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Late Modernity and the Changing Nature of Politics: Two Cheers for Henrik Bang

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It is common in the Sociology to argue that we have moved into a period of late modernity (Giddens, 1991, Beck, 1992, Lash, 1990), liquid modernity (Bauman,) or reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1984). Although the term used varies between authors, the changes identified, and the explanations given for these changes, are remarkably similar.¹ This debate has permeated Political Science, particularly in the literature on governance, but has been strongly resisted, particularly, as Bang argues in the work I consider below, by those working in the positivist, empirical, tradition, strongly reflected in the study of political parties. Such a response is misguided because this is clearly a crucial debate. Here, in addressing this issue I focus mainly on Bang's work because he raises (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008 and Bang and Sorensen, 2001) crucial issues for Political Science in relation to contemporary participation, political parties, modes of governance and forms of democracy. My treatment of his work is sympathetic, but critical. In essence, I argue that the trends which he, and others, identify are occurring, but not at the rate, or to the extent, that he claims.

Bang argues that the contemporary period is characterised both by increased complexity, reflected in changes in economic, social-cultural and political processes, and by increased reflexivity; these processes are related, but should not be simply conflated. In the political sphere, these processes are reflected particularly in: the replacement of hierarchy by networks as the dominant mode of governance; the hollowing out of the state; a move from politics-policy to policy-politics; the increased fluidity of identity, including political identities, coupled with a greater reflexivity; changing forms of political participation; the increased importance of the discursive arena for network governance and the associated rise of the role of the media and celebrity politics;; and the changing nature and role of parties. These are crucial claims which, to the extent that they are true, change the nature of politics and the political. Here, I want first to look briefly at each of these developments in turn, although I begin with a more extended discussion of Bang's take on late modernity, the emergence of network society (Bang, 2008). Subsequently, I shall look empirically at Bang's claims, focusing on the British case.

a) *Bang on Network Society and Network Governance*

i) *From Industrialised Society to Network Society*

Bang doesn't discuss late modernity as such. Rather, he focuses on Castells' (2001) work on network society. In essence, he accepts Castells' view that we have moved from industrialised

¹ As Kerr (2008) emphasises, similar changes are identified by those who characterised the change in terms of a move to post-Fordism or postmodernism. I prefer the term late modernity because the post-Fordist literature focuses too much on the economic aspects of the putative changes, while postmodernism is rooted in an ontological and epistemological position (anti-foundationalism and interpretivism) that I reject.

society to network society, although, unlike Castells, he emphasises the elitist, anti-democratic, elements involved in this change.

Bang accepts Castells' (2001, 52) contention, shared by most theorists of late modernity, that the social structure of advanced capitalist societies are changing in response, in large part, to changes in the economy which has become increasingly globalised, driven by knowledge generation and information processing, with firms involved in global (or international) networks of production and communication (Bang, 2008b, 9). So, globalisation is taken as axiomatic from this perspective and seen as a crucial driver of change. In addition, and crucially, this network economy rests on collaboration, not conflict, between capital and labour, resulting from high growth rates; thus, conflict rooted in differing class interests is a thing of the past (Bang, 2008b, p. 10). As such, while capital accumulation remains the driving force, economic activity is based on links between networks of production, organised around business projects, rather than firms, and networks of accumulation, that is global financial networks.

This new network capitalism is linked to changes in social and political life. The social world is characterised by greater individualism, so that sociality is thinner, but also by greater self-reflexivity. In particular, identity is more complex, no longer rooted in shared class experiences. Complex society produces complex identities, and individuals are both more knowledgeable and more reflexive. Of course, people do interact, but they do so through a new networked individualism. As such, to Castells, network society is characterised by self-selected networks which, as Bang argues (2008, p. 11): 'operate sporadically, depending on the needs and moods of each individual.'² In this view, the nature of communication has undergone a fundamental change. Communication has become more self-directed and, as a result, there has been move from a mass media system to a more user-orientated, fragmented, multimedia system (Bang, 2008, p.12).

At the political level, this has led to the nation state being replaced by the network state. In this view, governance has replaced government and, concomitantly, the nation state has been hollowed out. As such, rule is no longer focused on the nation state, but, for Bang (2008, p.13), a particular problem is that the increased complexity of global political problems, for example, global warming, means that global governance is essential, but without global government. In response (Castells, cited in Bang, 2008, p.13):

[states] increasingly share sovereignty while still proudly branding their flags. They form networks of nation-states the most integrated and significant of which is the European Union. But there are around the world a number of state associations more or less integrated in their institutions and practice that structure specific processes of transnational governance. In addition, nation-states have spurred a number of formal and informal international and supranational institutions that actually govern the world.

So, in essence, Castells argues, and Bang concurs, that the change to network society has had crucial consequences for politics and it is to these consequences that I now turn.

ii) *From Hierarchy to Networks*

² This phrasing invokes the image of the Everyday Maker as a new form of political participator discussed below.

The arguments of Castells and Bang about the move to network society and network governance have been paralleled in the last two decades in Political Science generally and in the study of public policy particularly. Here, the argument has been that governance has replaced government. So, Rhodes (1997, p15) argues: 'The term 'governance' refers to a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing.' He continues, defining governance as involving (p. 15): 'self-organising, interorganizational networks characterise by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state.' Here, Rhodes is drawing on European literature which identifies three modes of governance: hierarchy; markets; and networks (see, for example, Mayntz, 1991; Borzel, 1997; Kickert et al, 1997). Rhodes and others see the recent period as marked by a clear move towards governance based on networks. The argument is summed up well by Newman who contends (2001: 11):

It is argued that the capacity of governments to control events within the nation state has been influenced by the flow of power away from traditional government institutions, upwards to transnational bodies and downwards to regions and sub-regions. The old mechanisms of 'control through hierarchy', it is suggested, have been superseded by the rise of markets during the 1980s and early 1990s, and by the increasing importance of networks and partnerships from the mid-1990s onwards. Growing social complexity, the development of greater access to information and other social changes have made the task of governing more difficult.

In essence, the argument is that, while hierarchy was the dominant mode of governance historically, rapid change, and the increased complexity associated with it, means that government is much more difficult and governments can no longer govern without extensive cooperation from key interests within society. As such, politics now involves a series of exchange relationships, with the governments increasingly dependent on experts in policy and communication.

iii) The Hollowing-out of the State

From this perspective, the move from hierarchy to networks inevitably means that the state is 'hollowed-out'. Rhodes (1997), for example, argues that power has shifted *upwards* to supranational organisations (such as EU), *sideways* to non-state actors (such as transnational corporations and agencies) and *downwards* to sub-state actors (such as non-governmental organisation or sub-national governments). It is emphasised that these moves make governing more complex and reinforce the need for developing effective exchange relationships in an era of multi-level governance.

iv) From Politics-Policy to Policy-Politics

More broadly, Bang (2007a and b, 2008) traces a move from politics-policy to policy-politics which results from increased complexity and leads to a crucial change in the nature of democracy. Politics-policy was rooted in an input-output model, in which the focus was upon how pre-constituted political agents, individuals, but also classes, gained access to, and recognition in, political decision-making processes. In contrast, policy-politics is rooted in what Bang terms a 'flowput' model, in which the focus is upon how political elites from the public, private and voluntary sectors are networking in order to produce and deliver the policies wanted by the reflexive individuals characteristic of late or high modernity.

As such, Bang argues (2007b): ‘The democratic input logic of fairness and equity in *decision-making* is not easily applied to the output logic of competence development and policy critique in *action*’ (italics in original). Indeed, he emphasises that the policy-politics model is primarily a model of management, not of democracy, and, consequently, as we shall see below, the key problem in relation to contemporary political participation is not free-riding, but rather exclusion. Contemporary democracy needs to strike a balance between politics-policy and policy-politics, but that is a difficult problem. To Bang, the answer involves recognising what reflexive citizens, Everyday-Makers, have to contribute to democracy; to ensure that lay-people are also involved in the pattern of exchanges in network society.

v) *Identity and Reflexivity*

One of the key aspects of any late modernity theory is its emphasis on fluid identities and reflexivity. In this view, the end of industrialized society means the decline in the importance of previously shared identities rooted in shared experience of class cleavages reflecting the individual’s production location. Rather, current cleavages are rooted in one’s consumption location(s), social life revolves around ‘lifestyle choice’ and the new politics is an ‘identity politics’. From this perspective class is dead and gender dying as key social divisions (on this see Palulski and Waters, 1996). At the same time, the argument is that a more reflexive citizenry, linked to the growth of identity politics, has influenced the development of different forms of political participation and led to changes in the role of political parties, as we shall see below.

vi) *New Forms of Participation*

Bang (2003, 2004) is perhaps best known for his very interesting interpretation of the so-called participation problem in Western democracies. He acknowledges both the individualisation of politics and the decline of formal participation, but argues that the crucial problem of contemporary politics is political exclusion, rather than ‘free-riding.’ So, while some people are non-participants who still accept the benefits of democratic politics (they free-ride), the main problem is the ‘uncoupling’ of the political authorities from ordinary citizens (Bang terms them the laypeople). To Bang, a key feature of the dominant form of network governance is that the governance network is the basis of what Etzioni-Halevy (1993) terms ‘demoelitist rule’, which excludes the majority of citizens.

In Bang’s view, citizens have reacted to increased change and complexity in innovative ways; they are certainly not apathetic, as much of the mainstream political participation literature would claim (for a critique of this literature see Marsh, O’Toole and Jones 2006), rather they are increasingly reflexive drawing on their own experience. Some have become what he terms Expert Citizens who use their skills to speak on behalf of the less advantaged. They are most often new professionals, particularly in voluntary organisations, but many were previously grassroots activists. Expert Citizens deal with all types of elites and sub-elites, both political and corporatist, and feel they can do politics and make and implement policy as well as old authorities. As such, Bang argues, they build networks of negotiation and cooperation with politicians, administrators, interest groups and the media; they develop a ‘network consciousness’. Political authorities need them, given increased complexity, because they have a fund of everyday experience about how to deal with problems of exclusion based on race, gender, poverty etc. They are not creatures of those authorities, often being critical of them. However, to the extent that Expert Citizens are incorporated into expert networks, and perhaps even emasculated, by political authorities, Bang argues that an increase in their number may make uncoupling worse.

Another key problem is that Expert Citizens speak for, rather than listen to, their 'clients'. So, to Bang, the advent of Expert Citizens reflects a demoeitist ethos in which the key meta-principle of democracy is the need to rationalise and legitimise the discourses of the experts who are controlling a complex, negotiated, economy and polity. As such, the Everyday Maker is a response to the Expert Citizen. Everyday Makers are rooted in the idea that democracy is not merely about the strategic articulation of interests within expert networks. Rather, they argue that their narratives of everyday experience are important.

In many ways, Bang argues, Everyday Makers do not feel defined by the state; they aren't apathetic, but neither are they opposed to the state. Rather, they don't want to waste time getting involved with the state; they prefer to be involved at the lowest possible, local, level. As such, Everyday Makers typically think globally, but act locally. They have no interest in producing a new form of interest representation and have minimal interest in party politics. They are also sceptical of Expert Citizens, who, they think, pursue their own interests. Similarly, they are not driven by a sense of duty, or by an ideology, nor are they interested in gaining influence, rather they wish to feel involved and develop themselves. They aim to encourage what Bang terms 'small local narratives'.

As such, Bang argues that Everyday Makers live by a credo of everyday experience, which argues (Bang, 2004, p.28):

- Do it Yourself
- Do it where you are
- Do it for fun, but also because you find it necessary
- Do it ad hoc or part-time
- Do it concretely, instead of ideologically
- Do it with self-confidence and show trust in yourself
- Do it with the system, if need be.

Clearly, to the extent that Bang has identified new forms/modes of political participation (on this see Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2006, Li and Marsh, 2008 and Taylor, 2008), then this has consequences for the future of politics which I return to below.

vii) The Discursive Arena

Bang argues (2007b) that contemporary governance networks operate in three arenas: parliamentary; corporatist; and discursive. He contends that the first two arenas are becoming less important, while the discursive arena is becoming more important, because it is crucial for attempting to resolve the tension between the complexities of late modernity and the imperative involved in the need to produce effective public policy. The idea here is that contemporary states are under more pressure dealing with increased complexity and, for that reason, incorporate more elites in the policy-making process. These elites include leaders from business and the voluntary sector and, increasingly, celebrities, from sporting and entertainment arenas.

In Bang's view, the people involved in contemporary network society are social constructivists; they do not have pre-constituted interests or identities, and thus policy preferences. Rather, identities and policy emerged through the networking process, as a result of discursive engagement among the demoeite. At the same time, this demoeite engages in a broader

discursive arena, utilising their media expertise, in order to convince lay-people that they have the answers to the problems those lay-people face. As such, Bang identifies a shift from an input-output model of politics, in which inputs from citizens, via parties etc, were negotiated and aggregated into policy outputs by government, to a recursive one, in which the demagogue, operating through the political system, acts: 'in its own terms and on its own values, thereby shaping and constructing societal interests and identities' (Bang, 2007, 8).

viii) *The Changing Nature and Role of Parties*

In Bang's view, increased complexity and reflexivity and the accompanying move from politics-policy to policy-politics have led to a significant change in the nature and role of political parties. He acknowledges the validity of many of Blythe and Katz's (2005) conclusions about the rise of the cartel party. However, he sees this rise more directly as a response to the shift towards policy-politics and argues that, more recently, cartel parties have been superseded in many countries by what he terms expert-celebrity parties.

Blythe and Katz (2005), building in part on Katz's prior work with various collaborators (Katz, 2006, Katz and Crotty, 2006, Katz and Mair 1995 and 2002), trace the change in political parties from elite parties, to mass parties, to catch-all parties and, finally, to cartel parties. Elite parties were replaced by mass parties as the result of the extension of the franchise and the related development of class-based parties, split broadly along left-right ideological lines. Subsequently, the advent of the catch-all party, which attempted to create broad electoral support for its policies, reflected the erosion of class-based politics and these related ideological distinctions. There was a developing consensus among the major parties on policies, so that both the parties' need for, and their capacity to maintain, a distinctive electorate became even more insignificant and irrelevant. The move from the catch-all to the cartel party accentuated this trend. Blythe and Katz (2005: 37) argue that the aim of the cartel party was: 'the development of a permanent networked party without giving up much, if anything, to the 'party on the ground.'" So, the cartel party attempts to create a permanent coalition of elites, which, at best, is responsive to its members/electorate in a minimal way (see Table 1 below for Bang's outline, based on Blythe and Katz's work, of the key characteristics of a cartel party).

Bang sees the cartel party as an initial response, in the 1970s, to problems of late modernity. Governments need to involve elites in governing networks to manage increasing complexity. At the same time, they need legitimacy which is only available through elections and can only be achieved if parties can convince these lay-people that they are offering, and can deliver, what lay-people want. As such, cartel parties aim to control the state and use that control to produce necessary policy and convince the electorate that these policies have/will meet their needs. Cartel parties don't encourage active, involved, members; rather, they need individual members to proselytise and legitimize both their power and their policies.

In contrast, Bang argues that, from the 1990s, we have seen the development of expert-celebrity parties (see Table 1). As complexity has increased, and as individuals have become more reflexive, with the growth in the number of Expert-Citizens and Everyday-Makers, so the limitations of the cartel party have been exposed. Increased complexity has made governance more difficult, so, while in the 1970s networks and hierarchies perhaps coexisted as modes of governance, now network governance is clearly the dominant mode. This means that parties

have become part of what Bang terms glocalised policy-politics networks. involved in a series of exchange relations aimed at achieving good governance. Such good governance is essential if the governing party is to be re-elected, but so is the presentation of the party, the government and the policy. Consequently, parties use the media tools of celebrity (blogs, appears on popular TV shows, personalised web-sites etc) to communicate with the electorate. In this type of party, voters and members are not sources of policy ideas. Rather, members are valued largely in terms of how they can be used to communicate the message of good governance, and the electorate is there to be convinced.

Table 1: The Cartel Party and the Partnering Elite Party

	The Cartel Party	The Expert-Celebrity Party
<i>Time Period</i>	1970-	1990-
<i>Degree of Social-Political Inclusion</i>	Mass suffrage	Reflexive individuals
<i>Level of Distribution of Politically Relevant Resources</i>	Relatively Diffused	Niche Dependent
<i>Principal Goals of Politics</i>	Politics as a Profession	Policy as Good Governance
<i>Basis of Party Competition</i>	Managerial Skills, efficiency	Communicative Performance, Public visibility and Effectiveness
<i>Pattern of electoral competition</i>	Contained	Quasi-Competitive
<i>Nature of Party Work and Party Campaigning</i>	Capital Intensive	Information Intensive
<i>Principal source of party's resources</i>	State Subvention	Membership Fees and Voluntary Contributions
<i>Relations between Ordinary Members and Party Elite</i>	Stratarchy; Mutual Autonomy	Exemplarity, Co-operation, 'Truthiness'
<i>Character of Membership</i>	Neither rights nor obligations important (distinction between members and non-members blurred); emphasis on members as individuals rather than as an organized body; members valued for contribution to legitimizing myth.	Problem and project oriented, geared to self-development and the 'internalization' of a partnering sociality. Members valued for what they can and, in particular, <i>do</i> .
<i>Party Channels of Communication</i>	Party gains privileged access to state-regulated channels of communication	The party in the media: game shows, reality shows, personalized websites, blogging, etc.
<i>Position of Party between Civil Society and State</i>	Party Becomes Part of State	Party becomes part of 'glocalized' policy-politics networks
<i>'Representative' Style</i>	Agent of State	Partnering, Key Political Actor in Networks

b) *Bang to Rights?*

I want to emphasise again that Bang's work is important because he tries to link the increased complexity and reflexivity associated with late modernity to important changes in the nature of contemporary democracy. However, while I acknowledge that Bang's work is interesting and important, I would take issue with a number of his arguments. Unsurprisingly, the core of my argument is rooted in skepticism about the extent of the changes associated with late modernity. Nevertheless, my main concern is to examine to what extent late modern theorists', and especially Bang's, conceptualisation of the type of politics associated with network society/late modernity offers an accurate view of the politics of contemporary Britain. In particular, I want to suggest that in the UK change is not as ubiquitous as many claim, rather there have been significant path-dependencies. In this vein, I would argue that: the economic changes, and in particular the extent and consequences of globalisation, have not been as great as the late modernity theorists contend; relations between capital and labour in contemporary society retain a clear exploitative element; there have been significant path-dependencies, so politics-policy and policy-politics have always co-existed and still co-exist; relatedly, networks have not replaced hierarchy as the dominant mode of governance, rather government is attempting to retain control of network governance; consequently, any move towards policy-politics is mediated by the different traditions and patterns of institutions in different countries; although identities may be increasingly fluid, they remained shaped, although not determined, by access to economic, social and cultural capital; again relatedly, while we may be able to identify Everyday Makers, they may not exhibit all the characteristics that Bang identifies; talk of a politics based on consumption and identity politics sees choices as much more open than is the case; Britain has never had cartel parties, rather our parties probably remain catch-all parties which increasingly utilise the tools of celebrity politics; and there are clear patterns in ownership of, and access to, the media which means that the media reinforces, as well as, perhaps more than, undermining, existing structured in equality. I will look briefly at each of these points in turn.

i) Economic Relations in Late Modernity?

Bang gives very little detail about his views on the nature of capitalism in late modernity/network society. However, he does endorse two of Castells' arguments which should not go uncontested, that globalisation is a key feature of, and driver of, change in network society and that network society is marked by greater accommodation between capital and labour.

The literature on globalisation is vast, but two important themes in it are crucial here: the extent of globalisation; and the degree to which, and the way in which, economic processes are mediated by the institutions and process within particular countries. The debate on the extent of globalisation generates more heat than light. Hyperglobalists like Ohmae (1996) saw globalisation as a process which was overwhelming, inexorable and had led to the 'end of the nation-state.' Sceptics like Hirst and Thompson (1999) were rightly highly critical of this view and presented solid empirical evidence that the world is neither 'globalised' nor 'borderless'.³ Similarly, Hay (200x) argued that it is regionalisation, rather than globalisation, that is occurring

³ For example, the share of government expenditures in GDP averaged 47 per cent in the mid-1990s, compared to just 21 per cent before the Second World War (Rodrick, 1997, p. 49)

and uses gravity models to show that trade and investment within Europe have actually become 'de-globalised.' Held et al.'s work (1999) is important here because they take issue with the sceptics arguing that globalisation is a process which is occurring, but is far from complete.

This issue is certainly important, but it should not distract us from three other crucial points. First, all countries are much more exposed to international, that is non-domestic, economic pressures than they were previously. This is something that none of the authors discussed above would dispute. However, second, all countries are exposed in different ways and to different extents to external economic pressures; so what matters when examining each country is its position rather than the overall 'global' picture. Third, and here Hirst and Thompson, Held et al. and Hay would agree, the effect of these changes on state autonomy, or more specifically, policy outcomes is not automatic. In any given country the impact of external economic pressures is shaped partly by the economic and political institutional structures of that country and partly by policy makers' perceptions of the extent of the country's exposure to international forces and the economic and political structural constraints.

Overall, my position is best summarised by Held et.al. who argue (1999, px) that external economic pressures (whether 'global', 'international' or 'regional') are:

mediated significantly by state's position in global political, military and economic hierarchies; its domestic economic and political structures; the institutional pattern of domestic politics; and specific government as well as societal strategies for contesting, managing or ameliorating globalising imperatives.

The point here is that any late modern theorist needs to have a sophisticated appreciation of the globalisation literature.

Castells' network economy is capitalist, but without what used to be regarded by many as one of the key features, its exploitative nature. Capitalism in network society is marked by collaboration, not conflict, between capital and labour. Of course, this is a large and contentious issue. Certainly, Britain has seen a very significant decline in days lost through industrial action (in 1979 29 million days were lost, while in 2006 754,000 were lost) and trade union membership (54.5% of the workforce were in TUC affiliated unions in 1978, but only 28.1% in 2006) in the last thirty years. However, this decline resulted from both changes in the economic context - deindustrialisation, the decline in the public sector etc. - and legislation which restricted the right to strike. While the former might be viewed as an aspect of the move towards a network economy and society, the latter was driven by neo-liberal ideology and was designed specifically to intervene in the relationship between capital and labour in the interests of capital. Indeed, one doesn't have to be a Marxist to suggest that neo-liberalism and the policies associated with it were designed not to ensure a compromise between capital and labour, but rather to weaken the position of labour vis a vis capital.

ii) From Politics-Policy to Policy-Politics?

I wouldn't accept that there has been such a definite move in the UK from politics-policy to policy-politics as Bang seems to suggest. In my view, in the UK at least, they have always coexisted, but in a particular way. So, Hall and I have argued elsewhere (Marsh and Hall, 2007;

see also McAnulla, 200x and Evans, 200x) that the dominant view of democracy in the UK, what I term the British Political Tradition (BPT), which underpins its institutions and processes, emphasizes a limited liberal notion of representation and a conservative notion of responsibility. The former represents a particular, limited, take on politics-policy because it emphasises that a system is representative to the extent that there are periodic free and fair elections in a competitive party system, but downplays the importance of a more participatory notion of representation and, thus, a more active, citizenry. The emphasis upon a conservative notion of responsibility in contrast is pure policy-politics, although a policy-politics driven by hierarchy, rather than network, governance. Indeed, I would argue that the key mantra that underpins UK political institutions and processes is: ‘government knows best’.

So, in my view, in an important sense, the UK has always been a system marked by policy-politics and hierarchy, with party membership, let alone the electorate, having little influence over policy-making. Examining policy-making in British parties readily makes this point. In this way, the Conservative Parliamentary Party had no role in selecting the Party leader until 1965, while Party Members only gained a role in 2001. Similarly, the Conservative Party Conference had no real role in policy-making and, while the Labour Party Annual Conference did have a limited role in the past, it was constrained in practice because Labour Party leaders ignored, and/or politicked against, decisions by Conference with which they did not agree (Minkin, 198x), and, importantly, the role of the Conference has been significantly reduced under New Labour.

At the same time, there is considerable evidence that politics-policy and policy-politics still coexist in the UK (and, I’m sure, elsewhere). As one example, contemporary UK policy making has been particularly marked by two features: a move towards evaluation-based, rather than ideologically-driven, policy (hence, among other things, the increased focus on policy transfer); and the increased use of focus groups in both the evolution and legitimation of policy. Clearly, a focus on evaluation-based policy making (emphasizing that what matters is what works) fits very well with Bang’s argument about policy-politics, but focus groups seem to reflect more of a politics-policy focus. Of course, it is possible to argue that the first trend is more important in the UK than the second, and I would agree, but it is equally possible that this development fits happily with the BPT, and so doesn’t necessarily imply a new form of governance.

I am not suggesting here that nothing has changed; indeed I have recognized elsewhere increasing challenges to the BPT (Marsh and Hall, 2007). Interestingly however, many of those challenges are informed by politics-politics, rather than policy-politics, arguments. So, many of the demands for constitutional change under New Labour were underpinned with a more participatory view of democracy. For example, the putative move to proportional representation was driven by the view that the views/preferences of voters should be more accurately represented in Parliament, while the demands for an effective Freedom of Information Act were rooted in the argument that citizens must know more about what governments are doing, if they are to hold government accountable. Nevertheless, it remains the case that many of New Labour’s constitutional proposals were withdrawn (the proposal for electoral reform and a move towards proportional representation) or de-radicalised (Freedom of Information), in large part, Hall and I argue, because they were at odds with the BPT.

iii) *Hierarchy and Networks*

At the core of Bang's analysis is an argument about network society and the growth of network governance. In many ways, Bang's argument has resonance with the work of Rhodes discussed briefly above. However, while Rhodes sees networks as replacing governance as the dominant mode, Bang says little directly about hierarchy as mode of governance. On the other hand of course, unlike Rhodes, he sees networks as elite structures, with the implication that most contemporary governance is top-down. In my view, which I have advanced elsewhere (Marsh, 2008), in the UK at least, hierarchy remains a, perhaps the, dominant mode of governance. I argued that this is particularly evident in New Labour's participatory governance initiatives, which were designed supposedly to build cooperative networks within which to develop policy. Most of New Labour's policy initiatives were in the area of what Bulpitt (1983) calls 'low politics' and, more importantly, their operation reflects New Labour's concern with control, rather than empowerment. As Rose (1999) emphasises, new forms of governance (or governmentalities as he terms them following Foucault) are designed to incorporate citizens, including expert citizens, into new fields of power which appear to grant autonomy, but demand greater responsibility.

Unsurprising, it is easy to find analysts who are sceptical of New Labour's commitment to participatory, network governance. So, Newman (2005, p. 130) argues: 'Participatory initiatives may fall short of the ideals of empowerment or co-production and become part of a fundamentally managed rationality'. She also contends (2005, p. 133) that: 'power imbalances mean that public officials' 'claims to truth' tend to prevail over the experiences and knowledge that the collaborating publics bring to those interactions.'

Similarly, Sterling examines how partnerships work under New Labour and argues that (2005, p. 148): 'research consistently finds that most partnerships involve participation by only a small number of people and, with a few isolated exceptions, issues of community diversity, 'race', gender, disability and class still receive little attention in partnership practice.' As such, participatory governance often creates: '(a) veneer of consensus (which) can mask power relations between the 'partners' that could work to silence some voices and bolster others' (Sterling, 2005). So, participatory governance in areas of low politics can often be exclusionary and it is the usual suspects, the poor, women, those from ethnic minorities and the young, who are excluded.

Interestingly, in my view, this evidence contradicts Rhodes' (see Marsh 2008 for a more detailed discussion), but not necessarily Bang's, argument, although Bang needs to be clearer about the continuance of hierarchy and its relation to networks as modes of governance. At the same time, Bang is arguing that state actors have much less autonomy and control than they did in the past; so, it is an elite network, rather than politicians/bureaucrats who dominate. In essence, what Bang is positing is a dominant network, or series of networks, which need to be challenged.

Overall, it seems to me that any trajectory from politics-policy to policy-politics, or from hierarchy to networks as the dominant form of governance, is likely to be different in different countries with different political traditions and different political institutions, as well as different economic, social and cultural trajectories. So, as just one example, it does not seem surprising that my approach to these issues is influenced by the fact that I live in, and know most about the

UK, while Bang lives in, and knows most about Denmark (for an interesting discussion of the differences between the UK and Danish political traditions, with which I broadly agree, see Bevir and Rhodes, 2003, Chap. 5). These countries have very different political traditions and I would suggest that politics-policy ideas have always played a greater role in Denmark than they have in the UK. Hence, to me, what Bang's sees as a new development (the move towards policy-politics), I see as fitting well with the UK's past.

Of course, if we accept the main thrust of Bang's argument, then the key question becomes what is driving the change to policy-politics. There are clearly contextual factors, associated with late modernity, but Bang does not explore them at any length. So, for example, he says little about globalization, other than to assert that it is a key feature (cause?) of the increased complexity facing modern government. Yet, as we saw earlier, the extent and nature of globalisation is contested and it surely has different characteristics and different effects in different countries.

iv) Fluid Identities and New Forms of Political Participation

In my view, the stress on fluid identities in the late modernity literature is overdone. I am not denying, who could, that identities are more complex than they used to be and, certainly, class doesn't play the same role it did in peoples' lives. However, the idea that identities are totally fluid and that lifestyle choices are equally open to all is misguided and dangerous. Two brief examples will suffice to make my point here: a consideration of how class affected the lives of the respondents in a study of young people I undertook with Therese O'Toole and Su Jones (2006); and an outline of how respondents in Akhtar's (2008) study of Pakistani British younger people viewed their identity.

My work with O'Toole and Jones (2006) is cited positively by Bang (see, for example, Bang 2008b, p. 24) as evidence that young people are increasingly reflexive and, therefore, likely to engage in different types of 'political' activity, particularly as Everyday Makers. I return to this issue below. Here, I want to focus on our treatment of class (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2006, Chap.). We take issue with the argument that class is dead and no longer has an important affect on young people's identity and lives. Certainly, it is hard to read the transcripts of our focus groups and interviews and conclude that class doesn't exist or matter. Our respondents rarely talked of class, but they lived it. The groups we talked to with limited access to economic capital knew they had little and that many had much more. They also appreciated how that affected their life chances; our respondents' lifestyle choices were not open, rather they were strongly constrained by their access to what Bourdieu (1984) terms economic, social and cultural capital. So, while we see class, and indeed gender and ethnicity, as a lived experience, it is an experience clearly rooted in, but not determined by, structured inequalities. As such, I would argue that any focus on identity politics and lifestyle choices neglects the continued importance of structured inequality in shaping the options and chances of the disadvantaged.

Akhtar's work (2008) is on the political identity of British-born Pakistanis in Birmingham. She shows very clearly how their identities, including their political identities, are rooted in both religion and ethnicity. Most recent analyses of Muslims in the UK emphasise the importance of their religious identity, which itself suggests that their identities are shaped, although not determined, by external religious structures; the role of the mosque is clearly crucial. However, Akhtar shows how biradari, kinship networks, shapes the lives of her respondents. The

communities in which they live are shaped by these kinship networks, which are dominated by the older men, and Akhtar's respondents have constantly to negotiate these constraints. So, many young British-Pakistanis are face with a double-bind; discrimination from the mainstream white community and exclusion from decision-making in their own communities. Akhtar doesn't suggest that these constraints are determining, indeed she shows how many of her respondents negotiate them and become involved in 'political' activities. However, these are structural constraints which affect identities and actions.

Bang is less directly concerned with issues of identity than most theorists of late modernity. Rather, as we saw, he identifies new forms of political participation. Bang's focus on Everyday Makers has attracted growing attention (Bevir, 2004; Bevir and Rhodes, 1999; Blanc and Beaumont, 2005, pp. 409-420; Bogason and Musso, 2006; Edmondson, 2003; Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Li and Marsh, 2008; Mouritsen, 2003; Rhodes, 2002; Tapio and Auli, 2005; and Torpe, 2003). Here, I want to deal briefly with Taylor's (2008) interesting study of young women involve in feminist political activity in Manchester and my own work with O'Toole and Jones (2006).

To recap, Bang argues that Everyday Makers are: critical of politicians and political parties; non-ideological; participating on and off at the local level; and disengaged from the state. Both Taylor's and our study show that the respondents were highly critical of politicians and political parties. Similarly, both studies found that the political activity of their respondents was local and on and off. However, beyond this the two studies report different findings. Contra Bang, Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2006, pp.) found that many of their young respondents, especially the more disadvantaged ones, were crucially involved with the state (claiming benefits, living in homeless hostels etc), so that politics for them was, to a large extent about their interaction with the state. In contrast, Taylor's respondents (2008) did not engaged with the state, other than by voting. Their political activity was more local organized around producing music events and organizing action against newsagents who prominently displayed 'Lads magazines'. On the other hand, Taylor emphasizes that her respondents had a strong ideological commitment (they were on the left), that underpinned their activities. Thus, although, for various reasons, they might go in and out of political activity, all their political activity was informed by an ideological position. As such, they differed clearly from Marsh, O'Toole and Jones's (2006) respondents who were not ideological.

This evidence leads me to argue that, while Bang's identification of new forms of political participation, and especially of Everyday Makers, is important, it is oversimplified. Indeed, I would argue that the activity of everyday Makers is more context-specific and, is shaped by access to economic, social and cultural capital. So, to return to our two examples, Marsh, O'Toole and Jones's (2006) disadvantaged respondents had no choice but to engage with the state. In contrast, all Taylor's (2008) were highly educated and reflexive in less concrete, more ideological ways. Again, my argument would be that structures constrain choice.

v) *Changing Political Parties?*

Here I want to deal with both Blythe and Katz's (2005) discussion of the development of political parties and Bang's view (2008a and b) that we have moved into the era of the expert celebrity party in relation to the development of UK political parties.

British political parties developed initially very much in the way that Blythe and Katz's suggest, although, in my view, the idea of the cartel party has little resonance in the UK. In the 18th century the Whigs and Tories were factions within Parliament and Prime Ministers relied on these factions for majorities. The extension of the franchise in the 19th century and the redrawing of constituency boundaries after the Second Reform Act in 1867 meant that it became electorally imperative to develop an extra-Parliamentary Party to ensure the election of the Parliamentary Party. So, the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Parties was formed in 1867 and the National Liberal Federation in 1877. Here, the nomenclature is interesting and revealing. In strict terms the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party were the Parliamentary wings of the parties, while the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Parties and the National Liberal Federation respectively were the extra-Parliamentary Parties (contrast this with the Labour Party discussed below). In both cases the extra-parliamentary parties were not initially formed to give a channel of representation to citizens, but rather as a way of ensuring the election/re-election of members of the Parliamentary Party, and thus a government of that party. The origins of the Labour Party are very different. It was formed as the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 and changed its name to the Labour Party in 1906. It was established specifically to represent extra-parliamentary interests, most importantly the trade unions and the socialist societies, in Parliament – previously the trade unions had had some representation through what were called Lib-Lab MPs (who took the Liberal Whip). Here again, the nomenclature is interesting; the Labour Party was the extra-parliamentary Party, while the Party in Parliament was called, unsurprisingly, the Parliamentary Labour Party (so the reverse of the other two Parties).

The different origins of the Parties were, and are, reflected in their structure and constitutions. There was never any doubt that the parliamentary party was dominant in the Conservative Party. The Party Conference was a talking-shop and for over a hundred years played no real role in policy making. Its role remains broadly the same, although delegates and members are allowed to feed in views through debates and, particularly, e-mail contact. The Party has also established, particularly under Cameron, an increasing number of Task Forces to advise on policy. Nevertheless, most observers would argue that the Conservative Party remains a top-down Party in which the Parliamentary leadership controls policy making. However, that is not to say there have been no changes; so, the Conservative Parliamentary Party has had a role in selecting the Party leader since 1965 (previously he emerged from discussion between the party elite), while Party Members gained a role in 2001.

The Labour Party's structure was totally different. For most of the first century of its existence, the Party Conference was formally the key policy making body for the Party, with the National Executive Committee (NEC) fulfilling that role between Conferences. As such, the history of the Party is marked by a series of struggles between the extra-Parliamentary and the Parliamentary Parties. The key point however is that these struggles never prevented the Parliamentary Party leadership from pursuing the policies it wanted, although it made the Labour Party, in most senses, a much more difficult party to lead than the Conservatives (see Minkin). Under Blair, the role of the Conference (which became more like it had always been in the Conservative Party) and the NEC declined and the Parliamentary leadership exercised more direct control over policy through the National Policy Forum.

My key point here is that UK parties were always more concerned with ensuring Parliamentary majorities and strong governance than with acting as a channel of representation; they were always policy-politics organisations. So, a key feature of the Parliamentary Parties has been their party discipline; that is governments with a majority can rely on support from their party MPs in Parliament, so that, in the UK system, the Executive dominates the legislature.⁴

Of course, Blythe and Katz, and indeed Bang, see the cartel party was a response to the complexities of late modernity and the move towards network governance. However, the British case would suggest that cartelisation is much less likely without a proportional electoral system. This point deserves greater attention.

As elsewhere, UK parties can no longer rely on electoral support rooted in the voters' class or ideological positions and there has been clear class and partisan dealignment (see Denver, 2003; Dunleavy, 2005; and Wattenberg and Dalton, 2002, who put these changes in a comparative context). As such, the electoral support UK parties enjoy and their membership has declined significantly (as an example Labour Party membership was 348,000 in 1980, 385,000 in 1998 and 182,000 in 2006, while Conservative Party membership was 1,200,000 in 1980, 350,000 in 1998 and 247,000 in 2006). Consequently, during the 1960s and 1970, parties had to try much harder to attract support, changing into catch-all parties (perhaps later than elsewhere).

Of course, there have been fundamental changes in the UK electoral systems, particularly since 1999. At present, the UK now has five different electoral systems operating for different elections: the simple majority system, for General and local elections, except in Northern Ireland; the single transferable vote system for General and local elections in Northern Ireland; a regional list for European elections; an additional Member system for elections to the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly; and a supplementary vote system for the election of the London Mayor. However, there are relatively few signs that it has led to cartelisation.

As Dunleavy (2005) argues, these different systems, especially the proportional ones, together with the broader pattern of partisan dealignment, have led to the development of very different party systems across the UK. However, the evidence of cartelisation is limited. Perhaps three developments point in this direction. First, as Dunleavy (2005) emphasises, there is increased evidence of vote-splitting and the greater complexity of voters' preference structures. This could possibly lead parties to collaborate more with other parties which 'their' voters have as second preference and whom they vote for at other elections. Second, Dunleavy also points to the increases in tactical voting in the UK. He argues (2005, p. 216):

For Labour and Liberal Democrat voters to behave cooperatively to oust the Conservatives, as they did very extensively in 1997, several different things had to happen. The two parties had to

⁴ Of course, there has been a significant increase in dissent over the last two decades or more (see www.revolt.co.uk). So, as just one example, there were rebellions in 28% of the divisions in the 2005/6 Parliamentary Session (4 of which were big enough to result in Government defeats) and in 20% in the 2006/7 Session. Nevertheless, while dissent has significantly increased (largely as a result of the fact that MPs in the UK feel they have no say in policy, see Garner and Letki, 2005), most government legislation passes – so the system is still one of executive dominance.

communicate to their voters that they were, in some sense, connected (which they did via the agreement on constitutional reform); the parties had to coordinate their behaviour and their local signals to voters, concentrating their campaigning efforts in different seats, which they duly did; and voters had to see the alternative recipients of their votes as legitimate.

Here, there is clear evidence of elements of a cartelisation strategy. Third, at the sub-sectoral level, where there are proportional electoral systems, coalitions have become more common.

However, Dunleavy's work offers two important qualifications to an argument about cartelisation, although it is not an issue he addresses. First, he suggests that the rise of multi-party systems in the UK has made British politics more, not less, ideological. Here, he points particularly to the role of the United Kingdom Independence Party, the British National Party, the Greens and Respect, all of which have enjoyed significant votes at particular elections and all of which are clearly ideologically different. Second, he emphasises that, despite the changes in the electoral systems and, unlike in Canada and India, the other two plurality rule systems, there has not been a denationalisation of party politics, reducing the control by central party organisation.

Overall, Dunleavy sees the move towards proportionality associated with greater partisan dealignment as the key to changes in the party system. However, he acknowledges the continuing dominance of party and governing elites, while suggesting that this will only delay, not prevent, change (2005, p. 227):

The UK's governing elites have conceded the principle of (rough) proportionality for new institutions, where it is less threatening. But apart from the Scottish initiative to bring in STV for local councils and voting systems in Northern Ireland (which do not impinge on major party interests), neither the Labour nor the Conservative leaderships have been prepared to accept PR for established institutions. If this interpretation is correct then voters will have to persist for some considerable time in supporting multiple parties that are repeatedly crushed by plurality electoral rules before (one of) the major party elites finally cracks and concedes electoral reform system-wide or some other form of constitutional rebalancing.

So, Dunleavy suggests that this is likely to be only a temporary respite for UK national party organisation. Partisan dealignment and a move to more proportional systems is leading to change and this process will be accelerated as voters express their preferences by supporting other parties, leading in the end to a proportional system in the UK and, thus, inevitable change in the party system. However, this will not necessarily lead to less ideological political parties, even if a proportional system does lead to coalition governments, with an associated cartelisation of the parties.

Of course, while Bang (2008 a and b) accepts that cartelisation was a stage of party development, he contends that we have now moved into the era of expert celebrity parties. He attempts to defend this claim with a brief, and very underdeveloped, consideration of New Labour under Blair. He examined the Labour website and argues that:

- Blair is an example of a celebrity politician ‘in a mediatised political ‘stellar system’, where only highly mediatised politicians with persuasive skills and ‘star’ qualities can acquire a leading leadership role’.
- This cult of celebrity is essential for leading politicians (and indeed others in the demoeelite who play a key role in network governance), if they want to take charge of the governance network.
- Policy content comes before politics processes. So, for the Labour Party, the focus, reflected in its website, is on the discussion and negotiations between ‘stakeholders’ about ‘what is to be done’. Parties are no longer key channels of representation they are means of governing. Here, of course, policy-politics is replacing politics-policy.
- As such, the Labour Party is: ‘an expert celebrity party for connecting with stakeholders and winning the vote through the discursive construction of societal interests and ideas through the effective and timely delivery of demanded goods’ (Bang, 2008a).

Bang would acknowledge that this consideration of New Labour and Blair is cursory. However, he is not alone in emphasising the importance of the development of celebrity politics. This is a literature (see Street, 2004; Kamons, 2007) which needs greater rigour. However, there are clearly at least four types of celebrity politics/celebrity politicians, involving: celebrities who become mainstream politicians (for example, Reagan and Schwarzenegger); celebrities who become involved in politics to forward a cause or causes, some of whom, of course, may be doing so to forward their career (Geldoff, Bono); politicians who court celebrities in order to improve their image or gain credibility with certain sections of the electorate (Blair’s Downing Street receptions for various celebrities are an example here); and politicians, or parties, who use the tactics of celebrity in order to improve their image or gain credibility with certain sections of the electorate. All of these are clearly features of contemporary politics, although a consideration of the role of each is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, to key issue here is whether these developments are better seen as aspects of the strategy and tactics used to influence policy outcomes in the contemporary world or as more fundamental changes in the nature of modern politics and the behaviour of political parties and political leaders. Here, I turn to Peter Kerr’s (2008) interesting contribution to this debate.

Kerr argument has resonances with that of Bang in that he argues that the ‘post-modernisation’ of the Conservative Party under David Cameron reflects broader changes in party systems within the advanced democracies which are responses to late modernity (although Kerr sees this as a process of post-modernisation, while arguing that post-Fordists, postmodernists and late modernity theorists all identify broader the same changes between industrial/ modern society and contemporary society) – particularly the increased personalization, mediatisation and celebritisation of political campaigns etc.

More specifically, Kerr argues that there have been two response by political parties to the problems of late modernity: New Labour’s modernist response; and David Cameron’s post-modern response. To Kerr, New Labour’s response was based on a combination of evidence-based policy making and the evocation of a diverse range of ideological strands, involving: ‘a refashioning of its traditional social democratic tradition into a reformulated ‘third way’

discourse, and inspired by positivist theories, such as those of new institutionalism and communitarianism' (Kerr, 2008, p. 17). However, Kerr's focus is upon Cameron's post-modernist response.

Kerr identifies five features of Cameron's post-modernist response. First, he argues (Kerr, 2008, p. 18) that there is a scepticism towards the state: 'At the heart of Cameron's sceptical Conservatism lies a fundamental doubt over the states ability to successfully manage societal problems from the centre.' As such, Cameron marks a fundamental break with what Bulpitt (1986) characterised as traditional Conservative statecraft. Second, Kerr suggests (2008, p. 20) that Cameron's response involves a pessimism about the market: 'In response to this pessimistic gaze into the deleterious effects of late modernity (the destabilisation of family life, the weakening of social bonds and the sense of societal breakdown), Cameron rejects the orthodox Thatcherite emphasis upon the primary target of economic growth (my addition in brackets).'

Third, Kerr contends (2008, p. 21) that this response involves: 'a gradual repositioning of the identity of the leadership away from a traditional representation of 'authority towards reflecting a multiplicity of subject positions broadly equivalent to that of citizen.' as a 'new model citizen.' This is where the process of mediatisation or celebritisation becomes important. In this view, leaders need to communicate directly with the public, by-passing, and thus devaluing, the party organisation: 'the gradual shift in the presentation of political parties (involves) the steady erosion of the boundaries between authority figure and everyday citizen' (Kerr, 2008, p. 22). Here, Kerr, like others (O'Hara, 2007; Dorey, 2007) points to Cameron's use of the new, and indeed old, media, particular his webcam, Webcameron. To Kerr, Webcameron is an attempt both to appeal and to listen to, a younger generation of voters. Cameron is seen involved as participant in a variety of community schemes, learning to be a teacher, helping clean up the environment etc. Elsewhere, he is seen in his kitchen washing up, in a pub and a kebab shop, on the school run and spending a day with a Muslim family. Invoking Bang's distinction, Kerr claims that Cameron is presented as both a expert citizen and a everyday maker.

Fourth, Kerr points (2008, 23) to what he terms 'the existential death of the party': 'The effect of Cameron's presentational style, as has been the case with Blair and others, is to effectively eliminate the party altogether as a collective agency for interpellating the concerns of the electorate.' Again, this results in part because of the mediatisation of politics and the media's focus on leaders and celebrity politics and it leads to the elimination of the party from public view (Kerr, 2008, p. 24).

Fifth, and this is probably Kerr's most radical claim, while this response involves a retreat from meta-governance: 'it offers little in the way of a substantive reform agenda' (Kerr, 2008, p. 24). Indeed, Kerr contends (2008, pp. 24-5):

what Cameron seeks is to offer a process of infinite modernisation – infinite, not in the sense that it seeks to make itself permanent (though this is conceivable) but infinite in the sense that it is dislocated from a central, definable purpose. It is modernisation with no clear telos and divorced from any definable set of political interests.

Before I comment on Kerr, it important to be clear how he and Bang differ. They share the view that modern parties are not rooted in ideology or situated subject positions like class. Bang argues that all modern parties are driven by a focus on network governance and the drive to produce good governance (so, the contemporary party mantra is what works is good). In contrast, Kerr sees this focus on evaluation-based policy making as a feature of New Labour's modernisation strategy, a feature that he seems to suggest has been rejected in Cameron's post-modernist response. Both of course, suggest the media, and the associated phenomenon of celebrity politics, play a crucial role in the strategies of contemporary parties, although Kerr appears to be suggesting that there has been a significant change in the way that Cameron interacts with the media, especially the new media.

I think Kerr's argument is challenging, if underdeveloped, but I am not convinced. We really need to be told more about the differences between New Labour and Cameron's Conservatives, particular in terms of their interaction with the media and their use of celebrity; indeed both Kerr and Bang need to pay more attention to the idea of celebrity politics. More importantly, Kerr needs to consider the arguments of Bang and others about the move to network governance and evaluation-based policy making. To Bang, this is a move which is inevitably given the increased complexity involve in late-modernity and, to the extent that this is an accurate assessment, it will affect the Conservatives as it affects New Labour.

Of course, this raises another point, it is very early to make any judgement about Cameron's Conservative. One plausible, and more mainstream interpretation about what has been happening would be that Cameron has moved more towards the central ground, in contrast to his immediate predecessors, to make the party more electable. However, at the same time, in opposition, and some time from a General Election, he can afford to be bland when it comes to policy proposals. To the extent, that both of these are true we might expect the Conservatives to fight the next election on a platform which is more centralist than they did in 2005.

As I emphasised, both Bang and Kerr see the role of the media as crucial in relation to contemporary party strategies and it is hard to disagree with this assessment. However, I would argue that it is a strategy used by parties to generate support, an inevitable strategy in a more mediatised world. Of course, this doesn't necessarily contradict Bang's, or Kerr's, view. So, for Bang it is a crucial feature of the move from politics-policy to policy-politics. In contrast, my view, as I indicated earlier, is that the UK political system has always been a policy-politics one in which the dominant mantra has been 'government knows best.' As such, the problem for government has always been how to convince the electorate of their competence, that they are providing good governance. Hence, the British system has always involved 'spin'. It is more visible and more prevalent now because of technological changes in the media. So, in my view, many aspects of the mediatisation of politics fit very happily with the British political tradition.

vi) *A User-Orientated, Fragmented, Multimedia System?*

Again, this is a large subject. Bang adopts Castell's argument that the media has changed, to become more diverse and user-orientated, with new media increasingly playing a role reducing the power of the old media. Unsurprisingly, this is a key debate within Media Studies. For a long time, the Media Studies literature was dominated by what Curran (1998) terms the radical

narrative. This focussed on the role of the producers of the media; editors, journalists and, particularly, owners. It tended to see the audience as passive; a view sometimes termed the 'hypodermic model.' This view has been increasingly questioned, partly because of the changes that have occurred in the media, but also because of the move within Media and Cultural Studies towards a more constructivist/interpretivist, and what Curran terms a populist, position. Consequently, much of the recent research in Media Studies has concentrated on the role of the active audience. Here, messages are not seen as given; they are produced, but are then received/interpreted in different ways by the audience(s).

Both Bang and Kerr are identifying two trends widely acknowledged in Media Studies; the increased diversity of the media reflecting the rise of the new media and the lowering of entry costs; and the active audience. I do not want to dispute either of these points, but I do want to qualify both. First, in Britain, but also elsewhere, there has been an increased concentration in the pattern of media ownership. So, while there are undoubtedly more media outlets, newspapers and television have been concentrated in fewer hands. Of course, there is more diversity in the new media, but, at the same time, the most used internet sites are being bought up by existing media conglomerates. I am not advocating a straight-forward radical narrative, rather, I am suggesting this is an important structural aspect of the modern media which needs more attention than Bang gives it. Second, I don't deny that audiences interpret messages. However, it is possible to overplay the reflexivity of audiences, and indeed citizens. We know that there are clear demographic patterns in media access, both in terms of who has access to different media and how they access them. For example, internet access is classed, gendered and ethnically unequal.

In Conclusion

I recommend anyone to read Bang's work, which offers important insight into the politics of late modernity. However, while he seems to me to identify interesting putative developments in network governance, political participation and political parties, I remained unconvinced that they represent the fundamental break with the past he posits. In large part, this is because I am sceptical with the claims made about the shift to late modernity. Some of this scepticism may reflect some aspects of the political trajectory of the UK, but others do not. In many ways at the root of my unease is the fact that approaches like Bang place too much emphasis on agency and ideas and too little on material relations and structures, but that is an issue I have explored elsewhere (Marsh, 2008a and b).

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