesis arose this way. My aim was to avoid a simple analysis following the themes of my discussion guide and to make less expected findings possible – something discussion group data invites because of the relatively low researcher influence on discussion (Goss and Leinbach, 1996, p.117). The coding has drawn on terms used by participants, whilst reflecting on what is being done by speaking in these terms. This analysis was undertaken using NVivo 8, a descendent of the programme NUD*IST, designed to overcome the challenge of managing a large volume of data (Bazeley, 2007, p.4-6).

A careful reading, re-reading and cross-group comparison formed the basis for analysis, with codes being formed and altered throughout. At times I mapped out themes diagrammatically to create an overview of conceptual interconnections (as recommended by others e.g. Burgess, 1996, p.133; Kneale, 2001). The visual display of qualitative data can reduce its bulkiness and present it as being simultaneous rather than sequential. (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.91). Reading across groups highlighted absences and presences (Jackson, 2001, p.206-7) and this may particularly be the case in international comparative research where intra-group comparisons are likely to find substantial differences. I identified several discursive repertoires¹⁶ that pertain to inequality and considered how the groups relate to such repertoires (after Jackson, 2001, p.208); these became the basis for the chapter structure.

¹⁶ The term *discursive repertoire* draws on Stanley Fish's concept of repertoire, which is the "making sense of the world through systems of intelligibility shared by members of the same interpretive community" (Fish, 1980, p.230 in Jackson, 2001, p.206-7). Peter Jackson notes that groups and individuals relate differently to these discursive repertoires and do not necessarily agree with a whole discourse just because they agree with one part of it (Jackson, 2001, p.206-8).

I created hundreds of low-level codes¹⁷, working between countries; after this I amalgamated those that were sufficiently similar and ordered some that are related into tree structures with distinct and sometimes contrasting “siblings” stemming from single parent nodes¹⁸. Many nodes remained free nodes (unstructured) and the major benefit of NVivo was the fast retrieval of data, its secure storage, and being able to locate data within the text of longer transcription. Having identified themes from reading, writing, thinking, drawing and listening, I more investigated these themes by re-reading the quotations and comparing them, noting (on paper) the main points being made. In selecting which quotations to present I chose those that were broadly similar to others making that point, but that made the point pithily; elsewhere I present quotations precisely because they contrast.

Without co-researchers to compare findings with I relied on my own codings and interpretation, which will vary between individuals. However, with the feedback from supervisors, family, and other students I have checked some of my interpretations against those of others. As I present my findings in later sections I wish to stress that these should be understood as case studies that hope to illustrate wider understandings of inequalities, but cannot be considered representative of the countries in which the research was undertaken (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.125).

Whilst adopting Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, I am aware of other discourse analysis approaches. In particular the approach of Michel Foucault offers an alternative. Foucault’s approach invites a broader, more holistic analysis which extends to the regulations, decisions, ethics, architecture (such as the panopticon), and practice (Foucault, 1969/2002, p.37; Foucault,

¹⁷ By low level codes I mean making a new code for every small new theme that was identified in the transcripts. This resulted in many codes only containing one or two quotations.

¹⁸ The coding structure described is where low-level codes are grouped: the “parent” is the name of the overall group and “child” nodes are the codes that fall within a “parent” group. Whilst coding structures can become more complex, the codes I developed followed the patterns I describe.

1977/1991). Foucault emphasises how power and knowledge are interdependent by employing the notion of power/knowledge, with power based on relations rather than earlier economic models of power (Hodgson, 2000, p.44-5). Whilst this approach could provoke a rich analysis of discourses of inequality in their wider social and power context, the data collected in focus groups was more concerned with spoken descriptions which form just part of Foucault's broad conception of discourse. As such, Norman Fairclough's focus on language provides a more useful and suitably focused approach to analysing the spoken discourses of teachers.

Evaluation of method

One limitation of discussion groups is that if the group, or an individual, has little interest in the topic it may be hard to persuade them to talk about it (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.125). I found this in some discussion groups where certain members were quiet so it was hard to learn their opinions, or know the reasons for their silence. In other research this feeling of failure at not understanding why participants behaved in a particular way was noted, but this failure, the limits of reflexivity, can lead to other ways of situating understandings (Rose, 1997, p.306). Their silence is not simply personality, but a response to the social context that is influenced by others present and the topic. Making conversational space for quieter group members can encourage involvement; however some were not necessarily willing to comment or discuss. This has been described elsewhere as awkwardness (Kneale, 2001, p.146-7), which of course exists in other social interactions. This normal group dynamic is not problematic for my research findings, although it is worth noting that participants did not contribute equally.

The advantages of these groups have been mentioned in justifying this choice of method, yet it is worth reiterating the suitability of this method for comparing worldviews and gaining insight into competing discourses surrounding an issue. The researcher can remain more neutral as the participants challenge one another (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.123-124). Discussion also means new issues and questions can arise, which could develop future research, for example one a participant asked me "would you like to see everyone as

developed as you are?” Lastly, discussion groups can also be fun for everyone, making participation less burdensome:

“Meeting different people, sharing in their often quirky and entertaining ways of understanding the world, listening to their stories and experiences – these are opportunities that no human geographer with any interest in how the social world works should pass by.” (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p.133)

2.5 Attitude survey and quantitative analysis

The attitude survey entitled “What the World Thinks in 2002” is the main data source for the quantitative analysis. This survey was undertaken by the Pew Research Center and affiliated research organisations. It covers 44 countries and includes 38,321 respondents from countries with varying wealth, religions, languages, and levels of inequality, in all continents except Antarctica. The countries included were home to over 4.9 billion people, that is 79% of the world population in 2002. Amongst countries surveyed, per capita Gross Domestic Product in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in 2002 ranges from US\$580 in Tanzania to US\$35,750 in the United States (SASI and Newman, 2006).

The Pew World Attitudes Survey (henceforth simply *Pew Survey*) has its origin and point of reference in the United States. Many questions ask what people think about the people and politics of the United States, with the survey’s stated focus being “America and the world”. Note: first America, then the world. Another point of consideration is that whilst the Pew Global Attitudes Project states that it is a “nonpartisan ‘fact tank’” (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2008), a major funder of the project – Pew Charitable Trusts – is argued by some to be politically partisan¹⁹ (Wooster, 2005). Philanthropists, people who devote their

¹⁹ Pew Charitable Trusts have been identified as being politically influential. Some examples include support of ‘Common Cause’ and the ‘Center for Public Integrity’ to convince Congress of a public demand for campaign-finance reform which it is suggested did not exist. Also, Pew spent US\$9 million on the ‘New Voters Project’ to register 18-24 year olds to vote in “Battleground states” carried out with non-profit organisations that were hostile to the Republican

excess money to issues of their choice, fund the Pew Charitable Trusts. I present this information to confer a deeper notion of the construction of these data.

There are numerous other attitude surveys, such as the World Values Survey, Eurobarometer and Afrobarometer. The Pew Survey was chosen due to the topic of the questions (which differs from the World Values Survey) and its global coverage (which differs from Eurobarometer etc.). Combining attitude data with information about the material conditions of a population enabled me to test the relationship between them. Several other sources are used to access country level data, including freedom scores²⁰, the human development index²¹ and some economic measures. As with the Pew Global Attitudes Project, United Nations data have particularities to their provenance (see Ward, 2004).

Bivariate methods

Bivariate analyses at the country level are a way to simply compare variables and search for relationships. Many studies of world statistics also use the country as their unit of analysis (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995a, b; Offer, 2006, p.276-278; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Most United Nations statistics are provided at this level and reinforce the tradition of country-level analysis (see United Nations Development Programme, 2008). Also echoing data provision, most world maps showing human data are a patchwork of country-level information. Working at the country level limits the number of cases, however each case represents the appropriately weighted combination of thousands of individuals. Thus each country could be considered a case study being statistically compared to other case studies. Working at the country level can

party (Wooster, 2005). Yet this criticism was written, of course, from another non-neutral position of resentment for Pew's move to the political left.

²⁰ From Freedom House and Reporters without Borders. Note that these are particular definitions of freedom which are discussed further in section 6.3.

²¹ Sourced from the UNDP 2004 Human Development Report.

obscure sub-national differences, a limitation of this type of data that is complemented by using other statistical techniques at the individual level (something I have done in unpublished work not included in this thesis).

Weighting was applied within countries. In compiling national figures, individuals' responses were weighted based on settlement type (village/town), gender (female/male) and age (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+). This weighting system, calculated by the Pew Survey team, aims to make country data more representative and overcome a possible bias in who was surveyed. Weighting of individual respondents and countries was used throughout the bivariate country level analysis.

Data for an average world citizen are calculated based on the assumption that the 44 countries included in this analysis are representative of all countries. The weight allocated to the opinions reported as a percentage from each country is based on the proportion of the total population of these 44 countries. The weightings ranged from 2.6 for China, with the largest population, to .007 for Lebanon. This assumption overlooks particularly disrupted countries as described below.

Data preparation and cleaning

After weighting and amalgamating individual-level statistics of the Pew Survey to give country-level percentages of people responding in a certain way, basic data screening was undertaken on univariate statistics. For each country the percentage of respondents answering in a particular way was calculated as a percentage of the total respondents from that country (similar to others' work such as Offer, 2006, p.276). Using percentages creates continuous data from discrete or nominal data, which allows particular statistical tests including simple regressions. Although these 44 countries have differing sample sizes, the percentages account for this and make the data internationally comparable, albeit not accounting for the much larger populations of some countries compared to others. The following aspects of the data were checked (based on the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007, chapter 4):

1. Do cases fall within the range of possible responses?

2. Are there missing data? This was ascertained by a frequencies count.
3. Should 'don't know' and 'refused' responses be analysed? Yes if there is a pattern to these responses, but typically these have low response rates. They were retained because:
 - a. "Don't know" could indicate that it is politic to remain neutral on the subject; or respondent disinterest or uncertainty; or inability to simplify their opinion; or other possible reasons.
 - b. "Refusal" is even less common response within the Pew Survey, and could be due to cultural or personal sensitivity to a question.
 - Note that these types of response bear a similarity to the awkwardness of some discussion group participants.
4. Is the sample similar to the actual population for variables of theoretical importance? Data were weighted by gender, type of settlement and age group to better represent national populations. It was not clear whether to weight by other variables prior to undertaking the analysis that would indicate which are most important. Thus a simple 3-variable weighting system prepared in advance by the Pew Survey was employed. Future research could include a re-run of the findings with weighting according to other variables of theoretical importance.

Caveats and limitations

Being counted confers significance, validity and recognition. Often those who are worst-off are least counted. In the United Nations Development Programme's annual Human Development Report, 23 countries and territories are excluded from most statistical tables due to a lack of data. These include some of the poorest and most disrupted countries in the world: Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and North Korea (Dorling et al., 2006). Similarly, the Pew World Attitudes Survey does not represent the inhabitants of these 23 less documented areas. Within countries, indigenous peoples who typically suffer the worst health and socioeconomic situations, are often not counted (Stephens et al., 2005). Further, many countries lack reliable records of births or mortality, and many children who die young in poorer countries may well never be recorded (Gordon, 2004, p.4). Those with the worst life chances are generally

least counted, and so are not represented in analyses such as this. It is also the case that the super rich are less represented as they are secretive about their wealth and income, hiding assets in various locations around the world.

The Pew World Attitudes Survey used telephone interviews in Britain, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Slovak Republic, and the United States. Where telephone survey interviews were used, people without telephones were automatically excluded. Incidentally, the year of this survey was when the number of mobile phone subscribers overtook the number of landline subscribers worldwide (International Telecommunications Union, 2003, p.4). In Britain during 2002 landline ownership was greater amongst older than younger people; amongst home owners rather than people living in rented accommodation; and amongst higher earners. Those who did not own landlines tended to have a mobile telephone. One percent of homes had no telephony and 92% had landlines (Ofcom, 2003). For the remaining 37 countries, face-to-face interviews were carried out (Albright et al., 2002, p.86-90), where recruitment may have involved other biases.

This quantitative survey data is the result of respondents answering closed question surveys that impose the survey designers' preconceived possible opinions. The analyst also does not know respondents' justifications, caveats or critiques of the questions asked. A participant in UK 4 (retired urban teachers) commented about question 9 below, which was included on the informed consent form, that the answer really depends on the historical timeframe that "right now" is set within. She said that she is satisfied with where we are now compared to 100 years ago, but not compared to 10 years ago. Another constraint is that little methodological information is available from the Pew Research Center, meaning I have limited knowledge of the process of constructing and asking questions.

Question 9. Would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the world right now?

As noted earlier, when working between languages there is a challenge to map the meaning of one language onto another language (Twyman et al., 1999, p.320). This also exists within inter-language quantitative research. However

the nature of this challenge is less evident given that the questionnaire was translated, administered and its results compiled prior to my seeing it. This cleanliness of presentation makes it harder to detect the subtleties of difference in meaning that may be present in different language versions of ostensibly the same questionnaire. The words used to assess opinions alter in meaning over time and space, so it can be hard to know precisely what is meant by responses to each question. This possible hermeneutical gap^{15,p.69} could be tested by comparing responses to similar questions within and across surveys, but cannot be eliminated. There are other differences, such as the differing nature of educational systems, that render direct comparisons challenging.

The sample size, where countries are units, is 44. Each country, or data point, represents many more data points as they are constituted by compiling thousands of responses from each country. Looking at the country level, the country becomes a proxy for many aspects of life in that place. In Anver Offer's work on how income affects happiness, he found that the 'country' variable, where one lives, was important and has a greater effect on happiness than relative income (Offer, 2006, p.278). 'Country' describes a variety of common influences that might include: history, economics, government, official language, major religion, media institutions, and other cultural preferences.

Certain questions have incomplete data because they were not asked in some countries, or only a subset of the standard response set was offered (i.e. questions 10 and 11 for China and Egypt). It is unclear what the reasons behind this are, and who decides. It could be that in some cases the concepts referred to are meaningless to the respondents, so the in-country survey team have also modified the questions. Several options exist for managing this missing data: (i) exclusion of country or question from that analysis, or (ii) assign the mean percentage for the missing variable. I decided on option (i) so that no artificial numbers would be added, as these may ultimately be misleading given the relatively small sample size and this would assume that I knew how giving the full range of options would affect each answer. When respondents in one country have fewer possible answers to a question than in other countries, I highlight the possibility of artificial inflation. As data is missing

for just a few countries it is not enough to confirm or refute a trend, so will not greatly effect the overall patterns found.

2.6 *Writing this thesis*

In writing this thesis I have worked quantitative findings in with the qualitative findings, combining them to address the same research questions. Identifying how to do this was an iterative process between considering broader ideas, the approach of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the fluctuating research questions, and the findings themselves. Arranging ideas and evidence into a thesis structure required the allocation of interlocking themes into distinct chapters. This interconnectivity between chapters binds this thesis together to address the diverse ways in which inequality is understood.

3. Verbalising inequality and recounting the world

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses two of the key issues highlighted earlier in section 1.4. Firstly, how inequality is defined affects whether it is understood to be a social evil or a social good. The type of inequality that is identified determines the types of response to inequality (Rowlingson, 2010). Secondly, the boundaries to our awareness constitute the limits of our imagined worlds. This influences the ways in which global inequality and other international issues might be conceptualised and discussed. Understandings of the nature of inequality and awareness of the world are revisited in later chapters. As such this chapter is simply a first step that characterises understandings of themes to be further interrogated in later chapters, focusing on the verbal (as opposed to visual in chapter 4) semiotics of inequality (Fairclough, 2009, p.167). This chapter addresses discursive constructions of inequality, how these vary geographically in terms of their distribution, and the ways in which the world is interpreted, represented and possibly transformed. I respond to this question:

Question 1. What are the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world?

This chapter presents verbal descriptions of inequalities from Kenya, Mexico and the UK, showing how inequality is understood within these three countries. The forms that verbal constructions of inequality take are influenced by social and economic relationships that are not exclusively local, but differently situated within wider influences. The way that inequality is defined is an expression of, and has an effect on, whether inequality is understood to be problematic, benign or beneficial. Metaphors and stereotypes are used to render imaginable the scale and complexity of inequality in the world; these simplifications carry theoretical ideas about the nature of the world order. Whether imaginations of the world are planetary or more local is then addressed using quantitative data about perceived and actual threats to the world. This chapter establishes some reference points for the rest of this thesis.

3.2 Literature: talking about inequality

Visual and verbal descriptions influence our understandings of inequality. This chapter takes the first step of critical discourse analysis in focusing on a social wrong in its semiotic aspect (Fairclough, 2009, p.167); section 1.3 argues that inequality is a social wrong. The semiotics of inequality are the signs and symbols used to represent it; these signs and symbols are not mimetic of reality but add their own twists in interpretation and producing understandings. It is argued that language is not a transparent medium but a “prison-house” (Jameson, 1972), which traps us into particular modes of thinking and distorts places (Duncan, 2002). Language, like maps, encourages particular understandings; neither are transparent representations of the world (Harley, 1992).

Simplifying the world by using particular categories renders it easier to imagine and know (Foucault, 1977/1991). Through representation the world and inequality are constructed in particular ways. The choice of what to emphasise influences understandings, which often says as much about the people who are imagining as those imagined; a point made by Edward Said in his work on Occidental imaginings of the Orient (Said, 1978/1995). The partial nature of representations is exemplified by *Skírnir*, an Icelandic newspaper, which in the late 1800s presented Africans as “a colour-category, without gender, age or other personal characteristics” (Loftsdóttir, 2008, p.178). This reduces the complexity to a simple, impersonal group defined in contradistinction to the Icelandic readers. Choices about what to represent may draw on various versions of reality. This is the case for the diverse representations of the Zanzibari revolution, when Africans overthrew the British administration and expelled the Arab/Omani elite, which draw on intersecting interpretations from different positions (Myers, 2000, p.430). Representations are not necessarily a coherent version of reality, but draw on diverse ideas.

Metaphors are often used to simplify ideas and promote understanding. Metaphors “conjure up rich and illuminating visual images in the mind of the hearer, but you need to exercise caution in not overextending an image” (Bazeley, 2007, p.198); that is not to read more meaning into metaphors than is

deserved. When working with metaphors it is worth considering what determines the choice of metaphor and the effect of that metaphor on thinking and practice (Fairclough, 1992, p.237). The types of metaphor often correspond to particular ideological approaches to the topic in question. The “Pyramid of [the] Capitalist System” issued by Nedeljkovich, Brashick and Kuharich for the International Workers of the World, 1913, is a cartoon showing workers, who work for and feed everyone, at the base of a pyramid of society which includes: “professionals and the petit bourgeois (“we eat for you”), the military (“we shoot at you”), the clergy (“we fool you”), the heads of state (“we rule you”) and, at the very top, a sack of money, representing “capitalism”.” (Krieger, 2008, p.1099; Figure 11). The understanding of society promoted by the metaphor of a pyramid shows social groups in conflict with one another (*ibid.* p.1098), with the poorest being short-changed.

It is generally accepted that awareness of the world is much greater than in previous eras, due to the speed-up of communications between some parts of the world. It is argued that our greater awareness should correspond to a broader empathy with others. Empathy is based on the mirror neurons in our brains enabling us to feel what we see happening to others, and it has expanded in line with the size of our imagined communities (Rifkin, 2010). As places become more interconnected (Leyshon, 1995/2000, p.44; Wallerstein, 1975), theoretically we could have greater understanding of and empathy for others. A transformation to our scale of thinking could be driven by these changes (Monbiot, 2003, p.9).

This enhanced empathy that should expand around the world is limited in several ways, these include: (i) seeing others as being fundamentally different as detailed above, (ii) distancing problems both spatially and temporally as an emotional defence and avoidance of responsibility (Uzzell, 2000), (iii) the importance of the local to our opinions (Cutler, 2007, p.595), and (iv) the less well-noted existence of time-space expansion (Katz, 2001, p.1224). Lastly, empathy is often suppressed as we are socialised (Rifkin, 2010); which is made easier through various forms of denial (Cohen, 2000). Denial is easier when something is physically distant as well as being conceptually distanced. As

there are many ways in which people can learn more about the world and come to care about the international impacts of our actions, there are also considerable obstacles to our awareness of and engagement with the world beyond the tangible, immediate world in which we live.

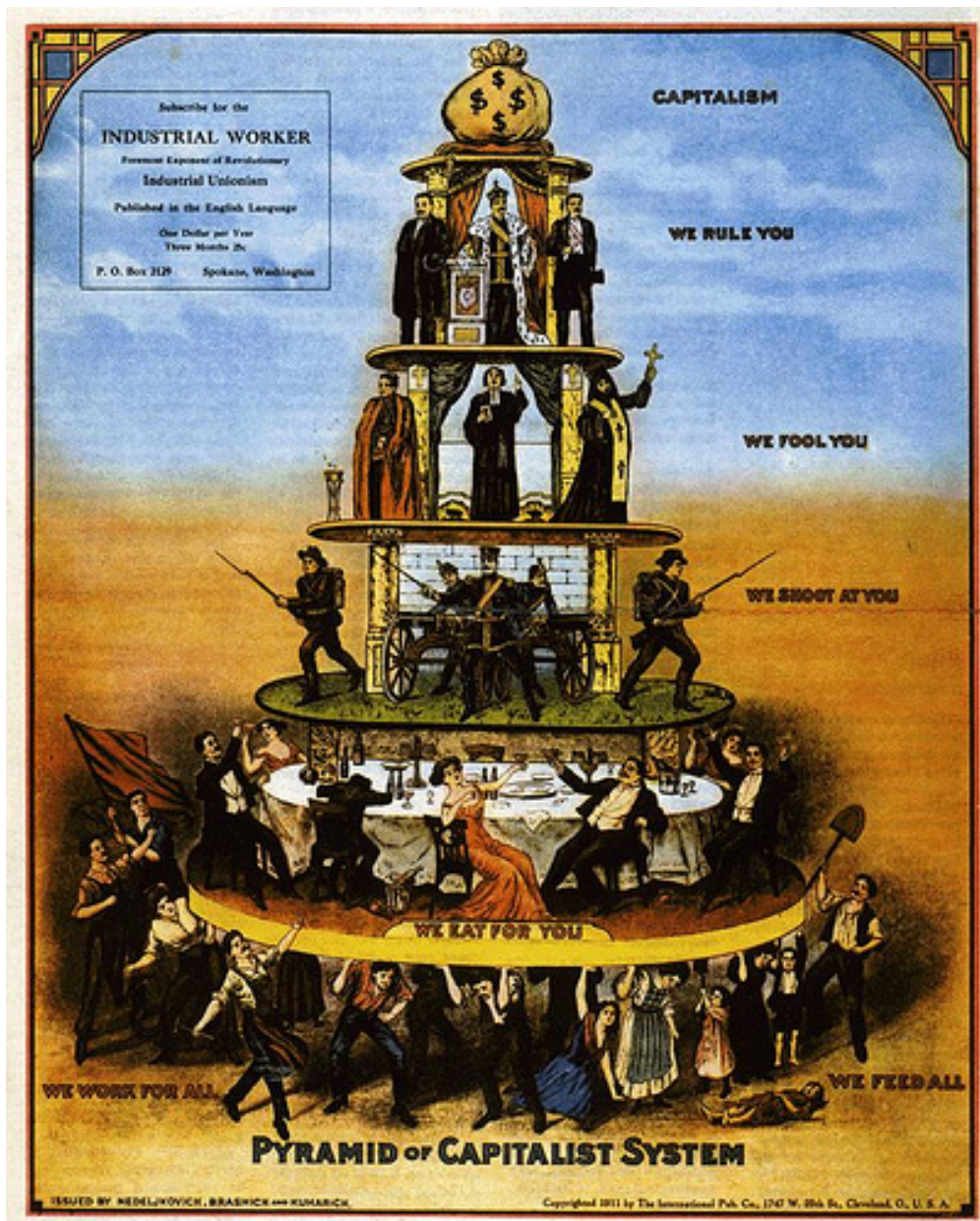


Figure 11: Pyramid of the capitalist system

Source: <http://uncivilsociety.org/2009/01/pyramid-of-capitalism.htm>

Accessed: 04.08.2010

3.3 Defining inequality

Definitions of inequality pertain to both distributions and what is distributed. The words used to define inequality in terms of distribution include: the opposite of equality; some having advantages and others having the disadvantages; an unequal distribution of goods and bads; and in terms of equity, disparity, imbalance and difference. British and Mexican groups at times contrasted inequality with equality and fairness, focusing on inequality in contrast to equality presents inequality in contradistinction to something that has been struggled for historically, e.g. the French revolutionary calls for '*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*'. Kenyan and UK groups focused on describing uneven distributions that, as in the quotation below, provide a more factual account without normative judgement. In defining inequality there is an acknowledgement of the relative nature of inequality; rather than focusing exclusively on one group, for example the poor, a comparison is made between individuals, groups or countries. In general conversation however, poverty is often conflated with inequality (see section 5.4 and 7.3).

“To me it just means more of one thing and less of another. It could be anything.

Anna: what sort of things?

Anything, everything, you know anything. Whether it's iron ore, wool, education, money, happiness, whatever.”

(UK 7, rural private school)

The focus of definitions of inequality varies, participants from each country emphasised particular types of inequality, due to their distinct situations. Natural resources were emphasised in Kenya (8/9 Kenya; 3/8 Mexico; 4/7 UK), an exporter of primary goods; race in Mexico (2/9 Kenya; 5/8 Mexico; UK 0/7) where popular discourses give higher status to white or European ancestry than to indigenous ethnicities (Howard, 2002, p.65-6); in the UK there was less elaboration about types of inequality that exist, but focus was on issues of money and opportunities. In all countries economic inequalities were noted as an important type of inequality. In Kenya and Mexico, as compared to the UK, there was a greater concern with issues of respect, status and discrimination (Kenya 6/9, Mexico 7/8, UK 1/7).

Inequality is: “When they don’t take you into account, when they don’t ask for your opinion.”

(Mexico 7, small rural school)

“When we see someone indigenous, brown, we don’t accept them nicely. But they are our roots, and we are neglecting them.”

(Mexico 5, urban middle-class government school)

The quotations above illustrate the personal nature of inequality, and how the speakers see themselves as involved in this. The first quotation refers to you, using the familiar *tu* form commonly used in Mexican Spanish and the unidentified “they” (e.g. *no te piden opinión*), showing how respect is personalised. The importance of indigenous culture to Mexican values makes discrimination against indigenous people worse, comparable to insulting one’s parents (Paz, 1961/2005, p.362). This gives the impression of a lack of respect coming from a generalised, unidentified source. The second quotation exemplifies how Mexican participants acknowledge their own discriminatory practices. In contrast, others spoke about inequality in a detached manner, as something of interest as opposed to something that they were personally involved with: “That’s quite an interesting thing to talk about, about how opportunities have changed over time.” UK 1 (urban trainee teachers).

Inequality understood as differences in identity, such as hair colour or favourite film, arose in groups from all three countries. Identity differences do not constitute inequalities but can form the basis of discrimination, such as racism or sexism. In this sense inequality is understood as a lack of sameness, rather than lack of equal capabilities (capabilities as described by Sen, 1999). The conflation of inequality and individual identity was used as an argument in favour of inequality, on the basis that Soviet-style equality crushes individuality. One participant, below, argued against this common misconception of inequality. The interpretation that inequality includes identity can block clarity of discussion and distract from questions of social justice, especially given the high value placed on individual identity which conflated with inequality can lead to the defence of inequality.

“But equality isn’t identity. I think that’s a great big mistake that people make, that they think you know if you’re talking about inequality you must

be wanting people to be identical, you know, one with another. You know, if you're good at music, you must be good at music"

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

Inequalities are recognised as being multiple and interconnected, which could lead to the definition being so broad that it means very little. Several comments alluded to this; stating inequality is broad, and is everywhere (also see section 5.4). Despite the breadth of this concept and the conflation of inequality and identity differences, there is general concurrence that inequality concerns material goods, respect, recognition, and opportunities. On the other hand, it is the interconnected nature of inequalities and their multiple forms that make them tricky but important to study.

3.4 Simplifying inequality

Hierarchy and blocked progress

The metaphors used in discussion groups often describe hierarchies. Whether in the form of a race where some *speed ahead* and others *lag behind* (Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers), or a *pyramid* whose base is composed of '*abysmally* paid people' (UK 4, retired urban teachers), society is presented as highly structured. These metaphors use spatial terms to show social and economic distance between people. *Speeding ahead* and *lagging behind* imply that the gap is continually widening between the fast and slow as through distantiation where groups pull apart (Therborn, 2009, p.110). This form of distantiation is presented as a process which 'just happens' and is not caused by anyone in particular. Yet thinking of a race frames members of society as being in competition. Likening society to a pyramid evokes a triangular structure where the many at the bottom support the rest. This is illustrated as the "Pyramid of Capitalist System" where the poor struggle under the weight of the upper layers of society (see section 3.2). The idea that height corresponds to socio-economic position is repeated when the participant comments that the poor are *abysmally paid*. This stems from abyss and suggests being trapped in a deep, narrow crevasse. Thus spatial imagery is central to these metaphors for socio-economic inequality. The race metaphor is used below, but here is more

critical, equating the large distance between *racers* with those behind being forgotten.

“... the fastest man on earth. Usain Bolt, eh? You find that whereas these people have already reached, these people are only just starting. They’re almost nearly forgotten because they’re just starting. It seems Usain Bolt is just finishing the line and for the countries are just starting, but when you look at the gap from here to somewhere like here, to some countries, you find that really it is very very big. But I don’t know how to define it because I’m not maybe an economist”

(Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers)

Choice of a metaphor is partly a result of one’s understanding: if you see the world as being hierarchical you are likely to explain it thus. Simplifying the world could reify that understanding. Pyramid metaphors express a view of social structure resulting from competition for resources and conflicts of interest. Circles show group boundaries not to be crossed; that is inequality through the exclusion of outsiders. Ladder metaphors are associated with understandings of social structure and position reflecting individuals’ attributes such as education levels, and imply a possibility of moving between the rungs i.e. social mobility (Therborn, 2006, p.18-19; Krieger, 2008, p.1098). Explaining the world in terms of hierarchy shows an ordering which resonates with Rostow’s developmental thinking about linear progress: the traditional society, the pre-conditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity and lastly the age of high mass consumption (Rostow, 1960/1990, p.4); moving up the rope or the ladder. Thus ladders are generally more conservative metaphors, which some participants invoke to argue against the myth of social mobility.

Metaphors are used to indicate blocked development paths. The quotation above expresses this in terms of the people who are still at the starting line nearly being forgotten. In other metaphors this blockage to progress has been stronger: that in capitalism “there is no ladder to rise” (Mexico 2, urban trainee teachers) or that those who are trying to climb the rope are unable to do so because the people at the top keep lowering it (UK 2, urban trainee teachers). This blocked progress is presented as trickery: aspirations are encouraged despite there not being a way to progress. The metaphor is inverted by saying there is no route to economic growth or ‘ladder to rise’. This was the conclusion

of a study detailing how rich countries used economic protectionism to secure their own wealth and now discourage this for poorer countries (Chang, 2003). The solution proposed by Mexico 2 was to find an alternative because capitalism is not working; UK 2, below, did not suggest a solution.

“So then you say London, New York, or Tokyo sort of around there would always be wealthy, but then when you’ve got really far from the centre, sort of in different parts of Africa, or different parts of South America, you can’t, you’ve still got to get that money to get it going in the first place. It’s like you’re trying to climb a rope but it kind of keeps getting lowered because everyone else is still taking the rope at the top.”

(UK 2, urban trainee teachers)

Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai has used similar metaphorical constructions, of the route up being blocked. She writes that Africa is like a person who has fallen in a hole, told that a rope will be thrown down to her but “the rope provided is never quite long enough for her to grab onto it, it’s long enough so she has a hope of reaching it” (Maathai, 2009, p.76-7). This refers to a lack of international commitment and acknowledges repeatedly dashed hopes of poorer countries. Whilst metaphors of inequality are powerful simplifications, which draw heavily on spatial metaphors, the examples above of their unpicking and retelling show how these are malleable. The more conservative versions that invoke rope and ladder tropes can be rephrased in terms of trickery and blockage to construct new metaphors imbued with ideologies that diverge from those of the original.

The world split up

Dividing the world is a well-used trope: “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.” (Marx and Engels, 1948, Chapter 1). This model of the world as the rich and poor is a strong theme in discourses of inequality found by this research. These bipartite terms are: “rich and poor”, “First World and Third World”, “developed and undeveloped or developing”, “The West and The South”, “haves and have-nots”, and “More Economically Developed Countries (MEDC) and Less Economically Developed Countries” (LEDC). These divisions have shifting borders as these unstable conceptual

dichotomies attempt to describe a changing world. The convoluted geography of these distinctions is illustrated by the slippage between the richer part of the world being referred to as the *North* or *West*, the currency of *third world* and *first world* yet obsolescence of *second world* since the end of the Cold War.

Participants in each research country used the terms rich and poor: 7/9 in Kenya, 4/8 in Mexico, and 3/7 in the UK. Distinguishing countries in terms of level of development was most common in Kenya (7/9); whereas talking in terms of First and Third Worlds was most common in Mexico (4/8). The UK participants showed no special preference for one term, but only the older group used the slightly out-dated terms “First and Third World” and “developed and developing”. Whilst different words were used, all these terms do the same work of simplifying the world by splitting it into two.



Figure 12: Malawian flag - risen sun symbolises being developed

These terms have particular histories and meanings; some of which carry negative associations. ‘Developing’ suggests countries that are still trying to arrive, and ‘developed’ implies they have already succeeded. A reaction against development since the 1990s has critiqued not just the feasibility but also the desirability of development as a pervasive cultural discourse with “profound consequences for the production of social reality in the so-called Third World” (Escobar, 2000, p.1 of article). In 2010 Malawi, which could be described as

third world or developing, changed its flag from a rising sun to a fully risen sun to symbolise that it is a developed country (Figure 12). This shows how being *developed* is a desirable status, and the *developing* is patronising and sometimes officially rejected like in this act of national redefinition.

Rich and *poor* have financial, cultural, moral, and intellectual meanings. *Poor* has the double meaning of having little and being of low quality. *Rich* means having financial resources, and richness exists in the sense of rich culture, which suggests intricacy, variety and history. Rich food on the other hand implies excess. First world and third world, along with the now obsolete term second world, have their roots in the ideological division of the world between communism and capitalism (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). The polarised thinking of a north-south divide underpinned policy from the 1960s until late 1980s but is thought by some to no longer provide “a perfectly clear representation of reality” (Thérien, 1999, p.723-724). Whilst some policy and academic debates have shifted from this binary, it remains the basis of the conceptualisation of world inequalities amongst the research participants.

“the major inequality that is there is that we have two camps: undeveloped world and developed world.”

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

“It’s the same, here and in all the world, the rich are rich and the poor are poor”

(Mexico 4, urban government school)

This bipartite division is applied both at the world and country level. This categorisation of people or countries is activated so that the categories become nouns, the subjects of speech, rather than adjectives; the poor *depend* on the rich (see Chomsky, 1970). Groups can become defined by these categories that may be reified, taken as natural, normal and expected categories. The widespread acceptance of such divides, and their normalisation, as seen above in the simple and logical-seeming statements, comes with differing expectations of what can be accomplished by each. Further, ubiquitous stories about the horrors that occur in “backward – that is poor – parts of the world” encourage the belief in the inevitability of tragedy there (this point refers to photographs in

Sontag, 2003, p.64). Those different expectations can establish different standards for different groups, partly because the rich and poor countries are seen as being incomparable.

Complexity and difficulty arise when one attempts to identify the position of real people and places along this divide because the divide shifts based on the reference point. When one has friends who are normally slightly richer and poorer than oneself, one is likely to consider oneself to have middle income, and there is a tendency to underestimate one's earnings (Lansley, 2009). The middle classes who do not consider themselves to be especially rich or poor can excuse themselves from bipartite categorisations and consequently from culpability in discussions of inequality, reasoning that someone in the middle cannot be accountable for the wealth of some and the poverty of others. They think they are neither part of the problematic poor or rich. Nevertheless, the people in the middle income groups are important: they are citizens and neighbours, teachers and police, part of public opinion, they vote, they consume, and they reproduce aspirations of self-improvement as detailed in chapter 5. They are some of the carriers of discourses about inequality (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.46).

A couple of teacher participants noted the difficulty of teaching this division, having been asked by their pupils where China and South Africa fit within this bipartite categorisation. One teacher confidently responds by pointing out that Johannesburg appears wealthy to her pupils from a private Kenyan school because indicators of deprivation are hidden from visitors. The other teacher, quoted below, recognises that the terms *more economically developed country* and *less economically developed country* are imperfect, but give a starting point for discussion. This teacher notes the need to simplify the world to start to understand it, yet calls for a new vocabulary of inequality as an alternative to existing bipartite framings which she suggests are almost inescapable:

“There are issues like, er is South Africa developed or not developed? Because they've flown from Nairobi to Johannesburg and it's a modern city, 'so why are you saying Johannesburg is in the less economically developed world, miss, it's not'. And so you've got to work around indicators of development, um you've got to work around GDP, um

you've got to work around the doctor patient ratio, teacher pupil ratio, you've got to work around illiteracy levels, you've got to go through the indicators before they say 'ooh, ok, are there slums in South Africa?'"
(Kenya 7, British-system private school)

"I mean also the big thing is can you, what's an LEDC, well 'Miss, is China an LEDC?' Well, mmm, no. 'An MEDC?' Mmmm, no. And actually you think it's ridiculous to divide them, but you need a starting point I suppose, and you need a vocabulary to use in common. But I think the common vocabulary is completely out of date and you're, you're forced to use it because it's so ubiquitous."
(UK 5, urban private school)

This splitting of the world into two camps is reminiscent of Edward Said's description of how the Occident knew the Orient, built into a binary of us and them^{1, p.16} (Said, 1978/1995). These binary divisions are reproduced in all three countries studied. Whilst the terms developing country and third world have their origins in Western projects, these have been adopted into the identities and worldviews of most discussion groups. Conceptually splitting the rich and poor creates a cleavage that renders them incomparable. These differences can become more entrenched through contradistinction; for example "European ideas of civilization and race were developed in interaction with discourses on Africa as the continent of primitivism and passivity." (Loftsdóttir, 2008, p.179).

Highlighting differences led to Africans being "conceptualized as a completely different kind of people" to the Icelanders (Loftsdóttir, 2008, p.183). In this example it is a racial distinction, but my own empirical examples show an economic distinction. Nevertheless, racial and economic distinctions overlap, for example in Middle America *indio* or Indian is a disparaging term also expressing low socio-economic status (Howard, 2002, p.62-3). Yet when observing economic distribution overall rather than measuring wealth relative to one's own, there are not just two extreme groups: "the contours of the geo-economic map show a landscape of great unevenness and irregularity; a landscape of staggeringly high peaks of affluence and deep troughs of deprivation interspersed with plains of greater or lesser degrees of prosperity." (Dicken, 2004, p.21).

Shrinking the world to manageable proportions

Shrinking the world to a scale that we can imagine more easily, a village or even a family, can render the world more tangible. This device has been used to illustrate inequality in the binary sense described above, where the polarised rich and poor segments of society are highlighted and those in-between are overlooked. By shrinking the world a contrast of wealth levels is made within a microcosm, which accentuates disparity. This is the opposite of business ethics encouraging immoral behaviour when applied to personal lives (Dorling, 2010b, p.205), instead ethics of personal lives are applied to the wider world and find it morally reprehensible. The quotation below from a British woman teaching in a Kenyan private school describes an ostentatious home surrounded by mud huts. Such an image simplifies and polarises society; adopting a half-joking tone allowed her words to be blunt and challenging.

“The global village, it’s a mansion and a few huts”
(Kenya 7, British-system private school)

These steps away from reality into simplified analogies give some freedom to adopt terms of debate suited to one’s own understandings, although it is easiest to reproduce clichés that have already influenced our awareness and sensitivities. Scaling the world down allows for a juxtaposition of wealth and poverty on a small scale that makes them less acceptable than when buffered by geographical distances. The contrast in living conditions mentioned above presents a stark contrast, as does the description below:

“Your father has nothing to eat today, your mother has no work, your children have nothing to eat, but you? You have 100 and your sister has 100. So together you spend the 200 pesos so that the whole family can eat. But no, ‘I’m going to spend my money on myself’. But it’s YOUR mother, it’s YOUR father. It’s the same in the world level. Yes. It’s the same.”
(Mexico 7, small rural school)

This quotation makes a moral point about selfishness. It is argued that within a family your responsibility is to ensure that everyone is well-fed, that caring for others is more important than spending money on oneself. Having established the moral obligations that exist within families, the participant scales these up to

the world level, making the argument that we have a responsibility to care for other people at the world level. If this argument had started at the world scale, other complications could have been introduced, such as one person not having enough money to feed everyone, the logistics of providing for those you have never even met, and the fact that they want to spend their money on themselves. Starting from the family level simplifies moral duty; of course one would help one's own parents. Building on that statement, why not help others who aren't related and employ the same morals at a larger scale?

Scaling down strengthens these ethical critiques because at a personal level actors have greater power to shape social processes whereas at the world level we are just tiny parts of the whole. Simplifying at a smaller-scale can make inequalities seem more morally intolerable and soluble (see section 7.3). This scaling down can facilitate the consideration of moral responsibility at larger scales, which is increasingly necessary because of the extensive spread of connections and influences of transnational production (Dicken, 2004, p.18).

Stereotypes

Stereotypes of others, (mis)representations that use synecdoche by taking a part to stand for the whole, are another way to simplify the world. Focusing on certain elements of a country or even continent allows us to form an idea of what that place and the people living there are like. Some degree of stereotyping is necessary: we build up expectations based on knowledge and experience, and then use those expectations to navigate our social lives. Stereotyping is problematic when it is inflexible, not reflexive, and negative. From a distance (social rather than geographical) stereotypes are more likely to thrive uninterrupted by an inconveniently contradictory reality. Stereotypes compensate for a dearth of more detailed knowledge, operating at the margins of our lives to explain people and places we have little contact with. Lack of social contact, lack of mixing, and hence stereotyping can justify inequalities and avoid acknowledging their damaging effects. Such stereotypes can influence interaction when social mixing does occur; the account of stereotyping below exemplifies the bi-partite worldview discussed earlier.

“And there’s a lot of um, there’s a lot of um pre pre conceived ideas about places and about people, and people are not willing to change. ... I’m talking from a years experience in the US at some point, they see you and they feel like ‘what can we do for you?’ You know ‘you are black, you are from Africa, so how can we help?’ And they have not even asked you your name, you know that kind of ‘lets fix it’, you are from there you must [have a problem] have a problem, yeah. And then when my kids finally visited it was like ‘oh, they can even speak English’. I mean they have no clue about what Africa is. So, so long as there is that big barrier between the 2 parts of the world, then it will remain an issue. Because how can we help and then the money will end up coming anyway, and they will be satisfied they’ve done something about it, but still not have reached the intended cost. And then life continues, yeah.”

(Kenya 7, British-system private school)

This quotation highlights what this teacher experienced as conflated ideas about Africa, blackness, and neediness. The response of some United States Americans was described as pity combined with their assumed generous responsibility for Africa, Africans and their expected problems. In expressing her experience of being categorised and offered help without even being asked her name, this teacher shows annoyance at people having “no clue” about Africa. The real frustration appears to be that these stereotypes are inflexible and influence behaviour. Being *told* she must have a problem and being sent money as a solution are presented as arrogant attitudes. She, her family, and continent are squeezed into another’s imaginary schema rather than asked their own views and opinions. Her final sentence, “life continues”, suggests that this interaction changed nothing; her interlocutors retained their stereotypes of Africa. The damage is done when Africans internalize such negative images, images of Africa that do not capture the tens of millions of Africans who “go about their business responsibly and industriously” (Maathai, 2009, p.79).

Of course stereotypes about America are strong too, with the British attitude of ‘we’re not as bad as America’ and the Mexican view of the United States as the land of opportunity. In the same group (Kenya 7) the British teacher reported that many Kenyans think – Dick Whittington-style – that in the UK ‘the streets are paved in gold’. Together these stereotypes of inevitable problems and unimaginable wealth reinforce one another: with the ‘rich’ giving to the ‘poor’ with little interaction.

“If you stay there for any length of time, you actually get to meet people and know people and live amongst people, whether that’s in a hut in Thailand or you know, people’s family homes in Peru, you know actually talk to them or understanding them, and knowing that that’s how they cook everyday on that mud floor, and that’s how they wash everyday on those ghats of the Ganges, yeah, I think you do have a much wider awareness of how it feels, to subjectively experience poverty, rather than it just being a short news flash on the BBC or something. Or you know a well judged picture of Ethiopia, and the flies, and the distended stomach, you know I think that’s all about heart wrenching ideas and people to give money.”

(UK 7, rural private school)

Spending time in another place is often presented as a panacea to stereotyping, by gaining specific knowledge of individuals. The meeting, knowing, living amongst, talking to, and understanding of people proposed above gives a thick description or awareness. I am sceptical about how well most British tourists “subjectively experience poverty” abroad, given the possibility of leaving that situation (a British passport, an onwards plane ticket, a credit card) and exemplified by their flitting, for instance, between Peru, Thailand and India. Nevertheless, interaction is contrasted to what are seen as superficial news stories and cynical exercises in raising money, which lead quickly to the stereotypes on the minds of the United States American interlocutors of the previous quotation, where Ethiopian famine, flies, and distended stomachs become synecdoches for a whole continent (also see section 7.4). Other ways of imagining and communicating about the world, such as Worldmapper maps in chapter 4, could generate more appropriate accounts of world issues, which could better inform our ideas and interactions.

3.5 Geographies of threat perception

Living in the context of speeded up communications and increased connectivity for many, whether since the 1970s, or the past 150 years (Leyshon, 1995/2000, p.44), or over a longer historical trajectory (Wallerstein, 1975) could force a transformation to our scale of thinking (Monbiot, 2003, p.9). A survey question about threats to the world contributes to understanding what “world” means to respondents because the threats identified often pertain to their region rather than a distant location or the planetary level. This shows that despite our

increased interconnections respondents' geographical imaginations are largely locally grounded.

“Here is a list of five dangers in the world today. In your opinion, which one of these poses the greatest threat to the world?” Pew Global Attitudes Project, Q.10	All respondents		Those satisfied with the world (20%)		Those dissatisfied with the world (63%)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Greatest threat to world						
Growing gap between rich and poor	1	23	4	19	1	24
Nuclear proliferation ^a	2	21	1	22	2	23
AIDS and other infectious diseases	3	18	3	20	3	18
Pollution and environmental problems	4	17	2	21	5	17
Religious and ethnic hatred ^b	5	16	5	18	4	17
Don't know / refused	6	4	6	1	6	1

Table 2: Threat identification and satisfaction with the world

Table notes:

Calculated using country data weighted by population size.

^a In Egypt this option was not given in the list of possible answers.

^b In China and Egypt this option was not on the list of possible answers; this may affect the results particularly as China heavily weighted due to the large population.

When the Pew Survey asked which of five dangers posed the biggest threat to the world in 2002, those who were dissatisfied with the world identified the growing gap between rich and poor, followed by nuclear proliferation. Those who were satisfied with the world were most concerned about nuclear proliferation, followed by pollution and environmental problems. These issues are linked: “AIDS and infectious diseases” are more prevalent on the poor side of the “growing gap between rich and poor” shown in the higher rates of infant mortality in poorer countries (Dorling and Barford, 2007, p.892); similarly the poor often suffer more from “pollution and environmental problems” (Weston, 1986); economic inequalities can provoke “religious and ethnic hatred”.

Countries that already have a nuclear arsenal accumulate more, or renew existing stocks (vertical proliferation), whilst frowning upon the rise of new nuclear powers (horizontal proliferation). Nuclear weapons are part of military power and support political and economic power, which sustains, aggravates and justifies the uneven distribution of power and wealth. Table 2 shows a relatively even distribution between the biggest threats at the world level, with the range being just 8%. However when this data is analysed at the country level, a geography to threat identification emerges.

What follows is an analysis of different levels of concern about threats of nuclear proliferation, AIDS and other infectious diseases, pollution and environmental problems. The figures presented result from summing the percentages of people who identified a threat as either the first or second biggest threat to the world for which I use the term “major threat”; the figures for each country total to a figure greater than 100%. Presenting data in this manner gives the percentage of people who were most concerned about that issue. However this concern is somewhat contrived, as most respondents identify two dangers although their levels of concern about these threats may vary widely. Further, the five threats (or four in the case of Egypt and China) in the survey may not include the issues most pertinent to some respondents.

Japan has the highest concern about nuclear proliferation; 67.9% responded that nuclear proliferation is a major threat to the world; 30 percentage points higher than the world weighted average of 37.9%, and 9% points higher than next highest, the United States. This high nuclear concern amongst Japanese people echoes the 1945 nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which killed, in the 2-4 month period after the bombing, an estimated 128,000 and 70,000 people respectively (Radiation Effects Research Foundation, 2008). The Mayor of Hiroshima, on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, reflected this concern by warning that: “So long as such weapons exist, it is inevitable that the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be repeated -- somewhere, sometime -- in an unforgivable affront to humanity itself.” (Hiraoka, 1995, no page number).

Other countries have only ever experienced the testing of nuclear weapons, or accidents, so may see the nuclear threat as hypothetical. Neither Ukrainians, residents of the country in which Chernobyl is now located but part of the Soviet Union in 1986 at the time of the power station explosions, nor Russians, have high levels of concern about nuclear proliferation, with concern at 46.8% and 37.7% respectively. Those least concerned about nuclear proliferation are Nigerians, Kenyans and Indonesians with roughly 20% rating nuclear proliferation as a major threat.

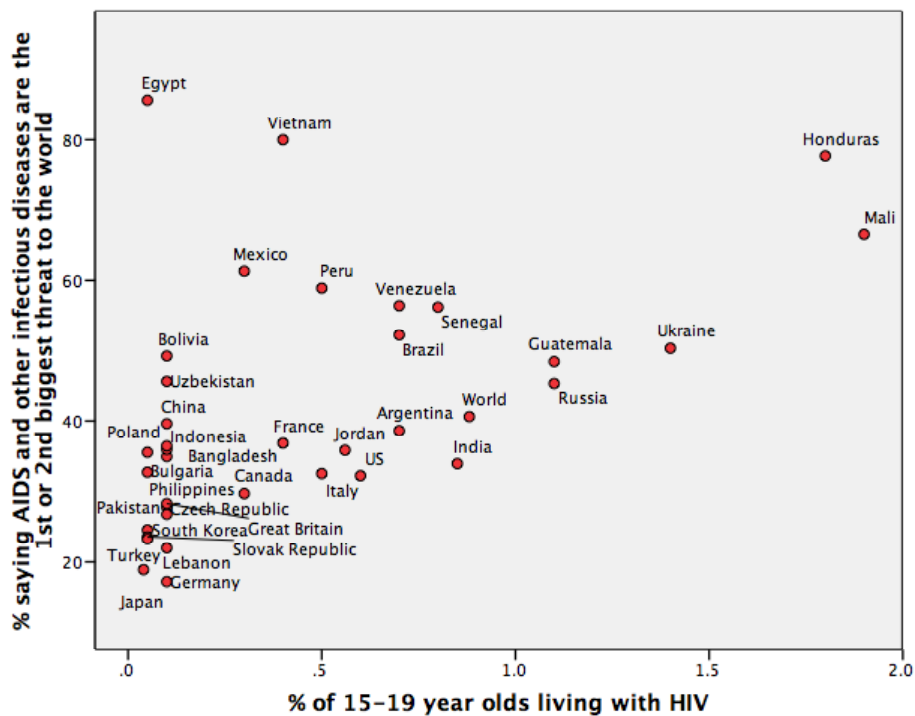


Figure 13: Perceived threat of disease and disease prevalence

The higher the prevalence of HIV, the more people tend to think disease is a major threat facing the world today, marking how people think of threats to the world as strongly connected to their positions within it. AIDS and other diseases are seen as a major threat to the world where there are high HIV rates, but not where they are low. Egypt is a particular exception where there are low levels of HIV but the disease is seen as a major threat. This could be partly due to an artificial inflation because Egyptian respondents only have four possible responses; a deflation of all Egyptian responses by 5% each could

compensate for artificial inflation but still leaves Egypt high. Or perhaps there is a heightened awareness of HIV/AIDS and fear of increased prevalence.

Where “environmental problems and pollution” are located as a threat could also vary according to social groups within societies. Within Indonesian society the natural environment or forest represents something different for different socio-economic groups: a work site, home, or adventure playground (Tsing, 2005). Alternatively, the environment can be understood as the immediate urban living environs (Weston, 1986), or in many others ways. Nevertheless, concern about environmental problems and pollution is greater amongst people with postmaterialist values, as opposed to materialists who are more concerned with economic and social security (Inglehart, 1995, p.62-6). Figure 14 below demonstrates that the higher the human development index, the more people are concerned about environmental issues. Also, pollution and environmental issues were much more important for those people who stated they were satisfied with the way things are going in the world; environmental issues were much lower priority for those who were dissatisfied with how the world is.

Reading Figure 14, there appear to be three groups of countries: a) those with low human development indices of 200-600 and low concern for the environment relative to other issues at 0-30%, b) those with high human development indices of 600-1000 and higher concern for the environment of roughly 20-60%, and c) those with high human development indices of 600-1000 and very high concern for the environment of roughly 70-80%. Of these groups, group A can be characterised as having to deal with more immediate material issues so wider environmental issues are of secondary importance. Group B, most countries in the survey, is generally richer, with longer life expectancies and higher literacy rates. Not having to struggle for these basic components can free people to care about other things, in this case the environment. Lastly, group C includes just Egypt, China, and South Korea; the first two being partially explained due to having four rather than five options in

the survey²², which may indicate greater political control where environmental issues may be a prudent, apolitical response compared to other threats.

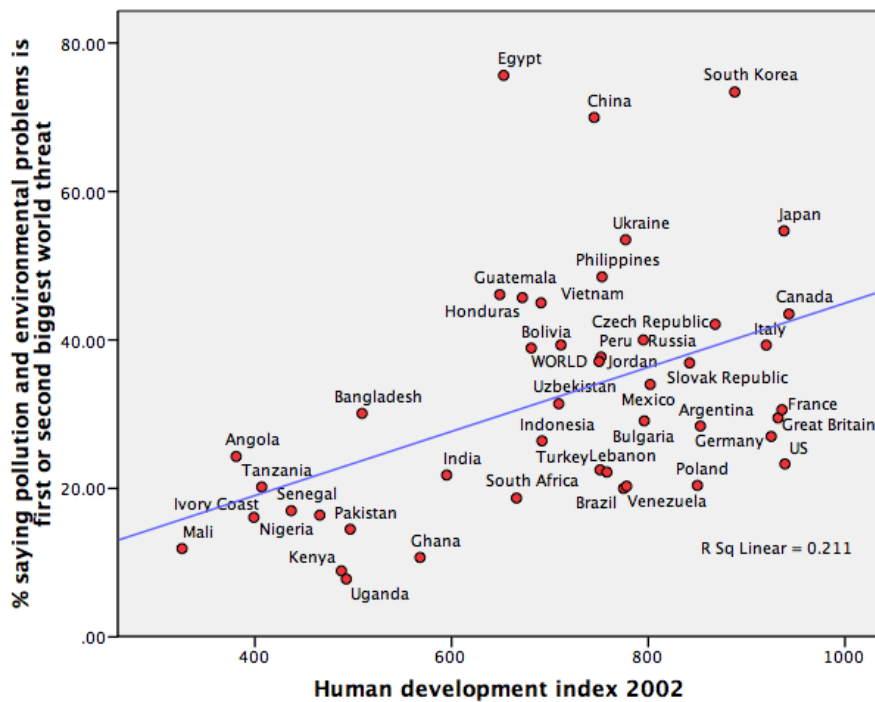


Figure 14: Environmental threat perception and development

In this subsection I have not considered those concerned about the rich/poor gap. I chose here to focus on other issues because the rest of this thesis addresses the issue of attitudes towards the rich/poor gap. I found it helpful to focus on issues that are more regionally specific contrasted with inequality, which is global; this allowed for a geographical analysis of the prevalence of a problem compared to concern about it. Lastly I found no strong relationships between concern about the rich-poor gap and other variables.

The pattern identified in these data could be due to various reasons: people have not learned a lot about the rest of the world, so do not know about other problems facing the world. This explanation does not explain why people in Britain for example do not think of HIV and other diseases as the major threats

²² The Pew Survey does not explain precisely why some survey questions or parts of these questions are not asked in certain countries.

to the world, because media coverage ensures a high level of awareness of the AIDS pandemic. However richer countries can afford antiretrovirals for HIV, making the disease a chronic condition rather than fatal. This fits with the explanation that people care more about people close to them than those far away, a *Russian doll* geography of responsibility (Massey, 2004, p.8-9); so the biggest threat to the world is the threat to those they care about. Taken a step further this suggests that for many people “the world” is the local, tangible, material world that they inhabit, and is what was considered in answering this question.

Thinking about the biggest threat to the world indicates respondents’ geographical scale of thinking and what “the world” means to them. That political concerns often differ between places has been explained in terms of interpersonal interaction and local information being used in the absence of national information (Cutler, 2007, p.576). Here national or regional information are substituted for world information. These data suggest that local threats are considered to be the biggest threats because these are what people know most about and experience directly. This is contrary to findings from Ireland, the UK, Australia and Slovakia where environmental problems were understood to be more serious the larger the scale, thus avoiding responsibility and protecting one’s emotions (Uzzell, 2000). Perhaps the terms threat and danger make respondents passive in a way that they can express their insecurities, whereas Uzzell’s work on environmental problems involves responsibility. Pride can also encourage this sort of spatial optimism, where what is happening locally is presented as less bad than elsewhere (Gifford et al., 2009, p.7). In talking about external threats pride may be less important.

3.6 *Synthesis: talking about inequality*

This chapter considered the geographies of understandings of inequality, how world inequalities are narrated and threat perception data suggests what *world* means when it comes to considering the threats. Inequality is identified differently, which is partly because of the contexts in which people live certain environmental and social issues are highlighted. This is important to consider in the context of later chapters because it details what the *inequality* people

refer to may mean. However, the ways inequality is discussed at other points in this thesis show that thought-out definitions sometimes differ from the implied meanings communicated in conversation. Inequality can be presented apolitically as a question of mathematical distribution, and at other times in more critical terms such as discrimination and poverty.

Inequality, like many other things, is often simplified to make it more comprehensible and the process of simplification can emphasise aspects that can make it seem more soluble and unacceptable. Whilst ladders and ropes as analogies for social structure suggest the possibility of everyone moving up, a pyramid structure shows that richer groups *require* many poor below them to support their lifestyles. All show a divided society, but ladders and ropes suggest that all can rise; these metaphors have been used to challenge the myth of social mobility that they promote in their original forms showing how discursive forms are malleable and can be imbued with new meanings. Altering scales of thinking by shrinking the world scale to something more imaginable like a village or household applies the ethics of the small scale to the world scale. Applying small scale ethics to the large scale presents unequal distributions as unacceptable.

What *world* means to respondents was considered in the final section, where the analysis shows that the geography of identifying threats to the world coincides with the geography of those threats. Thus in answering these questions, rather than considering the whole world, respondents generally reported that threats to their region were the biggest threat to the whole world. This has implications for awareness, understanding and action about contemporary global problems. However, as chapter 7 details, the local and everyday is an effective start point for reframing understandings of inequality and therefore challenging it. Before getting to that point, I consider the obstacles to addressing inequality as a social wrong and the extent to which inequality is presented as necessary. First, however, I present how visualizations of inequality can stretch our conceptions of the world from the more local and more tangible, so that our worldviews might become broader and more inclusive.

4. Putting inequality on the map

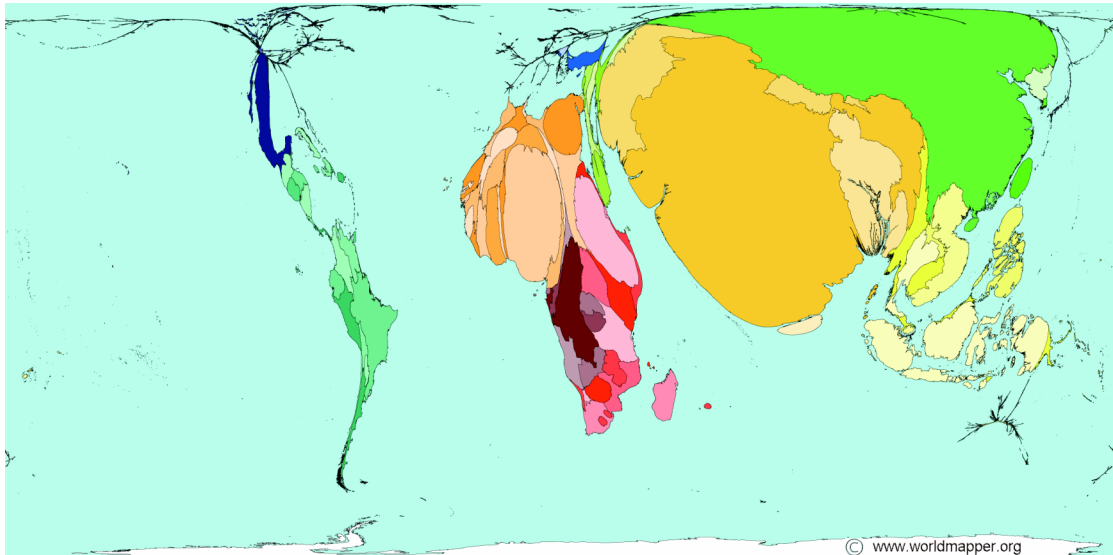


Figure 15: People living on under PPP US\$ 2 a day, in 2002

PPP is Purchasing Power Parity (see the glossary and section 4.5).

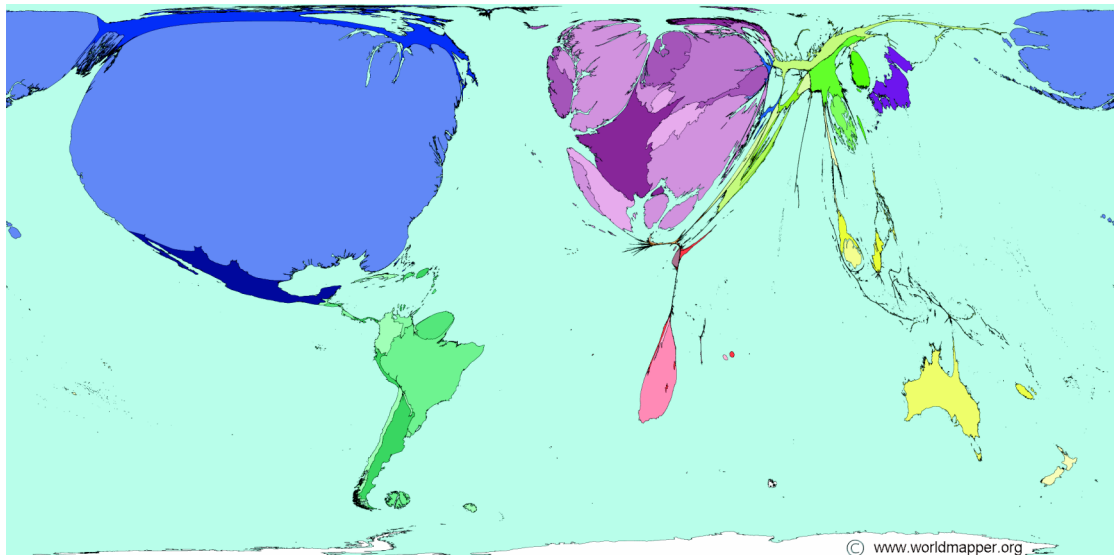


Figure 16: People living on over PPP US\$ 200 a day, in 2002

“... our own privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may – in many ways we might prefer not to imagine – be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others ...”

Susan Sontag, 2003, p.92

4.1 Introduction

Visual representations influence our understandings of inequality by showing how goods and bads are distributed, and how this affects people. Focusing on maps which represent inequality, this chapter takes the first step in Norman Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis, to consider the semiotic aspect of a social wrong (Fairclough, 2009, p.167); section 1.3 considers inequality as a social wrong. The semiotics²³ of inequality are the signs and symbols used to represent it. Maps are not mimetic of reality but add their own twists both in symbolising inequality and producing understandings, thus they encourage particular understandings of the world (Harley, 1992). Maps help us to imagine at the world scale as they simplify and allow readers to gaze at a representation of the whole, and like the Foucauldian *grids of representation* render the world imaginable and knowable (Foucault, 1977/1991). There is interplay between maps and verbal discourse as both provide representations of and influences on inequality; verbal discourse is considered in chapter 3.

This chapter focuses on interpretations of visual representations of world inequalities (Figure 15 and Figure 16), in relation to Question 2 below. Reactions to representations and the form that representations adopt are

²³ Semiotics is the study of signs; words and images that are used to denote or communicate about something else. The choice of words and images used to communicate about inequality constitute part of discourses on inequality.

influenced by social and economic relationships that are not exclusively local, although local contexts are differently situated in a nexus of wider influences. I borrow from Pickles the term 'social lives' to think about where maps get to, who they are read by, and how they are responded to (Pickles, 2006, p.348). An international audience's response to this novel form of mapping has not been researched previously.

Question 2. *What are the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality?*

4.2 Literature: mapping inequality

Imagery as deconstructable

The deconstruction of visualisations in a manner similar to that applied to written texts, in terms of their content and presentation, is a departure from a positivist concern with the technical methods of data presentation. It is generally agreed that maps are mediated representations of reality (Harley, 1992; Pickles, 1992; Monmonier, 1996; Dorling and Fairburn, 1997, p.194), despite often being interpreted as indisputable documents "blessed with the presumption of reality" (Jacob, 1992/2006, p.271-272). The map itself and its broader context influence what is communicated. A closer look shows that the technical is political, for example a "rule of ethnocentricity" where societies place themselves at the centre of the map (Harley, 1992, p.233-236) makes them appear to be at the centre of the world. So too the writing surrounding maps points to specific meanings, influencing interpretation and understanding. Map-makers' values, intentions, culture and epoch influence what is represented and how (Pickles, 1992, p.217 & p.211). More broadly, the presentation of a map affects its reception: Arno Peters arranged a press conference, presenting the Mercator Projection as a 'straw man' to be replaced by his equal area world map (Monmonier, 1996, p.96). This was despite the Mercator Projection's suitability for the task for which it was designed: mid-latitude seaborne navigation (Dorling and Fairburn, 1997, p.52-53). A map's value often depends on use: the London Underground map highlights connections so is useful for navigating the tube (Willats, 2001, p.125-7). The

tube map has become a cultural icon, illustrating how the use of a map is not solely dictated by intended purpose. This was the case with the Mercator projection, which came to symbolise the world and exaggerate the land area of the Northern hemisphere at the expense of the size of the Southern hemisphere.

Many image production choices *are* logical, such as putting one's country in the centre because one's location is central to one's world. A battery of geometric alterations to map forms exists: simplification (reduce detail, remove wiggles); displacement (stop overlaps and coalescences); smoothing (round the corners); enhancement (add wiggles); graphic association (link a label to a symbol); aggregation (group similar features); abbreviation (shorten words to reduce 'graphic congestion'); area conversion (show a general area where something is, rather than individual points); dissolution (remove some space); point conversions (group points); and segmentation (divide up space) (Monmonier, 1996, p.25-30). Such neutral-sounding techniques obscure or highlight information, about which map-makers may be unaware because their worldviews naturalise existing power distributions that are written into the map. Many maps are depopulated, in the sense of not showing humans, because maps are often static whereas people move. However such a technicality, at times, has politically germane implications: depopulated maps of war zones create the illusion that no one lives there, thus sterilising military actions and ignoring the lives that are disrupted (Gregory, 2004).

To try to avoid some of the criticism that map work and cartography obscure their own histories and origins (Pickles, 2006, p.349), I explain, contextualise and historicise the Worldmapper project. This work was initiated in 2005 with the collaboration of Danny Dorling, a geographer and my PhD supervisor who provided data, and Mark Newman, a physicist who processed that data using his algorithm to produce area-equalised cartograms (Dorling et al., 2006). These map-makers, both white, British-born men, were motivated to broaden knowledge and experiment with new techniques. I was employed as a research assistant on this project to write the text for these maps, create extra graphs and tables, and make a poster of each map for use in schools (see Appendix

5). John Pritchard designed and maintained the website, and handled much of the data. There were many others involved in this project at different times, the list of credits on the website numbered 70 individuals by May 2010. The Worldmapper team comprised of relatively liberal academics, all white, mainly male, working from the UK and United States. However the project was dreamt up on a New Zealand beach where Danny Dorling's imagination was freed from the demands of his email inbox²⁴.

Certain mapping conventions are exhibited in Worldmapper maps, such as being north-up and Eurocentric. These conventions were followed to make the maps as legible as possible. Mapping conventions that were not included were: a scale, a key, conventional regions, and labelling. The maps resemble caricatures of the world and have been included in art exhibitions such as *Confini* at the *Istituzione Museo D'Arte Della Provincia Di Nuoro*, in Sardinia, in 2006. Technical criticisms of this work include questioning the colouring and the data type. At the Infovis conference (2006) a member of the audience questioned the 'confusing' colouring, because she expected the colours to communicate pertinent additional information. The online²⁵ Worldmapper cartograms show regional averages of the Human Development Index, along a rainbow scale from dark red in Central Africa to the dark purple in Japan.

Another technical point, raised at a seminar at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, was that rates might be more interesting than counts. The epidemiologist concerned argued that high rates of disease could be more important than high totals. However cartograms are not suitable for presenting rates. Consider a cartogram as a fancy pie chart where a count is divided between the countries rather than slices; pie charts are not used to present rates. In displaying totals the importance of borders is diminished because totals are additive between adjacent areas, rates are not. Totals are also

²⁴ Danny Dorling commented "It's the farthest southern beach on the South-East coast of South Island – end of the earth ☺".

²⁵ The maps available at www.worldmapper.org have a different colour scheme than those published in 'The atlas of the real world' (Dorling et al., 2008).

democratising because each case or person gets the same space, whereas rates could inflate small countries with high rates to take up most of the map. That the visualisation expert spoke of colours and the epidemiologist of rates shows how the interest of the map-reader influences their critique, and aspects beyond their specialism are accepted less critically.

Initially the Worldmapper maps were presented on a website (www.worldmapper.org) followed by a book, *The atlas of the real world: mapping the way we live* (Dorling et al., 2008). Both were presented as reliable reference material, which was reinforced by the logos of the University of Sheffield and University of Michigan, Leverhulme Trust, and Geographical Association. The support of these mainly UK-based institutions made this work possible. As the author of most of the text surrounding the maps, I tried to minimise the influence of my own views of the topics being mapped because an explicitly political slant might deter some readers. Nevertheless, our worldviews (where we are and our politics) influenced the technicalities and presentation of these maps, for example trying to balance the number of accompanying quotes that came from women and men. Another example is that private health care was critically defined in terms of care distribution based on ability to pay rather than need.

The point in time, as well as space, made Worldmapper possible. The recent increase in world data availability due to the Millennium Development Goals combined with Mark Newman's development of his algorithm, created the possibility of combining the two. Data, like maps, are not neutral. The Millennium Development Goals are argued to miss the point, by hijacking the term 'development' and emptying it of meaning by pursuing targets in ways that are more likely to aggravate poverty than reduce it²⁶ (Amin, 2006b, a). In

²⁶ Samir Amin points out that during conferences to create the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), European, United States, and Japanese views often diverged with those from the global South. These differences were smoothed over in the creation of the MDGs. Amin recognises that each goal is individually "commendable" yet notes that debates about how to actually achieve these goals have been avoided. His main critique is that these goals

counting something other than what really matters, policy efforts may be directed towards improving the numbers rather than addressing the issue (Boyle, 2000, p.xvi-xvii). Some people and events are not counted at all (Gordon, 2004, p.4; Roy, 1999, p.4-5). Whilst UN data enabled this mapping project, a dearth of other possible data, such as global economic flows or networks of interdependence between people preclude other mapping possibilities (Sutcliffe, 2005, image 14; Taylor et al., 2001, p.215). The data used by Worldmapper enabled the creation of static maps that reify the state, something that flow maps and world city maps attempt to overcome.

Worldmapper cartograms are presented as new: the tag line for the Worldmapper website is “the world as you’ve never seen it before”. The idea of re-drawing the world map appeals to a sense of play, that the world is not fixed but can be represented in many ways, with headlines such as “Development redraws the map” (*Developments*, Issue 37, 31st March 2007), or “How the world really shapes up” (*The Daily Mail*, 1st March 2007). Worldmapper maps have been appreciatively received by teachers, the media, and the Geographical Association. The Geographical Association has reproduced many maps in its publications, invited articles about the project, and awarded prizes for this work. Yet a quick glance at Figure 17 shows that until October 2006 those who accessed the Worldmapper website were mainly European and North American, due to language, computer access and the influence of these two factors on the diffusion of information. By 2009 the printed version of the website, *The atlas of the real world* (Dorling et al., 2008), had been published in the United States, the UK, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, South Korea and Japan; all countries that are visible in Figure 17.

Following objects as they move between settings is an approach that has been applied to studying food and other commodities (Appadurai, 1986; Cook, 2006),

are assumed to be compatible with current capitalist economic strategies (Amin, 2006a). By September 2010 most of the 8 goals were off target for meeting the 2015 deadline (Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-11364717>; accessed on 23.09.2010)

here I apply something similar to maps which have already spread mainly to richer countries in both web and book forms.

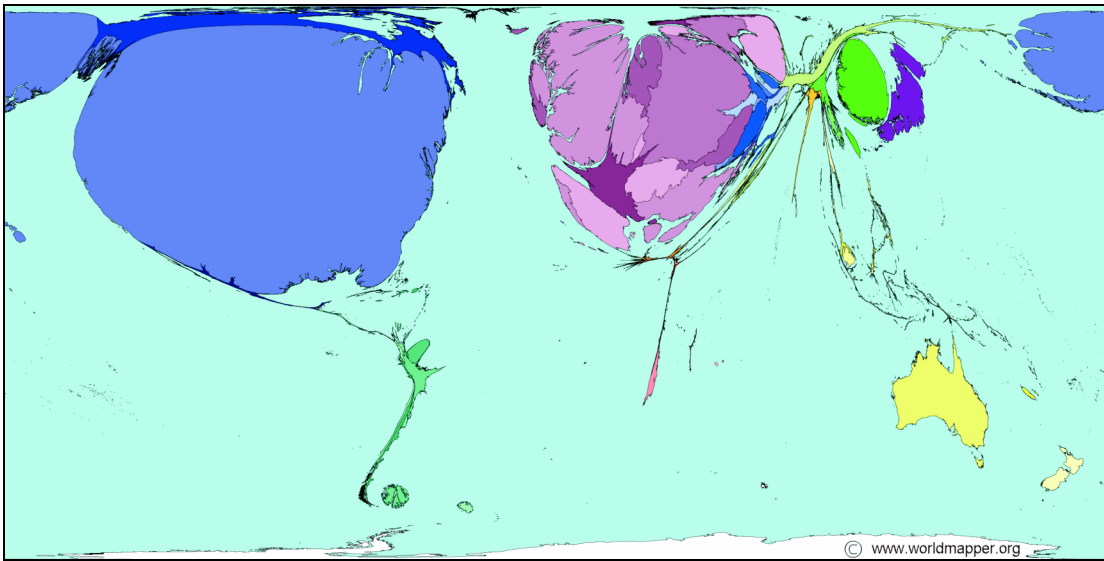


Figure 17: Unique hits on the Worldmapper website until October 2006

Simplification of complexity

“A good map tells a multitude of white lies; it suppresses truth to help the user see what needs to be seen. Reality is three-dimensional, rich in detail, and far too factual to allow a complete yet uncluttered two-dimensional graphic scale model. Indeed, a map that did not generalise would be useless.” (Monmonier, 1996, p.25). The ‘good map’ is useful precisely because it simplifies reality. To learn about some places or events beyond our direct experience the simplified version may be all we have; for example historical representations are all we have to learn about the past (Munslow, 1997, p.85). The act of representing, determining which white lies to tell, has, for some, become as “interesting and enlightening” as the events being described (Myers, 2000, p.430). How something is represented is of interest partly due to the effects this can have on understandings and behaviour. Visual descriptions can be especially influential because they appear to be accurate representations of reality.

That representations provide transparency and clarify reality is contested by those who spend time thinking about maps, and recognise “the pregnancy of

the opaque” (Harley, 1992, p.238). Simplifications encourage us to think in a particular way about others. Producing a simplified form can trick the reader into thinking that the complete story has been told, “there is always a double game of production and seduction” (Doel, 2006, p.345). The Worldmapper maps obscure certain political information by colouring French overseas *départements*, such as New Caledonia and Réunion, with the colours of nearby continents rather than the sovereign power. Placing countries into colour-coded groups implies regional similarities and the bold uniform colouring for each country suggests internal homogeneity. Mapping one variable gives importance to that over others; that hundreds of Worldmapper maps exist illustrates some plurality and connectivity between maps when they are read in conjunction: “The map is dead. Long live maps.” (Painter, 2006, p347).

Partial representation has a *double entendre* of incomplete and not impartial, and can manipulate information, world-views, and ultimately behaviour. “Wasn’t the map, after all, an archetypal symbol of military power, state bureaucracy, and instrumental science; ‘royal’ science epitomized?” (Pickles, 2006, p.348). Taken a step further, propaganda maps are a conscious attempt to influence opinion: the anti-communist ‘John Birch Society’ used Mercator’s map to show the ‘red menace’, assisted by the Soviet Union’s large size on that map and the colouring of the Soviet Union and China in a rich red (Monmonier, 1996, p.94-96). The preoccupation with land area, rather than population size, army size, or weaponry, demonstrates how maps can be persuasive despite presenting irrelevant and distorted information. Perhaps it is this critique, that land area is not always the most relevant variable to present, that resulted in the suggestion that cartograms are more accurate representations of data (Perkins, 2009, p.58; Whitehead, 2010). However, it was suggested that cartographic accuracy comes at the expense of comprehension (Whitehead, 2010). The cartograms of the United States, made using the same algorithm as Worldmapper maps, show voting in the 2004 US presidential election and are criticised for providing a “bewildering array of weird and wonderful images” served with a “pervading sense that these maps were somehow more ‘accurate’ or authentic depictions of Reality” but ultimately making “the US election harder for me to comprehend and understand, not easier.” (Whitehead, 2006, p.342). Although cartograms

simplify the world according to a single variable expressed as size, this simplification did not help Mark Whitehead's understanding.

"Is it possible to think of a map not as a representation of reality but as a tool to produce reality?" (Karnarinka, 2006, p.25). It is suggested that maps pre-exist the referent (the real world), by conceiving of it and making it imaginable (Jacob, 1992/2006, p.272). Our reliance upon maps to help us think about the world and results in certain neuroses: cartographic anxiety, the apprehension that something might not be mappable, and cartographic desire, a longing for mappability (Painter, 2006, p.347). This organizing of ideas, people and spaces into Foucauldian grids of organisation (Foucault, 1977/1991, p.195-228) creates 'populations' as knowable and manageable (Hannah, 1997). Understanding representation as creating an order poses the question of how "maps are an active part of the reality that they seek to depict." (Whitehead, 2006, p.343). However the extent to which maps create reality may be exaggerated given that map makers draw on pre-existing interpretations of the world (Dorling and Fairburn, 1997, p.3), as do map-readers.

World maps are often based on territorial boundaries, which is useful to try to understand international relations, where states are the prime unit of interest (Taylor et al., 2001, p.215). However, the state can become a large grid of knowledge, and mapping at this level reifies states as mappable "bounded totalities" (Painter, 2006, p.347). Another limitation of static political world maps is that they no longer provide an adequate spatial framework for understanding movement and flux: the movement of people, money, disease and ideas around the world. Alternative forms of mapping can show contemporary hierarchies and global flows (Taylor et al., 2001, p.214). Despite critiques of the ideological division of the world into nations, new representations of the global "still reflect the entrenchment of the geopolitical mode" (Cuddy-Keane, 2002, p.3), which reinforces this geopolitical approach in our understandings of the world.

The social lives of maps

If we are who we are through the interactions we have and our social relationships, it would not be absurd to suggest that the same is true for visual representations. A map is a very different object to the cartographer who sees

laborious measurements and partial data, and to the reader of the finished product (Jacob, 1992/2006, p.273). To have influence representations must be read or heard, at least as general ideas even if the map-reader has not seen an example. Hence the term “the diverse social lives of maps” (Pickles, 2006, p.348), which acknowledges the influence and existence of the map beyond its physical form. These are questions that others have asked of television viewing and sculptures, amongst other things (Morley, 1992; Cook, 2006). Pickles muses about what roles maps may have played in “dispossession, enclosure, and colonization and producing ... complex subjectivities” (Pickles, 2006 p.348). Maps are most influential when referring to something beyond our immediate experiences, i.e. most of the world for most of human history, as it is impossible to establish ground-truth. However such authority has even led map readers to question their knowledge of their local area before questioning the accuracy of a map (Deitrick, 2006).

Two types of reaction to visual information, specifically photographs, have been identified by Roland Barthes: the *studium* (general ‘polite’ interest; liking) and *punctum* (emotionally charged response and rupturing of complacency; loving) (Barthes, 1980/2000, p.26-28; Emmison and Smith, 2002). Differing reactions have also been identified as those that “make us stop and think” (Dorling and Fairburn, 1997, p.155) as opposed to something being “non-obtrusive” (Neuman, 1990, p.162). Achieving punctum is desirable for maps aimed at communication, such as Worldmapper maps. Simply turning a map “upside-down”, or South-Up, can provoke a punctum. The trick seems to be showing something that is almost recognisable, changing it enough to be challenging but not unrecognisable. Yet the possibility of punctum also depends upon several pre-requisites: the map reaching the target audience and being understood. Even then it may not change attitudes or instigate behavioural change (Handmer, 1985 in Haynes et al., 2007, p.3).

Being shocked by an image does not necessitate what might be the desired “correct interpretation”. Cartographic illiteracy comes in various forms. For instance the reader could not understand what is shown in a cartogram, perhaps due to not knowing how to interpret shapes or not understanding the

data or its significance (or insignificance). Another form of illiteracy would be reading maps as faithful accounts of reality when in fact they might be biased. This uncritical reading is invited by the nature of the map (Jacob, 1992/2006, p.273) – hence some of the writers referenced above not being ignored despite stating truisms. This point was also unambiguously made by Boggs, who coined the term ‘cartohypnosis’ (Boggs, 1947, p.469 in Pickles, 1992, p.198). Pickles upped the ante: maps “seduce us, and that in being so seduced we all too often lose sight of the complex matrix of institutions, practices, and discourses on which they depend” (Pickles, 2006, p.348). Misinterpretation, such as mistaking one country for another, is another type of illiteracy. The moment of abstraction, when symbols and conventions are introduced, is when many map-readers get lost.

Map use is common in the West (Jacob, 1992/2006, p.272). It is argued that it is a small rich part of the world where images hold such importance in defining and mediating our experiences, and to think otherwise is mere provincialism (Sontag, 2003, p.98). Not understanding a map can be aggravating because maps have the aura of being logical, sense-making tools. Yet one person’s simplification is another’s confusion, exemplified by the way that the rules of cartography vary between societies (Harley, 1992, p.233). If a reader is familiar with working at this level of abstraction, they will probably find it easier to understand abstract representations. Montserratian people when interviewed were generally better able to orientate themselves on aerial photographs taken from an oblique angle, rather than traditional plan view contour maps (Haynes et al., 2007, p.1-3). Thus for those who do not habitually use maps, a lower level of abstraction is often easier to understand.

Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the most familiar map for most of the world population *is* the world map. This is due to entertainment, communication and advertising industries presenting themselves globally and reflecting their world-wide interests; and also due to the adoption of the world map by internationalists and environmentalists (Dorling and Fairburn, 1997, p.26). The world image is used because it is recognised, and recognised because it is used. If TV broadcasting can form a bridge between private and public worlds

(Morley, 1992, p.283), so too can maps that enable us to think of the world as a whole. Land-sea borders are particularly distinctive because the sea is usually coloured differently to land. Islands and peninsulas are generally easier to identify than countries with land borders (Clary et al., 1987, p.46-47 in Jacob, 1992/2006, p.354). Continents stand out on world maps due to their land-sea borders and considerable size, giving world maps their distinctive shape.

The visual studies literature offers a consideration of the effects of visual material, partly developed by the way that images invite the observer to look at them. Of the two types of knowledge that go into objects, only one is how to produce them and the other is how to appropriately consume them (Appadurai, 1986, p.41). 'Scopic regimes', the cultural construction of what is seen and how it is seen (Rose, 2001, p.6), mean that people are likely to understand images differently. What is seen and how it is seen can be analysed using various concepts (the examples I provide pertain to Worldmapper): binary oppositions (poor / rich), frames (where it appears – a map becomes art when displayed in a gallery), genre (cartograms have their own codes and conventions), identification (how people relate to the image), narrative (the story told), reading (knowing how to read the image), the relation of the signifier to signified (there is no direct resemblance), subject position (of those in the image) (Emmison and Smith, 2002, p.66-69). The social modality of viewing images involves the social practices of spectating and the social identity of the viewer (Rose, 2001, p.27). The reader, the process of map reading, and the image itself influence responses to maps.

If these maps have social lives, what are their social circles? Where people read these maps has been outlined (Figure 17). At the sub-national level it is suggested that these maps, particularly in the form of *The atlas of the real world* are "radical chic, safely commodified for the bleeding heart liberal: global inequalities are a serious business and here they are ready to be consumed in the safety of a middle class household or map library." (Perkins, 2009, p.59). It seems that Chris Perkins would be happy for these maps to be in a textbook, but not a coffee table book. The radical nature of these maps, whilst attempting to appear as neutral illustrations of most available world datasets, has not

escaped other commentators. In a recent BBC documentary about maps, presenter Jerry Brotton commented that “these maps with their swollen and shrunken countries are a dramatic call to action, they take a mountain of statistics which are usually so easy to ignore and provide shocking clarity, a profound understanding of the most pressing problems that face our world today” (Nixon, 2010, no page number). The members of the Worldmapper team have also used the maps in publications to challenge the status quo (e.g. Dorling et al., 2007; Dorling and Barford, 2007; Barford, 2009). Thus whilst being presented as neutral they have been used to support social critiques.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the manipulation and seduction that maps and discourse can perform, it is relatively rare to find recent analyses of map interpretation. In fact, documents’ and texts’ functioning in daily life is reasonably under-researched (Rapley, 2009/2007, p.87). Most studies focus on the map and hypothesise about its social life. A study of hazard maps in Montserrat (Haynes et al., 2007) and another about using cartograms in disease mapping (Tao, 2010) are the only recent studies of audience map interpretation that I have found. This is in the context of calls to “take seriously and focus on the potential work of documents – and other elements of material culture – in co-ordinating and producing people's actions and interactions.” (Rapley, 2009/2007, p.97). One way to do this is to follow objects, as meaning exists in their trajectories and uses, as well as in form (Appadurai, 1986, p.5).

4.3 *Stepping outside the comfort zone*

“I love maps. There, I’ve said it. I am coming out as a cartophile.” (Painter, 2006, p.345). But we are not all cartophiles: many people find map reading unpleasant. Degree of difficulty in reading and interpreting visualisations can be understood as concentric rings from a central comfort zone to a confusion zone. The comfort zone is familiar and understood; the confusion zone is so uncomfortable that going there will be of little value and because nothing appears to be familiar there are no legible signposts to assist the reader. The place to expand horizons is the coping zone where some information or elements of the mapping technique are new. Peters’ map was seen as radical and new for many, although in many respects it was highly conventional, e.g.

Eurocentric and North-up (Dorling and Fairburn, 1997, p.36-38). In the coping zone the reader is stretched, learns something new, and is not defeated. Which zone the maps fall into depends partly on participants' attitudes to new ideas, because refusal to engage precludes understanding. The terms comfort, coping and confusion arose in the discussion groups as ways of describing interaction with maps.

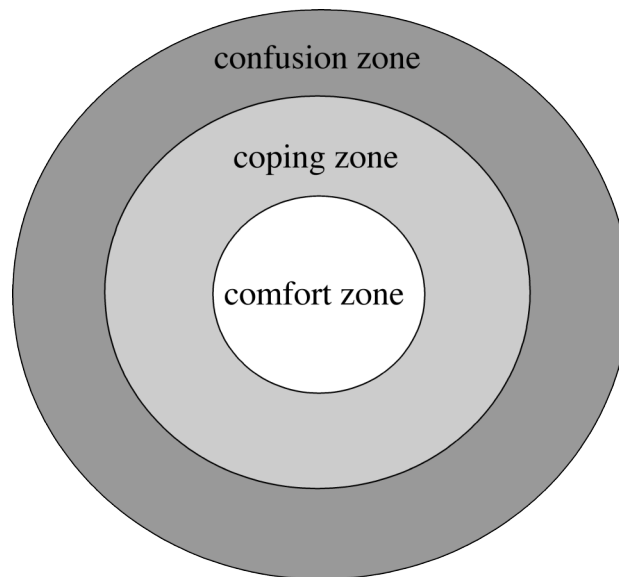


Figure 18: Zones of understanding

In what follows I present responses to Worldmapper maps when they were presented to discussion groups in Kenya, Mexico and the UK. I draw mainly on the experiences with the maps, using graphs as a point of comparison, to exemplify these approaches to the maps. The range of responses to these maps, even within a discussion group, is considerable:

“... just within our group, see Elsie can't cope and Jill immediately jumps to it and knows what it's about and what it's doing, and after I've looked at it I can pick this out and think well it's similar to ones we've done before. [Anna: yep] and Hannah's just fascinated, she wants to know more (laughter)”

(UK 6, urban private girls school)

The comfort zone, where there is familiarity and a good understanding of the maps, was the territory of people who had seen Worldmapper maps previously. As one might expect of a project run from the UK and United States, the British groups were most aware of these maps. Promotion of Worldmapper has been

international, but particularly widespread in the UK, receiving attention at the teacher-focused Geographical Association conferences and in geography magazines, and the broader media including articles in *The Times* newspaper and *Vanity Fair* magazine. A member of UK 7 (rural private school) had bought the atlas, UK 5 (urban private school) had the maps displayed on the classroom wall, whereas UK 2 (urban trainee teachers) had recently been told about cartograms and was pleased to see an example. However Worldmapper maps are by no means ubiquitously known amongst UK teachers and there were three groups that had not heard of Worldmapper before. Those who had already seen these maps understood the concepts and generally appreciated them as a rich source of information. UK 6 (urban private girls school) were quick to discuss the maps despite only some participants being familiar with them.

“Look at Alaska though, it goes off there and on there.
It’s amazing when you look at that, and how Canada is squeezed in, yes.
And Mexico
Or is, because that’s sort of
Oh yeah, that’s right.
Where is Nigeria?
And poor little Russia
I was trying to find Russia (disappointedly)
It’s green, this green bit here look
That one’s Nigeria
Anna: Nigeria has got one of the biggest populations in West Africa
I haven’t got a clue (despairingly)
Again I was just surprised that India was so big in comparison to so many countries in Africa, because these started out smaller, yeah?
Because the number of people”
(UK 6, urban private girls school)

In the quotation above the participants engage in discussing the map, spotting countries and developing their understandings. They are just outside their comfort zone; in knowing enough to work out more from the map they have little trouble in identifying countries and considering the reasons behind the distortions. One woman, however, self-reportedly did not “do” maps and sounded plaintive when voicing her confusion. This was accentuated by its juxtaposition with the others making sense of the maps. This woman was so

uncomfortable with maps that she physically pulled away and defensively crossed her arms as they lay on her lap; she visibly relaxed when she returned the maps to me. This contrasts with her colleagues' eager discussion, constructively pointing out interesting observations and comparing understandings. The positive attitude of those understanding contrasted with the defensiveness and negativity of the woman not understanding: if you find something easy and rewarding that is encouraging; if it is hard and it makes you feel stupid you are less likely to try to engage.

“Anna: if you see this sort of stuff in a magazine you just turn the page?
Oh, I just turn the page, I don't even look at it, it would mean absolutely nothing, it doesn't even now, it means absolutely nothing to me at all, I'm afraid.
Anna: and is there any way we could change it to mean something to you? Or is it just...
It would be very painful and I would get very ratty (laughter of others)
Anna: do you want me to take those off you and? (referring to the maps; laughter of others)
And have a piece of cake, quick!
(UK 6, urban private girls school)

Despite this discussion being in good humour, there is a tension and clearly the participant is not only uninterested in learning about these maps, but considers that it would be a particularly unpleasant experience to do so. Another reaction, also of not engaging with these maps, was amongst Kenya 3 (rural Catholic girls boarding school). Instead of blaming themselves for not understanding, they criticised the maps for being incomprehensible. These middle-aged men offered the strongest critique of all the groups, the basis of the critique being that the maps did not follow mapping conventions. Map reading and conventions form part of each year of Kenyan secondary school geography education, thus mapping conventions are firmly established amongst Kenyan teachers. Simply applying his understandings of map conventions to an unfamiliar form of mapping the teacher below arrives at the conclusion that the wealth map shows that people are living in the sea:

“One thing is that this is a population map. A map that is supposed to be talking of population, living people, and you see it is a map that has extended into the sea in some parts, and the shading gets out of the

margin of the land, that gives a different impression altogether, because when you are talking of people living more than this, you cannot shade in the sea because you don't have people living there. It creates a big big problem. And then just the disfigurement of the continents themselves, you see it doesn't show that the map is to scale. See the scale is a very important factor here, because it will help you tell, maybe the perception of people in terms of land, in terms of area. But you see if you look at this big bloated kind of situation in the US here, it's sends an impression that really the map is talking about the US and nothing else. So these other things are extraneous, they've just come in by accident or something, but the map is supposed to be talking of one thing, because the one that is being blown up, the rest is being shrunk. So it will create an element of confusion, it will not send the message that it is supposed to send."

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

The commentary above shows an expectation that the countries should remain the same size; if a country expands beyond its usual land-sea border it must indicate amphibious people living in the sea. This literal interpretation of the map shows a misinterpretation of cartograms due to an inflexible grounding in more established mapping techniques. The cartograms are seen as flouting mapping conventions: the absence of a scale and key were presented repeatedly as basic errors in Kenyan critiques of these maps. There is also confusion about what the map is *supposed* to show. The speaker finds it to be insufficient and erroneous, without saying what it *should* be showing. For many participants these maps were too unfamiliar. Many critiques and suggestions stemmed from a desire for the maps to be closer to their comfort zone. Specifically, it was common for groups to state a preference for choropleth maps or cuboid cartograms, and Worldmapper cartograms were described as abnormal using terms like *disfigured* and *deformed* which comes with connotations of being changed from what would be normal and correct:

"Why didn't you make them as a cartogram where each little square represents a fixed quantity? The one that has the biggest income, is biggest in size, so that it is not so deformed?"

(Mexico 8, urban private Catholic school)

Cuboid cartograms and choropleth maps are more widely established forms of mapping. New maps that play with the shape of the world and illustrate that there is no single correct world map were unappealing to some, provoking the question: why would one use a new form of representation when a perfectly

serviceable one already exists? Worldmapper cartograms were considered less easy to understand than more established forms, which indicates that they would be more valuable to those trained to use them. A lack of understanding was sometimes expressed in the third person; perhaps teachers are averse to saying they don't understand, given that their job is conventionally understood as imparting knowledge (although education's importance for raising critical consciousness is a preferable conceptualisation, after Freire, 1970/1990). Pupils' and the general public's understanding was often discussed. Teachers who disliked the maps often reported their pupils would not understand them, whereas teachers with an appreciation for the maps said their pupils would manage. Thus it is reasonable to take hypothetical pupil understanding as a proxy for teacher understanding.

"It is helpful, work can take time, it is not easy, the world takes time to know that we have to refer to this, to understand this. It's a problem, so the person has to be explained to. [Anna: yes, you're right] but it is really useful, especially when they can be used to publish books for research but not for learning. [Anna: not learning? Ah!] Be, because for students in our schools it will be very difficult to interpret."

(Kenya 3, rural Catholic girls boarding school)

"It's not so much that, it's that next to that. If you give them that one at the same scale, at the same size, they COMPLETELY GET IT. They completely get it and from the beginning they get a bigger picture. You can then unpick, rather than start with some data, some numbers and a place and build it up. So they are INCREDIBLY, INCREDIBLY valuable. And the fact that some countries disappear and you can't find them, that's the point isn't it? And I'm, sometimes I'm not terribly good at recognising the countries once they've been distorted"

(UK 5, urban private school)

The use of the third person drawing on their professional experience and their pupils bolsters the claims made by teachers, no longer are they simply describing their own reactions. This has a similar discursive effect to critiquing the production of these maps with reference to map conventions: protecting the reader from saying that they do not understand. Reactions to these maps range from them being seen as suitable just for sophisticated adults, to being an accessible form of data presentation. The sophisticated adult argument is based on the conjecture that teachers have superior understandings to others,

including pupils and the general public. A Mexican group solves the issue, “I work in a public and private school, in the private school there is more focus on reading and research, so this would grab their attention more than for a child in the public school.” (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). Those who are trained to think in that way will understand these maps; those without that support will have more difficulties. Map reading is learned, like writing or mathematics, and cartograms not only require map skills but also specific knowledge about that form of maps. There is also a question of what acceptable understanding is. The UK group above considers that Worldmapper maps are good communication tools, and that it is not necessary to recognise all of the countries shown. Not understanding the basics of these maps, that is the maps being in the reader’s confusion zone, precludes learning from them.

Knowing something of the world map and having some knowledge of which countries are located where in relation to one another is an important prerequisite for reading Worldmapper maps and enjoying the experience. Mexico 8 expresses this as *la concepción espacial* (spatial awareness), noting that many people do not know the world map, which renders reading these deformed and unlabelled maps particularly challenging. Kenya 7 (British-system private school) and Mexico 1 (urban teachers from different schools) made the point that teaching may be limited by the available resources, and that this sort of novel representation would not make it to the classroom; several groups (Kenya 7, Mexico 6, UK 7) asked whether I would give them the copies of the maps that we used in the discussion groups. Another limitation, expressed by Kenya 7, was that the curriculum is very demanding so teaching becomes a drilling exercise in preparation for exams, where imaginative and wide-ranging material is discouraged.

“... the actual maps of these countries have been altered. And like, this is not the shape of the USA, even Africa. [yeah, even Africa] is not this shape. So, with somebody who knows the African map, well they call the map the way it is, in map form, may feel confused. But the person who is going to study this, somebody who already has information on what he is looking for, so he may not be confused to say the shape of Africa, Africa as a continent, is not like that. Yeah, yeah, thank you.”

(Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school)

It appears to be worth stepping outside of the comfort zone to use new forms. When people are familiar with using these maps they find them a valuable resource about which they are enthusiastic: “I just think they’re absolutely brilliant” (UK 5, urban private school). But for the time being the benefits are greater in the UK than in Mexico or Kenya, due to greater familiarity and accessibility of Worldmapper, plus the availability of supplementary teaching resources in the UK. Location in a nexus of flows influences exposure to various media, including novel maps which present United Nations data that pertains to our places in the world.

4.4 Map reading from somewhere

Maps create the illusion of the possibility of a birds’ eye view, a view that is located nowhere, because there is no point from which you can see the spherical world looking like a two dimensional map. This omnipresent and omniscient gaze has been dubbed the “God trick”, producing the perception of “objectivity, distanced observation, and full knowledge” (Pickles, 2006, p.348). Neither the production nor reading of maps is placeless. As detailed in the literature section of this chapter, maps have particularities to their provenance. What is less commonly considered is the location of audiences in time and space. Audience location in a space of flows grounded in a particular time and place influences interests and sensitivities when reading a map. Pre-existing knowledge is gauged against the maps, and the maps against that knowledge. Location influences geographical awareness, which could be broadened by looking at visualisations of the world. The particularities of maps and audiences mean that their conceptual abstraction would detract from our understandings of the meanings generated through map reading.

Figure 19 to Figure 21 show the geographical foci of the conversation of each group, when talking in general, about the maps, and also about the graphs. The numbers presented are the number of times a country within that region or the region itself was mentioned in one of the discussion groups. For example, if Uganda were mentioned twice and Tanzania three times within a single discussion group that would mean a point for each country. Similarly, if Africa were mentioned 10 times it is counted once because subsequent references

may be shadows of the first. This counting captures variation of mentions by precluding double counting within groups. When comparing data please note that the discussion of maps and graphs rarely took more than a fifth of the total time. In Mexico and Kenya visualisations stimulate more place-specific talk than in the UK; the UK teachers more readily talked about a range of different places without visual prompting.

In Figure 19 to Figure 21 it appears that in Kenya and the UK the general conversation focused more on Africa than any other region; in contrast Mexican general conversation was more centred on Europe. However when references to the UK in 6/8 Mexican groups are ignored as a potential bias due to the interviewer being British, South and Central America are the most talked about. This shows greater interest and knowledge about a group's own region than others, except in the UK due to a distinctly non-European mindset. The ways in which this information was mentioned vary: it could take the form of stories of personal experiences, sharing detailed information, or more superficial mentions. All cases are counted equally in these graphs.

The introduction of maps and graphs to the groups altered the geographical focus of their discussions, partly in line with what the maps and graphs emphasised. With cartograms size attracts attention, and in the unlikely absence of a special regional interest, it could be assumed that on the wealth map most attention would fall on the United States. Greater attention is given to North America when reading the maps, than in the general conversation in each of the three research countries. On the poverty map, more attention would theoretically go to India and China, however there is no large increase in conversation about these regions on presentation of the maps. Both Kenyans and Mexicans again spoke most about their own regions when shown the maps. In contrast the overall focus of conversational attention within UK groups shifted away from Africa and towards both North America and Asia.

The trade flow map draws attention to Western Europe again using size, with a huge arrow showing intra-regional trade; the income bar chart draws the eye to the country with the highest bar, the United States, whilst also drawing attention to India and China, given that they have considerable space on the graph, not

due to high earnings but large populations. Attention of Kenyans when reading the graphs shifted from Africa towards Asia. I speculate that this may be because Africa did not feature much in the graphs, although this absence also attracted some attention from Kenyan groups. However the Mexican and UK groups barely commented on this absence, with *Africa out of sight, out of mind*. Mexican groups continued to focus on South and Central America when looking at the graphs with increased attention paid to Asia. The British groups paid more attention to Europe when not looking at the maps.

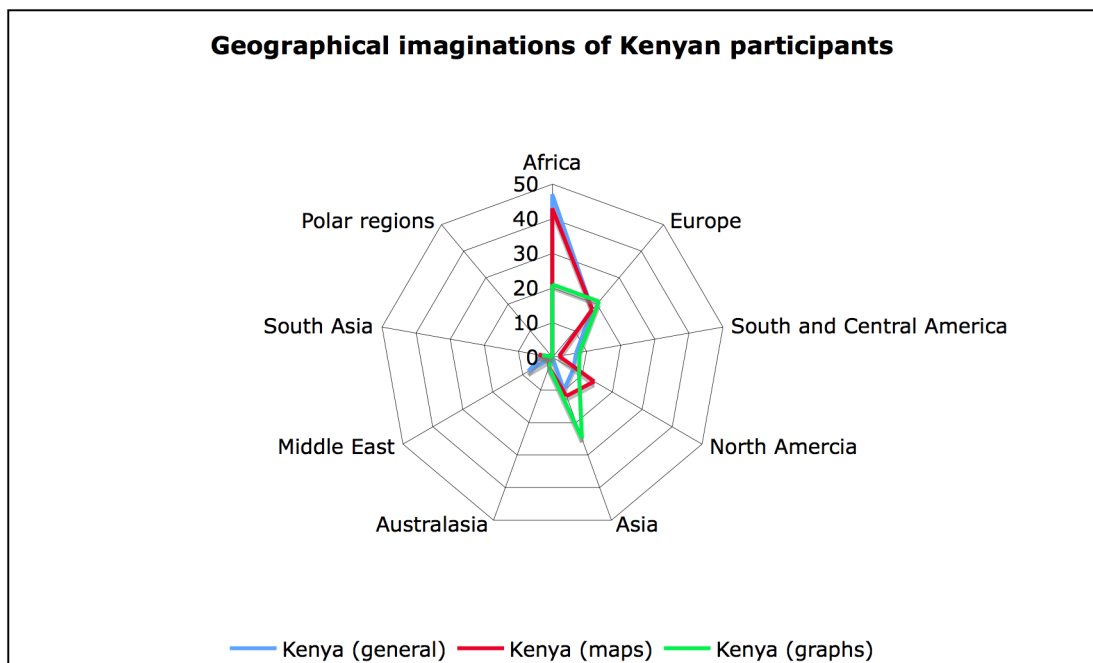


Figure 19: Talking about the world from Kenya

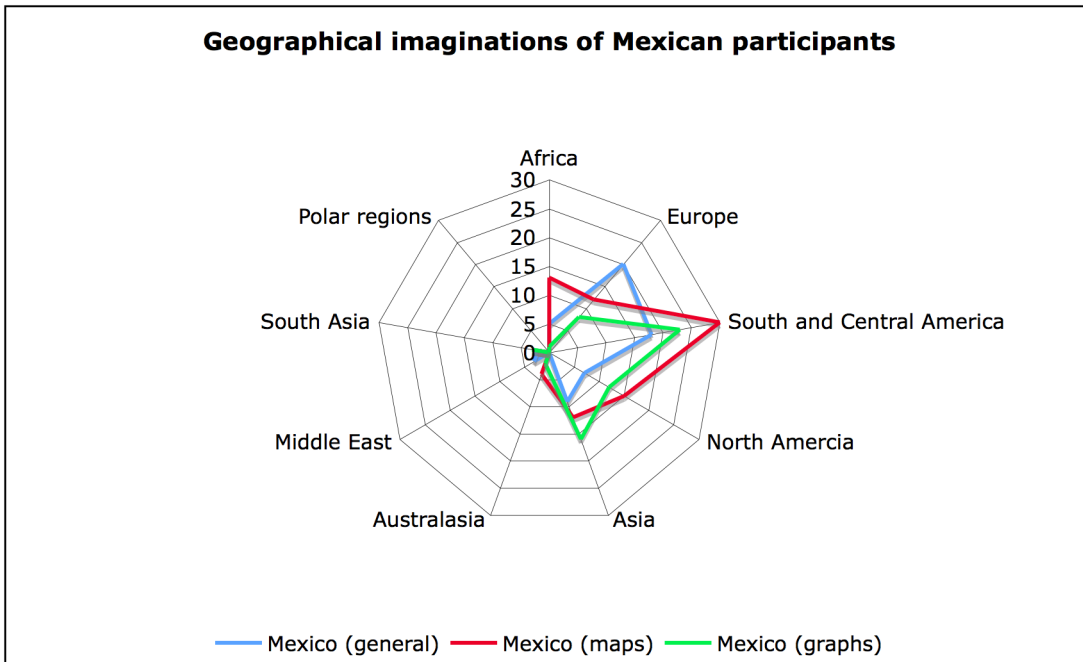


Figure 20: Talking about the world from Mexico

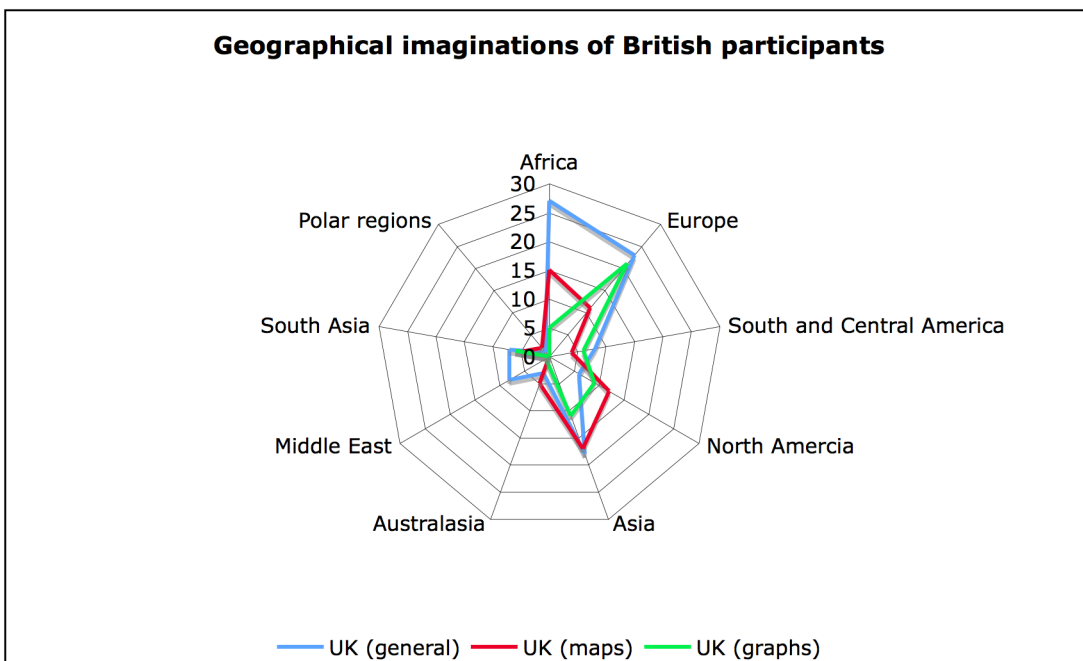


Figure 21: Talking about the world from the UK

The observations above, whilst based on rather small numbers, imply that where you come from influences your geographical imagination in terms of what you look for, what you comment upon, and what is noticed in its absence. I recognise that others' uses of the term geographical imagination would not use such techniques as this (in particular Gregory, 1994). Here *geographical*

imagination points to a heightened awareness and confidence in commenting about certain places rather than others. That conversation often focuses on the nearby, except in the case of the UK, reflects local interest and knowledge. The UK, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, is a different case as far as worldviews are concerned; the British post-colonial imagination is broad due to the cultural influences of former colonies on the UK. Kenyans and Mexicans both spoke of Europe second most frequently after their own region (after the interviewer bias is accounted for), which probably reflects historical and linguistic connections. That geographical imaginations appear to focus within the region suggests participants' worlds not extending to the entire planet. It is argued that "Every map is always a "world" map" because it shows *that* world (Pickles, 2004, p.192). Here it seems that participants picked their own worlds from the map.

There is a dialectical²⁷ relationship between how geographical imaginations shape map reading and how this influences geographical imaginations. In Kenya and Mexico an interest in participants' own regions directed considerable attention to those regions despite the whole world being represented. However this attention to their own regions was not exclusive, and participants' conversation was influenced by what was highlighted on the maps and graphs. This was also the case for the UK groups, whose discussion altered in accordance with the visualisations they were looking at, except that there was less preference for talking about their own region, which is probably linked to British people not feeling as European as Kenyans feel African or Mexicans feel Latin American.

This regional focus in Kenya and Mexico could be a pragmatic information interpretation technique of grounding oneself in the familiar as a point of comparison in order to look beyond to the less familiar. A disposition to be more interested in the local is perhaps a concern for what affects participants'

²⁷ By dialectical, I mean that there is a relationship between maps and our geographical imaginations, with each of these influencing the other.

worlds most. This special interest could be an instinctive desire to identify what participants know in a different form; however it seems plausible that this is taught. We are trained to search for our own country or continent, perhaps looking for its distinctive outline on a map or its name on a graph. This process could be ideologically motivated, a form of banal nationalism previously identified in Western countries where unobtrusive habits reproduce nations and nationals (Billig, 1995/2002, p.6); it appears that banal nationalism thrives elsewhere. This does not need to be confined to the nation, for example pan-Africanism aims to unite Africans, promote pride in African values and glorify African history (Esedebe, 1994, p.5). A similar affection for one's own region can be detected in the quotation below

“so Nigeria is one of the countries with the most poverty, it has 90.8% of people who earn under 2 dollars a day (reporting information shown on poster). Why are we so far? South-East Asia, *Africa*, and then LATIN AMERICA”.

(Mexico 6, rural government school. Posters are in Appendix 5)

In the above quotation ‘South-East Asia’ is said in a matter of fact way, followed by ‘Africa’ said pityingly, ‘Latin America’ is said with a triumphant fondness which seems less connected to the topic of conversation, who is poorest, than the fact of talking about his own place. However, having a map encouraged this teacher to talk about other continents as well, highlighted new information about Nigeria, and geographically broadened his conversation to places he might not usually refer to. A map can extend conversation to include more information about more places. The map not only communicates information, but also reminds people of less familiar places and events. In this context, specific information about distant places could be introduced in a more definite way, giving confidence to talk about places, events and relationships that might otherwise have been more vague, half-baked impressions. Putting somewhere on the map can attract the audience’s attention. Yet nationalist preferences and the pre-existing knowledge with which the visualisation blends also inevitably contribute to gel a slightly re-ordered worldview.

4.5 The 'purchasing power parity' US dollar

"It cannot buy anything and is nowhere legal tender ... The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) international dollar is not, in a word, money." (Freeman, 2009, p.1427-8). Nevertheless PPP is a widely used measure and the basis of many poverty and inequality measures; it presented a barrier to interpreting the maps and graphs. PPP aims to equalize buying power by currency, rather than relying on exchange rates. This is done by pricing comparable baskets of basic goods across countries and the PPP equivalents are calculated in terms of the purchasing power of the currency. A PPP measure should indicate how much can be bought with that money in the country in which it is earned. Both maps and one graph show Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) United States Dollars (US\$), the trade graph used exchange rate based US\$.

The PPP US\$ measure is challenging because (i) it is not a familiar measure for many people, (ii) it is assumed to mean the currency of United States dollars which is most meaningful to Mexicans, then British people, then Kenyans, and (iii) the '\$' sign is ambiguous because this is the sign for dollars and pesos, so is used in Argentina, Australia, Cuba, Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Singapore, and Tonga. A similar symbol but with two vertical lines is used in Brazil, Cape Verde and Chile. That '\$' refers to the US\$ is due to the United States-centric world data production. That the meaning of the poverty measures is highly abstracted makes it challenging to grasp.

A critical reading of these images necessitates a consideration of the variable measured, the conditions of production of these data, and what such data obscure. Good practice requires the detailing of data sources. That the maps provided source information alerted some readers to the production of maps and 5 out of 24 groups spoke about the data source or funding source for the mapping project. The graphs were over 10 years out of date and several groups commented on this, taking the age of the data to somewhat discredit what was shown. Data vintage should be considered case by case because information changes at different rates: a developing city changes fast whereas a geology changes slowly (Monmonier, 1996, p.54-55). To present visualisations without this information would encourage an uncritical reading because the

reader, receiving apparently source-less but nevertheless authoritative information, would have nothing on which to base their musings about map production. Whilst appearing to invite a critical reading and demonstrating some degree of neutrality and transparency, the listing of data and funding sources performs a validating role, to show that they are not one person's eccentric drawing. Reference to the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report (the data source) and other organisations supporting this research²⁸ asserts that it is a credible project with sufficient gravitas to make claims about the world.

Whilst the UK groups did not convert the PPP US\$ into the local currency, half the Mexican groups and 2 of the 9 Kenyan groups did so. However their conversions were based on current exchange rates, not PPP. It was frequently commented that prices differ between countries so US\$2 buys less in a richer country than a poorer country, however PPP equalises these differences to create an internationally comparable measure so that PPP US\$2 theoretically buys the same amount of goods and services anywhere in the world. Converting dollars into the local currencies, Mexican Pesos and Kenyan Shillings, changed an abstract measure into something tangible:

"It's in dollars

Yes, it's a lot

That's more than 2000 pesos at the moment.

In the USA

Yes in the USA

I say that yes, it's a lot.

[Quiet chat]

Here it says, dollar adjusted for purchasing power, so it depends on purchasing power, it's an approximation, nothing more."

(Mexico 8, private urban Catholic school)

²⁸ Supporting organisations include: The University of Sheffield and the University of Michigan (the home Universities of the academics who produced these maps), The Leverhulme Trust (the philanthropic organisation that funded the project), and the Geographical Association (that endorsed the work).

Calculating what PPP US\$2 or PPP US\$200 would be in the local currency using actual exchange rates distorts the value, because PPP US\$1 is not equal to US\$1. In fact it is hard to really know what PPP US\$1 is worth, even if you live in the United States. The data shown in the maps use World Bank PPP values (United Nations Development Programme, 2002, Box 5). These come from the International Comparison Programme that produces PPP data every 5 years; participating countries provide prices for at least 450 of 2000 broadly comparable items. The most countries surveyed in a single round was 90: for those not participating estimates are extrapolated from the last measurement; for those who have never been measured a regression model based on estimated Gross Domestic Product and secondary school enrolment is used to estimate PPP values (World Bank, 2010). PPP is not widely known to be the standard measure for comparing incomes despite disparity in purchasing power being widely acknowledged. Ironically this disparity is flagged up as invalidating international income comparisons when it is already accounted for by PPP. The exchange rate based conversions made by participants may produce estimates many times greater than what the actual purchasing power would be.

“Yeah, US dollars is good money, you can survive.
Two US dollars, because that is 150 shillings, Kenyan.
Yeah, you can operate on it in the village even the one pound, yeah. On 125 you can operate for 3 days.
If I’m living in my hut
In Nairobi and you are not paying transport, eh?
I say, 125.
Not a lot eh. It’s enough to keep you going.
Mm, it seems that the majority of Kenyans live below one dollar.
One dollar
One dollar
That is the kind of money we had even
That means that 2 dollars per day is too much.”
(Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers)

That people do not know that income comparisons and poverty data are usually measured in PPP has several implications. Firstly the interpretation that PPP US\$2 is sufficient to live on or even too much raises the question of what *enough* would be. This can undermine measures of poverty and could weaken

public support for policies addressing poverty. Secondly, it is ironic that world poverty levels and the Millennium Development Goals are expressed in terms that school teacher research participants did not know about, so it is unlikely that the subjects of these policies will understand them. Particular technical knowledge distinguishes the authors from the beneficiaries of these policies, a distinction that is reinforced by the measurement being based on the currency of the United States (and Ecuador). For map-readers, not recognising purchasing power parity as a measure and interpreting maps as being based on exchange rates impedes complete understanding. Nevertheless, map readers readily identified which countries have large rich and poor populations.

4.6 Achieving Barthes' *punctum*

Documents which are intended to communicate information often aim to make people stop and think, to cut into someone's consciousness over and above the background level of information demanding our attention. Roland Barthes' concept of *punctum* describes this reaction in contrast to *studium*, a general polite interest (Barthes, 1980/2000). The images that were shown at times achieved *punctum*, particularly: when pre-existing knowledge was challenged by the data presented; in response to the new form of mapping; and seeing the extremes of daily incomes shown by the pair of maps. These moments were identified by surprised tones of voice and comments. Contradictions to and extensions of pre-existing knowledge of the world required reconsideration of understandings to incorporate new knowledge, or reject information as invalid.

There were various causes of surprise, linked to pre-existing knowledge. In Kenya a major surprise was that Nigeria was ranked top of the list of countries with the largest proportion of people living in absolute poverty. Mexican groups were often surprised about the amounts of money represented. In the UK surprise and interest were more detached from the reality depicted. Interest in rankings and measures are responses to written rather than diagrammatic information, which is more firmly within the comfort zone so people are quicker to digest this information and more confident in their interpretations. Another cause of *punctum* is abnormal territory sizes that draw attention to certain parts of a map or graph. Attention can be attracted by pronounced presence and

unexpected absence, for example the diminutive presence of Africa in the trade graph and rich map, and the large arrow on the trade graph representing Western Europe's large share of international trade. Noticing presence or absence requires pre-existing knowledge and expectations.

In the table of 'territories with high absolute poverty levels', Nigeria is placed at number one with 90.8% of the population living under PPP US\$2 per day. This was a shock to Kenyans who understood Nigeria to be one of the richest African countries because of oil wealth. This impression of a wealthy Nigeria projects resource wealth on to the population. Sub-national inequalities in Nigeria have been characterised and mapped (see: Ojo, 2010a, b), illustrating the uneven distribution of oil wealth, which in 2008 amounted to petroleum exports worth US\$74.70 billion (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, 2009). The juxtaposition of the poverty of the majority of Nigerians and the vast oil wealth of Nigeria is partly explained by problems with the leadership (Achebe, 1983/1984).

The Kenyans who commented on Nigeria often contrasted Kenya and Nigeria, commenting on how Kenya should appear as poorer than Nigeria. Some UK and Mexican groups commented on Nigeria in passing, their attention drawn to it due to the number one ranking rather than their expectations being challenged. Kenyan participants expected Nigerians to be relatively wealthy and attempted to explain the disjuncture between their expectations and the tabulated data, thus demonstrating their regional knowledge:

"It's a surprise to us, because being the number one oil producer, though I think it has been overtaken by Angola, I expect, I would expect Nigeria to be
Out of this
To be well off, yeah, to be out of this."
(Kenya 9, urban boys boarding school)

The quote above exemplifies how 4 of the 9 Kenyan groups spoke about Nigeria's position in the table of countries with the largest proportions of the population living in absolute poverty. They used "surprise" and "shock" to describe their reactions; surprise requires some preconception to be built upon or contradicted. One of these groups argued that Nigeria *should* be one of the

better off African countries: they expected Nigeria to be less poor than Kenya. Here *should* can take a double meaning: Nigeria should have fewer poor people due to the oil wealth, and according to their expectations. The quotation above uses the phrase “out of this”, suggesting that Nigerians do not belong in this list of countries with large poor populations. Participants situate their knowledge about Nigeria in relation to other African countries, drawing comparisons to Angola’s export wealth (above) and Malawi’s poverty (below).

“Like Malawi it was of late THE POOREST, THE POOREST IN AFRICA, but here it is ranking 27 while Nigeria, to, to the outward impression what could have been captured more, more clearly, THE DISPARITIES, THEY ARE VERY VERY MUCH VISIBLE IN A COUNTRY LIKE NIGERIA (talking slowly). So that so much as we perceive most of the Nigerians, because of their oil, to be very very better off, but the wealth is only concentrated within a circle of a very few people. With a LARGER population ...”

(Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school)

This Kenyan participant recognises the disparities in income, acknowledging that they are self-evident. Having acknowledged this mismatch of expectations and information, and attributed expectations to Nigeria’s oil wealth, this participant proceeded to explicate this mismatch and was ready to discard their own knowledge as “perceptions” in the light of the information presented. This illustrates how persuasive printed documents can be in encouraging a reconsideration of ideas about a topic. There is also a critical edge to this talk of wealth concentration – the word “only” makes it sound like an unsatisfactory arrangement. Following this with “a circle of a very few people” implies an exclusivity in the control of Nigerian wealth. Discussion of this ranking table led to a reconsideration of understandings, in cases resulting in a politicised interpretation using terms like “disparity”, which seem implicitly critical of that distribution of wealth.

It appears that pre-existing knowledge, which often has local dimensions, has the greatest likelihood of leading to punctum. It is plausible that Kenyans had greater interest in Nigeria partly due to geographical proximity, for Mexicans and British participants Nigeria is more peripheral and there is less chance of surprise given that there are fewer preconceptions that could contradict the information that is being shared. Likewise Mexicans expressed more surprise

about information about the Americas, particularly Latin America. The variables that were mapped also received more attention where they were more meaningful measures. It was mainly Mexican participants who commented on the extremes of PPP US\$2 to 200; 5 of the 8 groups remarked that either PPP US\$200 is a large sum or that PPP US\$2 is very little.

“200 dollars, it’s a lot

It’s a lot!

So rich.”

(Mexico 5, urban middle class government school)

“30 pesos

No, yes, it’s totally.

It’s purchasing power,

Minimal

Minimal

2 dollars

Dollars”

(Mexico 8, private urban Catholic school)

Mexicans may have commented more on this because they had a stronger concept of what a dollar is due to their proximity to the United States (as discussed in section 4.5). Further, as Mexican teachers are, broadly speaking, middle income people in a middle income country both extremes represent a noteworthy difference from what they are accustomed to, whereas for UK teachers the high earnings are less extraordinary, as is the case with lower earnings in Kenya. Attitudes that accompany Mexican groups’ remarks about higher and lower earnings back up this argument, that 200 is “a lot” and 2 is “minimal”. Kenya 1 (urban trainee teachers) debated that US\$2 a day could be too much for some Kenyans. In contrast a participant in UK 4 was appalled that anyone in the UK, Canada or United States might be living on US\$2, despite the PPP measurement showing the same purchasing power in all countries:

“Where on earth is there anybody in the UK or the United States or Canada living on less than 2 dollars a day? And where are they? And what’s happening to them because they’re, ah! I don’t know.”

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

One difference between the Mexican and Kenyan groups, and the UK groups,

was that amongst the UK groups there was sometimes an engagement with the maps without an engagement in the nature of what was shown (in contrast with the concern expressed in the preceding quotation). The quote below shows an excited and positive reaction to the map showing that more than 1 billion people in Southern Asia live on under PPP US\$2 per day. The participant's enthusiasm for the map overlooks the seriousness of what the map depicts. Perhaps part of this positive attitude can be explained by the interpretation that England is not poor compared with other countries.

"I just think that the absolute poverty one is excellent, look at South Asia, it's huge! I would never realise that. When we're thinking about poverty in England and it's just nothing compared to India."

(UK 1, urban trainee teachers)

The surprise shown above does not have the same regional focus illustrated in the Kenyan and Mexican groups; instead this comparison of the UK and India indicates how British participants were not particularly regionally focused, and draw on current and historical relationships with physically distant places. This is exemplified below, in how a British teacher speaks of Africa and the United States. Again, surprise results from a mismatch of expectations and what is shown in terms of the size of the countries of interest.

"It can show stark contrasts. And I think the Worldmappers are powerful because it's challenging the way in which we are used to seeing something. [Anna: mm hm] so if you're used to seeing the versions of the world that we see, which are mainly Mercator projections centred on Western Europe, you expect the continent of Africa to look the way it does. If you suddenly see it much smaller you hopefully ask questions of why is it squished like that, or the opposite, ok, we see the USA looking that big, but then if suddenly it balloons out."

(UK 3, mixed group)

Size is the primary means of communicating information in the maps and graphs used in this study. In all cases a larger size indicates more of something: more trade, more rich or poor people, or more earnings. Given that size and shape are related in cartograms, shape is also a feature of size, as a large country may look "ballooned out" and a smaller country may appear "squished" as suggested above. Size, particularly when it differs from what is expected, may be a cause of punctum. Often larger sizes attract attention more than smaller sizes, because they take up more space and so one's gaze is

more likely to focus on that. However, there are cases when absence, or smallness, was of interest to the readers of these visualisations: this was mainly when their country or continent was small. In the same way that largeness can equate to importance, smallness can imply an unimportance to which people are probably most sensitive in relation to their own country. On three of the four images richer countries were bigger. In a world city network analysis Africa is barely on the map (Taylor, 2004), Peter Taylor comments that leaving out Africa makes a point about how Africa really *is* left out (Taylor, 2006; Dorling, 2009). As I suggest above, those most concerned about Africa's place on the map were the Kenyan participants. It is also the Kenyan participants who are least likely to forget Africa. The African continent almost disappears on the trade graph and the over PPP US\$200 a day map.

"So Africa has disappeared. What is left here is which country?"

Anna: South Africa.

South Africa. The rest of it is just sort of like a blank.

Anna: mm

(chuckles)

We're in real problems.

There's a strip, a black one, (chuckles)

A black strip, of Africa (laughs)

Anna: that's where Kenya is, in the black line

Yeah (laughs)

Anna: why are you laughing?

Because it is not there (laugh) it is not seen. So it's likely to be seen on the other side. (Group laughter)

Anna: This is the first time you've seen a world map without Africa?

Yeah, without Africa (laughs)

The whole world without Africa."

(Kenya 8, rural government school)

"But on some maps Africa disappears, doesn't it, like a little mosquito squish, and you think, you absolutely notice when things aren't there as well as when they are, when they are there. And here they were totally like 'what is going on here?' you know what is this sort of tear drop in the end there?"

(UK 5, urban private school)

In the quotations above the absence of almost all of Africa, except for South Africa, is noted. Whereas this Kenyan group described the shrinking of Africa

with some hilarity and amazement, the UK participant took a more negative view, comparing the continent to a squashed mosquito so drawing on associations of Africa with malaria, and the “tear drop” shape of South Africa adds a sad tone. The very large arrow on the trade chart showing trade within Western Europe also generated reactions to size: the wide arrow was associated with economic power and selfishness, the narrower arrows with weakness. European dominance of trade was at times seen as a sign of selfish trading practices rather than pre-eminence. Size draws attention when something is bigger or smaller than expected, and in response to this mismatch map-readers seek explanations. It is easier to spot if something is an “abnormal” size if one is familiar with the “normal” size.

My argument is that there is more punctum, more engagement with maps and information when it is set in the context of pre-existing awareness. The question of punctum is of importance because it shows a strong engagement with the information being presented and the consideration of this information in consultation with pre-existing understandings. This can be seen clearly in the example of Kenyans being most surprised at high levels of poverty in Nigeria. It follows that interest, knowledge and possibility of punctum should be highest with regard to one’s own country or region, based on the assumption that local knowledge is greater than knowledge of distant places.

“I think er with such kind of graphical images, the problem maybe becomes more stark to us now, the reality is hitting us even more, how poor or how unequal, er where we are. [Anna: really?] Yeah, if we are not on the world map then it means that we need to maybe do something. Sort of change”

(Kenya 8, rural government school)

4.7 Synthesis: reading maps of inequality

This chapter has tried to address the question: ‘*What are the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality?*’ The semiotic forms in which inequality is expressed are highly influenced by the context of their production and reading. However context is not local and bounded, but is to be understood by transcending local-global distinction to “think of how places are linked and intertwined” (Mercer et al., 2003, p.433). This framework better

accounts for Kenyan interest in the UK, and the lack of UK interest in the rest of Europe. For map-readers to learn from world cartograms it is preferable that they are comfortable with the conventional world map, which means that they have some knowledge to base their interpretations in. Having little confidence using maps or very fixed views about the correct way to map can result in confusion when dealing with new map forms. As well as coping with the map, to achieve a punctum response rather than simply studium (after Barthes, 1980/2000) pre-existing knowledge or expectations are needed to provide a context which new information can expand or contradict. This awareness is usually greater where it is local because information is usually more available and there is greater emotional investment; however post-colonial relationships of aid, trade and geo-politics continue to bind countries over considerable distances.

The imagery of the world split in two was supported by my map choice that shows the very rich and the very poor. Like the discourse, these maps illustrate these groups and overlook the majority (although a large minority of 43% were represented in the map of people earning under PPP US\$2 per day). In presenting how world maps of inequality are read I expand on and complement the preceding chapter's discussion of the spoken semiotic forms inequality. In chapter 5 I consider how inequality is justified discursively and attitudinally.



Figure 22: Map reading where the audience matters

Permission to use this photograph was granted.

5. Individualism as a driver of inequality

5.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights some of the values and discourses that promote inequality and block discussion about the possibilities of change. This work takes as its starting point the empirically-based argument that inequality is damaging for society and individuals, and that moving towards greater equality would benefit everyone within that society (Marmot, 2004/2005; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). It is socially unjust that some should have much greater power, or capabilities, over the direction of their lives than others (Sen, 1999; Sutcliffe, 2005); and money is an important determinant of the capabilities at individual, group, and national scales. In tracing discourses that support inequality in three countries with differing wealth levels, I find similar values exist in a variety of capitalist contexts. By including rich and poor in the same study I depart from the division between some studying rich or developed countries, and others researching in the poor or developing countries. This facilitates the examination of commonalities and divergences between people positioned differently within the same economic order.

What is striking are the similarities, rather than the differences, something which can be attributed to the insidiousness of neoliberalism, which stems from the pre-World War II liberal capitalism of North America and Western Europe (Castree, 2007, p.8). A huge variety of contemporary definitions of the term 'neoliberalism' exists (Ferguson, 2010, p.170-2), of which I adopt the description of neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.2). This logic, which becomes part of daily thinking,

influences the way people see themselves in relation to others and the way they behave.

Across Africa, Asia and Latin America services are privatised, jobs lost, earnings diminished, land appropriated (Polet, 2007, p.4-5), inequalities entrenched, space is privatised and markets boom and bust (Corbridge, 2004, p.192). These are processes that are familiar in Australasia, Europe and North America. Discursive support for neoliberalism in each country indicates its appeal despite these problems. Acknowledging that challenges to neoliberalism are diverse and widespread, the ideas presented here focus exclusively on the discourses that bolster inequality. These discourses are not necessarily coherent, but nevertheless are effective partly because a coherent case for neoliberalism is rarely required. Instead neoliberalism often spreads through apparently technical adjustments subscribing to economic rationalism, rather than through ideological arguments about a preferred system (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.42).

In this chapter I identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong of economic inequality (after Fairclough, 2009, p.167). As agents act “with points of view, interests, and principles of vision determined by the position they occupy in the very world they intend to transform or preserve” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.2), their perspectives from different vantage points within an unequal world may differ. These opinions, based in social reason, should be considered with concession to the reality from which they come (Bourdieu, 1993, p.13). Acknowledging the influence of diverse geographical, social and economic positions this chapter considers question 3 below. The discursive strategies identified split into two groups: those that support inequality through persuasive individualism, and those that defend inequality and dissuade people from change. Within each of these larger categories there are themes about precisely how this is done: persuasive individualism includes people aiming higher and wanting more; an emphasis on inequalities of opportunity rather than outcome; an opportunistic attitude to getting on in life, and optimism for one’s future. The defence includes denial of the problem and its severity; conflation of economic inequality and its causes; the discursive abolishment of alternatives and a naturalisation

that makes it seem unavoidable. Together these present an obstacle to moving towards greater equality.

Question 3: *What are the discursive obstacles to addressing socio-economic inequality?*

5.2 Literature: neoliberal ideology

Neoliberal economics and politics come with values that justify and sustain this system. The foundational value of neoliberalism is individual freedom (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.40-41). This is supported by other beliefs, for instance the majority in power in most rich countries believe that “elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, greed is good and despair is inevitable” (Dorling, 2010b, p.1), which is probably also true of many poorer countries. These beliefs support the existing system by justifying the power of the rich and excusing negative outcomes as unavoidable, and bolster preferred moral stories of rulers: “that we are decent folk trying to do our best” (Ignatieff, 1998, p.288). Discourses supporting inequality map onto neoliberal values, which support individualism, meritocracy, hierarchy, consumerism and growth. A dominant trope of capitalist hegemony is that ‘capitalism works’ whereas socialism has been ‘demonstrated’ not to work (Levitas, 2007, p.300).

These values do not inevitably lead to inequalities. The idea of the individual is central to western philosophy, economics, politics and religion. It is not inherently problematic, but could be considered to be a social evil when it takes the form of narcissistic self-absorption which is understood to be a response to loss of agency and solidarity (Thake, 2008, p.3, p.5-6). Loss of solidarity, for example, exists in those parts of India where the poor queue because they have to and those who can push in do push in (Corbridge, 2004, p.190); such behaviour encourages self-interest. Whether having benefited or suffered from individualism, one response is to be more defensively individualistic. Whilst individualism is not inherently problematic, it can develop a form that is socially corrosive when individuals are set competitively against one another.

Meritocracy is currently seen as a desirable characteristic of a society. However meritocracy is deeply problematic if thought to be a way of addressing inequality of outcome. Meritocracy means rewarding 'abilities' and 'efforts', and therefore generates inequalities of outcome (White, 2007, p.53-55). These inequalities of outcome mean that true meritocracy is difficult to achieve because people have different starting points in life (Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009). Meritocracy is therefore contradictory because whilst differential rewards are central to meritocracy they also compromise the possibility of people having comparable opportunities (White, 2007). Establishing a meritocracy was satirized as a warning of what could happen to Britain and is now, partially, becoming true (Young, 1958/1961; Young, 2001). Belief in meritocracy can result in people blaming their own abilities and effort for their social position, rather than the wider social forces that influence this.

The possibility for social mobility is a key aspect of meritocracy, because in Margaret Thatcher's language, it allows the tall poppies to grow (Thatcher, 1975). Thus an able and hardworking poorer person should be able to move up. In the UK economic inequality is often unchallenged because of political focus on social mobility (Sheldon et al., 2009, p.5), rather than making rewards more equal. Social mobility puts the onus on individuals, based on an assumed availability of opportunities. Mobility is related to inequality, as greater mobility exists in more equal societies where social classes are less entrenched so moving between them is easier (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). However a preferable policy choice would be to favour greater equality on ethical grounds, with greater social mobility being an additional benefit.

If meritocracy operated flawlessly and some individuals really were better than others, which is widely believed (Young, 2001; Dorling, 2010b), those at the top of the social hierarchy would be 'better'. Being at the top is communicated symbolically, and aspirations to exhibit such symbols of success drive consumerism according to tastes and consumption patterns partly shaped by large retail and entertainment corporations (Chatterton, 2010, p.513). It is these "excesses of individualism, consumerism and greed" that are integral to social, economic and wider political life in contemporary Britain (Creegan, 2008, p.10).

Consumption and lifestyle are core Western values to the extent that Australian Labour and Liberal politicians discussing climate change solutions stressed the importance of maintaining lifestyles, expressing a sense of entitlement to high standards of living which form part of national identity (Kurz et al., 2010, p.6 & 18). This is not just a rich world phenomenon: middle class Kenyans have been described by lifestyle magazine editors as “aspirational” and Nairobi book shops stock titles like “The 7 habits of highly effective families” and “Why we want you to be rich” (Wrong, 2009, p.281-2). Such aspirations can divert people from a critical assessment of the structure of the society within which they compete to rise and then protect any ground they gain.

Bowing to the economy and shrinking the state is a facet of neoliberalism that requires public endorsement, which is often partial as the full implications are rarely communicated. This process is presented as technical, not ideological, using terms like ‘employability’ and ‘flexibility’ which shrink the state and make labour increasingly casual and precarious (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.42). Market principles rather than welfare ideals are used to determine resource distribution (Smith and Easterlow, 2004, p.101), but very often the “pauperization of the state and commodification of public goods is accepted with resignation as inevitable in the evolution of nations” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.43). A hyperactive penal wing becomes a necessary limb of the neoliberal state, whose pulling back of welfare leaves people struggling. When presented with a policy package of flexible reorganisation of low-paid jobs, workfare rather than welfare, the public are not also told about a proactive and expensive penal wing. Yet the resulting inequality causes the penal system to be rolled out to manage growing lower class crime (Wacquant, 2010). Thus there is a mismatch between how neoliberalism is presented and the reality of its social effects. Such half-truths often extend beyond the domestic to the international arena. For example pressure for poorer countries to open their markets and for free trade to develop is prescribed by countries such as Britain and the United States, despite amassing their own wealth through protectionism and interventionist trade (Chang, 2003, p.1).

Since the late 1970s the shift towards political and economic neoliberalism and its associated thinking has penetrated common sense understanding to the extent that neoliberalism is seen as a necessary and natural way to organize. Antonio Gramsci notes how this can happen by the dominant classes coercively persuading subordinate classes that their values embody the natural order (Gramsci in Jackson, 1989, p.53). Consumerist and economic rationalist discourses become culturally pervasive and limit political debate. This “common sense” overrides good sense (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.41; Harvey, 2005/2009, p. 2 & 39-41; Kurz et al., 2010, p.22-3). Societal understandings often take their form from American social particularities which are generalised to the rest of the world as “notions with which we argue rather than notions that we argue about” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.41).

The concepts of neoliberal globalisation need *passeurs* (carriers) to transport these logics, values, and modes of organisation (*ibid.*, p.46), and it is to these transporters of the “common sense” of the period that I now turn. The strict loan conditions of the International Monetary Fund since the 1980s have brought neoliberalism to many countries, including Argentina, Mozambique and the Philippines, often enriching the wealthy at the expense of the poorer majority (Chatterton and Gordon, 2004, p.12; Harvey, 2005/2009, p.40). Conservative think tanks have played a role in naturalising and spreading neoliberal thought since 1979 (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.42). The political context was that Deng Xiaoping made steps towards liberalizing the Chinese market in 1978, Margaret Thatcher became British Prime Minister in 1979, and in 1980 Ronald Regan became President of the United States. University of Chicago economists also played an important role in promoting neoliberal thinking (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.1 & 8). The spread of New York City-style penal apparatus was promoted throughout Latin America and Western Europe by the ‘policy evangelism’ of the Manhattan Institute. In Mexico this was funded by telecoms tycoon Carlos Slim (Wacquant, 2010), which illustrates a snug connection between the wealthy and social control. Another set of *passeurs* are the media and education, with their great potential to educate and motivate the public (Rosenblatt, 1996, p.145; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.41).

Inequalities embodied in hierarchies often appear natural when there is close “correspondence between the social order and the principles of its arrangement” (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.164). System justification theory proposes that people are, often sub-consciously, motivated to support the status quo through resisting change (Jost et al., 2004, p.912). ‘Coping strategies’ to make injustice more bearable similarly defend inequalities through categorisations such as the lazy poor and the industrious rich (Bamfield and Horton, 2009, p.14). Those living privileged ways of life are also likely to be more unwilling to change, and may feel powerless to do so.

Forms of concealment of ideas and concepts surround most social practices. These include *isolation* (practices are separated from wider society and historical context); *conflation* (practices are not differentiated); *eternalisation* (practice appears unending rather than historically bounded); *emphasising natural causes* (obscures the social causes); *overlooking interrelations* between practices; and *hiding conflicts of interest* between differently positioned subjects. Social practices are ideological when the concealment of the concepts behind practices benefits a dominant social force (Urry, 1981, p.60-61). Karl Marx considered that the concealment enacted by ideology not only hides one’s own interests from oneself as false consciousness, but also hides one group’s interests from others thus representing ruling class interests as those of the whole society (Marx in Jackson, 1989, p. 49). Focusing on three capitalist countries, this thesis identifies neoliberal discourses that bolster economic inequality. This work identifies discourses that promote inequality and dissuade us from change.

5.3 In support of inequality: persuasive individualism

One element of this individualism is the isolation form of concealment where a social practice is not seen as a part of wider society or a longer history (Urry, 1981, p.60-61). In focusing on the individual there is a tendency to become oblivious to the wider societal impacts of a scenario in which everyone acts according to their own self-interest. Another aspect of concealment is the hiding of conflicts of interest (*ibid.*): in an economic system where the wealth is so unevenly distributed very few people will be rich and if everyone were to

become rich then relative to others they consider to be like them they would simply be average. There is a conflict of interest of everyone aiming for the same goal that by definition only very few can arrive at.

Aiming Higher

Some participants claim that inequality motivates. Inequality, they say, encourages healthy competition and struggle, and promotes development. According to some Kenyan participants this increases productivity, improves the quality of products, encourages hard work, leads to good quality services, altogether making us “pull our socks up” and move ahead. Similarly in Mexico, some participants argued that inequalities motivate, create competition and set challenges, resulting in hard work. In the UK inequality is reported to make us do things, to drive growth, and urges us to develop “which is obviously good” (UK 7, rural private school); overall stimulating a desire to better oneself. In all three countries the benefits of inequality were acknowledged as being work, competition and progress. The motivating mechanism is identified as observing others’ success, which generates a desire to “catch up” or even “move ahead”. The possibility to dream is highlighted as an advantage of inequality: “Oh the good is that it gives you an opportunity to dream, to aspire and to work towards.” (Kenya 7, British-system private school). In the UK Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and New Labour have argued that some inequality is essential to encourage aspiration (Sheldon et al., 2009, p.6). This assumes that people aspire to external symbols of success, not to just do a good job.

When teachers spoke about their own lives they were often aspirational, talking hopefully about the future. This aspiration took the form of making comparisons up the social hierarchy, demonstrating that their sights were set on upward social mobility. Aspirations were at times explained self-consciously and critically; several Mexican groups suggested that acting self-interestedly reproduces inequalities. The saying “*primero yo, luego yo, y despues yo*” (first me, then me, and afterwards me) arose several times, in a conscious critique of this mentality. Nevertheless this “yo, yo, yo” (me, me, me) mentality was also exhibited within those same groups. Not aiming high could result in the

accusation of a 'poverty of aspirations' (Creegan, 2008, p.8), the attribution of responsibility for poverty to the low ambitions of poor people.

"If you have purchasing power, you buy the best. You take the finest, it's a status symbol, social status. If you have you're in one social class, if you don't have then you're in another social class. If you have less you, you will be classified by your [accumulation of goods] accumulation of goods. And ultimately you will be unhappy because you are always trying to have / be something that you can't have / be*. You start to want to have a car, holidays, [a house] houses. What happens when poor people have credit cards? We buy more [than we can afford] than we can afford, then [then we have problems paying,] with problems, exactly. Why, because you want to create the fantasy that you have! You wanted to go to next social level. And when you wake up and find that no, on the contrary, that you haven't got a higher status you, you are affected by it because you're in debt."

(Mexico 6, rural government school)

**siempre estas ambicionando hasta lo que no puedes*

Interruptions of main speaker are shown in square brackets

In the passage above the speaker gains certainty when he says that one will be unhappy because of always wanting what one cannot have. His certainty suggests that he felt strongly about that possibly well-rehearsed point. His speech slows when giving examples of what people want, and becomes more eloquent when referring to the fantasy of ownership. That status symbols are important is explained by the Mexican proverbs: "*cuanto tienes, cuanto vales*" (you're worth what you have) and "*como te ven te tratan*" (you're treated according to your appearance). This emphasis on appearance and possessions explains wanting the best, to reflect being the best. Unfortunately desire for material goods often conceals their conditions of production (Howarth, 2000, p.87), distracting attention and concern from societal and environmental harm from consumerism and social competition.

Aspiring to lifestyles higher up the social hierarchy was seen as detrimental to pupils, the obliging subjects of teachers' social commentaries. In Mexico rural students dabbling in drug trafficking (*narco traficando*) parade their fast-won wealth and create desire for commodities amongst other pupils. Parental wealth can be a source of easy money for young people, winning them respect and role model status (see Kenya 7 quotation below). These teenagers are said to have little idea about the rest of society, parading this wealth to which

others aspire, and reinforcing the illusion that those who have can have more and more irrespective of the impact this has beyond their lives (Creegan, 2008, p.8). Another example of competition amongst young people was institutionalised in the form of a sign outside a Kenyan school instilling these values: “we believe we are the best nothing but the best”.

“You see young people, teenagers, driving these big cars from their parents. They have no idea why they came about, and so, they become like role models, people adore them and they wish they were like so and so, and some of them may be so dense in school so it makes kids feel ‘why worry?’ I mean you don’t have to work too hard in school, I mean if your parents are rich they’ll give you a big car. And, and, it’s something that people adore. Or wish they could have.”

(Kenya 7, British-system private school)

Amongst British teachers, being relatively rich compared to other participants, explicit ambition was replaced by complacency: “I’m a smug overweight bastard like anyone else you know. I have a pretty good life ... inequalities are fine by me.” (UK 3). This participant had previously discussed his concern about inequalities, but argues that he benefits from being high up the hierarchy. This apparent contradiction is acknowledged elsewhere, in the phrase ‘champagne socialists’ and book title ‘If you’re an egalitarian, how come you’re so rich?’ by G. A. Cohen (2001). However it is not even in the interests of the richer parts of society to maintain inequality because greater equality has been shown to benefit all segments of society (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), and affluence comes with its own psychologically damaging impacts (James, 2007).

Instead of aspiring to improve their social position, UK participants placed a greater emphasis on consuming in an individualistic manner. In UK 2 (urban trainee teachers) a participant said that despite knowing cheap clothes are probably produced in sweatshop conditions he likes buying nice clothes that are cheap. This attitude reflects the nested form of Western responsibility, termed a *Russian doll geography*, where caring for home first, then place, then nation is accepted (Massey, 2004, p.8-9). A difficulty in thinking about the ethics of caring is that it is not clear who or where our obligations are to (Robinson, 1999, p.41). The UK groups bought into consumerism, they had access to the products of technological change and globalisation, and as found by other research, they

distanced themselves from negative consequences of inequality (Thake, 2008, p.7). Kenyan and Mexican groups spoke of aspirations whereas UK groups, who are very rich in world terms and quite rich in UK terms, spoke of consuming whilst often avoiding talking about its effects. Aiming higher also applies to national ambitions. Alastair Darling, now shadow Chancellor, wants 3% growth for the UK (Hopkins, 2010); while world growth is lower than 3% this implies wanting greater international inequality.

Opportunity

Several groups from each country defined inequality partly as inequality of opportunity. An opportunity is “a time, condition, or set of circumstances permitting or favourable to a particular action or purpose.” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). The opportunities of greatest interest to participants were jobs, education and access to money, all indicators of success; a lack of opportunity means conditions that are not conducive to attaining these. It might be that equality of opportunity is ‘more apparent than real’ (Marmot, 2004/2005, p.257), as opportunity is the possibility rather than the outcome. Aspirations also influence what is seen as opportunity. The success of a minority may be interpreted to mean that everyone has that opportunity, which shifts the onus onto individuals to exploit that.

Lack of opportunity rather than structural inequality was often identified as being problematic. Kenya 7 (British-system private school) linked poverty to lack of opportunity by positing the latter as the main problem and describing how rich parents pay for their children to go to university even when they fail their exams. Establishing this connection between wealth and opportunity provides a blame-free way of explaining oneself: “I have not had the opportunity to travel much” (Mexico 4, urban government school) presents opportunity as an external limitation on behaviour, rather than something that individuals can create. Other research has found that opportunities being ‘truncated’ can cause frustration (Creegan, 2008, p.3). ‘Limited opportunity’ appears to be a euphemism for poverty borrowed from a discourse of rights and stripped of its critical edge.

A spatial dimension to opportunity was highlighted: in my discussion groups Kenyans spoke about the greater opportunities in the UK (compared with Kenya), and Mexicans about opportunities in Canada (compared with Mexico) and the city (compared with the countryside). “Mexico has very clearly marked inequalities. In other countries there is more equity and more opportunities, not in Mexico.” (Mexico 4, urban government school). Migration for opportunities is significant for Mexican society and there is an understanding that things are better in the United States. Speaking in terms of migrating ‘for opportunities’ rather than simply ‘for work’ sounds aspirational, aspirations being esteemed. Opportunity thus means capability to meet basic needs. This even applies to access to water: “There are not the same opportunities in the countryside as in cities, there are extreme examples when people don’t have water.” (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). The double meaning of opportunity, basic needs on one hand and desires for wealth on the other, creates the misconception that these wants are comparable and that aspiring more is the solution to both.

The success of someone from a humble background is often interpreted as signifying widespread opportunity. This myth is politically conservative, as it requires no major changes as suggested in UK 4 (retired urban teachers) “you need political parties that are going for not just equality of opportunity which is a euphemism for leaving things as they are”. Rags to riches narratives form the backbone of the argument that attitude matters and those who aspire achieve, and are readily told because they seem to reflect some individual merit (e.g. David Blunkett, a Sheffield MP, Barford, 2010). This argument overlooks the educational and social advantages of children from better off families (Devine, 2004; Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009). The successes of a few poor people can be misinterpreted as meaning that any failure is personal rather than societal, which overlooks the demands of capitalism for a flexible, low-paid workforce. The wealthy people who are seen as most deserving are those who rose from humble origins and succeeded by their own merit (Bamfield and Horton, 2009, p.19):

“A mentality could be a reason as to why we have poverty. Especially in Kenya. Or in Kibera where I’ve lived for almost 20 years of my life. Er,

there is one person, a great industrialist today, he is called Chris Kirubi, although a little bit proud, one day he was saying 'I myself, Chris Kirubi, does not wear second hand clothes', the other day he was quoted as saying he can take a jet to the UK, you know, do his studies there. After 3 days he comes back to Kenya. But he is damn rich, he is rich. But Chris Kirubi grew up in the slum. He is one of the kids who had nothing at all. He was also an orphan, but he was totally poor. He came from a very very humble background. But I don't think he had that kind of mentality which I, he did not, I stick to the fact that, and he did not stick to that mentality towards 'I don't have', 'I'm not going to have' yeah, he grew out of that mentality. That slum mentality and poverty mentality. And today we can see where he is, he can fly to UK and back any time."

(Kenya 6, NGO-supported slum primary school)

The quotation above suggests that with the right mentality you can escape poverty. What is missing is that Chris Kirubi is an exception; 1 billion slum dwellers (Davis, 2006/2007, p.17-19) testify to rags to riches not being the norm. Yet personal optimism combined with a desire to believe that things will get better, makes the success of those with such a modest starting point appear, at least initially, particularly inspiring. Unfortunately this is accompanied by a patronising tone prescribing 'growing out of the mentality of poverty' and the idea that minimal social mobility justifies the system. Yet equating opportunity with freedom for social mobility resonates with values of personal freedom. Neoliberalism is able to exploit a desire for freedom whilst overlooking social justice (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.39-42). Such stories position the poor as being responsible for 'their' poverty.

The idea of progress being relative was reflected in Mexican groups talking about their desire to "*salir adelante*" (to get ahead or to come out on top). This aim to improve relative to others puts people in competition with one another. Kenyans spoke about dragging behind, languishing in poverty, straining to catch up, doing well, and doing fine: everyone wants to do better. The apparent need to ensure one's own survival, success, and well-being can result in acting for oneself (at the expense of others), placing people in competition with one another. Those who do "succeed" feel as though they have earned this "success" so should enjoy it; disparities continue. Thinking "*yo, yo, yo*" (me, me, me) is therefore a cause and consequence of inequality.

Talk of opportunity and mobility is part of the new global vulgate (*la nouvelle vulgate planétaire*) of globalisation, flexibility and identity, whilst overlooking capitalism, exploitation and domination (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2000/2002, p.443). Focusing on opportunities highlights procedural equality, avoiding questions of outcome or justice (Rowlingson, 2010). Yet even social mobility is greater in more equal countries (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). However it is the appearance of and belief in the possibility of mobility that encourages public acceptance of a focus on opportunities. Concentrating on opportunities places the responsibility for success with the individual, and the myth of meritocracy presents career and financial success as reflections of ability and effort rather than an advantageous starting point. Participants thus construct themselves as being active within the system but unable to change the social structure.

Opportunism

Opportunism, the exploitation of circumstances to gain advantage perhaps accompanied by cynicism or “lack of regard to principles” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009), is likely where people aim high and poverty is unappealing. Seeing the costs of failure, individuals will do all they can to avoid themselves, or those they care about, failing. Those better equipped to do this will be more successful (Thake, 2008, p.6). Ironically the greater opportunism, the less fair society becomes because inequality encourages opportunism. Opportunism may seem rational and acceptable behaviour at the conjunction of certain desires and the capability to satisfy these, such as buying professional guidance for tax evasion. The opportunism of those without professional advice may be less smoothly performed: several Mexican women, during discussion groups and socially, inquired about British men. When I asked for permission to take photographs one reply was:

“As long as you write beneath my photo ‘looking for a RICH husband’.

Anna: are you interested in anything else, hmmm, should he be good looking?

No, just that he has (i.e. is rich). And should be older than 50.

Anna: No problem.

If you have an uncle or something like that?”

(Mexico 7, small rural school)

This money-focused approach, though brash, reflects the understanding that money is important to get ahead and marriage can provide this. Underpinning this request is a desire to move up the social hierarchy. As many health and social problems are distributed along a wealth gradient (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) almost everyone could aspire to be a little higher. To paraphrase Kenya 2 (high-achieving urban government school): you will never be satisfied because you will always want more; and Kenya 6 (NGO funded slum primary school): each time living conditions improve people aspire a bit higher. Individuals starting at different points and each making the most of their position will reinforce inequalities, because the rich are better equipped to become richer and the poor become relatively poorer. Constantly manipulating circumstances for one's own ends, as per economic rationalism, corrodes social solidarity. One participant offered a cynical interpretation of "success":

"If people on the whole, apart from the rich BASTARDS at the top who are utterly selfish, if people on the whole are given a chance to be good, they will be. [Anna: mmhmm] I think that's true. I mean I use the word rich bastards, I do that partly facetiously, but partly because the further up the chain you go the more grimly corrupt and self-centred people get."
(UK 7, rural private school)

The argument that the richer one becomes the more selfish one is could be due to the process of justifying keeping more and more. The participant above was angry, using terms like "rich bastards", "utterly selfish" and "grimly corrupt" to connect and condemn wealth and corruption. The epitome of opportunism is corruption, being "Perverted from uprightness and fidelity in the discharge of duty; influenced by bribery or the like; venal" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). Whilst many populations endure some political corruption, including the UK, Kenyans have been subjected to corruption to the extent that it is almost expected that when you have power you "eat". Corruption is extreme opportunism that demonstrates how power begets more power to the detriment of others. Kenya's President Kibaki appointed officials to appear to fight corruption whilst overseeing fraud within his cabinet (Wrong, 2009). Kenyan groups explained the logic behind corruption, though not approvingly.

Winning elections: “gives you access to wealth. That is a ticket for a good life, so if you don’t succeed in the elections or you don’t have your people in power, you’ll always remain poor.”

(Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school)

The quotation above suggests that having power is your chance to get rich and in not doing so one would miss a trick. Whilst opportunism reproduces inequality, inequality also encourages opportunism. Although the negative effects are clear, there is a compulsion to take one’s chance when it is there, otherwise one might be accused of a poverty of aspirations. This is not seen as opportunism, but *taking opportunities*, thus reinforcing the impression that this is common sense behaviour.

Optimism

Individualistic optimism can allow inequalities to continue, because believing that things will improve for oneself under the existing system means there is little motivation for systemic change. Aspiring means looking up and thinking of future improvements, even having experienced recent decline. The graphs that follow show how individuals’ positions, relative to their self-assessed potential, improved over the five years preceding 2002, and their expected improvements for the next five years. Position was ranked on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being optimal in terms of what was possible for them. On average respondents from each country envisioned a better future for themselves, perhaps because people are (usually) optimists who expect to get promoted and become richer over time.

Similar optimism for one’s own situation has been found with regard to environmental problems, expressed as “hyperopia”. The term hyperopia has been used to express the perception that temporally and spatially distant problems are worse than more proximate ones, so shines a positive light on one’s own situation (Uzzell, 2000, p.314). Hyperopia diminishes individual responsibility for distant problems by framing them as too big and too far away to be one’s own charge, whilst spatially and temporally immediate problems are seen to be relatively small so therefore not needing attention. Thus optimism

can take the form of seeing oneself / family / country as being in a relatively good situation.

Yet even when recent history makes hyperopic optimism impossible, optimism for the future can take its place. In Argentina, despite the overnight devaluation of the peso in 2001 (Chatterton and Gordon, 2004, p.12-14), there was nevertheless optimism for the next five years, as in all other countries surveyed. Perhaps there was a sense that things could not be that bad again. On the other hand, in individualistic societies where higher status is the ever-shifting goal, being aspirational is a motor for taking opportunities, which can generate social mobility. As such being optimistic about the future is almost essential at the individual level.

Note:

Figure 23 and Figure 24 present national weighted averages of responses to the question: "Here is a ladder representing the 'ladder of life.' Let's suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you; and the bottom, the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?" This question was also asked in reference to 5 years ago and 5 years into the future. The response range was: 0-10. Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2002, Question. 2.

Reported life improvements

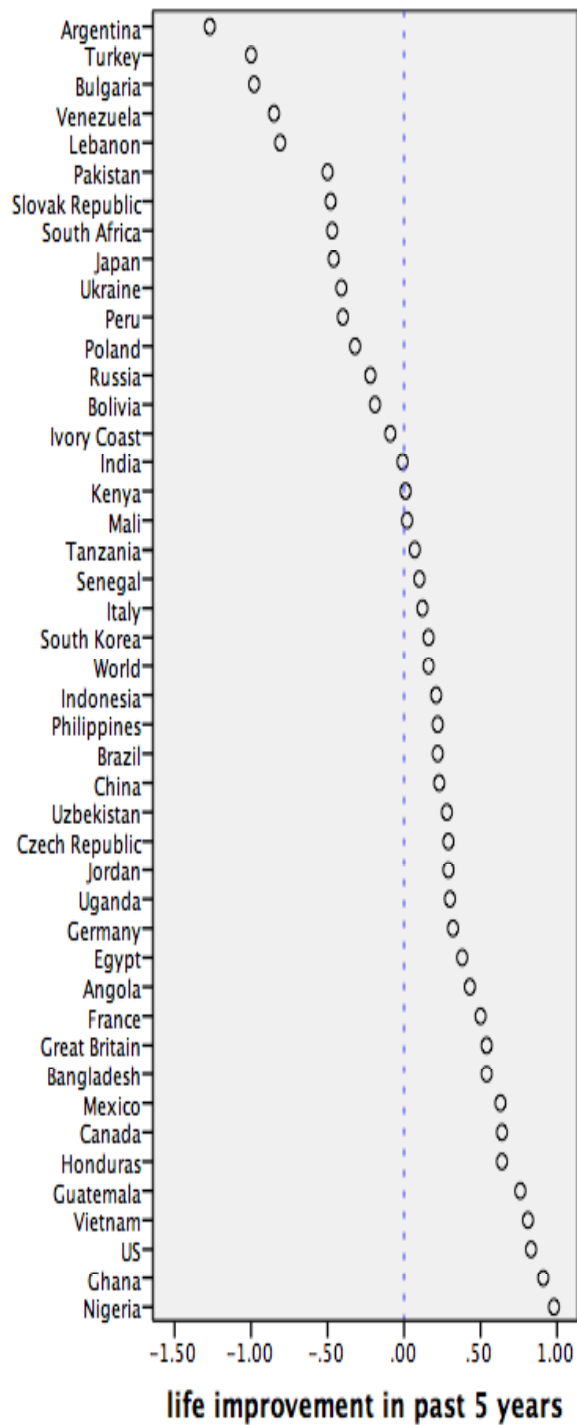


Figure 23: Reported individual trajectory

Predicted life improvements

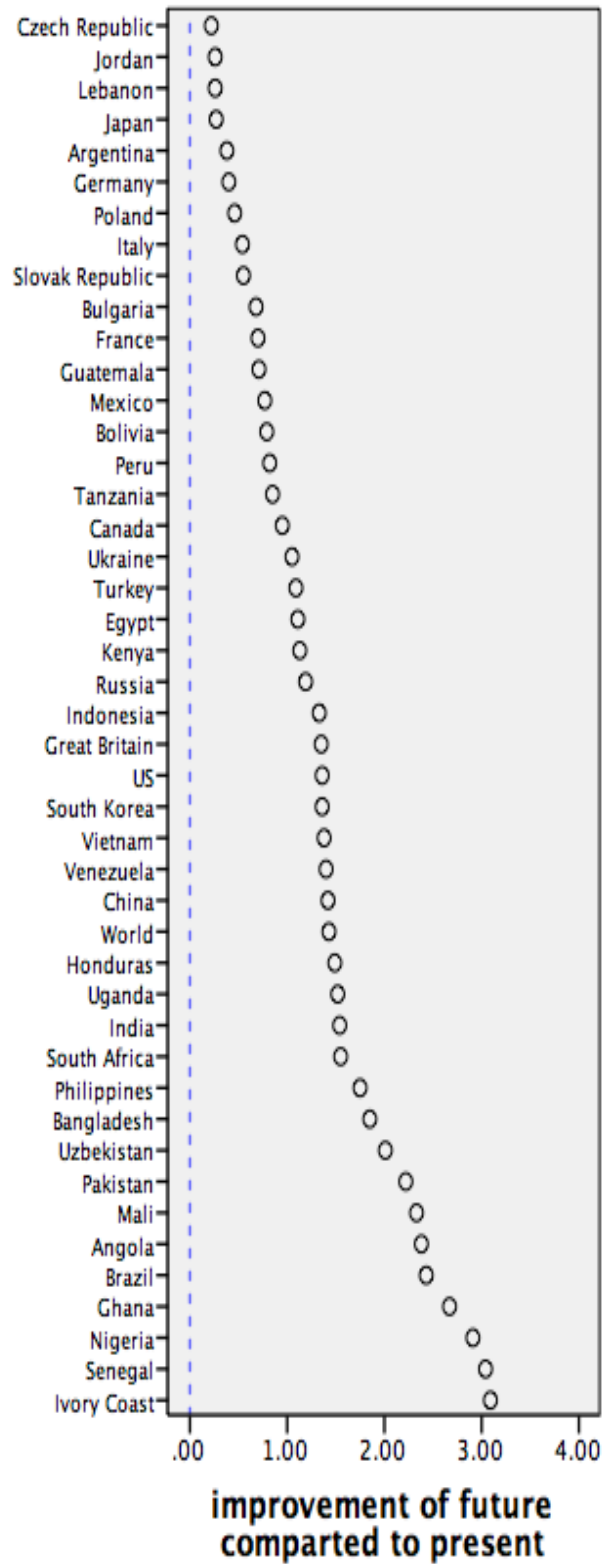


Figure 24: Expected individual trajectory

5.4 In defence of inequality: dissuasion from change

Denial

The myth of the happy poor promotes the idea that inequality is not as bad as it seems, and presenting oneself as average (i.e. not rich) seems to excuse responsibility for poverty. These arguments are particularly attractive because people dislike feeling guilty about living comfortably (Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009, p.33) and denying that inequality is problematic frees people to continue as they are. Marshall Sahlins suggests that hunter-gatherer societies, conventionally assumed by anthropologists to have bourgeois impulses limited by their paleolithic tools (i.e. desires for luxury material goods but without the means of getting these), are misjudged as being poor; they balance needs and material goods by possessing only what they can carry (Sahlins, 1972, p.4 & 11-12). Nevertheless, when intersecting with modern societies hunter-gathering people find themselves in politically and economically weak positions (Suzman, 2004, p.227-8), wanting more and lacking more (Sahlins, 1972, p.9). The myth of the happy poor reduces guilt, necessarily overlooking the politically and economically weak positions of poor people within modern society.

“In Chiapas there are people who are happy with \$2 per day.”
(Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools)

“Who are we to say to people who live on one dollar a day, it’s probably very hard for me to say this because I’ve never lived on one dollar a day, but some people might just be genuinely happy with that, they’ve got enough for them to stay healthy and, ok, maybe that’s very extreme, but you know who are we to say ‘POOR THEM’”
(UK 1, urban trainee teachers)

The happy poor are constructed as distant, either abroad or rural, which allows them to be imagined as having different needs from the research participants. The Mexican quote above refers to the district of Chiapas that is relatively poor and home to many indigenous people. That the people of Chiapas are happy with \$2 a day is based on their needs being different from those of the speaker. A similar comment in Kenya 1 (urban trainee teachers) suggested that \$2 is *too much* in the *shamba* (countryside). In UK 1 (also urban trainee teachers) the idea of the happy poor took the form of a warning against patronizing pity, as

though pity and apathy were the only possible responses to poverty; note the double meaning of *poor*. Lack of understanding supports the happy poor myth. It is a myth because “We cannot enjoy full community, you and I, if you make, and keep, say, ten times as much money as I do, because my life will then labour under challenges that you will never face, challenges that you could help me to cope with but do not, because you keep your money.” (Cohen, 2009, p.35).

Part of the thinking that the poor are happy comes as an inversion of the often-challenged ideas that wealth brings happiness. This false opposition ignores the mental stress caused by lack of material means. Elevating happiness to the position of the arbiter of right and wrong diminishes the importance of justice. If the poor were all happy, if everyone were happy, would gross differences in life chances be acceptable? UK 4 (retired urban teachers) argues that happiness is not the issue. In moving the discussion away from the moral and the material, happiness can depoliticise the debate. Happiness can also be deceptive because bearing adversity cheerfully does not mean there is no adversity (Sen, 2010, no page number).

Denying one's wealth avoids responsibility for inequality, because whilst the rich are sometimes blamed for their greed and the poor for their laziness or low aspirations, there is greater silence surrounding the middle classes who are nevertheless aspiring, consuming, and sustaining unequal values. People generally perceive themselves to be average (Bamfield and Horton, 2009, p.12); even city high-flyers, amongst the top 0.1% of UK earners, denied they were rich (Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009, p.23-4). Positioning oneself as average or below average is a way of, albeit subconsciously, excusing oneself of responsibility according to existing explanations of inequality. UK 7 (rural private school) derided one another for being posh and shopping at Waitrose (a high-end British supermarket). One Mexican group commented: “you can see inequality when driving, and soon a ‘Hummer’ stops beside your modest car.” This variation on working class pride contrasts with the aspirations to grandeur expressed elsewhere. When several reference groups are invoked people can simultaneously occupy positions of wealth and poverty; for example the double bassist who finds her lowly position within the orchestra microcosm painful

despite knowing she is situated highly in the macrocosm (Süskind in Bourdieu, 1993, p.16). It is not simply position but also the point of comparison that matters. Mexico, for instance, is typically contrasted with the United States, not Guatemala:

“And I saw lots of contrasts with Mexico, it is very clean, well ordered, very educated, a 1st world country. And in Mexico, like they say, well it’s another thing. This is an inequality.” (said forcefully)
(Mexico 4, urban government school)

Mexico, a powerful and wealthy state in many respects, was portrayed as the antithesis of the cleanliness and order of the United States, which is ironic because often it is Mexicans who take cleaning jobs there. Here the inequality seems inflicted upon the Mexicans, as something happening to them.

Conflation

The variety of inequalities acknowledged by participants is broad: gender, religious, health, age, sexuality, racial, political, and wealth. The causes identified are similarly wide ranging: place of birth, corruption, tribalism, selfishness, capitalism, colonialism, slavery, resource distribution, capacity to exploit resources, poverty, discrimination, oppression, and greed. This multiplicity of themes presents inequality as almost all-encompassing and too complex to address; this has been termed conflation and it conceals the nature of a social practice (Urry, 1981, p.60-61). Commentaries that emphasise complexity are almost enough to make one give up, for example: “The task of addressing social evils at the beginning of the twenty-first century appears to be of titanic proportions.” (Thake, 2008, p.2). Arguably the unequal distribution of economic resources may aggravate other inequalities. Discriminatory cultural and traditional views and fears may even be mobilised to distract people from the underlying economic inequalities (Harvey, 2005/2009, p.39); a divide and rule technique. By contrast, in societies that are more equal economically trust is higher and fear is less (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). On reflection perhaps some forms of discrimination could be partially addressed by tackling economic inequality, which aggravates social malaise.

Participants argued that the many forms of inequality are related. Highlighting this complexity can make inequality seem almost impossible to solve. UK 1 (urban trainee teachers) stated: “I mean I can’t see a way that you could sort of solve inequality, it’s a problem that you can’t get a simple fix for.” This participant was reluctant to say “solve inequality”, tempering it with “sort of”. Presenting inequality as unsolvable suggests that some participants had not seriously considered the possibility of greater equality. Inequality being conceived of as inevitable blocks people from imagining change, and the idea that there is no simple fix implies that it is too hard to do anything about it.

At the 2010 British Sociological Association Annual Conference, themed “Inequalities and social justice”, the focus was rarely economic. Questions following Karen Rowlingson’s plenary on ‘the problem of riches’ (Rowlingson, 2010) did not engage with the issue of wealth distribution. In preferring to discuss prejudice and intersectionality (types of inequality layer up and interact), the audience exhibited disinterest in the material. Yet intersectionality, like multiculturalism, could reify categories of discrimination and overlook the underlying cause. Multiculturalism is argued to be the struggle over the instruments of reproduction of the middle and upper classes expressed in an ethnic idiom (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.42). For example analysing social differences in terms of racial differences but not income differences, despite the two overlapping to some extent, means that certain effects could be attributed to the wrong cause and reinforce racial stereotypes. Identity differences can be exaggerated or played down depending on whether people are working towards solidarity (Dorling, 2010a). Greater equality could result in stronger feelings of solidarity, partly due to living in a healthier society. The single action which could most effectively reduce social problems is creating greater equality (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Thinking positively about what can be done prevents inequality from seeming so complicated and insoluble.

Abolishing Alternatives

The conviction that there are no alternatives is an effective justification for continuing as we are, because we have no choice. The *no alternatives* argument juxtaposes capitalism against “communism, which didn’t work”, which acts to conclude discussion. Saying “communism didn’t work” implies that

capitalism is working and that there are only two options in this binary political thinking; this echoes Margaret Thatcher's claim that "there is no alternative" (Thatcher, 1980; Watts, 2007, p.275; Harvey, 2005/2009, p.39-40). The argument that communism did not work, so cannot work, frames the discussion in extremes; it implies that capitalism is working without saying the word capitalism which is used in critiques where it is identified as causing inequality and inequality is presented as undesirable. The implicit contrasting of capitalism and communism means talk about our existing social organisation occurs without naming it. Not naming something makes it harder to identify and critique. Instead an alternative form of social organisation is specified as being unsuitable. That communism did not work alongside capitalism may be fairer.

Discursively destroying the ideal of equality, by associating communism and equality, is another way of abolishing alternatives. The argument that greater equality would not work rests partly on the conflation of equality and sameness, where being identical is deemed a necessary but undesirable aspect of equality. This reasoning is also based on a deep-seated belief that we should be differently remunerated, which makes equality unimaginable.

"There's no way ... people will be equal. [Anna: no?] It's not going to be. [Anna: never?] They cannot be equal. It's just some semblance and having to accept some certain things and you push on with life and you are just going to say that we are going to be equal, nobody's going to accept."

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

The flat denial of the possibility of equality, or even moving a little nearer to equality, above shows how strongly the idea of greater equality can be rejected, on one's own and others' behalf. Perhaps this group had become cynical over time having observed unpleasant politics, concluding that the best thing was to accept the status quo in the Kenyan context where critical voices, such as that of author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, are strongly discouraged. Abolishing alternatives allows inequalities to persist, avoiding social thinking and critique by focusing inwards on oneself. The use of unqualified phrases such as "no way", "cannot", "nobody" presents a world of no alternatives to inequality and no desire for alternatives.

The idea of 'working' or functioning contributes to this series of dualisms: capitalism works, communism does not. Yet there is little discussion of what it means for something to work or for whom it works. Like Kenya 1 (urban trainee teachers) said of Tanzanian socialism, "Socialism in Tanzania was abhorred and was deemed to have failed. Why? Because socialism was not on the right side of the politics of the day", but the resultant strong Tanzanian identity as opposed to the conflict and tribalism in Kenya now benefits Tanzania. Gandhi's ideas were also deemed *to not work*:

"I don't know whether Gandhi would agree with you there, but there you are
I'm sure he wouldn't!
He wanted everybody to make their own clothes. And wear a bed sheet
(scoffs)
Yeah but the world would not work if Gandhi ruled it [Yeah.]
Well maybe. Dunno"
(UK 6, urban private girls school)

The suggestion that Gandhi's thinking could contribute to thinking is belittled by mocking his views as backwards and likening his clothing to a bed sheet, which makes him seem silly. The idea that the world "would not work" under Gandhi demonstrates how the statement that something will not work discourages further discussion. It also illustrates how a partial understanding is used to undermine alternatives: Gandhi did not want to 'rule', the concept of Swaraj expressed a preference for self-governance at the village level (Gandhi, 2005, p.189). Although another participant considered that Gandhi's philosophy could work, the discussion did not contemplate what ends we are working towards. The conversational demolishing of alternatives to inequality can discourage discussion about what we want and how to get there.

"Yeah, yeah, I mean I don't know how everyone can be, can go and find that amount of money and be wealthy, I suppose everyone can't be poor as well, but it's not shared. Um, but I don't know if you could share it or not, I don't know how it would work. I suppose that would seem unfair perhaps to people who have earned their money, and then it gets shared out more. And then there are people who haven't earned their money but they probably haven't had the circumstances to earn it. It's quite complicated. [laughter]"
(UK 2, urban trainee teachers)

The trainee teacher above seems to be considering for the first time whether it would be possible to share wealth more equally. Whilst there exist many possible ways to redistribute wealth such as taxes, income caps, and smaller income differences, these were absent from his discussion. Concern about whether sharing could work centred on whether it would be acceptable to upset the rich. Again the complication card concludes discussion on this topic, rather than opening debate to resolve the complication. Stopping short of a solution without examining other possibilities reinforces the impression of there being no alternatives. Further, finding alternatives is often messy as opposed to being a coherent single argument (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), thus the requirement for a coherent alternative is asking for more than is needed.

Naturalisation

Identifying the 'natural' as causing trends and events obscures the social causes, and eternalisation makes a social practice seem timeless rather than temporally bounded (Urry, 1981, p.60-61). Both increase the impression of inevitability. Naturalisation of inequality takes two tacks: one is that human nature is to be unequal and the other is that natural resources are unevenly distributed which makes us unequal. This is backed up by concealment through eternalisation: "inequality has been a process forever, since pre-history" (Mexico 5, urban middle class government school) which reiterates naturalness by showing persistence and inertia. Inequality is presented as widespread and deeply ingrained, forming "the basis of all our institutions" (UK 4, retired urban teachers). Talk about innate behaviour and preference for looking after a small group of other people, your family, justified selfishness, competitiveness, and inequality in terms of human nature:

"I've got a little boy who is three, just thinking about things like Christmas, I'm, you know, quite happy to go into somewhere like 'toysRus' and spend 100 pounds on a toy for him. But when I'm going to buy a present to go to a party for someone else's child, then it's like a maximum 20 pounds. And so it's just a natural response to, you know, it's ok if it's going to be in MY house, for MY son [evolutionary drive, yeah] yeah"
(UK 7, rural private school)

Using natural instinct to explain the buying of expensive toys, not part of a natural state, transposes desires to secure basic needs to hyperactive consumerism. This behaviour is more easily justified by human nature than it would be by socialization. However the naturalness of inequality is challenged when the character of early humans is interrogated. In the eighteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that inequality is created and sustained by human society and did not exist amongst people in nature (Rousseau, 1754/2004). A similar thesis argues that during prehistoric times mobile hunting groups were egalitarian, due to weaker group members joining forces to dominate the strong (Boehm, 1999, p.3). The naturalness of inequality seems to be more a feature of contemporary ideology than historical and pre-historical reality.

Resource distribution and acts of God were identified as extra-human causes of inequality. Only in Kenya were acts of God identified as causes of inequality, causes that are too large to struggle against, although some Mexican groups mentioned discrimination within the Catholic Church. Uneven resource distribution was mentioned as an act of God and in a secular explanation of the naturalness of inequalities. However, inequality is something humans can consciously alter and attributing it to nature denies people's agency. The following examples show how human actions influence resource access, which is an important aspect of resource distribution. Oil-rich Nigeria has a very large poor population due to lack of distribution of resources (Achebe, 1983/1984); famines do not simply result from crop failure but from economic relations, such as the British still taking food from Ireland during the potato famine of 1845-52. HIV/AIDS was also considered to be a purely natural problem (Kenya 3, rural Catholic girls boarding school). Whilst acknowledging physical differences, it is time to "banish the bogeyman of geographical determinism" (Sachs, 2005, p.58) from our understandings of inequality.

"As much as it exists and it is very much with us, and you can't do away with inequality, and a good example is in the forests, a very natural environment, a very natural forest, you have those big trees that are able to grow up and get sunshine and carry out photosynthesis, and you have the small trees that will have to coil around it, so that they have to depend on the big trees for the sunlight for them to, so we can't be equal."

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

This analogy compares society to an ecosystem, promoting ideas of equilibrium with each person performing a role that complements others. Naturalness is emphasised through repetition of “very natural”. The big trees correspond to the big men, or powerful people, whose success is attributed to their ability to grow or take opportunities, reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher’s reference to ‘tall poppies’ who were encouraged to do the same. The dependence of “smaller people” upon the *big men* refers to tribal and family responsibilities to help the others. This is persuasive because in imagining the structure of a forest, society is simplified and its functionality is highlighted. An imaginative leap is needed to compare society to a forest, after which all that is said about the forest applies directly to society. The forest is described in positive terms of trees reaching up for sunlight to photosynthesise. Note how using a scientific concept adds credibility, yet there is no further explanation of the similarities between the forest and society.

The human nature argument attributes selfishness to survival situations, despite sharing often promoting survival. Identifying natural forces positions people as being passive and moved by human nature, natural distributions and natural diseases. The supposed naturalness of inequality comes with reluctance for change: “So we may not be able to change, it would be hard to change completely.” (Kenya 8, rural government school). In fact, inequality is entirely manageable, as evidenced by differing levels of equality between countries. People are socialised into certain preferences, but just because it is what we individually have always known does not mean it is natural. Presenting inequality as natural bolsters inequality as it can be hard to challenge “the irresistible authority of a law of Nature” (Marx, 1872, p.10 of Chp.14). This authority stems from nature being presented as a powerful and unalterable force; if something is natural we can renounce responsibility for it. Similar responsibility avoidance is evident in the environmental hyperopia mentioned earlier (Uzzell, 2000, p.314). Naturalising gives a sense of security embedded in a logic of nature.

5.5 Synthesis: arguments for inequality

The above arguments support and defend inequality along neoliberal lines, acting to justify existing economic and political arrangements. Similar discourses were exhibited between countries, and the techniques of isolation, conflation, eternalisation, naturalization and hiding conflicts of interest are modes of concealment that render social practices ideological (Urry, 1981, p.60-61). The particular conjunctions in which these values were expressed varied: Kenyans use the UK as a comparator whereas Mexicans cite the United States. When speaking of the happy poor, British participants referred beyond national boundaries whereas Mexican and Kenyan participants more often spoke about their compatriots. Whilst the “grammar” expresses similar logic, the “vocabulary” is context-specific.

The adoption of this neoliberal logic by people in all three countries shows how effective it is and the barrier to social change that it presents. Above are some responses from three continents to the question: “Why not make things better? It is in all our interests.” (Marmot, 2004/2005, p.266). The responses, like the recent Marmot review, could be more aspirational for society as a whole (Marmot et al., 2010; Pickett and Dorling, 2010). I have shown a widespread aspiration to improve one’s lot, concern with social mobility rather than social change, and optimism for the future that discourages talk of change. That inequality is presented as unproblematic, “not my responsibility”, the only viable option, and created by natural forces, also blocks talk about change.

The discourses presented here exist alongside less conservative approaches detailed in the following chapters. Framing debates about inequality in terms of the social and health outcomes, extending human rights to include socio-economic rights, and thinking in terms of social justice (Pogge, 2008b; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), enables other discussions about inequality. This might include seeing inequality as a problem, clarifying the major causes, and understanding inequalities to be avoidable and manageable. Identifying these dominant discourses can help us to question how they justify economic inequalities. Specifying the ways in which neoliberal logic becomes common sense enables its critique.

6. The functional ‘necessity’ of a fractured society

6.1 Introduction

Given the manageability of inequality, the extent to which it is necessary and acceptable becomes a relevant question. In this chapter I explore the ways in which inequality is posited as necessary for maintaining the social order, what it is necessary *for*, and the point at which inequality becomes unacceptable within the wider presumption of its necessity. I will consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong (after Fairclough, 2009, p.167). This chapter considers the ways in which inequality is socially divisive, which can have a positive feedback of decreasing empathy between groups. Lower empathy for others and limited awareness of how others live may reduce frequency and strength of objections to inequality. As such I use the term *fractured* to highlight the divisions between social groups, as *divided* does not capture the extensive and intertwined nature of social ruptures. *Fractured* also emphasises that inequality is not *working*. There is a tension between ‘inequality as necessary’ and ‘inequality as dysfunctional’. I consider:

Question 4: *In what ways does inequality fracture society?*

Question 5: *How is inequality perceived to be necessary and at what point does inequality-as-necessary reach a limit of acceptability?*

The term necessity was generated through discussion groups and appeared in comments such as: “from inequality come terms like necessary bad” (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). It is this tension between inequality being problematic but seen as crucial to the functioning of national, and international, society that is the focus of this chapter. *Function* has two meanings: firstly “a system of vital movements” or operation regardless of consequence, and secondly the relation between these movements and meeting the “needs of the organism” (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.49). However, likening society to an organism obscures the internal tensions and conflicts between groups, even when there is mutual dependency. The bourgeoisie has

always been “saddled with its antithesis: capitalists cannot exist without wage workers” (Engels, 1877/1962, p.117). The division of labour has resulted in the division of society into classes (Engels, 1884/1962, p.318). If inequality works for some, there are many for whom it is less beneficial. Joan Robinson suggests that capitalism’s only purpose is to ‘keep the show going’ (Watts, 2000, p.142), in which case the division of labour may simply ‘work’ for capital.

6.2 Literature: Necessary social cleavages?

This literature summary identifies three themes: firstly, contrary to some of the ideas expressed in the preceding chapter, inequality is not inevitable and is manageable. Secondly I discuss connections between inequality and the division of labour, which may be interpreted as functional or dysfunctional. Lastly I consider what level of inequality might be acceptable and to whom.

Inequality is changeable

It is argued by some academics and other members of the public that inequality is natural, and the division of labour is a law of nature (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.41; section 5.4). However historical and international comparisons illustrate how certain policies, ideologies and interactions result in greater or lesser inequality. For the period 1820-1992 there was considerable variation between countries and regions in their increases in per capita incomes: international inequalities in GDP per capita widened considerably with the prosperous getting richer and the poor staying relatively poor (Maddison, 1995, p.19 & 21). The interregional ratio of the GDP per capita of the richest region to the poorest region rose from below 3:1 in 1820 to 16:1 in 1992. International comparisons show the richest soaring from roughly 3:1 to 72:1 in the same period (Maddison, 1995, p.22). Thus inequality between countries is in flux and it has increased dramatically over recent history. This change challenges notions of the naturalness, inevitability and equilibrium of inequality. Perhaps people conclude that inequality is natural and inevitable because it has generally increased within their lifetimes.

One example of the international manageability of poverty, poverty being a usual companion of inequality, was the Marshall Plan; another is international development aid. The Marshall Plan was directed “against hunger, poverty,

desperation and chaos” in post-war Europe (Marshall, 1947). This was termed the “recovery” of Europe, which differs from moving out of longer-term poverty, the reported motivation for much development aid. However at the turn of the millennium there was questioning of the success of aid to Africa and a parallel reduction in aid given (Olsen, 2001, p.645-646). In some cases aid may aggravate a problem: “some critics argue that aid is the key cause of economic dependency, lack of growth, corruption, and even laziness amongst people living in poverty” (Oxfam International, 2010, p.3). Bilateral aid, measured by financial flows, appears to be more concerned with donor country wishes than recipient country needs (Alesina and Dollar, 2000). The channels explicitly aiming to lessen poverty (and consequently inequality) at times aggravate it, but at other times, such as the Marshall Plan, they have been largely successful.

Other interventions have dubious track records for reducing inequality. Structural adjustment and conditional unilateral, bilateral loans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, as well as World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade rules constitute part of the international regulatory context in which contemporary inequalities persist. Whilst there is debate about the precise relationship between structural adjustment programmes and poverty, “they certainly did not lead to poverty reduction” (McIlwaine, 2002, p.99). Some regulations accentuate existing hierarchies, for instance the UK and United States used considerable economic protectionism during their own economic development but prescribe opening markets for others’ development. This was termed ‘kicking away the ladder’ by nineteenth-century German economist Friedrich List, who wrote that once economic wealth has been achieved countries pretend that their protectionism has been a mistake and that free trade is the true path (Chang, 2003, p.5).

The European Union and United States pursue regional and bilateral trade agreements with poorer countries, and by 2007 these governed 30% of world trade and are described as ‘a new route to enforce economic domination’. This arrangement enables concessions that are unlikely within the WTO where poorer countries can unite and demand better terms (Oxfam International, 2007,

p.5-6). Two recommendations for change are that the policy conditions set by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and donor governments should be changed to allow more promotion of infant industries and allow tariffs and subsidies (Chang, 2003, p.14). Rules could be instated to limit richer countries' current disproportionate power in trade negotiations. It is not the rules and trade *per se* which aggravate inequality, but the terms of agreement.

“Most of the massive severe poverty persisting in the world today is avoidable through more equitable institutions that would entail minuscule opportunity costs for the affluent. It is for the sake of trivial economic gains that national and global elites are keeping billions of human beings in life-threatening poverty with all its attendant evils such as hunger and communicable diseases, child labor and prostitution, trafficking, and premature death. Considering this situation from a moral standpoint, we must now assess growth—both globally and within most countries—in terms of its effect on the economic position of the poor.” (Pogge, 2008a, no page number)

Having considered how international inequalities are changeable and manageable, national inequalities are arguably easier to tackle as a single government. The varying levels of national inequality amongst rich countries exhibit how policies, supported by varying social norms of acceptable inequality, can alter the extent of inequality. For example in Sweden, a well-used example of a more equal country, this is achieved through high taxes; in Japan greater equality (albeit increasingly unequal) is achieved by a fairer initial distribution of income. In the UK “Salaries and fees have shot up. Generous share option schemes have proliferated. Top bonuses and golden handshakes have multiplied.” (Young, 2001). This could be regulated to limit the growth of inequality, and policy proposals that could reduce inequality exist to complement divergent political philosophies (for example Cooke, 2010; Margo and Bradley, 2010; Wind-Cowie, 2010). This discussion of policy raises the issue of who is calling for change, and people may have different interests based on their socio-economic position.

Dividing labour is socially divisive

“Occupations are infinitely separated and specialized ... while this evolution is realizing itself with unprecedented spontaneity, the economists, examining its causes and appreciating its results, far from condemning or opposing it, uphold

it as necessary.” (Durkheim, 1893/1949, p.39). The interpretation that divided labour is necessary is entrenched – note how long ago Durkheim wrote this. Émile Durkheim describes the division of labour extending beyond the economic world, to juridical, political, administrative, scientific and aesthetic functions to the extent that children are trained differently based on the function they will later perform (*ibid.*, p.40 & 43). Whilst Durkheim suggests that this division increases solidarity due to interdependence, Karl Marx argues that the division of labour is alienating. In work, workers belong to another person, losing their own spontaneity as the capitalist mode of production separates them from owning the means of production (Marx, 1844-/1911, p.170 & 178).

Divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ have overlapping conceptual, economic and spatial dimensions. People earn a living from different sources of money: those with *labour-power* earn wages, those with capital make profit, and those with land collect rent (Marx, 1844-/1911, p.178-9). Wages are allocated amongst workers supposedly according to ability and merit, which reinforces and justifies financial inequalities. People are marked as being more or less skilled, with a corresponding value placed on their labour. This has an international dimension: “the labour of the Third World exchanges for the labour of the First World in a ratio of about 35:1” (Freeman, 2009, p.1445). Restriction of movement of labour between richer and poorer countries, but not of goods, characterises these contemporary class relations (Freeman, 1998, p.5). Financial divisions are often socially divisive as money brings financial exclusion, separating the poor, rich and middle groups into their niches of affordability and respectability.

“You will be content in your civilization surrounded by the hedge, but signals from the other civilization will be as incomprehensible to you as if they had been sent by the inhabitants of Venus. If you feel like it, you can become an explorer in your own country. You can become Columbus, Magellan, Livingstone. But I doubt that you will have such a desire. Such expeditions are very dangerous, and you are no madman, are you? You are already a man of your own civilization, and you will defend it and fight for it. You will water your own hedge.” (Kapuściński, 1978/1989, p.45)

Spatial division can limit awareness of other socio-economic groups. Residential divisions can discourage interaction between people in differing income groups, particularly when it comes to sharing leisure activities, friends, and joining each others' families. Minimal social interaction between groups leads to gulfs of understanding and a lack of desire for understanding. Economic differences alter the roles that countries and individuals play, and early last century led to the world being described as having "become divided into a handful of usurer states and a vast majority of debtor states." (Lenin, 1917/1963, chapter 8). Physical and economic distance, and their different roles, divides countries and people. Although the 'distant' other is now more reachable given greater access to information, our conceptual boundaries retain a distance between the 'other' and ourselves (Korf, 2006, p.246-7). Yet not all distances have shrunk, some have expanded (Katz, 2001); though we are least aware of these due to this distancing. This conceptual, functional and spatial distancing can result in partial awareness of society as a whole, or the world, which can undermine one's own perceived position in society.

Divisions and their social antecedents can have the impact of splitting society to the extent that it has been noted that many British citizens have lost a true sense of where they fit in (Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009; Rowlingson, 2010). In 2008 74% of people asked perceived themselves to be in a different earnings quintile to that which they were actually in, and the majority underestimated their income group (calculated from data in Lansley, 2009, p.29). Losing social awareness precludes objection to contemporary social organisation; however it is not like this in all societies. In more equal Japan a teenager in a poorer family can reasonably accurately estimate the incomes and lifestyles of people within each quintile of society, whereas in the UK it would be hard to have this discussion let alone come close to correct answers (Dorling, 2010d, p.21). This is not the fault of teenagers themselves. In Britain this divide is partly produced by higher education, "characterised by credit-fuelled spending, high entry fees, creeping privatisation" (Chatterton, 2010, p.514) that detaches the "profitable and buoyant student urban service sector, and the large cohort of local nonuniversity young people" (*ibid.*, p.512). This divide is also reinforced by respect or lack thereof (Skeggs, 1997, p.1) which further splits groups, boosting some and belittling others. At times these social divides are explained and

justified in terms of the moral and intellectual characteristics and work ethics of people and even countries (e.g. Collier, 2007).

The tenets of meritocracy form a key contemporary justification for our divided society, against which we were satirically warned in Michael Young's 'The rise of the meritocracy' in which he predicted a final revolt against this by 2033 (Young, 1958/1961). In 2001 he reported that Britain was somewhat in line with his predictions, for example the poor and disadvantaged "can easily become demoralised by being looked down on so woundingly by people who have done well for themselves", whilst those looking down have hardened into a new class of "people judged to have merit of a particular kind" (Young, 2001 no page number). Whilst meritocracy (social positioning based on ability rather than ancestry) may appear a desirable way to organise society, especially if you consider yourself to be able, meritocracy is problematic for several reasons. Maintaining an inequality of rewards based on different abilities and efforts (a feature of meritocracy) can undermine equality of opportunity (which is necessary for meritocracy) as the rich can privilege their own children. Further it is questioned whether it is fair to reward some for greater natural ability over which we have no control (White, 2007, p.74-77). "It is hard indeed in a society that makes so much of merit to be judged as having none. No underclass has ever been left as morally naked as that." (Young, 2001). The meritocratic justification for inequality creates a sense of deficiency amongst those struggling financially compared to the economically privileged.

The way in which economic divisions are managed provides an insight into how social divisions are reified. The extremely poor are at times referred to as an underclass. The term was coined in Sweden by Myrdal to describe structural marginalisation; but when imported to the United States responsibility for dispossession was ascribed to the anti-social conduct of that group (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.49-50). Racism also plays out along the imperialist divisions of the world, inscribing cultural divisions. In the hierarchy of the metropolis "the most recent arrivals from the poorest countries [are] at the bottom and the oldest arrivals from the richest countries at the top." (Freeman,

1998, p.6). In neoliberal states whose policy package is one of flexible reorganisation of low paid jobs, and workfare rather than welfare, there is also a proactive and expensive penal wing rolled out “in response” to the problems caused by inequality. This focuses on lower class crime, creating a disabling state at the bottom of society and an enabling state at the top (Wacquant, 2010). Thus responses to social problems can reinforce inequalities. Being imprisoned is an extreme, almost hidden, form of social exclusion given that people are locked away (Western, 2010). There are many socially divisive processes that deepen social cleavages, doubling up to reinforce the negative or positive associations of socio-economic positions.

Acceptable limits of inequality

The question of how equal would be equal enough is addressed by some critics of inequality. The argument that less inequality is better for people, hence we should strive towards equality is qualified; without empirical evidence that total equality would be good it would be irresponsible to argue for this (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Pickett, 2010a). This may be academic because internationally, and in most national cases, we are not about to become economically equal. Some of the most equal countries are Japan and Azerbaijan, where the ratios of the income of the richest 10% to those of the poorest 10%, are 4.5 and 2.9 respectively (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Despite some very equal countries existing, it has been increasingly acknowledged since 2008 that: “We have clearly crossed the limits of what is ‘acceptable’ inequality in most societies ...” (Ghosh, 2010, no page number).

Our moral outlooks often adjust to suit our situation and are reinforced by others (Pogge, 2008b, p.5), therefore what levels of inequality are acceptable varies. For example those of lower status are generally more critical of income inequality. In contrast, in most countries education increases economic conservatism and moral liberalism; education has a very conservative influence on the economic views of people from South Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe (Weakliem, 2002, p.152). One study shows how we are socialised to accept different levels of inequality as the level of unacceptable pay gaps between a chairman and manual worker amongst Swedes was a ratio of 3:1, whereas

United States Americans were tolerant up to 9:1 (Hadler, 2005, p.150). Sweden is much more equal than the United States. For the UK David Cameron proposes a 20:1 ratio within the public sector; others have discussed extending this to the private sector (Lister, forthcoming). Position in the hierarchy and the level of inequality to which an individual is accustomed influences what is acceptable. Yet this socialisation is incomplete as objections to inequality regularly arise.

“The increased social distance between the advantaged and disadvantaged puts further pressure on the values sanctioning vertical redistribution.” (Taylor-Gooby, 2008 p. 173). Such redistributive policies could extend high tax rates to more top-end earners, strengthen and reform inheritance taxes, introduce a financial transactions tax, and close tax avoidance loopholes (Lister, forthcoming, p.2). It has been suggested that in such a system that is centralised and equal, people feel unfairly treated and hate the power that imposes this (Hayek, 1944/1962, p.168-9). Whilst it is contradictory to argue that people will feel it is unfair to be treated equally, part of Hayek’s point is backed up by decreased support for collective provision and redistribution when people become accustomed to individualising institutional frameworks (Taylor-Gooby, 2008, p.182). As values are flexible and attitudes change, through living in an equal system overriding values are likely to alter, and are likely to lead to disapproval of things that are aspired to in a more unequal society. For example in more equal Nordic countries conspicuous modesty, rather than ostentation as elsewhere, is the *modus operandi* for political elites (Daloz, 2007). When people are less divided there is more consideration for others and less showing off, which would probably encourage continued redistribution.

Extreme poverty is the least morally acceptable element of inequality; this could be addressed by providing a universal basic income. World poverty, which is severe and widespread, is both bigger and smaller than we thought. Bigger in the sense that it kills a third of all people who are born; smaller because 1% of global product could eradicate it (Pogge, 2008b, p.264). People would still be poor, but slightly better able to access the basics, which would start to fulfil our

negative duty not to cause harm (*ibid.* p.15). Pogge challenges the presumption that although national inequalities are bad there is no problem with international inequalities (*ibid.*, p.92). He argues that the support of the European Union and United States is needed to eradicate severe poverty (*ibid.*, p. 217), and that we need to overcome the “sucker exemption”. This is the idea that there is no moral obligation to act if doing so would make the actor a sucker in the context of non-compliance of others, for example making an effort when others do not. Overcoming this requires a collective building of rules (*ibid.*, p.133-4; Swaan, 2005, p.186), which implicates the wider society in working to overcome world poverty.

6.3 Dissatisfaction with the world

In considering whether the existing social order is functional or necessary, reflecting on whether people are satisfied with how things are going in the world gives some indication of whether world inequality does “work”. If people generally adjust their values to things the way they are, then theoretically we might all be content with the way things are going in the world. However people are not widely satisfied with the world: of the respondents to the Pew Survey (2002), 63% were dissatisfied with the way “things were going” in the world and 20% were satisfied. When national sentiment towards the state of the world is examined (in Figure 25) only in Vietnam did satisfaction greatly outweigh dissatisfaction; Uzbekistan, Pakistan and China had a roughly even split of satisfied to dissatisfied respondents. In the other 40 countries there were at least 30 percentage points more dissatisfied people than satisfied.

This pattern of dissatisfaction appears to be connected to cultural norms of discussion and critique, which are closely connected to freedom of expression amongst the press and the public. Greater press freedom and freedom as a general measure correlate positively with dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the world. Further, the more people have access to international television news the less they respond ‘don’t know’ about whether they are satisfied with the way things are going in the world. Education and development levels alone do not appear to be directly linked to levels of satisfaction with the world. I used two measures of freedom to examine its relationship to dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the world.

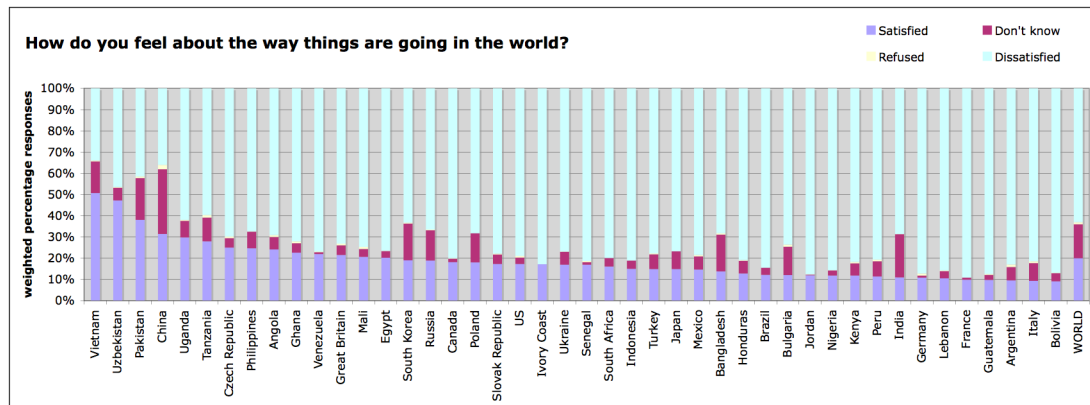


Figure 25: Levels of satisfaction with the world

Weighted percentages of reported satisfaction with the way things are going in the world; data from 2002.

An un-free press and discouragement of opinion sharing and protest are present in societies where people, counter-intuitively, express very low dissatisfaction with the world (Figure 26 and Figure 27). The strong negative correlation ($r^2 = .52$) runs from China and Vietnam in the bottom right with low dissatisfaction and low press freedom, to France and Germany in the top left with high press freedom and high dissatisfaction²⁹. To double-check this finding a “freedom” measure reported by Freedom House³⁰ was also used (Freedom House, 2007). A similar pattern emerged in both graphs, as Figure 27 shows that the least dissatisfied countries are also those with fewer civil liberties and

²⁹ This appears as a negative correlation because a low score means high press freedom.

³⁰ I take the precaution of writing “freedom” in quotation marks because of the moral and political weight this word carries. The Freedom score data are sourced from Freedom House, a United States-based Non Governmental Organisation. Freedom Scores are calculated by considering various elements of political rights and civil liberties (see appendix). These freedom measures show a particular view of freedom, from an organisation that in 2007 received 66% of its income from US government grants (Freedom House, 2007, p.3); note that the United States achieves the “optimal” Freedom score. With some links to the CIA and the World Anticommunist League amongst others, some consider, albeit some time ago, that Freedom House serves as a “propaganda arm of the government and international right wing” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Press Freedom data appear more independent as 58% of their funding was detailed as “self-generated” in 2007 (Reporters without borders, 2009).

political freedoms. Press freedom and “freedom” measures assess repression of journalists and the press and the public respectively. To reiterate, people express little dissatisfaction with the world where an un-free press and discouragement of opinion sharing and protest are present.

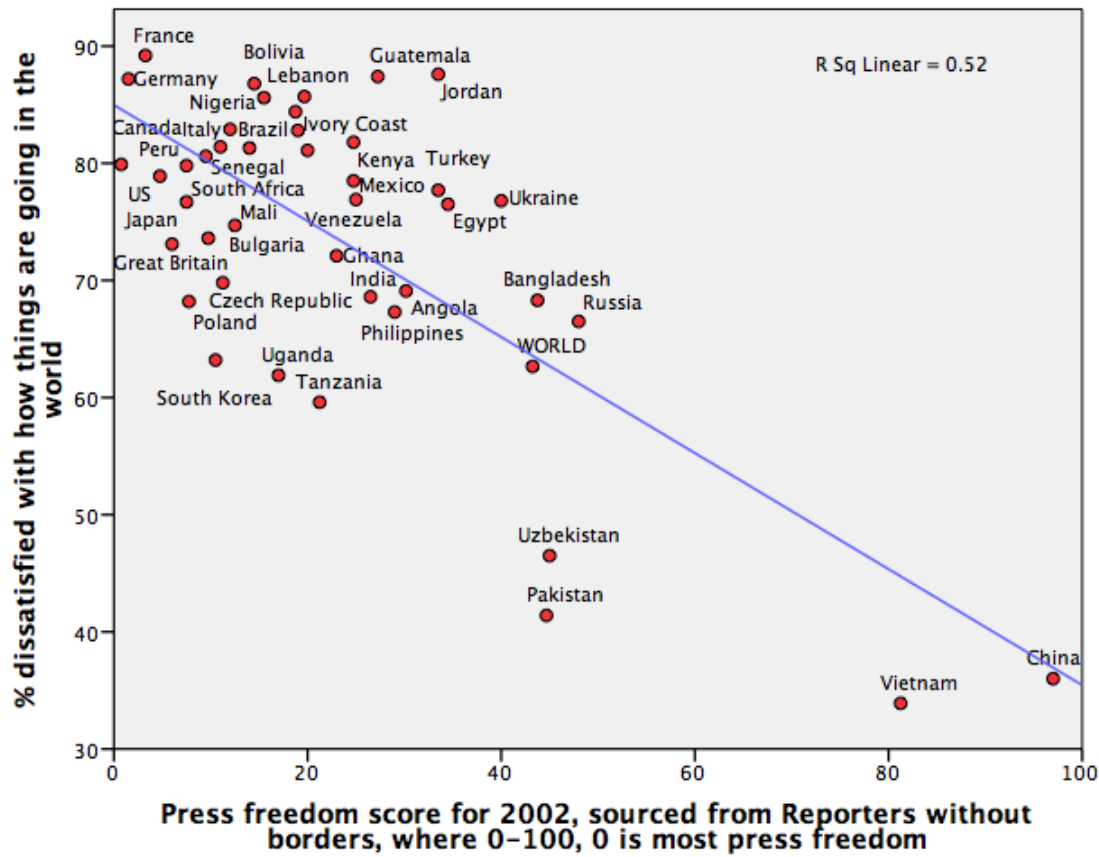


Figure 26: Press freedom vs. dissatisfied with the world

Press freedom scores show the freedom of journalists and media, as well as government actions to ensure press freedom. A 2002 Annual Report states “journalists went to jail for denouncing embezzlement, criticising officials or simply expressing concern of any kind - in other words, for doing their job, which was enough for even the most cautious journalist to be sued for harming the reputation of a leader or even national morale.” (Reporters without Borders, 2002, 2009). Living in such a charged political environment could explain why people might prudently report to be “satisfied” with the world. In contrast, where there is greater freedom of expression the norm is to report being dissatisfied. Perhaps some people are deeply dissatisfied whilst others may be avoiding

appearing ignorant or blasé by being satisfied with the way things are going in the world.

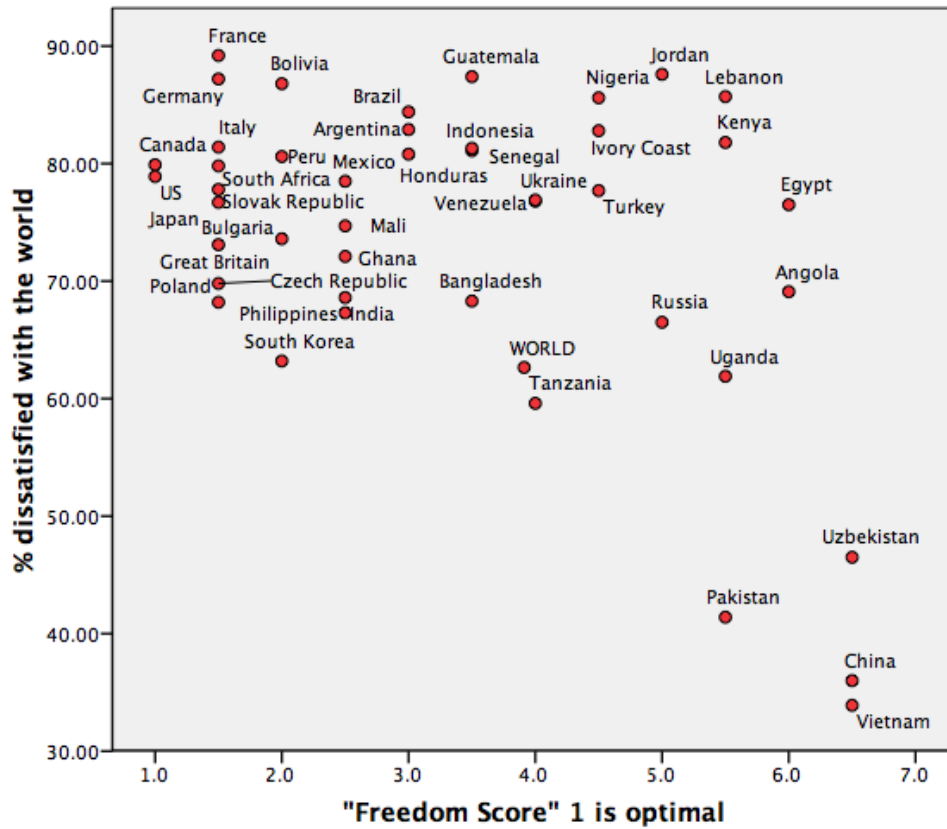


Figure 27: “Freedom” vs. dissatisfaction with the world

“Freedom” as ascribed by Freedom House vs. percentage of people reporting to be dissatisfied with the world. 1 = most free, 6.5 = least free.

Lack of freedom (press or otherwise) could affect satisfaction by blocking awareness of things that could cause dissatisfaction, although the media even in more “free” countries is usually partial. Another explanation is that people are discouraged from expressing dissenting opinions where there is little “freedom”. Those people reporting satisfaction may do so because of a culture of acceptance and support for how society is organized and maybe some are scared to be critical. Together these effects result in some of the least “free” people reporting that they are satisfied. In *Development as Freedom* Amartya Sen identifies five freedoms, which he says can be achieved by development. These five have a much broader scope than those shown above, and include:

political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. For Sen, freedoms are a means and an ends to development (Sen, 1999, p.10, p.37). Comparing dissatisfaction with the Human Development Index, on which Sen worked, there was very little relationship. Thus a narrower definition of freedom is more informative about what influences reported satisfaction with the world.

Overall the world population reports to be dissatisfied with the world. The reason for dissatisfaction is not inequality *per se*; however inequality is connected to some of the major problems currently facing the world. For example climate change: the biggest polluters will not suffer most immediately from sea level rise and can buffer themselves financially against food shortages and climatic events. Inequality affects the combating of disease, as 90% of the money in biomedical research is spent on the diseases of the richest 10% of the world population (Somerville, 2002, p.320). War is often influenced by unequal military power and unequal access to resources. As such some of the issues that could result in dissatisfaction could well have been aggravated by historical and contemporary world inequality. However freedom to be dissatisfied is not a satisfactory end point. Would it not be a shame to stop at the ability to overtly state dissatisfaction, and not exercise this freedom to change things?

6.4 *One-way respect and cleavages of empathy*

The division of labour characterises many aspects of life within Kenya, Mexico and the UK, as well as in many other countries. The global division of labour, and the price paid for that labour, influence relations between countries. Onto economic differences maps the acting out of one-way respect of the rich by the poor and a lack of understanding, awareness and empathy between groups. This section presents another way in which inequality fractures society, layering issues of respect and gaps in understanding over material inequalities. These processes challenge the suggestion that dividing labour produces feelings of solidarity and seals friendships (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.56). Of course there are diverse experiences of the same system, depending on one's position within it what some experience as functional others find to be deeply dysfunctional.

An inferiority / superiority division maps on to the divisions of rich and poor identified in chapter 3. These dualisms operate internationally and intranationally and are associated with respect for those thought to be superior, or alternatively feelings of inferiority and being “less”. Status is the symbolic expression of power and “[w]ealth, the ultimate basis of power, can exert power, and exert it durably, only in the form of symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.195). Those without these status symbols are often given less respect, to the extent that this is described as a “mass prejudice that the poor are somehow inherently inferior” (Dorling, 2010b, p.207).

Although some commentators have undermined the importance of emotional reactions to inequality (Putnam, 2010), others have detailed how respectful, unbiased, trustworthy and dignified treatment facilitates aspects of group life including self-esteem, collective identification, and engagement in group-serving behaviour. A psychological experiment found that respect can compensate for inequality of rights, having a “social healing” effect (Simon et al., 2006, p.535 & 544). These experiments involved small groups of up to 8 people so it is dangerous to generalise. But nevertheless, the importance of respect is established. When respect overlaps with social divisions, which is often the case, social divisions are more damaging.

Respect is described as necessarily, not voluntarily, being conferred on the wealthy: “[If] I have to depend on you in any way, I will have to respect you.” (Kenya 6, NGO-funded slum primary). This ‘social alchemy’ takes place particularly in contexts where economic violence is unacceptable, for example winning votes; economic capital is transmuted into symbolic capital through acts of conspicuous generosity which can result in the misrecognition of domination (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.192). Ostentation and conspicuous generosity give proof of ability to foster clientelistic relationships (Daloz, 2007, p.200-1). A participant argues that the granting of symbolic capital is play-acting:

“And looking at our case here also in the villages, these guys who come driving huge cars, looking for votes, when you look at the kind of, er, how people react to them, it’s not that they respect them, I mean they will take the money, I mean kneel down, take the money, sing them songs, but

once they are gone they are also willing to take from another person from the opposing camp. So it's not that they respect them so much to want to, I mean to be identified with them, but they are low, they only want to benefit from them."

(Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers)

Another comment from the same group suggests that people obey their bosses due to fear, not respect. The explanation above illustrates how money is central to the interaction, that the politicians are interested in getting votes and the villagers are interested in the money. This power dynamic undermines integrity of interaction between groups, especially when wealth differences are large. In the Kenyan groups where respect and inferiority were mentioned, these were aligned with differences such as rich / poor, educated / uneducated, white / black, being developed / undeveloped, and dependency (to which I turn later in this chapter). Amongst Mexican groups inferiority was mainly associated with being female, indigenous and poor; indigenous people have been marginalized economically, socially and rhetorically since independence (Howard, 2002, p.62-3) and dominant discourses about violence in Mexico have blamed women's deaths on their moral characters (Wright, 2010). The lack of respect and the inferiority associated with being poor, uneducated or other markers mentioned here are likely to aggravate the experience of occupying these social positions, and respect could ameliorate this (Simon et al., 2006).

A lack of respect comes with a sense of powerlessness, not being heard or having power in political or economic negotiations. As one participant sardonically put it: "America for Americans, right?" (Mexico 5, urban middle-class government school). *America* implies the Americas, but *Americans* are restricted to just citizens of the United States. In Mexico and Kenya there was discussion about the controlling behaviour of the richer countries and a sense of being manipulated. The first quotation below likens world economy to a game of chess with powerful countries moving the less powerful ones. The second illustrates how inferiority is communicated when the buyers control trade relationships.

"At the world level there are countries that are supposedly the powerful ones, and they are the ones that are almost moving the world. The smaller countries are those that are doing nothing more than depending on other countries. So, there is a lot of inequality.

We're nothing more than their game of chess."

(Mexico 7, small rural school)

“... the serious issue is that some of the developing countries, when they price their, they don't price their products by themselves. They are priced by the buyers, and you see when you can't price your product by yourself you may not sell it at a competitive price that is going to help you, you are likely to sell it at a price that is going to benefit the buyer. And at the end of the day, you feel inferior, or unequal.”

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

Superiority and inferiority are embodied in the quality associated with goods that are produced and traded between countries. This is another way in which richer countries communicate a presumption of superiority. *Quality* has the tone of a factual description but is imbued with biased ideas of what good quality is. This inferior-superior dynamic is exemplified by the idea that poorer people would want richer people's second hand clothes, which is often true because the perception of these clothes being good quality exists throughout the world and there is an international redistribution of second-hand clothes. In contrast the quality of Chinese goods is widely questioned in Mexico, for example T-shirts proclaim “made in chinga”; chinga being a swear word and in this case meaning in a rush which implies poor quality (Figure 28). This also shows that what is no longer good enough for the rich is nevertheless perceived as being good enough for the poor. As one Kenyan participant said: “we get the rejects” (Kenya 3, rural Catholic girls boarding school). This comment was frank and slightly resentful. Superiority is also implied by the way some British groups speak as though it is at their discretion whether they donate money and goods, especially when such donations can also translate into a moral authority (see section 7.4). Another way of phrasing the issue of respect was in terms of being able to look someone in the eye, which is a sign of honesty:

“And I think the um, you know, looking up at people or down at people, it um stops us from being able to look people straight in the eye. And that's what you need to be able to do, the world needs to be able to do, if we're to be able to create a world of love” (*love* said fast, perhaps due to embarrassment)

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

To not 'look someone in the eye' may be a sign of embarrassment or denial about the situation people are in relative to one another. As detailed above,

ideas about inferiority and superiority often map onto other social divides. Living in such differing situations can make it harder to understand others, especially if there is little real mixing. As G.A. Cohen (2009, p.35) suggests, “[I]f you make, and keep, say, ten times as much money as I do, ... my life will then labour under challenges that you will never face ...”. This facilitates stereotypes about others, including often-ungrounded aspersions about moral character. Constructions of the poor as lazy and the rich as hardworking have been interpreted as coping strategies to justify inequalities (Bamfield and Horton, 2009, p.14). Further, presumptions of respectability sometimes imply moral authority (Skeggs, 1997, p.3).



Figure 28: Mexican T-shirts “Made in chinga”

The denial enabled by not looking someone in the eye illustrates a preference for not acknowledging responsibility and also an embarrassment about inequality. But not engaging with others can lead to a lack of understanding because, as one participant put it, “this one may need to buy a car, this one may need to buy bread” (Kenya 8, rural government school). Another comments that at one extreme people have enough to live out their dreams and

at the other extreme they have absolutely nothing to eat (Mexico 6, rural government school). In this scenario respectful interaction could increase mutual understanding, which could lead to identification with general *human* status rather than just *traditional* class status (Marx, 1844-/1911, p.182).

Explicit discussion about inferiority and superiority was absent from the discourse of groups in the richest country (the UK) but was present in poorer two countries. This finding has arisen elsewhere, that a sense of inferiority may be very strong for some groups but others are oblivious to it. In a longitudinal ethnographic study of 83 British working class women a similar partial awareness was identified. Respectability was “rarely recognized as an issue by those who are positioned with it, who are normalized by it, and who do not have to prove it. Yet for those who feel positioned by and position themselves against the discourse of respectability it informs a great deal of their responses.” (Skeggs, 1997, p.1).

It was uncomfortable for me to hear international hierarchies of wealth and power being described in terms of inferiority and superiority. I felt regret that this hierarchy was internalised to the extent that people feel inferior. This was awkward because I come from a supposedly superior country, so had a sense of guilt that I materially benefit from this. Whilst the naming of this relationship made me feel awkward, this hierarchy is implicit to international relations and the way that the world is imagined. Those who feel inferior say so directly; in contrast a sense of superiority is communicated through actions and implied with words. Reticence to name the nature of this relationship is a form of denial by citizens of “superior” countries, what might be a modest reluctance to say the word *superior* means that the nature of the relationship is not openly acknowledged, making it harder to reject this misevaluation.

One obstacle to empathy is knowledge about the different situations in which people live. One teacher explained the financial situations of his poorer pupils to his richer pupils in another school and the richer children thought that he was either lying or joking (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). This cognitive denial is a simple refusal to accept the facts, facts which when learnt

about second hand are more easily segmented from daily life (Cohen, 2000, p.8, 20). A British teacher working in Kenya commented that she had become accustomed to seeing poor living conditions in the slums: “I don’t blink, so you do become a little bit immune to it, because it becomes so normal” (Kenya 7, urban British-system private school). Yet for an international group of pupils interacting with their less privileged contemporaries, the impact was emotional. Their teacher had assumed that they would be aware of poverty, yet the visit described below illustrates how separation leads to some degree of social obliviousness. Meeting people face to face prevented the cognitive denial that their Mexican counterparts adopted when faced with a similar lesson.

“You would imagine that kids coming to school here are aware that some countries are rich, others are poor. Some families are rich, others are poor, but they don’t get the actual feel of what poverty is. So I remember, 5 years ago, I took a group of students, year 11, 12 and 13 to, er, Mother Theresa Centre, missionaries of charities, she rescues the lowest of the low in society, people who have been abandoned by families, people that are paralysed, people that are deformed, mentally challenged and so on, and when the kids went there I assumed at that level they were psychologically ready to go in. But when we went in, they broke down and were totally disorientated. And weren’t prepared for that, and so I realised that I needed to have given them counselling before we went in, and the way they reacted, they did an assembly presentation, after that, and many of them still talk about that one experience today, as adults, they’ve been through university. But it’s like ‘do you remember when you took us to such a, it, it was bang’, and that means we are assuming they know, they get it, but they don’t. If they did they wouldn’t be as wasteful as they are, they would be a little more sensitive about the way they do things. So, yes, they know there is inequality, but they don’t digest, but yeah, they don’t get, they’ve got to be in contact with it to understand what it means.”

(Kenya 7, urban British-system private school)

This participant emphasises the importance of being there, her language is one of embodied understanding. Not understanding is described corporeally (or physically) as not “digesting” or incorporating new information, implying a superficial awareness. The prescribed antidote, “to be in contact”, also has a physicality to it. Given the differences in the built and social environments between different parts of the city, being there is the fastest way to understand more thoroughly. So this is what this participant arranges for her pupils.

Another way of dealing with observing and experiencing being amongst the poorer groups in the world was with a sense of humour, which could be called

morgue humour, where sad things are seen as being funny. Talking about politically motivated murders abroad or about how countries in Africa are poor compared to others in the world resulted, at times, in hilarity (see quotations below). This is explained by author Santiago Roncagliolo as a feature of poorer countries: “they have to laugh because if they got angry about everything they should get angry about, they would have a miserable life. As countries get richer they become more pc (politically correct) ...” (Roncagliolo, 2010, no page number). In place of anger or frustration, humour deals with awkward social situations and offers emotional protection.

“Of course they do find a way of silencing him. And you know a dead man never tells tales. Because they’re a dead man [laughter]”
(Kenya 9, urban boys boarding school)

“[Chuckles] we’re in real problems.
There’s a strip, a black one [chuckles]
A black strip, of Africa [laughs]
Anna: that’s where Kenya is, in the black line
Yeah [laughs]
Anna: why are you laughing?
Because it is not there [laugh] it is not seen.”
(Kenya 8, rural government school)

Morgue humour is a form of denial, where people block themselves from a situation essentially by not thinking about the implications, feelings and pain of those involved. Such a coping strategy makes sense given the frequency with which one might observe disturbing events, and one’s own proximity to these.

One way of distancing the causes, if not the consequences, of this hierarchy was to cite the colonialists as causing this. “You know when the white man came, when the colonialist came, he came and err established himself at a superior position. And since that time we as Africans have always been living this sort of brainwashed situation. That a white can do better than an African.” (Kenya 9, urban boys boarding school). This racial hierarchy roughly overlaps with wealth divisions. As with superiority/inferiority, racism was not mentioned by the all white UK discussion group participants although it was mentioned in Mexico and Kenya. It is an astounding sign of disengagement that none of the

participants in richer positions recognised that others might be obliged to (pretend to) respect them, feel inferior, or perhaps resent them.

6.5 *Limits to inequality*

One major objection to inequality is that some have power over others, which is unjust and frustrating for the disempowered as well as disabling because they are unable to manoeuvre for their own advantage; this was discussed earlier in this chapter. Another objection is that the very poorest suffer from the bads associated with extreme poverty, disease, hunger, and shorter life expectancies, which I discuss later. This stands in contrast to the supposition that “great political societies can maintain themselves in equilibrium only thanks to the specialization of tasks, that the division of labour is the source, if not unique, at least principal, of social solidarity” (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.62). Dissatisfaction with uneven power was overwhelmingly discussed in Kenya and Mexico, and less readily acknowledged in the UK. This is perhaps because the UK is a major former colonial power with the corollary psychological effect of a sense of entitlement to privilege. Feelings of powerlessness were expressed with regards to the national and the international levels. One group commented that the political class impedes development and guards its political and economic control to the extent that it appears “they don’t understand they are Mexican” (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). Here I focus on the more international elements whilst recognizing that those who make international agreements, as above, are the elites within countries.

International power relations were generally recognized to involve richer countries dictating to poorer countries, for example terms of trade and climate change rules. Trade rules that subsidise richer countries’ agricultural sectors with which poorer countries compete act to “sort of shut us out” (Kenya 8, rural government school). Climate change rules were described as being imposed upon developing countries by richer countries (UK 7, rural private school). Another aspect of international influence is migrant workers from Mexico working in the United States (Ortiz González, 2000), which has been described in terms of control: “Now we see how the USA can control the problems that exist within our families. Imagine it!” (Mexico 7, small rural school). A foreign government, perhaps at times unwittingly or unintentionally, influencing family

dynamics is not unique to the Mexican case. The example of emigration demonstrates how people feel powerlessness even over aspects of their personal lives; trade and pollution rules also have implications for people's daily lives. As with the question of respect addressed in section 6.4, those with less power at times feel suppressed. Such a feeling may be worsened by the stereotypes of "people in Africa" as shown in the second quotation below.

"... you see the worst problem, especially with us in Africa, has been that the higher those people go, they domineer over the ones who are below here, such that they never see the light of day. In as much as they want to come up, they still suppress them [laughter]"
(Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school)

"... this is going to sound really horrible but people who are in developing nations like Africa, countries in Africa, they've got to help themselves, we can't do everything for them. That's a really awful view point, sorry. But unless they want to help themselves or unless they want to develop further, um you know, there's not much we can do, and you can give all the money in the world, but if they're not willing to or not wanting to or aren't sure how to develop in the way that they want to, then that's not really going to happen."
(UK 1, urban trainee teachers)

The juxtaposition of the perspectives above shows how a lack of understanding can come about, because those suppressing and domineering do not necessarily recognize what they are doing, to the extent that those who are suppressed are understood as not having an interest in improving their own lives. The second of the quotations positions Africans as not wanting to develop, thus locating low aspirations as the cause of poverty. However there is evidently unease about expressing these opinions as immediately afterwards another group member told this speaker directly that this is an arrogant point of view. She anticipated that this was a controversial view and in acknowledging this she almost excused herself. This bears similarities to the prelude "I'm not sexist/racist/homophobic, but ..." as these devices attempt, unsuccessfully, to distance the speaker from a socially undesirable attitude.

An element of feeling powerless is not simply power over what one chooses for one's own life, but also power to change society more widely. Both a Mexican and UK group expressed feelings of impotence to do anything. It was

commented: “Yes, you feel impotent, you end up accepting it, but in a pessimistic way” (Mexico 6, rural government school). Elsewhere, “it leaves you with a sense of impotence and incompetence in the sense of what you can actually DO about it” and “it’s such a huge issue, it’s such a globalised issue, they feel powerless, so people just give up and go ... into their own homes” (UK 7, rural private school). This feeling of powerlessness is almost self-fulfilling because a belief in one’s inability to initiate change is likely to be ensued by inaction, which vindicates the original assertion.

Whilst it was noted in section 6.4 that differences in wealth can lead to respect aligning along these socio-economic divides, another response is resentment and anger. Resentment is distinct from the pessimistic acceptance described above because it is a stronger reaction which elites in some more unequal countries seek to deflate by terming it a “politics of envy” which terminates possibilities for discussion about wealth redistribution. By contrast, in the more egalitarian of hunter-gatherer societies talented people who could dominate a group opt for modesty and groups might use techniques including mockery and expulsion to discourage individuals’ arrogance and self-importance. “A wise and respected hunter who wants to stay respected makes little of his achievements, and builds his reputation instead on generosity and modesty.” (Hughes, 2010a, no page number). The quotation below illustrates the frustration that can arise for injustices that stem from inequality:

“... inequalities that are acquired because there are other shoddy jobs being done besides, like corruption or like the tribalism, like the discrimination, if inequality comes because of this, then I believe it cannot be good because it is bound to bring hatred. I will HATE that that person is not giving me the opportunity to grow, yet I hate the opportunity to grow. I will HATE that political leader that is grabbing the piece of land which should have been made for the hospital. Where I have got the treatment from. So he is getting richer in a crude way, but I am becoming poorer. Inequalities, if they are geographical, but then there is hardly anything you can do, other than try to promote what we have. USE what you have. But if they are cheered in the right way, then as I say, they are healthy. If not, like it is in Kenya, where the rich are getting RICHER and the poor POORER, then no wonder there is a lot of turmoil.”

(Kenya 9, urban boys boarding school)

When discussing the problems of inequality it was clear that some participants had a fundamental problem with inequality *per se*, whereas others were just

perturbed by particular aspects of inequality. Chapter 7 analyses discourses that challenge inequality. Below I identify when an argument in favour of inequality reaches its limit and it is conceded that some aspect of inequality is unacceptable:

“... by examining it (inequality) it implies that it should be equal, I think. Whereas I'm in the fortunate position to be from a wealthy country, then (laugh) I'm quite happy with the way things are. I don't know, you know, that necessarily it should (pause) be equal. It would be nice if people didn't have to live on a dollar a day or anything like that, but we shouldn't all be striving for the same thing ...”

(UK 1, urban trainee teachers)

This trainee teacher³¹ was uneasy about even discussing inequality because, according to him, to even discuss this suggests it is wrong. In saying this he is perhaps referring to the contrasting of inequality and equality, with equality or *égalité* being desirable according to the cultural reference point of the French revolution. It is rare to come across open arguments in favour of inequality, but preference for equality of opportunities and meritocracy could be interpreted as more subtle arguments in favour of distributional inequality. This trainee teacher is uneasy about the argument he is making, and he laughs before saying he's happy with world inequality or “the way things are” and pauses mid-statement when talking about whether we would want equality. As such it is unclear whether his distaste for severe poverty is a concession to others listening, intended to make his discussion more palatable, or a sincere preference for a reduction in severe poverty. Phrasing this in terms of “it would be nice if” suggests this is not a strong commitment and he might not go as far as to say this is unacceptable. Saying that we should not all be striving for the same thing implies that some should be rich but not others.

The attitude that living on less than 1 dollar a day, dying from easily curable diseases, or not having enough to eat symbolises unacceptable inequality is concerned only with the poorest in society. Instead of the poor being “always

³¹ This is a different participant to the earlier UK 1 quotation under this sub-heading.

with us”, poverty is now something that is accepted only in the most distant places (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.149). The focus on poverty avoids the issue of inequality and overlooks the simultaneous excesses of wealthy and affluent groups, and how those on comfortable or modest incomes fit in. Existing extremes are unnecessary contemporary features of the existing world order precisely because of inequality: we can afford to share more. Relatively small ameliorative measures costing 1% of global product could eradicate world poverty (Pogge, 2008b, p.264). Those of us in richer parts of the world would hardly notice the difference and billions of people would have slightly better lives. Extreme poverty could become unacceptable, both discursively and in practice worldwide.

6.6 *The functional “necessity” of inequality*

Here I focus solely on those approaches that posit inequality as a functional necessity in the sense that the world would not “work” without inequality. I also identify what inequality is necessary for, a question originally addressed by Émile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.49). I have identified two main arguments for the necessity of inequality. Firstly, groups rely on each other in ways that they would not without inequality. One type of reliance is that poorer groups / countries are described as depending on richer groups / countries for support, especially financial support. Another reliance is the richer groups buying labour and services from poorer groups, which maintain their lifestyles. This mutual dependency could be portrayed as functional however some participants pointed out its flaws. Secondly, inequality is seen as a motivator that encourages hard work and high aspirations. This is another way in which uneven distributions of wealth and income are presented as key to the functioning of society, and is addressed in section 5.3. Here I focus on dependence.

In many of the discussion groups there was a sense that inequality underpins a somewhat symbiotic relationship between groups within a society or between countries. This echoes the Durkheimian “society as organism” (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.49), which itself reinforces the idea of inequality being natural as detailed in section 5.4. Described in other terms: “one of the few ways of “holding” someone is to keep up a lasting asymmetrical relationship such as

indebtedness” (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.195). Thus people are bound into relationships of dependency because they rely on the other group providing for them what they “need”. Unequal distributions of wealth can be interpreted as necessary because they inspire enterprise and aspiration, and also fulfil needs: “I don’t think inequality is also bad, because the others need the other” (Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school). Elsewhere inequality was presented as a necessity for allocating jobs and ultimately to ensure that others are available to do less desirable jobs. The arguments above echo Milton Friedman’s idea that there is a natural rate of unemployment that balances wage rates with labour supply, so, Friedman argues, monetary controls can do little to alter levels of unemployment in the long term (Friedman, 1968, p.8-14).

“Without inequality, I mean I, we would, we would all be the same, we’d all be the same [yes] who’s going to do, you know, different types of jobs, [yes] you know, what it is that you aspire to.

Actually that’s a REALLY good point, like in Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, everyone’s actually, so what they do is they actually engineer people so that they are equal [particularly] because if you have an entire society made up of incredibly bright, intelligent but no body, no body wants to clean the toilets.

Quite

Yeah

And that

Well I think that’s it really isn’t it, and society, and economy need [Yeah.] variation.

Yeah but

See in intelligence and in the things, in the things that, well lets face it, you want inequality in intelligence so that you can con some people into cleaning the toilets [raucous laughter]

I mean my mum is a cleaner and she gains, she is honestly one of the people who is most satisfied with her job.”

(UK 6, urban private girls school)

In the quotation above assumed differences in intelligence justify some people doing undesirable jobs, with toilet cleaning being the epitome of a bad job. The assertion that people are coned into toilet cleaning because of lower intelligence positions them as partly responsible for their employment situation. Seeing poverty as a personal defect avoids questioning the legitimacy of the state and economy (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.151). It is implied that

intelligence gives you the right not to undertake undesirable jobs. This interpretation assumes meritocracy to be working smoothly, so intelligence and hard work are thought to influence the job someone gets more than the family socio-economic background. The supposedly appropriate allocation of people to jobs is further approved of in the comment that one teacher's mother is particularly satisfied working as a cleaner. The message is that inequality usefully allocates people to jobs and enables everyone to make a contribution to society, and the people doing less desirable jobs may be even content with this (this bears similarities with the trope of the happy poor in section 5.4).

In other conversations however this mutual dependency has been presented less idyllically. There is a prevalent idea that poorer countries depend on the West, but the West is dependent on the relationships it has with poorer countries. Foreign aid constitutes only a small reverse flow, which doesn't offset the flow of cheap goods to richer countries. Further, gifts, following the conception of foreign aid as a gift, are complicated by politics and feelings of owing someone something (Mawdsley, unpublished). A brief aside in a wider discussion notes that "(a gift which is not matched by a counter-gift creates a lasting bond, restricting the debtor's freedom and forcing him to adopt a peaceful, co-operative, prudent attitude)" (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.194). Not only does such a gift entail certain behaviour, it may not be what recipients would choose for themselves:

"But it's been so hard for African countries to depend just on themselves, because for business for example they have to make a certain deal with the Western countries for them to do business, for them to, develop. So it's been African countries depending mostly on Western countries. So you have to beg or steal to get what you want. It's like you're being ruled by that person, so that's what is happening. Actually Africans don't get what they want, they get what that other country feels they can give them."

(Kenya 6, NGO-funded slum primary)

The main point is that this mutual dependency does not work equally well for everybody given the asymmetry of the power relations. Durkheim describes different roles, implicitly with different power, as the basis of friendship: "... this one advises, that one follows that advice ..." (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.56). However, as the quote above details, some people have needs that are not addressed when others *rule* over them. Thus whilst there is some dependency

in the sense that the needs of some are met by others and collectively tasks are carried out which benefit society, not all participants presented inequality as *working*. The necessity of inequality was premised on maintaining trade, divisions of labour and one's position in society. It is a truism that for these things to stay the same the organization of society should not change, and the assumption is that it is preferable for things to stay as they are. The quotation below, a direct continuation of the words from the same group earlier in this section, attests to my interpretation that inequality is seen as necessary to the existing socio-economic order.

“If we are all equal maybe a country like Japan with resources, where are they going to sell their goods? Because you can only sell what you don't have, or what you have to get what you don't have. If everybody had his own thing I don't know how the world economy would behave. It might be difficult, if you were all maybe able to manufacture weapons, where and how would we get the exchange? I think there are also times it (inequality) is good, it helps the world be what it is.”

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

In this quotation the argument goes that inequality is necessary for trade, because if we all had what we needed we wouldn't trade. Thus trade becomes the end in itself rather than the means to people getting what they need. Trade can earn foreign exchange however the benefit of this rests on the terms and balance of trade. Between 1980 and 2001, 126 of 200 territories experienced a decline in terms of trade, including Kenya and Mexico. The UK had the same terms of trade at the beginning and end of this period (SASI and Newman, 2006). This argument is based on an acceptance of how the world is and recognition that inequality is part of that. In the UK some participants expressed the view that whilst inequality has some undesirable elements, there are benefits including cheap clothes in the UK, which, they reported, “people want”. Yet wanting something such as cheap clothing, even if lots of people want it, does not justify having it irrespective of consequence. Inequality is instrumental in maintaining certain aspects of modern day life that are presented as either necessary or as fulfilling people's wants.

“Saying good things to inequality is difficult because they're WRONG but at the same time you've got things like cheap clothing that people ... you know they want cheap clothing. And I know it's wrong to say, but due to

inequality we do get cheaper clothes and things. And it feels wrong but then it's there, it's a fact. [interruption] So you have got things like cheap clothing and markets as well because whatever we have technology they then later on have a new market, so India and places like that are just coming after the world market things, like Nike.”

(UK 1, urban trainee teachers)

That inequality leads to a balance between the rich and poor was argued in a Mexican group (below) and Kenyan (Kenya 8, rural government school). Balance implies stability so seems desirable. That poor people are needed for there to be rich people acknowledges the relativity of these positions, which is captured by thinking in terms of inequality. The argument below that inequality is needed and that rich and poor are necessary is based on the supposed social equilibrium that stems from this:

“... that there will always be people with a lot of money from night and day, others who will always be poor. Because it is a balance, there have to be poor people and there have to be rich people. I believe this is necessary that there are rich and poor ...”

(Mexico 4, urban government school)

6.7 *Synthesis: the functional necessity of inequality*

This chapter makes the argument that inequality has socially and individually damaging effects that are acknowledged in various forms. It also presents evidence of a widespread dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the world. The social damage is a divided society with reduced interaction, one-way respect and limited empathy between groups. There are also damaging psychological effects of being relatively powerless over one's own life, and health problems due to malnutrition, and other detrimental yet solvable issues.

The argument claiming inequality as necessary to the functioning of society persists. This takes a Durkheimian slant of emphasising the mutual dependence of members of society. The conservative perspective advocated by some participants is that it would be undesirable to reduce inequality much, because it helps the world be what it is. However none of the participants explicitly argued for increasing inequality. The division of labour and lives means that inequalities appear necessary because they do underpin who we are in relation to others, what we can do, and where we can go, in various ways. Explained differently, “... classed categorizations provide discursive

frameworks which enable, legitimate and map onto material inequalities. Class conceptualizations are tautological in that positioning by categorizations and representation influence access to economic and cultural resources.” (Skeggs, 1997, p.5). Because living unequally is so central to our geographically dispersed contemporary lives, it seems indispensable.

I aimed to show the extent to which inequalities are presented as necessary to the social order, which raises questions about the threshold between making conservative amendments to existing arrangements or more radical restructuring. Small adjustments to ameliorate the worst extremes of poverty are reasonable undertakings even to those who interpret inequality to be a functional necessity. In the next chapter I discuss attitudes that are more critical of inequality and the ways in which they challenge the status quo.

7. Alternative discourses of inequality

“Despite the best intentions of powerful elites to create the discursive and legislative conditions necessary to privatize natural resources and enroll individuals into the market economy as wage laborers, people resist, policies go awry, and contradictions emerge.”

Sundberg, 2007, p.269

7.1 Introduction

In this penultimate chapter I present ways in which inequality is challenged. This involves the ways in which research participants think and talk about inequality, and also other actions that they engage in. I have shown in earlier chapters how conservative discourses bolster inequality and create the illusion that “there is no alternative” (Watts, 2007, p.275). Nevertheless many argue against these neoliberal approaches from their various standpoints around the world (see: Polet, 2007). It has been argued that now is a moment of possibility for positive change: “this global crisis offers a greater opportunity than we have had for some time now to restructure economic relations in a more democratic and sustainable way” (Ghosh, 2010, no page number). At this moment of flux the values of the system within which we live are called into question more than usual. In this chapter I identify challenges to the discursive obstacles to addressing the social wrong of inequality (Fairclough, 2009, p.167), in answering:

Question 6: *In what ways is inequality challenged in everyday life?*

Following a literature summary, I consider how society and inequality can be conceptualised to make evident the causes and impacts of inequality. This involves a more holistic framing of society, thinking how the problems of inequality and responsibility for inequality connect individuals to a wider society. Thinking holistically also means seeing links between practices to recognise how inequality aggravates other social problems, and to consider wealth as well

as poverty to be problematic. To contemplate at a larger scale means specifying the economic orders of neoliberal and colonial capitalism which are central to understanding the generation and maintenance of inequality. Lastly, framing inequality in ethical terms and voicing emotional reactions and objections to inequality can constitute strong challenges.

In terms of action that people undertake in their daily lives towards greater equality, several proposals were generated through the discussion groups. Firstly, discussion of alternatives, of utopias, is one way to find a direction for change even if we are unlikely to actually reach the endpoint. Financial transfers, between individuals or countries, were seen as a solution by some, and as an inadequate form of compensatory politics by others. Talking about inequality also makes it possible to challenge assumptions and to have a broader dialogue of ideas and subtleties, with less reliance on stereotypes or incomplete reasoning. Respectful interaction presents a major challenge to inequalities; respecting others communicates that we are fundamentally equal and can counteract some other inequalities. Overall this chapter offers a positive approach to the ways in which inequality can be addressed in our everyday thinking and interactions. These proposals, generated from discussion with people in Kenya, Mexico and the UK, show widespread and ongoing opportunities to contest inequalities.

In this chapter I draw considerably on the words of one participant from UK 4 (urban retired teachers), for whom I will use the alias *Alison*. She speaks strongly against inequality and challenges broadly accepted views of what is bad about inequality. Alison explains her involvement with work on inequality / equality as follows: “I was just sort of born into it really. I had parents who were desperately interested in all this stuff”. When asked how much she spoke about inequality she replied “I talk about it one hell of a lot”, then her friend added: “because your life is based around it”. She agreed: “most of my life [laughs] is one way or another, both within my family and with colleagues and people with whom I work on equality related issues”. Part of the work that she refers to is her membership of a political party. Alison is unambiguous about inequality being bad and why it is bad, so her argument holds a central place in this

chapter. Alison's voice is prioritized because she is particularly articulate and represents the most clearly developed critical approach expressed in these discussion groups. It is therefore appropriate to bring her ideas to the fore when detailing ways in which inequality is challenged.

Whilst I prioritize Alison's voice in this chapter, it is important to note that she is not alone in her anti-inequality stance. Other voices that are critical of inequality are cited throughout this thesis: an older man from Mexico 6 (rural government school) and a younger man from Kenya 6 (NGO funded slum primary) were also particularly vocal against inequality. Challenges to the unequal status quo were *more* common amongst participants in Mexico and Kenya than the UK, probably because they and their compatriots experience more immediately observable and damaging aspects of inequality and so publicly challenging inequality is more acceptable. The Pew Survey shows that amongst the majority of respondents worldwide who are dissatisfied with "how things are going in the world", the growing gap between rich and poor is their biggest concern (see Table 2 in Section 3.5).

Alison is an articulate spokeswoman in her criticisms of inequality. However, within the UK Alison's position as a middle class woman over the age of 60 fits the trend that older people are more politically interested and active (e.g. voting), and generally more supportive of increases in taxation to enable greater health, education, and social benefit spending (Park, 2000, p.9 &15; Bromley and Curtice, 2002, p.159-60). This is within the wider context that at least between 1986 and 1994 most people wanted to taxes to be raised in order to increase health, education and social benefit spending. With regards to *who* should be taxed, in 1994 there was general support for progressive taxation (Taylor-Gooby, 1995, p.3 & 15). These views show concern for societal well-being and broad support for the type of social policies that tackle inequalities, this is compatible with Alison's position. Some of these anti-inequality views are coalescing as the *Equality Trust*, with local groups emerging around the world (see section 8.3 and The Equality Trust, 2010).

7.2 Literature: other possible worlds

What people talk about and express concern about influences political agendas, especially if they are in powerful positions. The Bangladeshi ruling elites, for example, give limited support for a universal welfare state which was thought to be just for richer countries, and prefer trickle-down or targeted redistribution (Reis and Moore, 2005b, p.19). This preference, particularly in a powerful group, helps shape policy. Similarly, aspirations influence behaviour and collective outcomes. It is argued that it is necessary to think not just about individuals' aspirations, which have been "impoverished by contemporary excesses", but about our shared aspirations for society (Creegan, 2008, p.10). Thinking in terms of society could make debate and policy responses more holistic and help to overcome the impact of divisions of labour on making the conscience more obscure and refractory to change "because it does not perceive quickly enough the necessity for changing nor in what sense it must change" (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.52).

The apparent self-evidence of social systems (doxa) can discourage the critique of these systems (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.164). Crisis, such as we are currently experiencing, can encourage the questioning of this self-evidence; in David Harvey's terms "the irrationality of capitalism becomes plain for all to see" (Harvey, 2010b, p.215). Yet crisis is not necessarily enough to generate critical discourse (Bourdieu, 1972/2009, p.169). In fact, the ways in which people who are dominated by others are complicit in their own domination, is itself an aspect of that domination to the extent that their thinking is manipulated (Bourdieu, 1996 p.4). Yet this domination is not complete and people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds challenge neoliberalism. Whilst reducing inequality won't be easy, it is not impossible:

"It will require the north to reduce its consumption of scarce resources and carbon emissions ... It will require the global elite, spread across both developed and developing worlds, to curb extravagant lifestyles. It will require wage shares of national income to rise from their current very low proportions, with corresponding declines in the shares of profits and interest. And it will require governments in the powerful developed countries to recognise that they can no longer call the shots in all important international decisions" (Ghosh, 2008a, no page number).

Talking in a way that makes it clear that there are solutions to the problems we face, as Jayati Ghosh does above, has clearly overcome forms of denial that exist. Yet Karl Marx suggested that those who consider general emancipation to be necessary or achievable are forced to by their immediate circumstances and material conditions (Marx, 1844-/1911, p.182). Denying the possibility for change fits in with other strategies of avoiding acknowledging inequality as a problem. Stanley Cohen has identified four main ways in which people might do this. This chapter refers to these themes of denial (below), identifying ways in which denial is countered by talking candidly about inequality, engaging emotionally with the topic, taking a moral stand, and engaging in actions against inequality.

1. Cognitive denial avoids acknowledgment of the facts.
2. Emotional denial, resistance to being emotionally disturbed by this information. A case has been made for embracing empathy in a rethinking of our institutions (Rifkin, 2010).
3. Moral denial means not recognising wrongness or responsibility for something.
4. Lastly, not taking active steps in response to knowledge of something objectionable.

(Cohen, 2000, p.9).

Some people do take a stand against the status quo even when it's not in their immediate interests, because of a conviction of what is the right thing to do. This challenges Marx's explanation of the locus of emancipation above. Such people include those who hid Jews from the Nazis, the suffragettes, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj* was written by Gandhi reportedly because of his urge to communicate his ideas about self-government, non-violence, and to reflect on the dangers of modern civilisation; the manuscript was written in just ten days on board a ship (Parel, 2005, p.xiv-xv). Gandhi's response takes a moral stance, motivated by a sense of injustice. Moral values are subject to change, which may come about through reflection or discussion (Smith, 2000, p.1). This flexibility of morals means they may be altered through discussion.

Taking a moral stand against the evils of poverty, identified as "hunger and communicable diseases, child labor and prostitution, trafficking, and premature death", gives a position from which to critique persistent yet avoidable poverty

in the world and to assess the benefits of growth (Pogge, 2008a, no page number). That these “evils” are avoidable through minor redistribution makes a strong case for action against poverty (note that Thomas Pogge’s main concern is poverty, not inequality). Another argument is that just focusing on poverty and disease eradication overlooks the importance of the “slow changing of minds of the now poor and diseased” through rejuvenating education systems that were devastated by colonialism (Spivak, 2008, p.43). Yet it is not just the poor who would benefit from particular types of education, or just the colonized who suffered. The colonizers and their descendents also suffer from a misplaced sense of superiority.

The moral objection to inequality results in a call for debate and a duty to promote change: “we have a duty to change our mode of thinking ... it's not going to revolutionise anything but nevertheless it's a necessary condition for some revolutionary change to occur” (Harvey, 2010a, no page number). A discussion about social virtues, to complement the existing discussion of social evils, is proposed as part of such a change in our mode of thinking (Thake, 2008, p.7); discussion of replacements, alternatives, utopias and exchanging the international economic regime for a “better model” (Corbridge, 2004, p.192; Heynen et al., 2007, p.291; Ghosh, 2008b); and clarifying what barriers poorer people face thus enhancing understanding could encourage broader support for tackling inequality (Bamfield and Horton, 2009, p.49).

Marx phrases this in terms of forming a “radical chain”; forming a social group into which classes dissolve, with a universal character based on shared *human* status and its opposition to wrong in general (Marx, 1844-/1911, p.182). Thinking in terms of responsibility as some essential part of being human rather than the role of one particular group, and acting on this, is advocated (Spivak, 2008, p.26); albeit with the warning that there is no formula for responsibility (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010, p.121). Some of these calls for change are directed at academics, yet there are possibilities for altering social realities within everyday life. Social collectives adopt and mix philosophies with a general aim of rejecting the individualised self in preference for a socialised self (Chatterton and Gordon, 2004; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010, p.479-480).

“Wherever people engage in social activity, they reflexively produce representations of it and of their own place within it; these representations may (given certain social conditions) be consolidated and stabilized as diverse shared discourses, and they may include imaginaries for possible alternative forms of social activity, and may (always subject to particular social conditions) come to be part of strategies for social change.” (Fairclough, 2006, p.163).

This continual production of representations of social reality enables us to alter the representations that we repeatedly produce at any point. “Being simultaneously against, within and after capitalism means that the everyday becomes the terrain where our politics are fought for and worked at” (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010, p.488). Many groups prefer not to define themselves in oppositional terms, preferring to be accessible to new members and wider society (*ibid.*). This contrasts with the approach that Marx and Engels took; with specific reference to Karl Marx: “Governments, both absolutist and republican, deported him from their territories. Bourgeois, whether conservative or ultra-democratic, vied with one another in heaping slanders upon him.” (Engels, 1883/1962 p.168). This chapter focuses on strategies for discursive change, which could result in social change; this reimagining should not result in deportation. These critical representations of social reality co-exist with and respond to more conservative discourse about inequality.

7.3 Refocusing on inequality

Below I document ways in which inequality can be framed that are critical and challenge the dominant arguments that bolster inequality. This includes thinking holistically, considering how wealth as well as poverty is a problem, the unoriginal but effective strategy of naming capitalism and colonialism as forces shaping the world and reflecting on their merits, and engaging the ethical and emotional objections to inequality. These are not new ideas and I use the term *refocusing* to distinguish these approaches from those delineated in chapters 5 and 6, and to mean looking again at inequality. Reframing “common sense” is the first hurdle for radical political programmes, and has been broadly achieved by others interested in social change such as the feminists of the nineteenth century and gay rights, environmental and anti-racist movements of the twentieth century (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.153). What the big social struggles of the twenty-first century will be remains to be seen.

Thinking holistically

Thinking holistically about society and its processes can overcome some of the concealment of ideas surrounding social practices. Inequality is an inherently holistic concept because it looks at distributions across an entire population, be it within a city, country or the world. Thinking holistically can connect practices to the wider society and longer histories in which they fit; indicate interrelations between practices; and make visible conflicts of interest between subjects (after Urry, 1981, p.61). Changing the terms and framing of discussions of poverty (and inequality) can alter the questions we ask and the causes identified (Barford, 2009, p.218). Recent work shows that inequality is bad for the rich as well as the poor (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), which means that for most people greater equality is in their own self-interest as well as being preferable on moral grounds and for societal well-being.

Here I focus on the views of Alison, a participant from the UK with a particularly strong interest in inequality. As I showed above, Alison represents a small but vocal minority in arguing that inequality diminishes us as human beings. For her, seeing someone searching for food in a bin makes *her* life worse; she sees herself as part of this degrading distribution. This forefronts connectivity between people in recognising that we are influenced by the state of others' lives, challenging the idea that poverty is just bad for the poor. When speaking her voice rose and she was irate when making the point that "MY life is worse". Inequality damages people throughout society.

"If the problem is inequality, which I think it is, you can't just look at the third world and say, you know, 'we've got to do something about the third world'. No, we've got to do something about the first world and the second world as well. Because they're, for me, they're equally problematic. My, if I, if I have to walk through Manchester and see somebody scrabbling around in the dustbin to find food, MY life is worse. I mean I know that their life is worse (said fast), but my life is worse. We've got to get to recognise that."

(Alison, retired urban teacher)

This broad focus on the problems of richer countries as well as poorer countries, and on the impacts of inequality on those who are well-off,

encourages discussion around the broader impacts of inequality. She self-consciously contests widely held ideas and juxtaposes her own opinion against these with a defiant “no”. By looking at the whole world, and the whole of society, she acknowledges that groups do not exist in isolation from one another. Often socio-economic groups or countries are discursively treated as being sealed units; discourse that posits groups in relation to others challenges this. Alison’s approach does not blame the rich but considers how they also suffer from inequality. Another time she provides more detail about why the wealthy are badly off:

“You know there’s a level at which I want to resist the talk that goes, you know, ‘look at us, aren’t we so wealthy, aren’t we well off, compared to all these other people who are poor,’ because, because I think we are badly off. We are badly off because we have more than others. [Yes!] Inequality is BAD for human beings. It’s bad for their life to have more than others. It’s not that we are better off, we could only be described as better off if we thought that success means having more than the next person. Which I don’t. I, I, the problem is the gap. That’s what I see, the problem is the gap.”

(Alison, retired urban teacher)

In rejecting what is portrayed as a smug and patronising approach to others, Alison argues that having more is not necessarily normatively good. On the contrary she makes the case that having more is bad for us. Although she does not go into detail here about why it is bad for some to have more than others, others have also made similar arguments. For example the Pāli Canon in Buddhism rejects wealth in preference for simplicity and ‘religious poverty’ (Fenn, 1996); others have questioned how much wealth is deserved (Rowlingson and Connor, forthcoming). Being overly concerned with external verification of one’s success in terms of material items and others’ approval does not lead to fulfilment, but just to an ever greater need for yet more of that approval (James, 2007). Alison also makes this point: success is not to do with having more. As in the previous passage, she is definite in her disagreement, using a short “which I don’t” to punctuate her speech. Another reason that having more than others is not fulfilling is because it isolates people from one another, partly due to not understanding one another’s circumstances (Cohen, 2009, p.35). One solution is to refocus ourselves not on having, but on being (James, 2007).

By identifying *the* problem as being the gap between those that have and those without, this argument takes a holistic approach. In other groups a similar approach was expressed: “But structural differences make these terrible differences between us ...” (Mexico 3, urban poor area). At another point, Alison argues “But it’s structural, it’s the system. It’s what this terrible economic system that we’ve got ourselves living in does to us all, to all of us.” To point out that we are all suffering from these differences makes a strong case for change that could appeal to the public more broadly.

In the following section I follow up this point, that the contrast of wealth and poverty is found by several groups to be unacceptable. First I turn to another element of thinking holistically: shared responsibility.

Taking collective responsibility for inequality, in terms of our discourse and other actions, recognises that social arrangements are constituted and altered by people, rather than being fixed features. One participant phrased the problem in collective terms: “we’re failing and need to do something about it. Um.” (UK 7, rural private school). Note the use of “we”, rather than “they” or “I”; social arrangements are a shared project. Responsibility is not limited to those in power: “responsibility is not what the fitter have to the more needy, but is an essential part of being human” (Spivak, 2008, p.26). Gayatri Spivak’s approach that we share responsibility contrasts with patronising and paternalistic ideas about the rich looking after the poor. This inclusive approach was shown in Mexico, albeit in a defeatist tone: “Everyone has to resolve it but no one does anything.” (Mexico 2, urban trainee teachers). Section 7.4 illustrates some ways in which people act against inequality.

A third element of holistic thinking is seeing the connections between practices (Urry, 1981, p.60-1). Seeing how inequality is linked to other social problems stresses how the solving of inequality could have considerable benefits. Emphasising this connectivity shows how inequality is an important issue to tackle. As one participant stated: “This is something that bothers me a lot, and impassions me a lot, that there is so much inequality, above all in economic terms, because correcting these things can correct much more.” (Mexico 6,

rural government school). Here inequality is described as a large problem and something that personally aggravates the teacher who is speaking. He speaks positively, in terms of what could happen, about correcting inequality rather than focusing on problems. This positive thinking contrasts with ideas that there is no possibility of change, and portrayals of individuals as just passive witnesses.

The problem of wealth

It is common for poverty and inequality to be conflated, which illustrates how inequality is sometimes interpreted to be a problem of poverty. However, the wealthy and elites are also crucial segments of society for understanding the nature of inequality and how it is socially divisive. The rich as a group are under-researched, in contrast to the poor who are arguably over-researched (Rowlingson, 2010). There are more barriers to access and there is more privacy about earnings in the higher income / wealth groups, which is perhaps one reason for directing the researcher's gaze at the poor. Given the power of elites in commanding positions within national institutions, such as politics, bureaucracy, military, police, media, education, and religion, their views strongly influence society (Reis and Moore, 2005b, p.2). It is argued that if elites see neither threat nor opportunity in the poor, they are likely to be indifferent towards them (Swaan, 2005, p.184). Elites are important for the decisions they make and because of their wealth; the latter is discussed below.

A prominent voice in discussions of poverty and inequality, Amartya Sen, commented: "obviously richness is a pretty good thing in many ways". The word *obviously* usually flags up an assumption not to be taken as self-evident. Sen continues: "you may be quite rich personally and live in an area infested with epidemics, and and crime, and terrorism." (Sen, 2010, no page number). A similar attitude came from UK 7 (rural private school): "even if you're one of the ones who is wealthier, I still think that brings you disadvantage, whether that's more crime in your area". There might be fewer epidemics, less crime, and lower anger, were wealth not concentrated amongst a few. The concentration of wealth amongst a few will make life more difficult for the rest of society, being sold unattainable aspirations to be like the wealthy, living without basic services because they are privatised, feeling unfairly treated and disrespected (see

previous chapter). This less pleasant landscape lies beyond the protected homes of the wealthy and can generate unease (an unease also observed by James, 2007). In some discussion groups wealth was seen as being a more central part of the problem of inequality:

“Anna: What would you say that um the bad things are about inequality?

Well, at the lowest level, starvation.

Alison: That’s poverty. (said quietly)

Oh yeah, well

Alison: I do think that we have to distinguish between poverty and inequality.

Well, poverty is one of the bad things of inequality.

Alison: Well, what about richness being one of the bad things of inequality?”

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

The passage above demonstrates how poverty being the bad part of inequality is a commonly held position; the suggestion that richness might also be a problem was met with quietness from others in the group, followed by refocusing on poverty as the problem of inequality. It seems that talking about poverty is a more comfortable, well-rehearsed topic than the problems of wealth. Thus the discussion groups and academic research both pay more attention to the problems of poverty than those of wealth (Rowlingson, 2010). Perhaps one reason is that being well-off oneself it is easier to bemoan the fact that others are poor than suggest having less money oneself. This bears a similarity to environmental hyperopia, where problems are understood to be distant and thus come with less individual responsibility for change (Uzzell, 2000, p.314). In response to the question of richness being a bad thing about inequality, perhaps it is no surprise that it was the school in a Nairobi slum that was the other group, along with Alison, most ready to challenge wealth:

“And why are we living in this situation while the other people have enough so that they can even throw it? Like the politicians who come with the helicopter and just throws money [giggles]”

(Kenya 6, NGO-funded slum primary teachers)

Conspicuous wealth is a visible target for a critique of inequality, particularly when it involves throwing money from a helicopter over a slum. This teacher

challenges why some should be so rich whilst he and others are living in a slum. Such “ostentatious flamboyance” shows “ability to nourish clientelistic networks”, in contrast to the Nordic political elite who adopt “conspicuous modesty” to show their “humble devotion to the public” (Daloz, 2007, p.200-1). It is telling that in more equal countries there is less parading of wealth and richness is not seen as such an *obviously* good thing. Elsewhere the question of desert (deservingness) often applied to the poor, has been asked of the rich. Much of the wealth of the rich is not ‘deserved’ in the sense of being earned, although even earning a very high salary does not mean one deserves it. Instead much wealth comes from inheritance and the social and cultural capital of family backgrounds (Rowlingson and Connor, forthcoming). The most objectionable thing about wealth identified by research participants is the luxury and opulence of some whilst others suffer from not having enough. Feelings of injustice are accentuated when wealth is not deserved.

“It is a terrible thing that X person has hundreds of millions of dollars or pesos or euros, or whatever it might be, and this person doesn’t have enough to buy food for today!”

(Mexico 6, rural government school)

Seeing wealth as a necessary topic of discussion and research moves beyond inequality being framed as a problem of poverty, to one of distribution. It also renders questionable the desire for ever greater wealth, which could help gain greater support for redistribution. Although wealth as a problem was not a major topic of conversation, it is something that, at least in Britain, has been increasingly challenged since the financial crisis.

Naming capitalism, remembering colonialism

To overlook the wider social, economic, political and historical context in which events occur *isolates* social practices from the surrounding meaning (Urry, 1981, p.60-1). *Nominalization* or the naming of something, such as capitalism, simplifies the categorical component of the sentence and so allows the lexicon, the description of that subject, to be enriched (Chomsky, 1970, p.185). This enables us to discuss causes, effects and alternatives to the system within which we live in a way that would be much harder if words like capitalism and neoliberalism did not exist. Having a name for this enables us to put it at the

heart of discussions and facilitates statements such as neoliberalism “is in need of replacement” (Heynen et al., 2007, p.291). The word capitalist also allows an oppositional position, anti-capitalist, as there is something to struggle against. Many contemporary problems can be attributed to capitalism in some way, and perhaps “[a]ny sensible person right now would join an anti-capitalist organisation” (Harvey, 2010a, no page number). However nominalization also runs the risk of reifying something; when a noun stands for capitalism what capitalism actually is, or anti-capitalism for that matter (see: Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), may be less interrogated to the extent that it could be named and then even forgotten about (Jackson, 2010).

Capitalism was only mentioned in 10 of the 24 groups, despite our focus on world inequality, with almost-global capitalism being the context in which this occurs. In the UK capitalism was used as a factual description of an arrangement, but capitalism does not regularly come up in conversation in the UK. When Mexican participants spoke about capitalism they challenged this system and acknowledged capitalism as a cause of various problems. In Kenya, capitalism was contrasted to mutually supportive historic socialist arrangements. Generally the term *capitalism* is used by its critics, almost as though to name it is to criticise it. Alison reasons that it is capitalism rather than individuals, such as Fred Goodwin, the former head of the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, nicknamed *Fred the Shred*, which should be criticized:

“... one of the things that I find myself talking about and often being held down, I mean but I still talk about it, is that I think that the way in which Fred the Shred is sort of pilloried is absolutely wrong. There’s no excuse at all, you know for pointing to a particular human being and saying you know, ‘isn’t he bad, isn’t he wicked?’ He is a product of the system that we live in, and you know, he’s the sort of product that stands out as a very big sore thumb.”

(Alison, retired urban teacher)

Alison argues that instead of blaming individuals for their particular actions one should look at the system. Her point was that individuals are motivated and rewarded by the system within which they live, which will encourage certain types of behaviour. Fred Goodwin was publicly blamed for almost destroying

one of Britain's biggest banks, the Royal Bank of Scotland, and retired on a huge pension of £700,000 per year, which was subsequently reduced following public protest (BBC, 2010). Alison acknowledges that her approach of evaluating the system rather than criticising individuals is often rejected by others. Her approach avoids damaging social cohesion by isolating people through criticism of their actions. Thinking of the system that we collectively constitute is more likely to lead to generalised responsibility and generalised challenges to this system. This is in line with Marx's proposal of not looking for redress to a particular wrong, but responding to *wrong in general* (Marx, 1844-1911, p.182). Ultimately, this is more generative than the debate ending with the naming, blaming and shaming of one person.

Those Mexican groups that spoke about capitalism attributed inequality and poverty to this economic arrangement, commenting: "if we continue to be capitalist we will keep inequalities" (Mexico 2, urban trainee teachers) and "Poverty is part of the mechanism of capitalism." (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). Thus inequality is seen as a necessary outcome of capitalism and uneven development is described as a geographical expression of the contradictions of capitalism (Smith, 1984/1990, p.4). Another Mexican group identified that the values of this system do not prioritise societal goods: "The economic system is managed in this way: first individual well-being, then collective well-being" (Mexico 6, rural government school). Thinking in terms of capitalism and what values and distributions it promotes allows an assessment of the merits and consequences of this system. Seeing capitalism as liable contrasts with more mainstream interpretations that show capitalist globalisation as not responsible for its effects and something we need to adapt to (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.140). Phrasing capitalism as a cause which should be answerable to critique might lead to some modifications.

Kenyan participants highlight the individualistic nature of capitalist values. Capitalism, to them, is seen as encouraging selfishness and individualism; this contrasts with idealised pre-capitalist and pre-colonial times, when people shared with their wider families and communities. Described as communism, in the first quotation below, this presents an idyllic picture of people working together towards a common goal. Capitalism is featured as being introduced,

by colonialism, to a more communally minded society. It is presented as a remnant of colonialism that contributes to contemporary inequality, as well as the processes of colonialism themselves generating inequality.

“... if I may add to what she is saying, er you see, the African set, setting of things, is that it was was er communism, that er society where we live all of us together all of us for the same goal, but today it's capitalism, everybody works for himself, me and my er, er nuclear family, I'm working hard to accumulate wealth to educate my children, NOT my brother's children. Not my neighbours' children ...”

(Kenya 8, rural government school)

“Look at the way Kenya got its independence, we inherited a British kind of system, and this was a colonial system and so we had our own people come in and continue to perpetuate the system of colonialism and that creates inequality in the country.”

(Kenya 2, high-achieving urban government school)

Likening present neoliberal capitalism to past imperial capitalism, as neo-colonialism, is a device for challenging the system that creates and sustains inequalities in the world. Most of the groups who spoke about colonialism were Kenyan groups (7), the most recently decolonised of the three countries. Just two Mexican and two UK groups spoke about colonialism. It is intriguing that the UK groups, with their country's colonial past of ruling over the biggest empire in history, were not more vocal about this.

Colonialism had some particularly disastrous effects described as *dismembering* Africa, replacing African histories and languages, and separating the elite from the rest. Re-membering Africa thus takes on another meaning, of putting Africa back together after colonialism (wa Thiong'o, 2009). One major aspect of dismembering cited by Kenyan groups was the colonialists taking their resources and leaving them in poverty; note how the Kenyans are passive in this description despite significant Kenyan resistance, particularly the Mau Mau rebellion. European colonialism in Africa is cited as a major explanatory factor of world inequality and African poverty; African countries “are the way that they are because say the whites came, colonised them, took the resources to their countries” (Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school).

Kenya became independent from Britain less than 50 years ago, in 1963. Mexico became independent from Spain precisely 200 years ago, in 1810. There are still 14 British overseas territories, which could be described as remnants of the British Empire. Whilst colonial rule is within living memory for many Kenyans, for Mexicans the independence struggle is further from contemporary consciousness. The proximity of colonialism affects thinking and learning, in the sense that at the beginning of colonialism/capitalism, indigenous teaching systems were often emptied of their social relevance (Spivak, 2008, p.45). Regaining this social relevance takes time, according to Spivak, because the teachers themselves were “maimed” by the educational system that needs changing (*ibid.*, p.49; Spivak, 2002, p.26). That British participants were not particularly forthcoming with conversation about colonialism shows some denial, which is partly institutionalized in the British education system and its curricula.

Thinking about the nature of the system in which we live enables us to reflect on the foundations of that system and consider whether these foundations are useful. One such reflection is on the idea that higher pay motivates harder work. A review of many studies about what motivates people found that people do not respond particularly well to better pay, to the extent that higher financial rewards can worsen cognitive performance. Instead people work better when they have autonomy over their work and enjoy improving their skills. When there is too much focus on pay this can be a distraction and result in bad products, bad service and unpleasant work environments (Pink, 2010). Capitalism even encourages people to see each other as sources of enrichment or threats to success; both are unpleasant ways to view others (Cohen, 2009, p.40-1).

Ethical and emotional objections

Arguments that inequality is necessary or inevitable often take a mechanistic tone with a subtext that this is a rational approach. Here I argue that ethics are central to the argument against inequality, and that emotional responses to inequality are not irritating distractions but responses to a necessary recognition that inequality is problematic. Emotional reactions signal how inequality disrupts our impulses to care for others, jarring with our sense of justice. When

emotional responses arise they are often suppressed, managed, or dismissed even by the person who is reacting. This is particularly the case in contemporary society (Rifkin, 2010). Denial can take a moral form, where wrongness and responsibility are not recognised; it can also take an emotional form where one is not disturbed by something that is morally wrong (Cohen, 2000, p.9). Below I discuss morals then emotions.

At least half of the groups that participated in this research argued that inequality is negative overall. When asked what was good about inequality it was often stated that there is nothing good about inequality or that inequality is just bad. One participant said, “on the whole inequality is a dreadful thing” (UK 7, rural private school). This condemnation of inequality as undesirable is a strong objection with an ethical and moral dimension; the terms good and bad were included in the phrasing of the question asked. These objections were articulated in terms of some living in luxury whilst others struggle to get by, and social, economic and cultural problems associated with this. One participant mentioned that the rich and poor are treated differently when it comes to rights (Mexico 3, urban poor area). Another, below, expressed how inequality is bad in terms of people not having access to education and health. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 25 & 26, expresses the right to a standard of living adequate for health and elementary education (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

“For me there is nothing good about it (inequality), it means the lack of capacity. It’s different from diversity. Thanks to this, there are people who can’t have education, health, they work to live and eat.”

(Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools)

Discussion around justice, and inequality as an injustice, underline the ethical and moral problems. Using the concept of justice, as in the recent book *Injustice: why social inequality persists* (by Dorling, 2010b), is to use a more explicitly moral term than equality. As chapters 5 and 6 of my thesis show, inequality is argued to be good for several reasons, I am yet to encounter arguments explicitly in favour of injustice. Nevertheless there are plenty of arguments that *do* support injustice albeit less overtly. Other terms, like exploitation, also invoke injustice. One participant asserted “And in fact we are

living in a situation of exploitation of man by man, right? Even now.” (Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools). “Even now” suggests that this participant had hoped for something better by this point in human history. The creation of injustices is seen as bad, partly in and of itself, and partly due to the consequences of injustice: “Social, political and economic injustice can lead to violence and frustration” (Kenya 3, rural Catholic girls boarding school).

Saying inequality is bad or unjust is a strong normative judgement. Associating inequality with other terms, including violence, is a way to challenge it on moral grounds. Mexico Group 2 (urban trainee teachers) when asked whether they use the word inequality or other words, answered: injustice, inequity, intolerance, discrimination and violence. All these words have the same negative tone to them; the first three, like *inequality*, have a preferable opposite: justice, equity and tolerance. To be indiscriminate (*indiscriminado*) has a disapproving tone of being undiscerning, yet its opposite *discrimination* is also negative as it implies unfairness and partiality. Inequality as violence is discussed below:

“Thinking of equivalent words for inequality, I understand it as violence, there is a lot of violence. For example in my case, there are teachers in the school, and I am gay, there are people for example teachers in the classroom that hate us, that don’t accept us. They speak badly about us, that we should die, that we are going to burn placards in the plaza ... So they are not respecting me as a person. It’s a violence, a violence.”
(*raised voice with parts spoken fast, defensively*)

(Mexico 2, urban trainee teachers)

‘Violence’ was said in the context of a participant who commented that sometimes he is not respected because he is gay. This, he said, is violence (*una violencia*). Here, violence was the lack of respect and verbal threat of violent acts, in particular saying that homosexuals should die. Actual physical violence was not reported here, although threats of this were, the word violence meant that intention and severity were communicated. The word ‘violence’ heightens the seriousness of this criticism, because violence implies physicality, pain and intention to cause this. However it also means interfering with personal freedom and undue constraint (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). Violence goes beyond what is acceptable, and is used effectively in the writings of Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 1990), referring to the violence inflicted by French

colonial presence in Algeria. For Fanon violence was problem and solution. Equating inequality to violence ascribes severity to what is happening. This participant spoke fast, in a high pitch, so seemed edgy and defensive, and was emotionally affected by talking about this. Emotional distress, according to psychologist Oliver James, “is best understood as a rational response to sick societies” (in Leith, 2007, no page number). The remainder of this subsection focuses on how emotional engagement can challenge to inequality.

Through time humans have come to empathise with larger and larger groups: from families, to small groups, to religious groups, and up to the level of the nation state. We have come to see increasing numbers of people as somehow part of our extended family in terms of caring about them (Rifkin, 2010). This larger scale of thinking has also been termed an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991). Rifkin asks “is it possible that we could extend our empathy to the entire human race?” He responds: “if it's impossible to imagine that, I don't even see how we're going to make it.” (Rifkin, 2010, no page number). The shrinking of time and space, according to Rifkin, makes empathising with more people at a greater distance easier. Yet some places, such as parts of rural Sudan, have experienced time space expansion in needing to rely on larger and larger areas to meet their subsistence needs (Katz, 2001, p.1224). The time-space compression experienced by many Westerners differs from that of the majority who do not fly or travel abroad, and have limited Internet access.

Rifkin’s argument for empathy extending to the entire biosphere is that empathy is crucial for addressing environmental issues and for the human race. He warns that the repression of empathy, possibly by parenting, education, business and government, leads to other problems, which include narcissism, materialism, violence, and aggression (Rifkin, 2010). So in suppressing normal empathetic reactions to inequality, we are less likely to do something to address inequality, and instead aggravate it by engaging in more individualistic behaviours and undermining social cohesion. Rifkin proposes a rethinking of what we understand to be human nature to include empathic sociability, and a rethinking of institutions (Rifkin, 2010). The value of thinking about and debating alternatives, utopias, is addressed in more depth in section 7.4.

Reactions to inequality vary, and some participants were angry about inequality. In response to the cartograms showing the distribution of people living on over US\$ 200 / day and under US\$ 2 / day, one group commented:

“The extremes
The offensiveness of it ...
Yes.
It’s offensive to see these two [extremes]
It’s insulting
It’s insulting to see this one and this one. What happened?”
(Mexico 6, rural government school)

That inequality is offensive and an insult is an emotionally charged response. These teachers were not talking about something abstract, but something that affects them personally, at least in their emotional reactions. The way they talk makes it clear that they care about inequality and that they think it is unacceptable. When empathy and other emotional responses to injustice are suppressed, as Rifkin suggests is common, this type of statement becomes rare and even considered as rude itself. Mexico was the country where clear statements against inequality were most common. I focus on how UK groups report talking about inequality below in order to see how inequality is challenged in the most discursively conservative country.

Some teachers at times avoided the topic of inequality, finding it, in contrast to those above from poorer countries, too heavy a topic of conversation. There was an undertone that it is somehow distasteful to bring up. Those who did report discussing inequality, noted that talking about “more serious things ... gets depressing”. Someone else from the same group said: “it’s a heavy conversation” (UK 6, urban private girls school). Another said that inequality is not a conversation topic for him and he does not sit around in the pub “putting the world to rights” (UK 3, mixed group). This phrase implies an attitude that talking about solutions to inequality might be inappropriate and a little arrogant or self-righteous. Preferring to avoid inequality as a topic of conversation was more common in the UK compared to in Mexico and Kenya, where inequality was understood as an integral part of everyday life about which discussion could not be avoided. The emotional disengagement of UK groups takes a form of talking little about inequality, rather than talking without internalising.

UK participants were often emotional about inequality when they did speak about it; perhaps being distant from the least acceptable facet of inequality, extreme poverty, allows a more emotional response when it is addressed.

For those who did find inequality a more serious and distressing topic of conversation, there was a clear sense that there were certain *safe* groups to whom they would speak about this. One teacher commented that whether she talks about inequality depends on whom she is with (UK 4, retired urban teachers). Someone else, making the same point, noted that inequality is not a topic of conversation for the staff room or her family (UK 6, urban private girls school). Another from the same group said that she talks about such issues particularly with her friends at choir. To whom one speaks about inequality, as well as how it is spoken about, determines how much talk can challenge inequality. It is possible that those who speak about this are talking to others who are in general agreement rather than raising the issue more widely. This illustrates some participants' concern for the social desirability of their opinions and avoidance of discord. In Alison's case the other participants in that group measure their behaviour against what they consider to be her values (see quotation below); in this case concern for social desirability *could* lead to more radical behaviour and discussions. As such, the small-but-vocal segment of society of which Alison is part is probably influential beyond its own members.

“Um, but I think there are certain societies, certain spheres in which I move, where I would not ATTEMPT to discuss this, in social things such as this, so I don't talk about it very often. You know I certainly wouldn't in other aspects of my social life because it would just create dissent to no purpose. Or perhaps Alison would think I OUGHT to.”

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

I am interested in considering how some participants express their critical approach knowing that they have unconventional views. I have chosen UK groups because in the UK talking about inequality is reported to be a much less frequent occurrence than in Kenya or Mexico. In the UK there is a concern about being utopian or idealistic and even a major voice in studies of inequality, Michael Marmot, when talking about how we can improve society asked: “[d]oes this all sound a bit starry-eyed?” (Marmot, 2004/2005, p.258). Those who

challenge inequality in the UK are often accused of being utopian (Dorling, 2010b, p.3-4), positing utopian thought as negative (which I later discuss).

Alison makes her points in no uncertain terms (see earlier quotations from Alison). The others in this group were deferential to her, and she was ready to correct them and highlight shortcomings in their logic, which could lead to some resentment. The quotation above ends with another speaker from the same group deferring to her about what she *ought* to do. Alison has spent a lot of time arguing for a more equal society, so would be used to making her point in a confident way backed up by a well thought-through moral position. Alison's discursive style is to briskly set others straight, then purposefully redefine the issue. This contrasts markedly with the woman quoted below, the same participant in both quotations, who also objects to inequality:

“But I do have moments when I think ‘god, this is, I cannot live with this, this is awful, how can this be’, you know. And then obviously you do, you’re not actually affected by it, and I think maybe I’m just being a middle class white woman having a little bit of a worry, and then I’ll buy something fairtrade and it will be ok. But you know I do feel it personally to be quite difficult.”

and

“And it sounds very cheesy, but I’m interested in what you say about change, it’s GOT to change, because you can’t tolerate it, it’s not right, and if you don’t teach children about it, it’s unlikely TO change. It’s kind of a twee Miss World answer, but at some level that’s what I think.”

(UK 5, urban private school)

This woman has strong emotional reactions to inequality. During the discussion group she argues against inequality and is committed to working against it. However, she expresses doubt in her own convictions and undermines her perspective using her white middle-class and female position against herself to suggest that she may be more emotional (female) and less in touch with things in the ‘real world’ (white and middle class). Dismissing her feelings as “a little bit of a worry” or a “twee Miss World answer” turns her legitimate misgivings into something minor and, as she hints, silly. She mentions that a quick fix to her distress is buying fairtrade items (see: Jackson, 2006).

Whilst Alison (also a middle-class white woman) may be persuasive, although a little intimidating, the second woman’s opinion might be overlooked given that she expresses little confidence in her reactions and opinions. However,

because she is more amenable to others' ideas, others may be persuaded to discuss their thoughts with her. Embracing emotional reactions and rejections of an unequal system can strengthen positions against inequality when presented as legitimate responses. The internalised de-legitimisation of these responses or its more bolshy alternative can be considered as diffident and defensive reactions to the social context, of avoiding talking about inequality, in which they exist.

7.4 *Everyday challenges to inequality*

This section focuses on ways of being active that arose mainly from the discussion groups, although the final sub-section draws heavily on the wider literature. Firstly the better-off giving money to the worse-off is considered as a method of redistribution. Then the role of debate in changing perceptions and attitudes is discussed, and the importance of interacting in a respectful way across socio-economic divides is shown to be a way of expressing fundamental equality and enhancing mutual understanding. Lastly, thinking about utopias encourages the re-imagining of the world, which gives direction to social change. There are various ways to acknowledge a problem, one is to respond by taking active steps towards change (after Cohen, 2000, p.9). This section identifies some actions against inequality and some limitations to these actions.

Just giving?

One response to inequality is redistribution of money. This is formalised as giving a percentage of income to the poor in several religions as the *zakāt* in Islam, the *dasvand* in Sikhism, and the tithe in Christianity. Redistribution might take the form of giving directly to someone else or giving to a charity of choice. The same happens internationally as a response to inequality between countries, the richer and middle-income ones redistribute to the poorer ones. Middle-income or *postcolonial* donors include Brazil, China, India and South Africa (Mawdsley, unpublished). Whilst some groups advocated donations to charity as a response to inequality and reported instances of themselves doing this, others were more cynical about this as a response. Perhaps the most pessimistic account of aid is as a form of false generosity, produced by an

unjust social order and “nourished by death, despair, and poverty” (Freire, 1970/1990, p.26).

Often those giving to charity commented on the beneficial effect it had on them personally. In the UK richer households are more likely to give to charity; however the proportion of income which is given is greater in poorer households (Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009, p.186). Participants from private schools spoke most about their charitable actions. One teacher had set up a programme to feed poor children in her late mother’s home as a way to remember her mother (Kenya 7, British system private school) and another systematically capped her own income and commented “actually, embarrassingly I don’t do it now, but I felt, I felt a lot better, but I think it was because I’d taken that emotional baggage off” (UK 7, rural private school). Giving was fulfilling as it removed an emotional burden or became a symbol of remembering. For some teachers, particularly in the UK, giving to charity was seen as a way to challenge inequality:

“Obviously people are living in absolute poverty, they don’t have anything, don’t have enough food and other things they need such as water, and obviously that’s not nice and that’s what aid charities are trying to tackle I think.”

(UK 1, urban trainee teachers)

“You can’t be thoroughly content yourself I don’t think, when you see that there are people who are living in such dire poverty. I mean it moves me to tears often, as well as to writing cheques.”

(UK 6, urban private girls school)

Not all British groups were uncritical of foreign aid and one described the annual Children in Need appeal as “token gesture, just to get some laughs and just to raise the profile of a lot of comedians and sports stars” (UK 7, rural private school). This is a more cynical view that charity does not solve the problem despite appearing to attempt to do so. One Mexican group saw foreign aid as tailored to the interests of those in power:

“It’s like compensatory politics, no?”

Like Mexico, is a source of cheap labour, so people give a small amount so that they can continue to benefit from this inequality.

There is a risk that the poor don't buy. If poverty is reduced, then people will become consumers."

(Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools)

There is a sense that maintaining a certain income level amongst Mexicans allows them to be manipulated as a work force and market; it is implicit that the United States is pulling the strings. Aid becomes a balancing act understood clearly to serve the interests of the one who is giving. In British government development reports, for example, aid has explicitly been acknowledged as useful to furthering the interests of the British government (Noxolo, 2004, p.205). This is something that postcolonial donors distance themselves from, at least rhetorically, presenting a more equal partnership between donors and recipients (Mawdsley, unpublished). A similar attitude was expressed towards voluntary work in this Mexican discussion group: "voluntary work won't solve the problem." The feeling was that these gestures have a relatively small impact; given that the problem is structural a little extra help or money is insufficient. The contrast between British and Mexican participants' views of the role of aid could be explained by which part of the aid relationship and rhetoric they are most exposed to; British people (donors) are likely to be encouraged to believe they are *helping* whereas people who are promised improvements but do not often see them may well become increasingly cynical.

Other objections to donations as a response to inequality, include that voluntary redistribution can constitute an unequal interaction rather than a solution to inequality (Bourdieu, 1972/2009; Mawdsley, unpublished; section 6.4). Further, relying on individuals' philanthropy does not ensure that resources are distributed to the most needy rather than the most likeable causes (Toynbee and Walker, 2008/2009). Partly due to these limitations and because welfare should not depend on discretionary generosity, donations alone are inadequate and insufficient means to address inequality. Need for redistribution in this way will be unremitting without adjustments to the original distribution of wealth and income; or as Paulo Freire more eloquently puts it in reference to the trembling hands of the "rejects of life":

"True generosity lies in striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or of entire peoples – need to be extended less and less in

supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work, and, working, transform the world.” (Freire, 1970/1990, p.27).

Respectful interaction

At times giving money or goods is “a quick, impersonal transaction that involves little more than a transitory, marketised relationship ... [with] no demand on our time and no real commitment of the self” (Jackson, 2006, p.202). If giving money can reify unequal relationships, respect, as discussed in chapter 6, can remedy the negative effects of inequality on psychological well-being. This is partly because respect requires an investment of the self, and shows that someone else is seen as a valuable human being. Levels of respect are communicated possibly unintentionally and are implicit to social interaction. As mentioned earlier, looking someone in the eye, rather than avoiding their gaze, is a simple and effective way of showing that someone has your attention. Tone, vocabulary and posture also communicate respect or lack thereof. Respectful interaction with others as equals, and behaving as an equal, offers an immediate solution to the quandary of what someone can do about inequality. One participant expressed this quandary as follows:

“In a sort of removed way we can be very aware, because I read the paper a lot, cut articles out, pass them on to people, erm listen to the radio a lot, so yes, an awareness is there, it makes you uncomfortable when you know about it, and there’s not a lot you can do about it.”

(UK 6, urban private girls school)

Interaction could be an antidote to her sense of removal. Ensuring that one treats others respectfully and not avoiding interaction with people from different socio-economic backgrounds may require some rethinking of behaviour, but can be continually acted upon. Gestures communicate respect. One person reported: “There are inequalities that mark, (for example) when athletes came to Mexico, they bought their own water as they did not want to drink Mexican water” (Mexico 5, urban middle class government school). This implied that what was good enough for Mexicans was not good enough for the visiting athletes. As social creatures we are sensitive to how we are treated (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), and respect was mentioned in all three countries:

“What is most important is respect, I just mean a recognition that someone exists, some basic communication. I don’t necessarily mean friendship, but at least ... how can I explain, respect is fundamental ...”

(Mexico 1, urban teachers from different schools)

“Many of our Africans have been migrating to the Scandinavian or these these British countries, the UK for example, they always have a belief that Africans are [tuts] not good enough to live with.”

(Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school)

“It seems to me that that would be the first step, to recognise that the way other people do things, and the way other people live their lives is equally valid.”

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

Respect entails recognition, communication and being treated well; expressions of dignity would be an interesting further investigation. There is also a requirement to acknowledge that people have reasons for making the choices they make. Others’ thinking and action being understood as valid requires the sort of “reading” of reality referred to by Gayatri Spivak as “suspension of the conviction that I am necessarily better” (Spivak, 2008, p.23). The sort of understanding and appreciation of circumstances that is made possible by this is central to thinking about others as equal human beings. One trainee teacher illustrated this sort of understanding: “To be poor doesn’t mean dirty, (we should) understand why someone might not be able to bathe” (Mexico 2, urban trainee teachers). Meeting people from different backgrounds, talking and interacting, has the possibility of changing perception and enhancing understanding, and therefore respect. An example of how people mixing prevents discrimination is given below:

“You could either go to a school in North-Eastern, a school in Lithi Valley, a school in Western Kenya, a school even at the coast. So even you have now been delocalised from your other tribesmen, so you go and meet other people, with different and diverse cultures, therefore now you strike an harmony with them, you start building yourselves to become one. Actually, during that time, I think tribalism wasn’t as it is today

As serious as

Anna: really?

Yeah, yeah, it was not as it is today.”

(Kenya 9, urban boys boarding school)

This delocalisation scheme mixed people from all over Kenya, putting them into situations where students were obliged to mix with and understand people from other tribes. On a smaller scale a teacher from Kenya 7 (British-system private school) took her students to meet children from poorer parts of the city, they sat together “doing their colouring”. This got her pupils thinking about what they could do about this inequality; inequality became tangible and immediate, so something *they* could act upon.

Interaction with others as equals disrupts negative stereotypes and promotes understanding. Whilst this argument was most often made in terms of understanding the poor, Alison applied it to the rich. Her point was that the actions and misdeeds of the rich or powerful should also be understood as products of the value system from which they come, rather than because any individual is particularly “evil”. Talking, and challenging ideas and stereotypes, with people from one’s own and other socio-economic groups can broaden understanding of inequality and respect.

Action

Of the 24 discussion groups 13 emphasised the importance of ‘doing something’ about inequality. Doing something was seen as good because it challenges inequality that “should not exist” and “should be addressed” (Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers). For participants in the UK, as in Kenya, being active against inequality is presented as working within the system to mitigate its ills, rather than having a greater emphasis on struggling against it as in Mexico. The language of the following quotations is often moralising, saying what *should* be done, referring to what *we have to do*, and invoking normative judgements about what *good* behaviour is; this illustrates how action stems from ethical objections to inequality as highlighted in section 7.3.

Amongst the Kenyan groups who emphasised action, talk was expressed as one way to do this. Kenya 6 (NGO-funded slum primary school) stressed the importance of discussing issues like inequality in order to come up with solutions. Talk is also seen as a way of correcting misperceptions: “You know sometimes people may think that we are poor because God made us to be poor, so when this enlightenment and advocacy gets to the ground, people start

taking their destiny into their own hands” (Kenya 8, rural government school). Talking about inequality can empower people, raise critical awareness that things can change, and can lead to solutions; such consciousness raising can counter some forms of denial (Cohen, 2000, p.11). Talk can also exert pressure on politicians:

“So, I’m saying we talk much about it, and we try to encourage people, especially our leaders to see the need to bridge what, the gap, so as to avoid conflicts like we were mentioning before. Because if we all kept quiet, nothing would happen. And one way of trying to address the problem is talking about it, telling people about the dangers of inequality, with a view to trying to change through voting in people who will see to it that that kind of problem is not allowed.”

(Kenya 4, rural Catholic boys boarding school)

This teacher goes beyond the suggestion that talk is good, by arguing that it is necessary for change, which makes talk a responsibility. This echoes the suggestion that the first step towards change is to rewrite our narratives (Cameron and Palan, 2004, p.153). That without pressure from people “nothing would happen” suggests a bleak outlook where things would continue as they are. For Kenyan teachers involved in this research, action took the form of education and enlightenment. *Authentic* thinking about reality and dialogue can lead to “*emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (Freire, 1970/1990, p.58-62, quotation on p.62).

In Mexico action against inequality was phrased more oppositionally, in terms of struggle (*lucha*) and demonstration (*manifestación*). Also, amongst the three groups discussing action in this way there was a great sense of necessity for action, using terms like “we have to ...” (*tenemos que*) and “it is very important to ...”. These moralised phrases frame fighting inequality as an ethical responsibility. One teacher stressed “we have to struggle for there to be no inequality, for more justice” (Mexico 8, private urban Catholic school). There is a sense of urgency in the vocabulary used, which frames action against inequality as an oppositional activity; struggles and demonstrations are usually *against* someone or something. As one teacher told me, “I’ve demonstrated against the capitalist system” (Mexico 6, rural government school).

Of the 7 UK groups, 5 presented some form of action as being desirable. Action was connected to awareness, knowing about something wasn't enough because something must be done: "So it's not about what you know, just about what you know, it's about what you do" (UK 3, mixed group). Someone else suggested that being aware *enough* would mean "doing something about it" (UK 7, rural private school), which echoes Cohen's point about not acting on something being a form of denial (Cohen, 2000, p.9). The main emphasis on "doing something" was less specific about what that something should be. However one teacher commented on being pleased with pupils' willingness to take action by collecting money for charity because it symbolises a feeling of needing to do something about a problem, and how her own awareness influences "who I bank with, where I shop, how I vote" (UK 5, urban private school). One teacher commented to Alison "well you're good because you're in a political party" (UK 4, retired urban teachers). The multiple ways of being responsible avoids being over-prescriptive, which could undermine the very idea of being responsible, which involves being alert, careful and learning as we go (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010, p.121). The activities above are seen as positive, and are encouraged or congratulated by others. These engage with the mainstream, rather than being oppositional.

Talk as action, as raised mainly in the Kenyan discussion groups, is central to this thesis given that discourses and understandings of inequality influence the reality. Thus changing ideas can ultimately alter reality. One question in the discussion group guide asked how often people talk about inequality, and I now turn to responses to this question in order to consider how much talk was a means of challenging inequality for these participants. I identify how it is possible to talk about inequality without fully engaging with the topic, and how interjections in everyday conversations can challenge stereotypes and misperceptions in a way that encourages discussion and thinking about the issues that surround inequality. The power of talk is limited when words are reified and disconnected from other action; further talk, especially overly technical language, can obscure politics and alienate publics (Ferguson, 1994).

A concern about being slightly hypocritical arose in some groups, Mexico 7 (small rural school) commented that they explain inequality to their classes and

then they, the teachers, go and enact it in the rest of their lives. Thus talking and awareness does not necessarily entail behavioural change. Elsewhere participants acknowledge how they talk about inequality without really engaging with it: one commented that inequality comes up as a “by the way”, they “don’t even reflect on it” and “then we leave it there” (Kenya 1, urban trainee teachers). The same phenomenon was phrased as not internalising the issue even though they live it and talk about it (Mexico 8, private urban Catholic school). Participants from Kenya 1 also acknowledged that whilst they debate inequality at an academic level, this thinking is not applied to their daily lives, for example discussing harmonising University salaries. Emotional disengagement is one form of denial identified – not feeling or not being disturbed by something (Cohen, 2000, p.9). This denial could be interpreted as a coping strategy, like morgue humour discussed in chapter 6. Disengagement is more reported in Kenya and Mexico, perhaps due to more frequent confrontation with some extremes of inequality. This contrasts with the UK participants’ more emotional reactions when inequality was acknowledged, as discussed in section 7.3.

It was stated by many groups, disproportionately in Mexico and Kenya but also some in the UK, that they talk about inequality on a daily basis. This is “because we live it” (Mexico 3, urban poor area). In Kenya women teaching at the most privileged school acknowledged that inequality is highly visible. An example given was people suffering from jiggers, sand fleas, which embed themselves in human skin that then becomes infected. Jiggers can easily be managed by keeping skin clean (Kenya 7, British system private school). Note how inequality is conflated with poverty in this comment. The high frequency and superficiality with which inequality is discussed is illustrated by one group’s description of these discussions as their sport (Mexico 7, small rural school). This suggests that talking about inequality is both normal and enjoyable.

The passage below shows how it can take a small interjection of an alternative viewpoint to change the narrative of a conversation, although it may take some courage to disagree with the dominant views being expressed. The passage demonstrates an *aporia* as the discussion group flounders to find a meaning and are unable to eloquently express their point. This shows an awkwardness

and uneasiness with the topic, and suggests that they do not frequently consider this topic in depth.

“It’s also the suggestion that by inequality, you’ve got the rich and you’ve got the poor. In some ways I think the poor are put in a bad light, but sometimes necessarily just because you’ve got wealth doesn’t mean you’ve got a better quality of life. And so yeah, it’s quite ...

Yeah, again, who are we to say to people who live on one dollar a day, it’s probably very hard for me to say this because I’ve never lived on one dollar a day, but some people might just be genuinely happy with that, they’ve got enough for them to stay healthy and, OK, maybe that’s very extreme, but you know who are we to say ‘POOR THEM, they’ve not got any money. Shall we go over there and give them some money?’ I think it’s a bit ...

Yeah, there’s loads of people who’ve got lots of money who are not happy, who, you know ...

Yeah, it’s different, wealth is different from things like access to inequality like clean water because I think we see clean water as a necessity, and wealth perhaps is not, I suppose. Because yeah, clean, clean water like a roof over your head is a necessity. With things like that, I think ...

Even medication, who are we to say ‘oh they haven’t got vaccines’ because for hundreds of years they might have built their own, you know, got their own medicines from their own environments, so who are we to come over and tell them, oh look you all need this.

But on the other hand, a lot of countries do ...

Oh yeah. I know. [defensive]

So in that way it is so hard to learn about inequality. Because there are so many people out there who really do need some sort of assistance or [inaudible].

Yeah [said in a defeated manner]”

(UK 1, urban trainee teachers; here ‘...’ indicates unfinished sentence due to interruption)

In the extract above each person rehearses a section of an argument for economic inequality, running out of steam without managing to complete their sentence but is conversationally rescued by another participant taking over. Then one participant gently challenges the idea that richer countries should not give medical support to poorer countries, saying: “But on the other hand, a lot of countries do ...”. She is cut off by others hastily and defensively agreeing in a slightly embarrassed manner, saying “Oh yeah. I know.” She forgivingly responds that it *is* hard to learn about inequality then makes her point that actually a lot of people are in need, proposing assistance as a solution.

This illustrates how bringing these topics into discussion, including the forum of a research discussion group, means that assumptions can be expressed and debated. Such discussions can interrogate assumptions, may mean the discussion is referred back to in future conversations, and could heighten sensitivity to and awareness of inequality. How inequality is brought into conversation affects how it can influence wider ideas about inequality. Nevertheless, for inequality to be named, in whatever way, brings it into common parlance and makes it a more accessible concept for people to think with. By talking openly about inequality we might realise that more people object to it than one might otherwise think. It has been suggested that there are a lot of closet egalitarians (Pickett, 2010b).

Utopia as method

Utopian thinking is not universally seen to be normatively good. Some imply it would be useless, arguing that it is a mistake to think “we would agree on the nature of a perfect world” (Sen, 2010, no page number). The benefit of debating utopia may come less from arriving at consensus about the nature of an ideal society but more simply for there to be a discussion recognizing that alternatives exist, and the weighing up of their relative merits. Amartya Sen recognizes there is no agreement about what a utopia might be, but there is not even consensus about what the term utopia means (Levitas, 2005). One way of thinking about utopia is “as a method rather than a goal, and accompanied by a recognition of provisionality, responsibility and necessary failure.” (Levitas, 2007, p.289). Utopia as a method enables the imagination of utopias without necessitating their implementation (*ibid.*, p.300). Acknowledging that some failure is inevitable and that moving towards utopia may create new problems where others disappear enables utopian thought, instead of stifling it with high demands.

Dominant political culture in the UK is reported to be anti-utopian. Images of ‘the good society’ are removed from public debate. This is problematic because utopian thought has the advantage of encouraging holistic and long-term thinking, alternatively described as the imaginary reconstitution of society

(Levitas, 2007, p.290 & 300). This view is challenged by the stance that we should focus instead on how things are going in the real world (Sen, 2010). However utopian thinking is implicitly a critique of the real world because it acknowledges imperfections and considers alternatives. Simply thinking of better alternatives can undermine the apparent naturalness, necessity or inevitability to the contours of the contemporary world order.

Some imaginings of improved society, or at least improvements to individuals' lives, are influenced by the advertising of consumer goods. As demonstrated in chapter 5, the way that many imagine improvement is in terms of rising up the hierarchy and bettering their lot. However when phrasing a social critique in terms of society as a whole, looking at the nature of the world order within which we live, and incorporating empathy and ethics into discussions, it is less likely that greater consumerism will be seen as the answer (see section 7.3). One of the more critical groups spoke about a book written in the 1950s, 'The Hidden Persuaders' by Vance Packard:

"I mean he said that they took a load of psychological ideas to try to get them into people's heads that you needed things. And status was important, you know, having this and having that. Fuelling capitalism and industrialism."

(UK 4, retired urban teachers)

Advertisers influence our desired futures, by working with psychologists to manipulate our wants in order to stimulate markets. I include this example to acknowledge, in agreement with Sen, that utopias are not always compatible. However, utopia as method could raise these issues for public debate and the type of critique demonstrated above. In contrast, below is a utopian way of thinking based on a critique of the current situation and a belief in the possibility of change. This way of thinking is holistic in his concern not just for himself but also for the others around him.

"I live in the slum, and I don't like that kind of life. So er not just talking about it but also thinking about it. I keep thinking, 'how can I change things? How can I move out of this you see, and have that?' What, I talk about it with people, 'for how long shall we continue living in this situation?' ... 'So what can I do to change this?' Not just for me but for all of the other people who are living around me."

(Kenya 6, NGO-funded slum primary teachers)

In this sense utopia as a method is a way in which people move imaginatively beyond the present to configure possibilities of better futures. The current world situation requires a lot of imagining: “the horizons of our imagination will need to be stretched far wider than before if we are to overcome our current disaster” (Dorling et al., 2007, p.6). Recognising the provisionality and necessary failure of utopian thinking as a method of change (Levitas, 2007, p.289) judges these imaginings and attempts at change forgivingly. Further, looking for the commonalities in what is thought to be desirable rather than the points of friction can result in a stronger movement. For example, the idea of reducing the extremes of inequality, making societies *more* equal, as opposed to being totally equal, is more broadly persuasive. Becoming more equal could help to establish that greater equality is *possible*, in a similar way to how generally increasing inequality can make inequality appear inevitable. Utopian thought is useful as well as inspiring because when it comes to change “... navigation is easier in the presence of beacons” (Pieterse, 2000, p.xvi).

7.5 *Synthesis: towards greater equality*

Inequality is a major contemporary world problem and talking to people from three countries in very different positions in terms of this inequality has, I have tried to demonstrate here, generated some positive ways in which inequality can be framed. These enable inequality to be discussed in not only a critical manner, but with an awareness of what might be a preferable way to live. Ways of framing inequality critically include thinking holistically as we are all affected by inequality in some way, as well as all bearing some responsibility. To name the systems in which we live and on whose legacies the current world system rests enables an important contextualisation and acknowledgement that our understandings and desires are influenced by particular neoliberal forces. Engaging ethical and emotional objections to inequality can contribute to challenges to inequality; avoiding the suppression of empathy can provide the energy and commitment to address social wrongs. Simply altering the terms in which we discuss this issue is a step towards the contemporary extremes of inequality becoming widely unacceptable.

Despite the idea that inequality is hard to tackle and individuals alone can do

little against this unjust economic distribution, the discussion groups raised various examples of ways in which inequality is challenged as part of everyday life. These include giving to charity, which has some clear benefits and some significant limitations given the power relations associated with the relationship between the 'generous' donor and the 'grateful' recipient. Other approaches that involve a greater investment of self are to interact respectfully with people from diverse socio-economic groups and from other countries. To behave as true equals is not easy when hierarchy and status are deeply engrained in our world views and are institutionalised; however to do so would start to counteract some feelings of inferiority and superiority identified in chapter 6. Engaging in action where and when it is possible is a valuable disposition, and this can also generate positive feelings within individuals as active members of society and making positive contributions. Lastly, discussing utopian visions of where we want to get to, albeit unlikely that we will arrive, enables the recognition that alternatives exist and gives a direction for the small steps we take. This discussion needs to be inclusive because it affects everyone. To repeat an earlier quotation:

“... we have a duty to change our mode of thinking ... it's not going to revolutionise anything but nevertheless it's a necessary condition for some revolutionary change to occur” (Harvey, 2010a, no page number).

8. Conclusion

The original contribution of this thesis is its focus on the discourses about inequality of people from different countries yet occupying similar socio-economic positions within the country in which they live. In adopting a critical discourse analysis to structure my study of inequality, the substantive chapters focus on: meanings carried by discursive and textual representations of inequality; discursive and attitudinal obstacles to addressing inequality; the extent to which the social order “needs” inequality; and possible ways around obstacles to addressing inequality (after Fairclough, 2009). This research into readings of novel world cartograms from different positions on the map contributes to literature on the power of maps by considering audience reactions (Harley, 1992, Monmonier, 1996, Pickles, 2006). The work appears to be original in its geographical scope and as a user study of novel cartograms.

My research addresses the tension that whilst distances are generally being compressed by new communication and travel possibilities, income and vital distances between people are increasing at the world level (Therborn, 2009, p.111-2). This tension comes with an ethical imperative as current levels of inequality are both morally objectionable and have deleterious effects to societal and individual well-being (e.g. Smith, 2000; Sutcliffe, 2005; James, 2007; Pogge, 2008b; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Harvey, 2010b). When inequality is framed in terms of the social and health outcomes, when human rights are extended to include socio-economic rights, and when we think in terms of social justice, discourses that challenge inequality are encouraged. Identifying dominant discourses contributes an understanding of how these justify and challenge socio-economic inequalities.

The thesis developed here is that there are significant commonalities in discourses about inequality across space and socio-economic difference amongst discussion group participants. These commonalities include a sense of inevitability about inequality combined with frequent arguments in favour of

inequality as the only viable way forward. Yet there was also a sense amongst some in each country that current levels of inequality are unacceptable, and upsetting. Definitions of inequality vary: in Kenya there is an emphasis on resource distribution, in Mexico a focus on respect and discrimination along racial and gender lines, and in the UK the main concern is economic. The Pew World Attitude Survey data from 2002 show that whilst the majority of people were dissatisfied with the way things were going in the world, there was nevertheless optimism about respondents' personal trajectories, with people in each country on average expecting future improvements in their life situations.

This conclusion recapitulates the major findings of this research and outlines new research directions that emerge from this work, substantiating research council accountants' fears that *research only leads to more research*. I then reflect on the implications of these findings in reference to national and international policy; the framing and interpretation of inequalities has implications for social reality, and policy is an important way to reduce inequalities. International public discourses that critique inequality and call for positive alternatives could initiate positive change.

8.1 Reflection on research questions

Question 1. *What are the geographies of constructions of inequality and the world?* The geographies of representation of inequality include variations in understandings of inequality between places and the ways in which representations of inequality and the world convey our geographical imaginations. Definitions of inequality vary geographically as the context in which people live influences the terms used to express inequality. Inequality could be understood as an apolitical mathematical distribution or framed more critically in terms of injustice and violence; critical definitions were scarcer in the UK than Kenya and Mexico. The simplification of inequality to make it more comprehensible can emphasise its more or less acceptable facets. Rescaling the world by using metaphors of the world as a village or household transfers the ethics of the small scale to the world scale, often rendering inequality unacceptable. Geographical variations and constructions of inequality reflect and recreate reality, privileging certain interpretations and highlighting particular

injustices. The working definitions we adopt sway our attitudes towards inequality.

The meaning of *world* was considered by analyzing the coincidence of identification of threats to the world with the geography of those threats. The biggest perceived threats to the world were generally the major threats posed to where respondents live. The extent of awareness of contemporary global problems has implications for action; our imaginations are grounded, our worlds are constructed from the local. Yet when considering inequality, something of which we are all part, the grounded nature of our imaginations may be a partial limitation because world inequality is between people with divergent local realities. This is one reason for considering the roles of maps as a means of sharing information about the lives of our contemporaries.

Question 2. *What are the social lives of Worldmapper maps as semiotic forms of inequality?* The social lives of maps refers to the ways in which maps are read and digested: maps are considered in terms of how they are read and by whom. These maps are read by people whose lives are located on that map and they compare map-readers' countries to others, potentially expanding awareness of world inequality if map-readers engage with these new visual forms. Map reading and openness to new forms of mapping varied between individuals and more broadly between countries. Map-readers who are comfortable with the conventional world map find it easier to learn from world cartograms as they have some knowledge as a basis for their interpretations. Teachers in the UK were most familiar with these maps, whereas Kenyan teachers had more conventional understandings of mapping. Having little confidence in map usage or fixed views about the correct way to map can result in dismissal or misinterpretation of new map forms. In contrast, pre-existing knowledge or expectations provide a context which new information can expand

or contradict, and even elicit a punctum³² or surprised response (after Barthes, 1980/2000). Punctum is more common with national and regional information, because map-readers know more and have greater emotional investment, despite relationships of aid, trade and geo-politics that bind countries and people over greater distances, making places linked and intertwined with many others (Mercer et al., 2003, p.433). Maps can broaden geographical awareness and influence discussion about inequality, but this is enmeshed in pre-existing knowledge and normative understandings of inequality.

Question 3: *What are the discursive obstacles to addressing socio-economic inequality?* Inequality is supported and defended using arguments that justify existing neoliberal arrangements. The modes of concealment of isolation, conflation, eternalisation, naturalization and hiding conflicts of interest were exhibited in Kenya, Mexico and the UK (after Urry, 1981, p.60-61). I have shown a general aspiration to improve one's socio-economic position, concern with social mobility rather than social change, and optimism for the future that discourages talk of change. That inequality is presented as unproblematic, "not my responsibility", the only viable option, and created by natural forces, also blocks talk about change. The conjunctions in which values were expressed varied, Kenyans' ambition to improve uses the UK as a comparator whereas Mexican participants cite the United States. When speaking of the happy poor British participants referred beyond national boundaries whereas Mexican and Kenyan participants more often spoke about poor compatriots. Whilst the *grammar* of these discussions expresses similar logic, the *vocabulary* is context-specific. The adoption of this logic in all three countries shows how it has spread and the barrier it presents to social change.

Question 4: *In what ways does inequality fracture society?* Inequality has socially and individually damaging effects that are acknowledged in various forms and there is a widespread dissatisfaction with the way things are going in

³² *Punctum* is an emotionally charged response that ruptures complacency; punctum is contrasted with the more common *studium*, which is a general, polite interest in something (Barthes, 1980/2000, p.26-8).

the world. The social damage is a divided society with reduced interaction, one-way respect and limited empathy between groups. Mexican and Kenyan groups emphasise the problem of a lack of respect and feelings of inferiority, whereas the UK groups do not raise this topic. The reason for this difference is probably because those who are being disrespectful are much less aware of this than those who they disrespect (Skeggs, 1997). These different perceptions of inequality show a fracturing of empathy and awareness of how others are experiencing the negative aspects of inequality. Other fractures and challenges of inequality include: individuals being relatively powerless over their own lives; governments lacking power over the economy and social policy; health problems due to malnutrition; and people feeling that they were different from one another because of their divergent material circumstances. These differences disrupt a sense of common humanity that is the basis of many struggles for justice (Smith, 2000, p.174-5); this is perhaps the most damaging fracture and, once begun, enables greater fragmentation in other forms.

Question 5: *How is inequality perceived to be necessary and at what point does inequality-as-necessary reach a limit of acceptability?* Despite the fractures outlined above, the argument that inequality is necessary for society to function persists. To some economists, for example, the division of labour is “the supreme law of human societies and the condition of their progress.” (Durkheim, 1933/1949, p.39). A conservative perspective advocated by some is that greatly reducing inequality is undesirable because it helps the world “be what it is”. The division of labour and lives means that inequalities appear necessary because they underpin who we are in relation to others, what we can do, and where we go. Classes legitimate and map onto material inequalities, and one’s positioning influences access to economic and cultural resources (Skeggs, 1997, p.5). Ameliorating the worst extremes of poverty was seen as desirable even to those research participants who believe that inequality is a functional necessity. According to this argument the point at which inequality becomes unacceptable is when people die from forms of poverty; uneven wealth and income are of less concern. The degree to which inequalities are

seen as unacceptable or necessary to the social order affects whether reform or even radical restructuring is contemplated.

Question 6: *In what ways is inequality challenged in everyday life?* Reframing inequality invites identification of the inherent problems with inequality and consideration of alternatives and even utopias. Ways of framing inequality critically include thinking holistically as we are all affected by inequality and bear mutual responsibility. Important contextualisation is done by naming capitalism as the system in which we live, and colonialism on whose legacies the current world system rests. Engaging ethical and emotional objections to inequality challenges this social wrong, and avoids the normal suppression of empathy, which could strengthen collective commitment to addressing social wrongs. Altering the grammar and vocabulary of discussion is a step towards current levels of inequality becoming unacceptable.

Despite the broadly adopted argument that inequality is hard to tackle and individuals alone can do little about it, participants raised ways in which inequality is challenged in everyday life. Giving to charity has some benefits as well as straining relationships between 'generous' donors and 'grateful' recipients. Approaches that involve greater investments of the self can be more transformative, in particular interacting respectfully (after Jackson, 2006). To behave as equals is not simple when hierarchy and status are deeply engrained in our personal identities and institutions, yet could begin to counteract divisive feelings of inferiority and superiority. Engaging in action can generate positive feelings of being an active member of society and making a contribution, which undermines the argument that we are too small to do anything. Lastly, discussing utopian visions of where we want to get to, albeit unlikely that we will arrive at precisely that point, enables recognition that alternatives exist and gives direction for change. This discussion needs to be inclusive because it affects everyone.

Thinking geographically. This thesis draws on thinking from several social science disciplines, and in particular geographical concepts of relationality, distance and scale offer powerful tools to tackle understandings of world inequality. The recognition of the relationality between countries and people is part of the rationale of this thesis; our interconnectedness means that

understandings or misunderstandings influence the nature of relations with not so distant others. A more public appreciation of our relationality could diminish the conceptual and socio-economic distances between us that are aggravated by inequalities (Raghuram et al., 2009, p.9-10; Therborn, 2009, p.111-2). Thinking at the world scale is promoted by maps and other images of the world which locate our knowledge; thinking in terms of continents and countries also adds order to our globalised world (Grataloup, 2009, p.17). Thus geography, or *earth writing*, equips us well to tackle contemporary and ethical world issues, including when these pertain to discourses on socio-economic dimensions of the world order in the case of inequality.

This international comparative study considers three countries that are positioned differently in the world system. This positioning is partly to do with questions of the econometrics of Gross Domestic Product and terms of trade, however the specifics of place influence this, and are influenced by this. Place has always been a central theme in human geography. However what is meant by *place* varies from *place* as an object, as a way of looking at the world as a patchwork of different places, or as a way of being where places are produced through people's practices (Cresswell, 2004, p.15 & 82). The last two points are addressed by Doreen Massey and Pat Jess in their argument that place should not be understood as fixed and bounded, but as having porous boundaries. They emphasise the importance of one place's connections with other places to the extent that a place cannot be understood in isolation. Instead, places are articulations of a specific time-space mix, described as earlier layers of social relations mingling with more recent relations (Massey and Jess, 1995, p.218-22). This understanding of place is remarkably similar to Massey's approach to space, also as a product of interrelations and always under construction (Massey, 2005, p.9-10).

I have acknowledged something of the particular histories and historical interactions between the three study countries in section 1.5. The colonial histories of all three countries influence understandings of their current position; the historical interaction between Spaniards and indigenous peoples contributes to contemporary racial discrimination, Kenyans contrast their capitalist present

with their pre-colonial socialist past, and UK participants generally took a paternalistic approach to world problems by advocating foreign aid. The uneven development of these places is partly due to their interconnectedness: “The ‘gap’ between the ‘first’ world and the ‘third’ is not just a gap; it is also a connection.” (Massey and Jess, 1995, p.225). These interconnections are also flows of people, goods, and ideas over smaller distances.

The power of globalisation discourses subjects us to the idea that the local is less powerful than the global, or even impotent (Gibson-Graham, 2002, p.34-6; Herod and Wright, 2002, p.10). Yet it is imaginations of place which are often crucial to political identities (Robinson, 2008, p.267) and where we are influenced our perspective on our place within global flows. By focusing on the global issue of inequality, this research has been influenced by the persuasive importance of the global and the power of thinking at this scale. Yet this research is not devoid of an appreciation of the importance of place as shaped by and shaping global flows and forces. Chapter 5 uncovers the hegemonic logics that rationalise and justify inequalities, this recurring justification expressed in more locally relevant terms is what enables capital to ‘touch down’ how and where it does. If these justifications were less established then capital may go elsewhere. Even the carrying of these concepts is not placeless, grounded journalists, politicians, teachers and others rearticulate arguments in favour of, or against, inequality (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p.46). These places together constitute the global, and global imperatives rely on “the material forms and practices of situated knowledge” (Katz, 2001, p.1214).

Chapter 7 details local political acts of redefining the ways in which we think about inequality; this complements the call for “opening the local as a place of political creativity and innovation” (Gibson-Graham, 2002,p.53). As people collectively make place (Massey and Jess, 1995, p.221) a sense of empowerment may be felt by working at the smaller scale on more localised projects of change. Gibson-Graham’s contentment with the local as a scale for action without extending to the national or transnational has been identified in anti-capitalist movements where it has been suggested that “scale-jumping” is a preoccupation of which overlooks the particularities of place-based struggles (Katz, 2001, p.1231; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010, p.12). Comparing these

three countries shows how situated knowledges respond to global forces of capital. Yet these local knowledges, as Massey and Jess highlight, are porous and hybrid (Massey and Jess, 1995, p.218). This thesis acknowledges the importance of interrelations to situated knowledges at its outset by questioning how those positioned differently in terms of world inequalities interpret these.

8.2 Future research directions

My research responds to calls from others for more research into the public's discursive representations of inequality. In undertaking this work other avenues and possible data sources have arisen. Below I outline some research projects that build on the ideas and empirical work begun here. These proposals, like this thesis, would contribute understanding of how inequality and alternatives are represented and the ideologies carried within these representations. Others also emphasise the importance of such research: "Why do people make choices that maintain or exacerbate inequalities and undesirable status quos, and where do changes (that do sometimes occur!) come from? These are some of the BIG questions that must be at the heart of our empirical work" (Heynen et al., 2007, p.289-90, emphasis in original).

One way in which this could be developed would be to compare policy documents and other political rhetoric surrounding national and international inequality in Kenya, Mexico and the UK. Correspondence and dissonance between political and public discourses could be used to interrogate the connections and influence between these arenas of discourse. Such a project could allow a more direct understanding of how public discourse could influence policy. Another research direction would be to consider variation in discourses and attitudes towards inequality in context of differing levels of national inequality. This could take the same methodological approach of combining attitude surveys with discourse analysis. However much better data is about to be released as the International Social Survey Programme's 2009 round specifically asked about attitudes towards inequality.

At the 2010 Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers Conference in London, there were calls from several speakers that we need to

engage in more positive research projects. For example, instead of focusing on war geographers should also research ways of establishing and maintaining peace; as well as studying injustices we should try to describe what a more just world might look like and how to get there (Dorling, 2010c; Megoran, 2010). In response to these calls I propose a study of discourses of equality and inequality within the more equal countries of Cuba, Japan and Norway. This would complement the work I have already undertaken for this thesis, whilst posing more positive questions in seeking to understand ways in which greater equality is legitimised and lived. It would also add to the work of others who have investigated behavioural differences of elites in more equal and less equal countries, noting greater ostentation comes with more inequality (Daloz, 2007). A positive approach to studying inequality and equality could consider the mechanisms by which inequality has been successfully challenged, what we can learn from this, and how similar change could be recreated.

As well as the new research projects proposed above, I also plan to further interrogate the material collected for this thesis. This corpus of “talk about inequality” can be used to ask questions other than those posed and answered here. In particular, teasing out some of the variations between age groups, the rural and urban, and gender could be used to describe the ways in which different people relate to inequality. Considering variations between representations of national and world inequality could position the question of scale more centrally, and contribute to thinking about scales of responsibility, scales of action and the imagining of problems at a world level. Further, working through this material with a co-researcher could generate differing aspects to those that I have worked with alone. I have applied to the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Academy for a postdoctoral fellowship to pursue some of these research directions.

8.3 Policy implications

I have established that whilst inequality has deleterious effects, it is supported by some due to their particular interpretations of the causes and impacts of inequality. So, in a democratic society should we not maintain an unequal society if that is what most people want? I respond to this challenge by proposing a broader, more critical and well-informed public discussion of the

causes and consequences of inequality, bringing into view historical forces, geographically distant impacts, the connections between people, and how we influence each other. As chapter 7 illustrates, broadening our social and geographical imaginations can be an effective way of highlighting structural causes of inequality and historical injustices that are the precedents for contemporary inequality. For democratic societies to properly exercise their role, a fuller public consideration of inequality is needed.

Given that my research is situated with teachers, a policy proposal I would make would be to incorporate into secondary school teaching the more holistic views of society suggested above, ethical discussions (about the rights and wrongs of inequality), political lessons (about the role of superpowers in influencing other countries and vice versa), and historically-grounded discussions (about the influence of colonial history on contemporary inequalities). Such an addition to school curricula would fit well within geography, a subject that currently needs to defend itself both in schools and universities. As many geographers have commented, university-level geography has allowed other subjects such as human ecology and environmental psychology to move into its heartland (e.g. Burgess, 2010). In UK schools citizenship has assumed some areas of teaching that could have been covered by geography; this was lamented by teachers in UK 3 (mixed group). Questions of spatial inequality are already addressed within school geography classes as development, so could easily expand to offer a more politically aware and morally engaged approach to world inequality.

A more politically engaged and socially concerned public understanding could also interrupt some of the four mechanisms thought to produce inequality. Note that at least the first three of these mechanisms is a spatial description of how inequality is divisive or fracturing. Firstly, *distantiation*, where some pull ahead whilst others fall behind, could be addressed by a greater awareness that this is occurring then be countered by affirmative action, the opening of new opportunities, and policies that level out the field. *Exclusion* of certain groups can be reduced by extending human rights and entitlements, which would receive greater support in a context of greater empathy and understanding

towards others. *Hierarchical* structures that position people in distinct status and material situations could be flattened, but to do this would require sufficient questioning of hierarchy as opposed to buying into it. Lastly, *exploitation* would be unacceptable in the context of deeper respect for others, and awareness of past exploitation could lead to support for redistribution and reparation as a matter of social policy rather than whim (Therborn, 2006, p.14; Therborn, 2009, p.110).

A proposal that would require public support, as a progressive means of redistribution, is the provision of a basic income. This is paid unconditionally and universally to individuals, without requiring work or means testing, at “the highest sustainable level” (Christensen, 2009, p.2). Minimum incomes have been proposed for subsections of society, such as the minimum income for healthy living for older people (Gorman, 2007, p. 1307-8). However universality is crucial as an expression of citizenship, strengthening commonality between members of society (Lister, forthcoming, p.2); besides, that which is paid to the better off can be later recuperated through taxation which occurs with the South African basic income grant (Ferguson, 2010, p.174). Means tested welfare acts as a disincentive for moving into marginally higher income groups because it effectively taxes this by removing welfare, thus discouraging what some would see as “good behaviours”, in particular gaining employment; as such we should maximize universal provision (Garfinkel, 2010). Nevertheless, the acceptance of basic income, like other policies mentioned earlier, will require changes to historically evolved institutions and norms. It will also need policy makers’ and citizens’ thinking about value and distribution to adjust (Purdy, 2007, p.25).

Social movements and campaigns can have a dramatic effect on political rhetoric and debate. The example of the 2010 UK General Election and the role that *The Equality Trust* played shows how pressure groups can alter the terms of debate. This Trust is very new, thought up in 2007 and established in 2009, the same year as two of the three founders published *The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better* (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). This book contributes international and sub-national empirical evidence for the damaging effects of economic inequality within rich countries. In November 2009 an associated campaign, *One Society*, was established to

push all parties to commit to greater equality in the 2010 elections (The Equality Trust, 2010). In the run up to the election and since, evidence and arguments in favour of equality received considerable national radio, television and newspaper coverage (e.g. Asthana and Helm, 2010 in the *Obersever*; Beattie, 2010 in the *Mirror*; Jump, 2010 in *Time Higher Education*; The Economist, 2010). This has been combined with numerous lectures around the country to present and explain to diverse audiences that inequality is socially damaging (e.g. Pickett, 2010b, a). This work, though recently attacked by “idea wreckers”, has received cross-party support (Booth, 2010) and was probably behind a Conservative campaign poster pointing out that inequality *rose* under Labour. Political engagement is shown in their support of three publications describing policies to increase equality that are coherent with each of the three main parties’ political philosophies (Cooke, 2010; Margo and Bradley, 2010; Wind-Cowie, 2010). Politically engaged campaigns can alter the terms of debate.

At the world level exerting policy pressure can be more challenging because the many agencies pull national social policy in different directions and impose different controls (Deacon et al., 2009, p.20). Organisations have different types of influence on national policy, shown in Table 3, so even if those organisations were to appeal for greater equality they may have limited success. Observing some of the more redistributive political movements in South America, it appears to be quicker to bring about national level redistribution without reference to international regulatory bodies. Nevertheless, a change to international politics could enable countries to enhance rather than cut welfare services, which could reduce national inequalities. Comparing internationally can be educational, and the existence and *functioning* of more equal societies shows that greater equality is not utopian but a reality for some countries (Therborn, 2006, p.51). There are also international regulations that could be introduced in the interests of greater equality, such as the ideas in Table 4 that include the Tobin Tax which is discussed below.

	Raise revenue from citizens or businesses	Raise revenue from states (extra to running costs)	Expend money on basis of social need	Lend money on non-market terms	Capacity to influence national social policy	Social regulation of trade
UN	× (not yet)	✓	✓	×	✓	× (not yet)
World Bank	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	× (not yet)
IMF	×	✓	×	×	✓	×
OECD	×	×	×	×	✓	×
WTO	×	×	×	×	× (not yet)	× (not yet)
EU	×	✓	✓	?	✓	✓
NAFTA	×	×	×	×	×	×
ILO	×	×	×	×	✓	✓ (aspires)

Table 3: Supranational and global redistribution and regulation

Source: Deacon et al., 2009, p.21

Sphere	Social	Economic
Political-institutional (top down)	Social (labour) clauses, human rights (Council of Europe, UN Declaration of Human Rights)	International financial commission (TUAC), Global Tax Authority, Tobin Tax
Market (bottom-up)	Fair (ethical) trade, social labelling, consumer campaigns, trade and labour boycotts	Corporate codes of conduct, ethical investment

Table 4: Strategies and proposals to regulate globalisation

Source: Yeates, 2009, p.49

Greater world equality almost certainly requires an international approach, with redistribution and reparation mechanisms of taxation, international minimum wages, and labour protection. A progressive global social policy is proposed

which would aim for redistribution, regulation and enhancing social rights. The Tobin Tax could be levied on international currency exchange, and there is a campaign in favour of this. Other ideas include a Global Tax Authority and a Global Social Affairs Ministry. There are examples of how to manage redistribution, for example the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria combines various criteria to decide how to direct funds where they are most needed (Deacon, 2009, p.431-2). International collaboration also avoids the “sucker exemption” where non-compliers would see those who do comply as foolish for helping others, which risks a race to the bottom (Pogge, 2008b, p.133). Whilst the wider policy context is extremely important, the previous chapter demonstrates that there are also changes we can make to our own behaviour and interactions, independent of the wider policy environment.

8.4 Ultimately: why inequality matters

Inequality is a pressing contemporary issue that constitutes an injustice according to three notions of injustice. Firstly it violates the just forms of equality of human rights and citizenship; secondly the difference is too big and it limits the life chances of the poor; and thirdly it “goes in the wrong direction” as unfair advantages go to those who are already privileged (Therborn, 2006, p.4-5). As such, what we say about inequality, how we interpret it, and the actions based on those interpretations all matter because this is a morally fraught topic. There is pressure being exerted by academics, as well as by social movements and individuals, that something be done to reduce inequality. In particular David Harvey defends his arguments about how to improve society with urgency and gravity: “Of course this is utopian! But so what! We cannot afford not to be” (Harvey, 2010b, p.231). The importance of politics and calls for change is emphasised by Dave Gordon, who points out that it is political will, not a lack of money or insufficient scientific knowledge, which prevents the eradication of poverty (Gordon, 2009, p.109).

This thesis contributes to existing literature on inequality and attitudes towards inequality in several ways. Drawing on discussion group and attitude survey data I have considered approaches to inequality from different parts of the

world, particularly Kenya, Mexico and the UK. This responds to calls for further research into the discourses people draw on to understand inequality (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007 p.x & 42). In adopting a critical approach to understandings of inequality I question 'business as usual' (Castree et al., 2010, p.3) and inequality as expected or inevitable. The investigation of the role of visual representations of inequality by world cartograms responds to a call to consider the legibility of these maps (Eckert et al., 2008, p.5-6). The reading of maps is a theme less frequently explored than what a map itself shows. Relationality is an important theme around which this research is structured, hoping to decentre understandings of inequality to include voices from what might conventionally be described as the *periphery*, to enhance appreciation of "the lives that others live partly because of us" (Cook, 2006, p.660).

There are reasons to be optimistic, especially if the place that inequality persists most strongly is our minds (Dorling, 2010b, p.309). If that is the case, and I argue that our collective understandings and values have a strong influence on the world, we can start to think our way out of world inequality. Moves to rethink ethics have implications for world inequality. Nancy Fraser challenges national (Keynesian-Westphalian) boundaries to justice and responsibility, proposing reframing the boundaries of responsibility so that ethical commitments are to all affected (Fraser, 2007, p.252-262). Whilst there has been considerable pessimism during the current financial downturn, some have seen this as an opportunity. If, as David Harvey's little brainteaser goes, crises "are the irrational rationalisers of an irrational system" (Harvey, 2010b p.215), then a crisis invites us to rethink, as things are shaken up and values challenged. The global crisis has already altered public views of wealth, and could alter views of inequality by association depending on which stories are told and believed about this period (e.g. McDowell, 2010). The new fragility of "rich" countries may make them less self-assured, and poorer countries may aspire less to credit-fuelled wealth. Debating the causes and effects of the current crisis could result in wider support for a strong safety net of greater equality for all affected.

Appendix 1: Discussion group details

	Location	School details	Participants & their subjects	Age (yrs) & sex (m/f)	Date	Duration Hrs:Mins
Mexico 1	Satelite, Ciudad de Mexico	Teachers from different schools who had trained together. These teachers work a double shift, e.g. one worked in a poor and rich school.	5 people (inc. language assistant). Teaching History, Geography, and Civics & Ethics (<i>Formacion Civica y Etica</i>)	32 m 29 m 29 f 29 f 24 m	03.02.09	2:02
Mexico 2	Nr. Satelite, Ciudad de Mexico	Student teachers from a teacher training college or <i>Escuela Normal</i> .	4 trainee teachers in Geography and History	31 f 22 m 22 m 20 f	06:02:09	1:30
Mexico 3	Periphery of Guadalajara	Small government school in a poor neighbourhood. There were no computers like in other schools.	5 teachers of English, Science, Civics & Ethics, History and Technology, and Physical Education	65 f 45 f 44 f 40 m 34 f	18.02.09	1:53
Mexico 4	Periphery of Guadalajara	Government school recruiting from middle class and working class neighbourhood.	3 teachers, one left early. Teachers of Geography, Chemistry and History	47 m 39 f 29 f	23.03.09	1:19
Mexico 5	Guadalajara	Government school recruiting from middle class neighbourhood.	4 teachers of History, Civics & Ethics and Geography	56 f 50 m 47 m 42 f	25.02.09	1:35
Mexico 6	Fishing town, Jalisco	Government school for that town.	5 teachers of Civics & Ethics, Geography, and History	62 m 48 m 42 f 38 m 35 f	25.02.09	1:45

Group	Location	School details	Participants & their subjects	Age & sex	Date	Duration
Mexico 7	Fishing village, Jalisco	Telesecundaria, very small government school with just 3 teachers and an assistant.	4 teachers that covered all subjects.	46 f 42 f 31 m 30 f	27.02.09	1:42
Mexico 8	Ciudad de Mexico	Private Catholic school in wealthy part of Mexico City, with good facilities.	6 people: 5 teachers and one co-ordinator. Teaching English, History, Geography, and Civics & Ethics.	64 f 50 f 48 m 47 m 43 f 37 f	11.03.09	1:20
Kenya 1	Nairobi	This was done in the Department of Geography in one of the main Nairobi Universities	8 participants: 7 post graduate students, some were trainee teachers. My assistant joined the discussion. There was a Ugandan and Tanzanian.	40 f 33 m 28 m 28 m 27 m 25 m 25 m 24 f	07.09.09	2:33
Kenya 2	Nakuru	High achieving government day school.	3 teachers, all of Geography.	48 m 39 m 39 m	11.09.09	1:30
Kenya 3	Rural West Pokot	Catholic girls boarding school, quite a new school.	4 teachers, covering Maths, Business Studies, Geography, Kiswahili, History and Religion.	32 f 32 m 30 m 27 m	14.09.09	1:22
Kenya 4	Rural West Pokot	Boys Catholic boarding school. This school was well established compared to its sister girl school (Kenya 3)	5 teachers of Geography, Business Studies, Christian Religious Education, English, Literature, Kiswahili, History and Government.	46 m 37 m 35 m 32 m 29 m	14:09:09	1:44

Group	Location	School details	Participants & their subjects	Age & sex	Date	Duration
Kenya 5	Machakos	Girls government secondary school	4 teachers of Geography, Kiswahili, Christian Religious Education, Business Studies, English and History.	47 f 42 m 41 f 39 f	18.09.09	1:15
Kenya 6	Kibera slum, Nairobi	Community primary school which is funded by NGOs and private donations	4 teachers of English, Science, Maths, Kiswahili, Social Studies, Christian Religious Education.	27 f 27 f 26 m 26 f	22.09.09	1:26
Kenya 7	Rich district, Nairobi	Private school teaching British system education to international pupils	2 teachers of Geography, History and Sociology. One teacher was British.	55 f 42 f	23.09.09	1:17
Kenya 8	Rural area close to Machakos	Government school with regional award for the biggest improvement and 3 rd best exam results	4 teachers of History, Business Studies, Geography, Chemistry, Christian Religious Education and Government.	41 m 36 f 33 m 32 m	25.09.09	1:26
Kenya 9	Machakos	Boys boarding school	4 teachers of History, Christian Religious Education. Geography and Kiswahili.	45 m 40 f 39 f 38 m	25.09.09	1:36

Group	Location	School details	Participants & their subjects	Age & sex	Date	Duration
UK 1	Cambridge	Teacher training college	6 trainee Geography teachers	23 m 22 f 22 f 22 m 21 f 21 f	07.11.08	1:09
UK 2	Cambridge	Teacher training college	2 trainee Geography teachers	33 f 22 m	14.11.08	1.11
UK 3	Manchester	Geographical Association Annual Conference	2 former & part time Geography teachers	54 m 51 f	13.04.09	0:53
UK 4	Stockport	Retired teachers from a Further Education College	5 retired teachers of general studies, biology, environment, social sciences and geography	71 f 70 m 68 f 68 m 63 f	21.04.09	2:07
UK 5	Birmingham	Independent Grammar School	2 geography teachers	37 f 35 m	30.05.09	0:45
UK 6	Bedfordshire	Private Girls School	5 teachers of Geography, Philosophy and Religion	59 f 59 f 58 f 48 f 31 f	20.05.09	1:32
UK 7	Oxfordshire	Private school	4 teachers of Geography, Music, General Studies and Psychology	34 f 33 f 40 m - m	17.11.09	1:00

Appendix 2: Discussion guide

Introduction:

1. Welcome and thank participants. Hand out informed consent forms.
2. Explain topic is how teachers in diverse place think about world inequality.
3. Give information about PhD thesis & publications. Note that data made anonymous, by removing people's and schools' names. Explain the audio recording and ask if this is OK.
4. Suggest guidelines for discussion: I ask questions followed by discussion. There is no order for speaking, but just one person speaks at a time. Note that it will take roughly 1 hour, and check if anyone has to leave early.
5. Any questions before we start? Collect consent forms; offer refreshments.

OPENING: Ask name and the place they were born.

INEQUALITY: What does the word 'inequality' mean to you?

SCALE: Now I would like to ask more about inequality at the world scale. How aware are you of this in your daily life?

CAUSES: In your opinion, why do some people have few opportunities, whereas others have many? Is inequality inevitable?

IMPORTANCE: How important an issue is inequality, compared to other issues like global warming and terrorism?

MAPS: I would like you to tell me what you think works, or doesn't work about these images. How useful are they in learning about inequality?

GOODS, BADS: What are the good things and bad things about inequality?

CONVERSATION: How often do you talk about these issues, with your friends, family or colleagues?

Final comment: there are no clear answers of what to do about this. I think talking, awareness, and information communication are a good start, to put & keep this on the agenda.

Appendix 3: Guía de discusión (Spanish)

Introducción:

1. Bienvenida y gracias a los participantes.
2. Explicar asunto de investigar como profesores piensan de desigualdades.
3. Pautas de discusión: Pregunto cosas anchas, después discutámoslas. No hay orden de hablar, pero será uno por uno de inicio.
4. Registraré la discusión, esta bien? Datos serán hecho anónimos, por sacar nombres de personas y escuelas para mi tesis y artículos. Demora 1-1.5 horas
5. Tienen algunas preguntas?

PRINCIPIO: me gustaría que se presentaran con sus nombres y lugares de nacimiento.

DESIGUALDAD: Para ustedes, que significa la palabra “desigualdad”.

ESCALA: Estan consientes de desigualdades en una escala mundial, en sus vidas cotidianas?

CAUSAS: En sus opiniones, porque unas personas tienen pocas oportunidades mientras que otras tienen muchas. Desigualdades son inevitables?

IMPORTANCIA: que tan importante es la desigualdad, en comparación con otras emisiones actuales?

IMAGENES: Después de ver los mapas podrían darme su punto de vista, que esta bien o en su caso que esta mal en funcionamiento ellos ? Pueden ser útiles para aprender sobre desigualdades?

BUENAS Y MALAS: Cuales son las buenas y malas cosas de desigualdades?

CONVERSACION: que tan frecuente hablan sobre desigualdades con sus amigos, familia y colegas?

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

About this project

Anna Barford is a research student in the Department of Geography, at the University of Sheffield (U.K.). She is researching how people think about the world. This research involved discussion groups with teachers in Kenya, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

This group discussion will be audio recorded. The findings from this research will be stored for later analysis. The anonymised discussion transcript will be made available in the ESRC Qualitative Data Archive and provided to the Kenyan National Council for Science and Technology. If you have any complaints about this research, please contact me or my supervisors.

Consent form

I agree to participate in this focus group. I agree that information from this interview can be used in published and unpublished works. My identity will be protected by using false names for myself and for my school. I give permission for voice recordings to be used publicly.

Signed by participant:

Name:

Date:

Age:

Gender:

Town / city:

Religion:

Nationality:

Questions

1. Would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the world right now?

satisfied dissatisfied don't know

2. Here is a list of five dangers in the world today. In your opinion, which one of these poses the greatest threat to the world?

- Spread of nuclear weapons
- Religious and ethnic hatred
- AIDS and other infectious diseases
- Pollution and environmental problems
- Growing gap between rich and poor

Thank you for participating.

Anna Barford, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, Winter Street, Sheffield, S10 2TN.

Email: Anna.Barford@sheffield.ac.uk

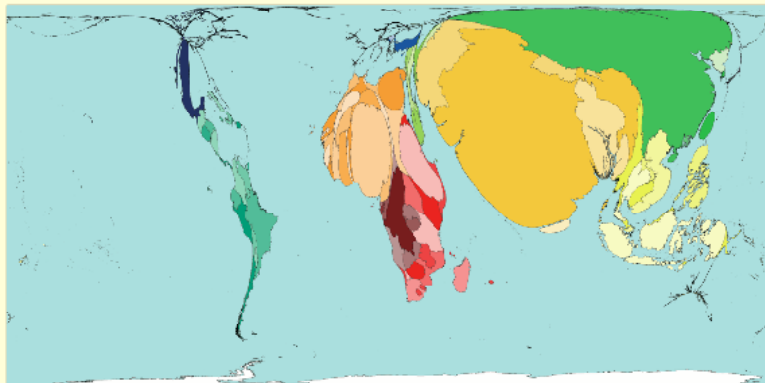
Supervised by Prof. Danny Dorling and Prof. Peter Jackson

Geography Department telephone: 0044 (0) 114 222 7900

Appendix 5: Posters of Worldmapper maps

Absolute Poverty

The University of Sheffield | The Leverhulme Trust | Produced by the SASI group (Sheffield) and Mark Newman (Michigan)



Absolute poverty is defined as living on the equivalent of US\$2 a day or less. In 2002, 43% of the world population lived on this little. This money has to cover the basics of food, shelter and water. Medicines, new clothing, and school books would not be on the priority list.

When almost an entire population lives on this little, it is unsurprising if undernourishment is high, education levels are low, and life expectancy short. In both Nigeria and Mali, 9 of every ten people survives on less than US\$2 a day.

South America has a relatively small poor population, yet 39 million people have less than US\$2 a day in Brazil.

Territory size shows the proportion of all people living on less than or equal to US\$2 in purchasing power parity a day.

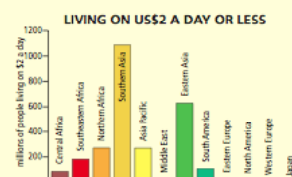


Land area

Technical notes
 • Data are from the United Nations Development Programme's 2004 Human Development Report.
 • Territories are shown where the regional average was assumed due to missing data (Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Congo, Gabon, Sao Tome & Principe, and Equatorial Guinea ranked 20th; the Maldives and Bhutan ranked 24th).
 • See website for further information.

TERRITORIES WITH HIGH ABSOLUTE POVERTY LEVELS					
Rank	Territory	Value	Rank	Territory	Value
1	Nigeria	90.8	17	Nepal	82.5
2	Mali	90.6	18	Burkina Faso	81.0
3	Burundi	89.2	19	Ethiopia	80.7
4	Zambia	87.4	20	India	79.9
11	Niger	85.3	20	Nicaragua	79.9
12	Rwanda	84.6	22	Ghana	78.5
13	Central African Republic	84.0	23	Mozambique	78.4
14	Madagascar	83.3	26	Cambodia	77.7
15	Gambia	82.9	27	Malawi	76.1
16	Bangladesh	82.8	28	Sierra Leone	74.5

percentage of population living on US\$2 a day adjusted for purchasing power parity*



“Trickle-down theory – the less than elegant metaphor that if one feeds the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrows.”

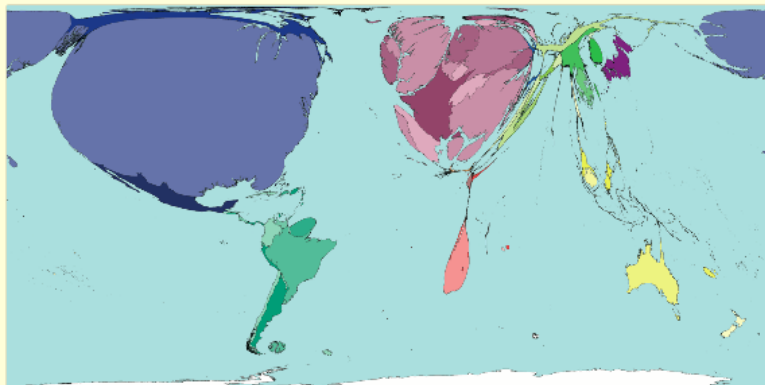
John Kenneth Galbraith, undated

www.worldmapper.org © Copyright 2006 SASI Group (University of Sheffield) and Mark Newman (University of Michigan)

Map 180

Living on more than US\$ 200 a day

The University of Sheffield | The Leverhulme Trust | Produced by the SASI group (Sheffield) and Mark Newman (Michigan)



In 2002, 53 million people in the world lived in households in receipt of US\$200 purchasing power parity (PPP) per day. Of these high earners, 58% lived in the United States.

Western Europe and South America are also home to quite large populations of high earners. Within Western Europe the most very high earners live in the United Kingdom, Italy and France. The highest earners of South America live primarily in Brazil and Argentina.

Few very high earners live in Southern Asia, Northern Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Africa.

Territory size shows the proportion of all people living on over PPP US\$ 200 a day worldwide, that live there.

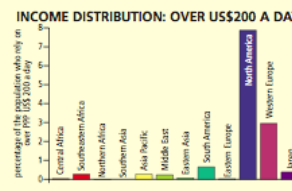


Land area

Technical notes
 • Data are from the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report, 2004.
 • Income is measured in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) US\$. Thus PPP US\$1 has the same purchasing power in every territory.
 • *The table does not show territories where fewer than 1 in 1000 people have an income of over PPP US\$ 200 a day.
 • See website for further information.

PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION EARNING OVER PPP US\$ 200 A DAY					
Rank	Territory	Value	Rank	Territory	Value
1	Luxembourg	35.0	81	Venezuela	0.22
2	United States	10.7	82	Swaziland	0.21
3	Ireland	9.7	83	Trinidad & Tobago	0.20
4	Greenland	7.9	84	Uruguay	0.20
5	Equatorial Guinea	6.6	85	El Salvador	0.18
16	Hong Kong (China)	5.9	86	Peru	0.17
7	Australia	5.2	87	Saint Lucia	0.16
8	Switzerland	5.1	88	Slovenia	0.16
9	Canada	4.8	89	Dominican Republic	0.14
10	Singapore	4.6	90	Dominica	0.13

percentage of people living in households that live on over US\$ 200 purchasing power parity a day*



“I still don't understand how a man can justify awarding himself a 40% pay rise when he is already on a huge salary, the like of which those of us in the public sector will never see, especially with a 3% annual pay rise.” Geraldine, 2001

www.worldmapper.org © Copyright 2006 SASI Group (University of Sheffield) and Mark Newman (University of Michigan)

Map 158

Appendix 6: Visual representations of the world

Resource	Format	Description
Lantern slide collection (Geographical Association, unknown date)	Slides, stored in Sheffield	These slides were photographs from various parts of the world, and were used as a means of learning about the world. These were collected by a group of teachers, and were the reason for forming the Geographical Association, U.K.
6 billion others (Arthus-Bertrand, 2007)	Filmed interviews, online. Website in French, Italian and English.	Interviews with people around the world, where they speak about topics such as anger, the meaning of life, dreams, family, fears, tears, and laughter.
100 ways of seeing an unequal world (Sutcliffe, 2005)	Book, available in Spanish and English.	Collection of over 100 images, including maps, graphs and lists of various measures of our social and economic lives. The scales used range from subnational to global.
Miniature Earth (Donella's Foundation, 2008)	Video.	This shows the earth as a community of 100 people, so maintains the same proportions of race, sex, gender, religion, living conditions, health, education, wealth. The globe is shrunk until it works on a scale we can imagine. "What it urges is the ability not so much to see things whole, as to look through the hollow globe to connect to the eyes of other people who are looking through at us." Cuddy-Keane, 2002, p.6)
Gapminder (Rosling, 2006, 2008)	Animated, interactive graphs & film. Available online, in English.	"The Trendalyzer software ... turns complex global trends into lively animations, making decades of data pop. Asian countries, as colorful bubbles, float across the grid -- toward better national health and wealth. Animated bell curves representing national income distribution squish and flatten. In Rosling's hands, global trends -- life expectancy, child mortality, poverty rates -- become clear, intuitive and even playful." (Rosling, 2006)
Worldmapper (SASI and Newman, 2006)	Website is in English. www.worldmapper.org	Cartograms change the size of the countries to represent the proportion of the variable that is found there. The variables mapped include trade (imports and exports), work, education, health care, disease,

		wealth, and war.
State of the World Atlas (Smith and Bræin, 2004)	Book, in English.	Text, maps (mainly choropleth world maps, some rectangular cartograms), and graphs. Showing information on politics, economics, rights, war, entertainment, disease and death.
Atlas de la mondialisation (Atlas of Globalisation) (Durand et al., 2007)	Book, in French.	Maps at world and regional scale, accompanied by text and graphs. These focus on issues including international inequalities, regionalism, transnational actors, peace and war, regulations.
World Atlas of Sustainable Development: economic, social and environmental data (Sacquet, 2005)	Book, in English.	Mainly choropleth world maps, with text and graphs. Covering themes of Human Development, Risk and the Environment, and Economy, Dependency and Solidarity.
The Atlas of War and Peace (Smith and Bræin, 2003)	Book, in English.	Variety of land area and anamorphose maps, graphs, timelines and text. Concerned with international trends, and also chapters on particular regions.
The Tobacco Atlas (Mackay and Eriksen, 2002)	Book, in English.	Choropleth maps, graphs, diagrams and text. Covers the history of tobacco, health costs, the tobacco industry, and taking action.
Inheriting the world: the atlas of children's health (Gordon et al., 2004)	Book, in English.	Choropleth maps, graphs, diagrams and text. Covers health and poverty, health and the environment, and what we can do to improve things for the future.
The Atlas of Endangered Species (Mackay, 2002/2005)	Book, in English.	Choropleth maps, graphs, diagrams and text. Global and regional focus on extinctions, ecosystems, types of species, and biodiversity.
The Atlas of the Future (Pearson, 1998)	Book, in English.	Choropleth maps, graphs, diagrams and text. Covers globalisation, communications, resources, and demographics.

<p>The Milestones Project (Friendly, 2006a)</p>	<p>Website, in English</p>	<p>“... designed to provide a broadly comprehensive and representative catalog of important developments in all fields related to the history of data visualization. Toward this end, a large collection of images, bibliographical references, cross-references and web links to commentaries on these innovations has been assembled.” Friendly, 2006b, p.34)</p>
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Appendix 7: Freedom scores checklist

Source: http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana_page=341&year=2008

“POLITICAL RIGHTS CHECK LIST”
1. Is the head of state and/or head of government or other chief authority elected through free and fair elections?
2. Are the legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
3. Are there fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, fair polling, and honest tabulation of ballots?
4. Are the voters able to endow their freely elected representatives with real power?
5. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?
6. Is there a significant opposition vote, de facto opposition power, and a realistic possibility for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?
7. Are the people free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
8. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups have reasonable self-determination, self-government, autonomy, or participation through informal consensus in the decision-making process?

“CIVIL LIBERTIES CHECK LIST”
A. Freedom of Expression and Belief
1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression? (Note: in cases where the media are state-controlled but offer pluralistic points of view, the Survey gives the system credit.)
2. Are there free religious institutions and is there free private and public religious expression?
B. Association and Organizational Rights
1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?
2. Is there freedom of political or quasi-political organization? (Note: this includes political parties, civic organizations, ad hoc issue groups, etc.)
3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?
C. Rule of Law and Human Rights

1. Is there an independent judiciary?
2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Is the population treated equally under the law? Are police under direct civilian control?
3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies? (Note: freedom from war and insurgencies enhances the liberties in a free society, but the absence of wars and insurgencies does not in and of itself make a not free society free.)
4. Is there freedom from extreme government indifference and corruption?
D. Personal Autonomy and Economic Rights
1. Is there open and free private discussion?
2. Is there personal autonomy? Does the state control travel, choice of residence, or choice of employment? Is there freedom from indoctrination and excessive dependency on the state?
3. Are property rights secure? Do citizens have the right to establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, or organized crime?
4. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?
5. Is there equality of opportunity, including freedom from exploitation by or dependency on landlords, employers, union leaders, bureaucrats, or other types of obstacles to a share of legitimate economic gains?

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