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Max Farrar

## **How can we meet ‘the demands of the day’? Producing an affective, reflexive, interpretive, public sociology of ‘race’.**

### **Abstract**

This article argues for a public sociology of ‘race’ that can respond to Weber’s injunction that sociology should ‘meet the demands of the day’. While the author’s version of these demands – for a society of autonomous individuals and groups, living as equals – is utopian, the main argument offered here is that a sociology of ‘race’ should be a modified version of Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’. Adopting Bauman’s notion of a sociology of interpreters, a further suggestion is that this type of sociology needs to be reflexive and affective. Based on an analysis of his own sociological education in the late 1960s, his participation in social and political movements in which ‘race’ was key, and with brief reference to the sociology of ‘race’, the author argues that the emotions that circulated in each arena need to be examined, acknowledged and incorporated if theoretical and practical progress is to be made.

**Keywords:** affective, interpretive, reflexive, public, sociology, race, autonomy

### **Introduction**

Sociology produces itself as both a vocation and as a game. As an undergraduate in Leeds University, UK, (1968 – 71), and in my first incarnation as a postgraduate (1972 – 4), I imagined it as a vocation. I lapped up Alan Dawe's (1970, 1979) 'action' sociology; he inspired me with Weber's epigram that our vocation was to obey 'the demon who holds the fibres of [our] very life' and to meet 'the demands of the day' (Weber 1991 p. 156). Among nominally left-wing postgraduates in a department headed by Zygmunt Bauman, I concluded that, for most working academics, sociology was a game, played by the same rules as any other white-collar profession. The only demon that seemed to grip the PhD students around me in the early 1970s was the one called 'theory'. For me, the 'demand of the day' was to overturn social and economic inequality across the globe – and I thought that sociology was an intellectual tool to that end. That was to be my vocation. Instead, the theory-demon has over-run most sociology departments today in British universities: empirical work seems largely to be hived off into education, criminology, religious studies, medical and business departments. The demands of the day have been reduced to obtaining and holding down a career in university sociology (once a very easy-going career). Returning to sociology in the mid-1990s I thought I could both play the game and pursue the vocation. In a former polytechnic specializing in practical degrees, balancing its books as a teaching machine, with no sociological research group, my vocation focused on trying to interest students in thinking sociologically about issues in 'race' (scare quotes following Miles 1982), modernity and popular culture. Teaching is an exceedingly important and under-rated aspect of our vocation, but the demands of the day for racial justice are even more significant. They require us to understand how racism persists in a society where the ethos (if not the practice) of multiculturalism and of equal opportunity is hegemonic. We need to work out how sociologists can contribute to full emancipation in a society where people think they are already free, and where universities have reduced the space for critical thought as they have increased the space for commerce.

In this article I utilize my own life-course as the data on which my argument rests for an affective, reflective, interpretive, public sociology of ‘race’, attempting mainly to highlight those moments in which my own intellectual and political analysis were shaped by the emotional context in which I placed myself – usually without me fully understanding what was going on. The article concludes with a response to sociology’s usual objection to this type of analysis – that it lacks objectivity, and that its individualism contradicts that ‘science’s’ focus on groups and organisations – by invoking Alvin Gouldner’s notion of reflexivity and Cornelius Castoriadis’s ideas on otherness and autonomy.

### **Forming a sociological/political subject in the field of ‘race’**

Thinking through the process of becoming a ‘politically useful sociologist’ entails a sociological examination of the way in which we produce ourselves, including the affective dimensions of our self-production. In this section I attempt critical reflection on aspects of my own formation within the ‘race’ field. I use myself as a case-study partly because there is insufficient material on other sociologists’ lives to attempt a more general account. But I also believe that sociology needs to be more personalized than it is at present if it is to increase its impact on public debate. Mine is a strongly positioned story: reading only in English; engaging in political struggles based in England; doing both from postures influenced by my class (middle), my colour (white), my gender (male), my heterosexuality, and my unimpaired physical ability. This positioning has provoked life-changing moments as I internalized the clash between classes, genders and ‘races’, experienced in my body even more intensely than they were displayed in the public arena.

*Intellectual formation in a ‘race-less’ university*

Later I will justify my reason for departing from the impersonal stance that professional sociology demands. My aim here is to expose some of the problems – personal, political, intellectual and emotional – that have arisen for me over the past 45 years or so in order to expose some of the dilemmas that are likely to arise for anyone who aims to practise sociology in the field of ‘race’ as a vocation with a radical, political purpose – in other words, to try to practise, as well as think, a really useful sociology of ‘race’. This section aims to show the deficiencies of the university as an institution in which a public sociology of ‘race’ is to be formed. (In developing this story I offer an idiosyncratic sketch of those aspects of British ‘race’ history which impacted directly upon me.)

I arrived at the University of Leeds in 1968 with an awareness of racism in the UK, a passionate commitment to the civil rights movement in the US, deep hostility to apartheid in South Africa, and some immersion in the novels of Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, James Ngugi (as he was then called), and the French writers on ‘Negritude’. I had been drawn to this work through a deep friendship I had formed with a black boy at our boarding school in Liverpool in the early 1960s. He had told me about the racism he experienced in his small Lancashire town, where his father, whose own father came from Trinidad, was the local GP and a stalwart of the local establishment. Before, I had thought he might be Spanish. I began to see the world through his brown eyes, and I found novels which helped me develop my empathy with him. My reading reinforced my sense not only that racism was irrational and repugnant, but that it was lived in the body and experienced in the heart and mind. I had the strange experience of feeling some of my friend’s pain while my thinking was being rapidly expanded.

At Leeds University, where John Rex had recently been on the staff, I was surprised by the absence of any mention of ‘race’ in the course. Racism was visibly on the agenda in Britain in the years before I arrived, and during my undergraduate years at Leeds University.

The holocaust was the context in which many of my lecturers had grown up. They should have been aware of the UNESCO statements on 'race': in 1950, 1951, 1964 and 1967, scholars assembled by UNESCO had demonstrated the incoherence of the biological notion of race (Rex 1970). Even if the staff ignored the world outside the UK, had they not noticed that black and Asian people were growing in numbers in the UK and in the city of Leeds, and that some of them were engaging in public protest against racial exclusion? The Institute of Race Relations had been created in 1957 and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) in 1965. One of CARD's founders, Hamza Alavi, joined the staff at Leeds in 1972. Black Power was in the headlines. Stokely Carmichael precipitated a media storm when he addressed the Dialectics of Liberation Conference in London in 1967. In April 1968 Enoch Powell delivered his infamous 'rivers of blood' speech. Michael X (later Michael Abdul Malik) was arrested for inciting racial hatred that same year (Williams 2008). The United Coloured People's Association's leader, Obi Egbuna, was remanded in custody for six months in 1968, charged with 'conspiracy to incite murder'. The London-based Black Panthers were campaigning from 1967, with much media attention around the Mangrove Trial in 1971, though dissolving themselves in 1973 (Rossi and La Rose 1973, Bunce and Field 2010, Angelo 2009). It appeared that none of these events had struck my lecturers as sociologically significant.

To excuse the absence of any mention of 'race' in the sociology course at Leeds at that time they might have said there was insufficient British sociological literature. That would not have been good enough. Reading some of the available books today (Little 1947, Banton 1955, Richmond 1955/1961, Patterson 1963/1965) provides some uncomfortable moments when anachronistic terms are used and some patronizing remarks are made, but these books are brim-full of fascinating sociological and anthropological material. Adding to them the work of Rex and Moore (1967), and the history, data, and policy initiatives in Rose et al (1969) would have provided the foundation for an excellent course.

A more telling reason must be that none of the staff had any psychological or ideological investment in the barbarism of slavery and Empire, or the manifest racism facing the descendants of those slaves and subject peoples now in the UK. Each of the staff in my sociology department was white. Their intellectual interests, like their emotional and ideological dispositions, were as socially formed as anyone else's. I think that no-one asked themselves why 'race' was not in the curriculum because they lacked the self-reflective capacity to examine the source of their indifference to the sociological issues at stake while black people in Leeds, in the UK and across the world were in revolt against the white power structure. They had no emotional investment in these issues. (Among those few sociologists in the UK who did take up this issue, it cannot be incidental that John Rex was a voluntary exile from apartheid South Africa, nor that Sheila Patterson had spent years in Africa and the West Indies before her foray into Brixton in 1955. Michael Banton, on the other hand explains: 'Before commencing on this research I had not previously associated with coloured people, nor been greatly interested in race relations' (1955 p. 14.) But as he got more deeply into the field, a life-time's investment in exploring these issues took place.) The demons who push our intellectual interests are, obviously, massively varied. My friendship with a black boy kick-started my engagement, but I now think that I was predisposed by my father's reflection that the only person who loved him as a child was the Indian (male) servant in his colonial home in what is now Pakistan. Understanding our subjective drives is one of the foundations for a fully reflective sociology of 'race'. To be effective, public sociology itself has to be deeply reflective and affective.

### *Political formation in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood*

The absence of a 'race' course within my sociology degree did not stop me from reading or from seeking opportunities to be politically active against racism. Getting forcibly ejected

from Twickenham as anti-apartheid militants tried to stop the South African Springbok tour of the UK in 1969 was one of the higher points. This political-emotional commitment guided my decision to start doctoral research in the multi-ethnic, inner city area of Chapeltown in the early 1970s. But the ethnography I undertook provoked a series of dilemmas so huge that I abandoned the work in 1974. These included how to be an intellectual as well as an activist; how to make a bridge across my class and colour with people of different classes and colours; how to fabricate a rational persona in situations in which I felt huge emotional stress (particularly when my class, gender and colour were fore-grounded in arguments, or when sexual desire reared its beautiful head). These dilemmas have shaped my work ever since, unresolved, but lived within.

Failing to resolve the most blatant of these dilemmas – combining political activism with sociological research – pushed me out of academia. I now see that the sociology of John Rex and Robert Moore was daringly partisan, but then it seemed too abstract and remote from the community-based struggle going on all around me in Chapeltown. (These events are described and analysed sociologically in Farrar (2002).) Early work on the thesis also became impossible partly because my chosen methodology (participant observation) still adhered to the ‘value free’ faux-science advocated by professional sociology. I could not see my way to the ‘activist observation’ I justified methodologically many years later. Nor could I see how one could combine committed political engagement with academic norms and styles of thought. All university staff who have public political commitments have to face the seeming contradiction between the (correct) demands of pedagogy – that one encourages students to make up their minds – and the realization that ‘objectivity’ is either epistemologically impossible or extremely hard to maintain. Radical researchers have the difficulty of reconciling what they encounter in the field with their aim to contribute to politically progressive outcomes for their subjects. Both have to bear the weight of increasingly conservative management regimes in universities which feel obliged to align

themselves with the government of the day. Grappling with these issues over nearly 40 years resulted in my adoption of what might be called an 'inside-outside' approach to both scholarship and the academic institution.

### *Thinking 'race' in the social movements*

A partial intellectual-political resolution did emerge in the late 1970s when I encountered a writer who might be described as a scholar-activist. Earlier, I had devoured *The Black Jacobins* (James 1938/1963) but had no idea that there was a movement attached to the author's name. I obtained *Facing Reality* (James, Lee and Chaulieu 1958/1974) and realised I had already arrived at similar conclusions. When *Alison and Busby* issued, between 1979 and 1984, three volumes of James's writings it became obvious to me that James had combined rigorous intellectual work in the Marxist-Hegelian tradition, detailed historical investigations into every type of uprising (putting black revolt at the centre of his analysis), and deep attention to the ways in which culture (including literature, music, film and cricket) reflected and shaped popular thought and practice. He had also put a lifetime of energy and intellect into political movements. James was a model of the intellectual, political and cultural activist. Although he mainly worked independently as a scholar-activist, he did have short periods on the staff of American universities in the 1970s (Buhle 1988). He had one further attraction for me. He seemed to have bridged the black-white barrier in his personal, political and intellectual life. While some of his emotional life emerged much later (Grimshaw 1996, Webb 2003), James was open about his motivation (explaining his family situation and his schooling in Trinidad) and his values (Humanist-Marxist, affirming the Western Enlightenment).

More significant was a resolution he offered to the political-intellectual issue that had threatened to derail my own efforts as a political activist in racialized community struggle,

and in the wider aspects of far left politics. What legitimate role could whites play in the struggle against racism? (So far as I know, among the new sociologists of ‘whiteness’ only Ware and Back (2002) address this question.) Given our historical position as the initiators of Transatlantic slavery, as the imposers of British cultural and economic interests on an Empire that encompassed Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, and as the perpetrators of racial discrimination when dark-skinned British subjects were invited to the UK, how could white Britons claim to have any place at all in the struggle for black liberation? The position announced by Stokely Carmichael at the Dialectics of Liberation conference in London in 1967 was that white people’s role was to work among other whites against racism (Cooper 1968, Bunce and Field 2010). (Carmichael’s violent imagery in this speech indicates the metonymical underpinnings of Black Power.) His book *Black Power* (Carmichael and Hamilton 1969), however, does not even go that far. One of its main arguments is that white ‘liberals’ cannot be relied upon in any form, and that the history of working with them in the civil rights movement showed that collaboration was counter-productive. Only by organizing themselves separately from whites would black liberation be possible. Carmichael’s position effectively promoted further personal and political distance between blacks and whites. It also begged a question – how does the revolutionary movement build sufficient unity to overthrow the system? – that James had already answered. At the Dialectics of Liberation conference, in his praise for Carmichael and earlier exponents of black liberation, James only hinted at the argument he had developed over the previous thirty years, honing it in discussion with Trotsky, explaining some of its implications in *Facing Reality*. (This book’s few references to ‘race’ also illustrate the depth of feeling: racism is a ‘cancer’, contemporary society is plagued with ‘sores and diseases’, the ‘violent passions of the Negro questions’ must be comprehended.) James reiterated Carmichael’s point (at least in the conference speech) that whites do have a role in their own communities, but added Lenin’s observation that people initially without class-consciousness had played significant roles in revolutionary protests. The inference that people (even white people) can and do change their stripes was obvious

(Bunce and Field 2010). He sums up his support for Black Power thus: ‘The independent struggle of the Negro people for their democratic rights and equality . . . [is] *a contributory factor to the socialist revolution* . . . and indispensable addition to the struggle for socialism’ (James 1967/1980 p. 233, italics as in original). For James (but not, it seems for Carmichael), the independent thought and political activity of black people is a major part – an ‘indispensable addition’ – to a wider struggle engaging all of humanity. Thus whites would inevitably play their part, alongside black people, in forging socialism. James’s political analysis here, as in everything he wrote, was clearly based on careful scholarly work. But not of the type you normally find in a university sociology course.

### *Political activism in the field of ‘race’*

No doubt partly because of the inadequacies of university sociology of ‘race’, the really important developments in the analysis of ‘race’ in the UK over the past forty years arise from the social/political movements that formed themselves in that period, outside of the university. Public sociology, as currently outlined, suffers from its implicit assumption that theory is what sociologists do, while practice is what ordinary people do. But CLR James had a quite different way of thinking about theory and practice. Where Carmichael and Hamilton’s book closed doors for me, theoretically and practically, they were opened with the emergence of the UK magazine *Race Today* in 1974, when James’s relative – the former UK Black Panther Darcus Howe – took over as editor. *Race Today* exemplified James’s approach to what came to be called ‘black autonomy’. James’s books, widely available in the 1980s, contained the basis for several developments in ‘race’ theory, some of which took another twenty years to percolate into the academy. (Stuart Hall understood James’s work (see his conversation with James (Hall 1996), and no doubt it was known to the authors of *The Empire Strikes Back* (CCCS 1982).) The Jamesian approach to theory was extremely challenging for sociological theorists. Expressed in a nutshell: ‘Today there is no difference

between theory and practice' (James, Lee and Chaulieu 1958/1974 p. 134). While the Marxist concept of praxis expresses the same idea, for the academy, theory normally takes place inside, and practice outside.

I initially learned 'Jamesianism' through reading Howe's *Race Today*, which seemed to complement my own efforts in *Chapelton News*, the neighbourhood newspaper I co-edited in the area of Leeds I had started to study for my thesis. While *Race Today* moved effortlessly from Bengali struggles in the East End of London to crises in the USA or the Caribbean, *Chapelton News* was resolutely local, with only one page of international news. (It was also much shorter than *Race Today*.) But for both, the absolute priority was documenting the lives of ordinary people as they were being churned by the forces of capital, as enacted by school teachers, employers or police officers. We took particular interest when these lived experiences were transformed into political struggles. (This attention to everyday life has obvious parallels in the ethnographic tradition in sociology; the difference with Jamesian documentation is that it is unashamedly value-laden and politically directed. Sociology today is only beginning to tolerate such a position.) While Darcus Howe no doubt knew he was following James's ideas as set out in *Facing Reality*, we at *Chapelton News* were just edging our way towards the merger of theory and practice. We began to transform our theory – that local people can and should control their own destinies, and are already in the process of doing so – into practice: that revolutionaries should simply support that process by documenting and publishing their thoughts and actions. Derived from these insights, I suggest that white sociologists' work in a public sociology of 'race' should only acquire validity when it emerges out of democratic engagement with the lives of black people and, wherever possible, with black thinkers and activists.

Since Chapelton was a hive of self-activity by black, white and Asian people (mainly but not exclusively working class), since radical black leaders in Chapelton already

had contacts with the Black Panthers, and since *Chapelton News* was (despite being mainly put together by whites) a paper of record for the black and Asian movements, as well as those whites engaged in struggle, it was only a short time before we started supplying materials to *Race Today*. Here we experienced the Jamesian notion of black self-organisation in practice. When the Race Today Alliance formed by combining the *Race Today* magazine collective, the Black Parents Movement and the Black Youth Movement, a grouping containing some of Britain's leading 'politically black' intellectuals and artists took centre stage in black political life in the UK. (One of the lasting achievements of this grouping was the 'Black Book Fair' held annually from 1982-1991 (see White, Harris and Beezmohun 2005). It exemplified James's theory that black people would organise separately, developing their power, but would collaborate with white individuals and organisations as and when their interests overlapped. In our case, in *Chapelton News*, the terms were, in practice, dictated by the Alliance. Set out in this way, in conventional social historical terms, the emotional drivers for this political-intellectual work are erased. But I was far from the only one in this scenario whose personal life was being turned upside by the black-white encounters, and by the fluctuating fortunes of the relationships within mainly white groups, as all of us struggled for both political clarity and personal affection. When five members of the London-based 'Men in Crisis' group came to Leeds to stay in our collective house in April 1974 for the third Men's Liberation conference (Cooper 1991), it was striking to hear men who were working class and middle class, black and white, highly educated and not, speak openly of the trauma they experienced as their wives and girl-friends became feminists and, in some cases, political lesbians. What we never discussed was the 'race' dimension of this trauma. The progress made on emotion in the women's movement, and the faltering steps we took in the pro-feminist men's movement are yet to be translated into the social movements arising from racialized identities.<sup>1</sup>

Joining Big Flame in 1975 introduced me to the Italian Marxist version of the theory of autonomy being developed in the Jamesian group.<sup>ii</sup> The notion of autonomy that Big Flame produced built upon the basic Marxist notion that the working class would develop its own theory, organisation and practice, utterly separate from that of the ruling class. Big Flame argued that the people who were oppressed, as well as exploited, under capitalism – women, black people, sexual minorities – would also develop their own theories, organisations and practices, separately from their oppressors. Orthodox Leninists later denounced this as ‘identity politics’, and called these black thinkers and organizers ‘nationalists’. What they failed to notice was that the corollary to this alleged separatism was a unifying trajectory within the movements. The internal dynamics within each of the oppressed groups were/are much more complex than a simple focus on identity. As Big Flame saw it, a socialist and sometimes neo-Marxist current existed within each of these movements, along with a separatist or nationalist current. The socialists had two modalities. One was the commitment to developing the group’s independent power. The other was, under the right conditions, working with the dominant group (with its various identity positions) in the joint struggle against capitalism. Like James, we came to this conclusion simply by observing what was actually happening in the feminist, black and gay liberation movements, as they unified their theory and practice in their struggles to extend the radically new form of society that was developing around them. Big Flame believed the ‘unifying’ tendencies within these movements would grow, leading to a future situation in which the power of each oppressed group was so significant that the dominant groups would be induced to jettison their racism, sexism and homophobia. As their prejudices were dispelled, we believed the dominant identity group within the movement against capital would consider forming new unified movements, far less affected by what *Facing Reality* had called the ‘sores and diseases’ of the old society (James, Lee, Chaulieu [Castoriadis] 1958/1972 p. 154). In retrospect it is clear that we underestimated the intractable nature of these ailments and we overestimated the power of the forces for the ‘new society’. We should have reflected upon

the acute emotional turbulence we were experiencing within our group, particularly over sexual relationships, which were often disguised within arguments about women's power and feminist theory. We should have paid more attention to the emotional dimensions of our work within the black, class, gay, disability and youth movements, reflecting on the way that the love and hate that rippled throughout our activity was pushed to one side (as often as possible) while we grappled with the supposedly more serious material issues. Had we developed a more reflexive and affective analysis we would have been better equipped to achieve a proper balance between the emotional ructions, the political theory and the sheer physical demands of relentless activism.

### **For an affective, reflexive, public sociology of 'race'**

If, as some claim, sociology is a science, operating with the research norms of natural science, then emotions are by definition to be excluded. Michael Burawoy (2005) eschews moralizing concepts like 'demons' and 'vocation' and he side-steps the vexed issue of objectivity in sociology. Yet these are issues that need to be addressed if we are to contribute to a radical public sociology. One reason why it is so hard to practise our vocation and meet the demands of the day is that we fail to think about what Weber meant by 'the demon who holds the very fibres of [our] lives'. Weber's metaphor alludes to some extraordinarily potent force, so potent that it takes hold of the core of us. While this force 'holds' rather than controls us, Weber's idea seems to be that we are in the grip of this force and that it drives us on. As so often, Weber is writing about the affective dimensions of human existence, and on this occasion he is talking about affectivity in a social scientist's life. Sociologists are in general uncomfortable with the notion that emotion is at the heart of their profession, and sociological structuralists tend to deny the role of subjectivity in society. The standard reading of Weber's argument for 'value neutrality' in social science leads many sociologists to strive to be objective observers, purveyors of an ethically neutral science. They ignore the paradox posed

by Weber's profound analysis of the erotic and the aesthetic aspects of life, which he sees as antidotes to the juggernaut of rationality (in Gerth and Mills 1991 pp. 340 – 5). The demon for artists is taken to be the urge to create something new; for monks it is the urge to close the gap with God. Perhaps sociologists assume that Weber believes these forces only operate amongst the religious brotherhood and the artists, but there is no reason to suppose that these are the only ones possessed. They might differ from the mass by acknowledging, and responding to their demons in art and prayer, but it seems clear that Weber acknowledged his. Anyone who reads literature, enjoys cinema or theatre, or follows popular culture will know that humanity is a species suffused with irrational and emotional desires. The demons obsessively analysed in those genres are love and hate. Ignoring their own demons, probably rationalizing them away completely, most sociologists stand back from the messy, subjective, emotional world inside and outside their offices, adopting the role of 'professional' sociologists (Burawoy 2005). If they seek some type of engagement, perhaps in Think Tanks, they position themselves in the 'legislative' arena because of their claim to scientific expertise (Bauman 1987), or as 'policy' sociologists (Burawoy 2005).

In my view, Burawoy's argument needs pushing further towards radical political engagement. His critique of sociology needs to be enlarged. 'Critical sociology' has long pointed out that there is no such thing as an objective science of sociology. As Alvin Gouldner argued:

If every social theory is thus a tacit theory of politics, every theory is also a personal theory, inevitably expressing, coping, and infused with the personal experience of the individuals who author it.

(Gouldner 1971 p. 40)

But critical sociologists rarely seem to examine the demons that drive their personal theorizing, still less expose them, usually writing with the cool detachment of the neutral

intellectual. Yet, particularly in politically charged fields such as gender, 'race' or sexuality, where the power of the dominant forces may be wielded with murderous consequences, coolness is often read as indifference. It is widely recognized that writers and readers are socially positioned, but it should also be noted that both are also emotionally positioned. We respond emotionally to the text we are reading; our evaluation of the text is affected by the conscious and unconscious feelings that are provoked. What Weber calls 'adequacy at the level of meaning' is achieved, I would argue, when the reader (often intuitively) feels that there is a good degree of 'fit' between the writer's emotional and value positions and their research findings. I would even suggest that whites only achieve some limited legitimacy among their black and Asian colleagues in the contemporary field of 'race' if their subjective motivations are deemed authentic. (That judgment, I guess, is intuited by each individual, given the rules of good behaviour in academic circles, and sometimes checked in private conversation with their black/Asian friends.) Conversely, and despite our commitments to reading rationally (if not objectively), we are likely to dismiss scholars in whose work we intuit a gap between their emotional disposition and their findings. (In other words, we read emotionally, as well as rationally.)

If a critical sociology is also a reflexive sociology, this would imply a full interrogation of our positions as writers and readers. A fully 'reflexive sociology', as Gouldner put it:

would need to be a radical sociology . . . [that] would recognise that knowledge of the world cannot be advanced apart from the sociologist's knowledge of himself [*sic*], or apart from his efforts to change these . . . the question he must confront, therefore, is not merely how to *work* but how to *live*.

(Gouldner 1971 p. 489)

This self-knowledge should not be just a matter of examining our beliefs and values. A new type of society, where autonomy, dignity and equality flourish, requires universal self-

reflection: 'The self-reflexive activity of an autonomous society is essentially dependent on the self-reflexive activity of its members' (Castoriadis 1996-7 p. 90).<sup>iii</sup> Zygmunt Bauman calls for 'sensitivity' in sociological thinking – we must 'sharpen our senses', 'open our eyes wider'. '[T]he art of sociological thinking tends to widen the scope, the daring and the practical effectiveness of your and my *freedom*' (Bauman 1990 p. 16, italics in original). Significantly, for Bauman, sociology is a form of art. Self-reflection in pursuit of freedom must extend from an examination of our own beliefs (as sociologists would propose) to an exploration of the 'demons' within, since an autonomous society will arise only when people know themselves to the extent that they are able to respond fully to the emotional needs of all others (and not merely to their economic or social needs, as most socialists appear to believe). For me, the search for an autonomous society is the major demand of my day, but even if this is regarded as utopian, social progress of any sort, must be based on meeting not only the income needs of the people, their needs for social welfare (health, education and so on) but also their needs for love, emotional recognition and psychological support. I would argue that none of these are achievable without self-reflection, and this is particularly obvious in its emotional dimension.

This self-reflection is most necessary in the field of 'race'. The field is now so diverse that no-one can claim the emotional luxury of full 'insider' status: even those whose ethnic markers seem to place them within a given ethnic category must confront the actual heterogeneity of that group, and often find themselves 'outside' the group as their class, gender, sexuality and other identifications come into play. This means that every sociologist's position, values and motivations are on the line in each setting, and he or she is always vulnerable to challenge, as a person, as an intellectual, as an activist or in whatever way the situation provokes. Without deliberate self-reflection and an open heart, politically useful sociology will be hard to produce.

Neglecting the affective dimension of social life from sociological writing on ‘race’ reduces the intellectual and political value of our work. Fortunately, Sara Ahmed provides examples of the usefulness of linking the emotional, the sociological and the political (Ahmed 2004, 2012). Despite feminist writers, inside and outside the academy, leading the way in making these connections over many decades this type of activist-thinking-and-feeling has had limited impact in university scholarship. The sociology of ‘race’ rarely captures the intensely charged emotions that are generated inside the movements (even though they occasionally erupt in university seminars and conferences). (In the late 1970s I told one of the advocates of Black Power whom I had known for several years that she treated me as though I was a white devil stalking the streets of Chapeltown (where we both lived). She replied: “You are.” I left the bar and cried.) Yet, if identity is understood as a complex process of negotiation between Self and Other, and if Self is recognized to be (as it was for Freud) a synonym for Soul, identity-construction, maintenance and performance is inevitably be infused with emotion. Our deepest fear, that our identity is, as Lacan argued, irretrievably split, is provoked each time our identity is sharply challenged – as it often is in the daily encounters between blacks and whites. Living easily with the deep ambiguity at the centre of identity might be almost impossible for all humans, and perhaps most difficult for those whose racialized identity is always at stake. Socially emboldened by the strength of the movements on gender, sexuality and ‘race’, psychological repression declines, passion rises, and arguments, sometimes fights, flare. The trauma experienced is as likely to be transferred into the hardening of the claim to a unified identity as it is into a considered acceptance of ambiguity. Yet, if our goal is to undermine essentialism in general and racism in particular, personal transformation (including the acceptance of ambiguity) is as necessary as the economic, cultural and political changes that radical sociologists advocate.

Again, this type of thinking was prominent in the women’s movement in the UK, and it appeared in mixed groups like Red Therapy, in the men’s movement, and was at least partly

unified in the notion of 'personal politics' championed by the libertarians and Big Flame from the 1970s onward. While Lacanianism made its jump into aspects of feminist theorizing, and influenced Stuart Hall's notion of the de-centred self, leading to his advocacy of 'identification' rather than 'identity' as the more relevant concept (Hall 1992), this version of Freudianism had limited impact. In a similar vein, important developments in both intersectional and racialization theory (Banton 2005, Miles 1982) would take place if we were to examine the affective dimensions. Specifically, intersectional theory (Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1992, Dhamoon 2010) would examine the role of emotion in forging the 'identities' of class, race, gender and sexuality, and would trace the psychological disruptions that occur when individuals, and social movements, attempt to unify those identities, with the massive impact the inescapable personal disturbances have on their ensuing political engagements. In analysing racialization, sociologists would (for example) become much more alert to the emotional issues arising in individuals and groups whose origins lie in more than one 'racial' group. They would also ask themselves where a 'racialized class fraction' finds the resources to deal with the daily psychological hurt of contemporary forms of 'othering'. (It is arguable that, however damaging unabashed racism was, the anger it provoked was psychologically healthy and politically productive. Today's mealy-mouthed 'soft exclusion', wrapped in organizations' endless 'diversity statements', seems much harder to deal with emotionally, as well as politically.) A major barrier to the transfer of the intellectual understanding of the connections between, say, 'race', class and gender into productive cross-movement political collaboration is that, in practice, emotional conflicts (not least those associated with sexual desire and personal hostility) are rife. Racialization theory might be productively developed to help us deal with conflicts which take political form, but usually contain emotional dimensions. The conceptual move from 'identity' to 'identification' starts this process: understanding multiple identifications (some of which are racialized, some of which might not be) might lessen the emotional strain of propping up a supposedly unified identity.

Responding to sociologists who argue that our discipline is founded on – and must maintain – an antipathy to psychology, and who therefore reject my argument here as subjectivist, I would refer to Cornelius Castoriadis once more. For Castoriadis, the psychological and the sociological are inseparable, and an emancipatory politics may only be developed when these spheres are bridged. Castoriadis explained that individual autonomy was achieved when consciousness ruled over the unconscious; he cites Lacan’s observation that ‘the unconscious is the domain of the Other’. (It is of course extremely unlikely, and probably undesirable, that consciousness will ever rule the unconscious.) Racist antagonism, I would argue, has roots in Castoriadis’s list of the dimensions of the unconscious: its ‘intentions, desires, investments, demands, expectations – significations to which the individual has been exposed from the moment of conception and even before, as these stem from those who engendered and raised him or her’ (Castoriadis 1975/1997 p. 102). Clearly, these significations are not merely those which circulate in the family – they saturate the society in which the child grows. Castoriadis’s concept of individual autonomy ‘leads directly to the political and social problem . . . its realization cannot be achieved except as a collective enterprise’, since ‘autonomy is the relation in which others are always present as the otherness *and* as the self-ness of the subject’ (Castoriadis 1975/1997 p. 108). Later he fleshed out his concept of social autonomy: ‘The object of politics is not happiness but freedom; autonomy is freedom understood not in the inherited, metaphysical sense, but as effective, humanly feasible, lucid and reflective positing of rules of individual and collective activity’ (Castoriadis 1994 p. 337). As Jeff Klooger argues:

What gives Castoriadis’s work its politically progressive character, so conspicuously lacking in the post-modern tradition, is the central place within it of the concept of *autonomy*. Though Castoriadis justifiably maintained that he was writing about autonomy long before his break with Marxism, it acquires a prominence and centrality in his later writings that it had not possessed previously. It represents an effort to distill the core of a radical, emancipatory politics so that it might be defended against the positivistic aspects and tendencies of radical political thought, particularly Marxism. It is a deceptively simple idea which leads to the most profound complexities. *I/we give myself/ourselves my/our own laws.*

Applied to the argument in this article, I would stress that the ‘me’ and ‘our’ here are white or black individuals or groups, whose collective freedom is both the subject and the object of our work.

### **Conclusion: for an affective, interpretive, public sociology of ‘race’**

What is needed, I think, is a renewal of the effort to work simultaneously as a sociologist and an engaged, emotionally aware, political activist in the ‘race’ arena, inside and outside the university. Contrary to the suggestion that we live in a ‘post-race’ era, the sharp exchanges during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century over the alleged death of multiculturalism remind us that there is still an (almost obsessive) interest in identity, and that identities are invariably racialized. The emotional aspects of identities, I have suggested, are as important as the social dimensions. This article has suggested that we revisit the arguments made by Gouldner (1971) and others about the nature and purpose of sociology. More recently this ‘sociology of sociology’ has been taken up by Michael Burawoy (2005). Elsewhere (Farrar 2010), I have attempted to describe and unify Zygmunt Bauman’s earlier advocacy of an ‘interpretive’ sociology (Bauman 1987) with Michael Burawoy’s proposal for a dialogic public sociology that ‘represents the interests of humanity – interests in keeping at bay both state despotism and market tyranny’ (Burawoy 2005 p. 24). Agreeing with Bauman’s refusal to claim any special political status for sociology, but also agreeing with Burawoy’s argument that sociology should take a stand against both neo-liberalism and the authoritarian state, I now want to suggest that, if it is going to be politically effective, this type of sociology needs to give up the discipline’s traditional antipathy to the personal, psychological dimensions of daily life, recognizing the deep emotional issues that underlie our values. Implicit in

Bauman's advocacy of the 'interpretive' role for sociologists is political hostility to those autocrats who legislate over humanity, and affirmation of the individual who welcomes dialogue and individual freedom. In this there is an echo of Castoriadis's commitment to both the personal and the collective dimensions of autonomy. For Castoriadis, the personal and the social are inseparable, and the emotional roots of both are to be embraced. These are the lines of flight that an affective, interpretive, public sociology of 'race' should pursue.

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### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> I attended a workshop called ‘Thinking and Feeling Race’ at the Crisis-Opportunity conference organized by Tidal, a global justice activist group in Leeds, in October 2012. So progress on this issue is apparent – again, outside the academy.

<sup>ii</sup> Big Flame (1972-1986) was a small revolutionary socialist organisation which aligned itself with the autonomous socialist feminist, gay, libertarian, internationalist and black Marxist movements in the UK and internationally. See <http://bigflameuk.wordpress.com/> Accessed 18.1.2013

<sup>iii</sup> Castoriadis was an early collaborator of CLR James. Later, he successfully combined insights from Marx and Freud.

MAX FARRAR is a sociologist and Emeritus Professor for Community Engagement at Leeds Metropolitan University, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS1 3HE, UK. [maximfarrar@gmail.com](mailto:maximfarrar@gmail.com)