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History and ethnography: interfaces and juxtapositions

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What is our present today? How have we become what we are and what are the possibilities of 'becoming other'? This question has triggered and underpinned my ongoing research on writing genealogies as 'histories of the present' (Foucault, 1975 [1991], p. 31). In doing this, my work has unfolded as an interface of historical and ethnographic inquiries. In this chapter, I look back in this body of work, tracing encounters between history and ethnography while framing them within the broader field of educational research.

Historical and ethnographic inquiries are wide and complex fields in themselves that have drawn on a variety of research methods and approaches depending on the epistemological and theoretical traditions that underpin them. What both fields have in common, however, is a vibrant area of 'critical studies' that keep interrogating what history or ethnography can do.[1] Researchers in educational studies have been particularly influenced by and contributed to this body of 'critical studies'. As Sue Middleton[2] has aptly put it: 'the subject "Education" has always been theoretically promiscuous and my own research toolkit includes concepts, strategies, and techniques pulled from phenomenology, neo-Marxism, and feminism, as well as Foucauldian post-structuralism' (2003, p. 38). Foucault's theories and analytical strategies have indeed been influential here, particularly in the way he has interrogated linearities and continuities in traditional historical research (Foucault, 1971 [1986]), as well as the way he has problematized the role of the human sciences in the constitution of power/knowledge regimes (Foucault, 1966 [2000]). Foucault's critique has been rigorously encompassed in his suggestion for doing genealogies and it is trails of this approach that I want to explicate and discuss in relation to my work.[3]

In Foucault's genealogical analyses, the past can never be revived or reconstructed and there is not a final destination, a place where things originated in the first place. The first task of the genealogist is therefore to turn to the past so as to excavate different layers of how human beings have created knowledge about themselves and the world. Within the genealogical

framework this turn to the past is conceived as an analysis of 'descent' and 'emergence' (Foucault, 1971 [1986]). Descent moves backwards revealing numberless beginnings and multiple changes, while emergence is about the entry point of the event on the historical stage. As Foucault explains in the search for descent, it turns out that 'truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are' (1971 [1986], p. 81). The analysis of descent is about revealing the contingency of human reality, describing its complicated forms and exploring its countless historical transformations. It was in this context that in my work I have looked at the formation of 'technologies of the female self' in the social milieus of education, art and work (Tamboukou, 2003, 2010a, 2015, 2017). In focusing on the context of the *fin de siècle*, I attempted an analysis of the specification of the female subject in a nexus of signifying genealogical events, which have constituted her public persona, but have also dissolved the frontiers between the public/political and the private/personal.

As the genealogical turn to the past can never reach an origin – it rather encounters number- less beginnings – an important task of the genealogist is to identify points of emergence, criti- cal historical moments when 'dissonant' events erupt in the course (and discourse) of history. Emergence refers then to a particular historical moment when things appeared as events on the stage of history. It is in the context of intense power relations at play that Foucault stabilizes this 'moment of arising' (Foucault, 1971 [1986], p. 83). In this light, emergence is not the effect of individual tactics, but 'an event', an episode in a non-linear historical process. The analysis of emergence is not about why, but about how things happened; it is about scrutinizing the complex and multifarious processes that surround the emergence of the event.[4]

Locating a beginning is thus conceived as 'the researcher's cut' (Tamboukou, 2010c) in the genealogical process. In the study of women in education, my beginning was the turn of the nineteenth century. Being a period of crises and significant changes in the education of women in Europe, North America and Australia, I thought that it perfectly constituted what Foucault has defined as emergence in the genealogical analysis. The turn of the nineteenth century has of course been the object of numerous and important studies by feminist historians.[5] These studies have often represented women in quite contradictory and often juxtaposing ways: either as heroic figures or as tragic victims within the urban spaces of modernity. Instead of being confusing, these contradictions have become highly relevant to the genealogical project. As a genealogist I was particularly intrigued to look more carefully not only into the surround- ing discourses but also into the discourses of women themselves, their personal narratives through which they made sense of their lives.[6] Events are always fleeting

moments in time, but they leave traces behind them in stories: tracing marks left on textual bodies, I thus chose to follow auto/biographical narratives of women in education, who moved in between different geographical, social and cultural spaces in search of a new self.

I have referred to auto/biographical narratives, but where have I looked for them? My genealogical inquiries took me to the archives, the genealogical research field par excellence. It was in the archives and in libraries that I followed traces that some of these women left in diaries, journals, letters, autobiographies and memoirs.[7] These narratives have irrevocably disrupted their image as either heroines, bearers of middle-class ideology, victims or agents of oppression. A genealogical approach to these narratives points to the fact that it is exactly when traditional history meets inconsistencies and disruptions that omissions and erasures are made for the historical linearity to be able to flow. Instead of subjects, these self-writings have therefore revealed 'nomadic subjectivities'[8] difficult to be pinned down in stable subject positions: it is upon the constitution of these subjectivities on the move that the genealogical approach has focused.

I have discussed how the genealogical turn to the past unveils power/knowledge interrelations in the constitution of truth around the self and the world. However, as I have also noted, Foucault has seen his genealogical project as 'a history of the present'. Calling into question self-evidences of the present by exposing the various ways they were constructed in the past, such histories shatter certain stabilities and help us detach ourselves from our 'truths' and seek alternative ways of existence. In my attempt to decipher the present of the genealogical project I have turned to ethnography.

WHAT IS OUR PRESENT TODAY? ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS

While immersing myself in the adventure of writing feminist genealogies, I am always concerned about contemporaneity: how have past formations been transposed in the constitution of the female self today? A major task of the genealogist is thus to chart the present she wants to interrogate. In the genealogical framework this is the process of constructing a *dispositif*: 'isolating a cluster of power relations sustaining, and being sustained by certain types of knowledge' (Foucault, 1980, p. 196). As Deleuze has noted, in each *dispositif* it is necessary to distinguish the historical part, what we are (what we are already no longer) and the current part, what we are in the process of becoming (1992, p. 164). It was therefore in the construc- tion of the *dispositif* of my research that I turned to ethnographic practices as one of the ways I followed to relate to contemporary reality.[9] Amongst the

different and diverse ethnographic studies that I have conducted, in this chapter I will discuss my work in the Massachussetts College of Art (MassArt) in Boston, USA, which I visited in March 2006 as part of my inquir- ies in women's art education; my research in MassArt will further be discussed in relation to an ethnographic study of a group of women artists in Sussex, UK.

What was particularly striking with my work at MassArt was the way the history of the college is so much at the forefront of the college's identity. The following passage from an e-mail exchange with the archivist Paul Dobbs in preparation for my visit there forcefully expresses the deep historical consciousness of the people of MassArt:

> You probably know that we were the first and remain the only state-funded college of art in the states (at least the only one free-standing – not part of something else). Massachusetts industry developers and civic leaders caught wind of Thomas Cole's Kensington School and in 1870 convinced state government to mandate similar public drawing education. The state Board of Education asked Cole for help, and he sent a graduate and art school master, Walter Smith. Smith ran the Boston and Massachusetts drawing programs and in 1873 convinced the legislature to fund the Massachusetts Normal Art School (MassArt). He is often quoted for saying that he thought women were particularly well suited to art education; not an unwise move, since 60% of his enrollees were women. (E-mail communication, 16 March 2006)

What was further interesting in my work at the MassArt archives is that alongside traditional ethnographic practices[10] like participating in the everyday life of the college, attending courses, seminars and workshops and talking with students and teachers I would also work daily in its archives, which were conveniently housed in the library. Thus 'the present' and 'the past' were in a way co-existing as planes informing my research and actively interacting with each other. The case of contemporary artist May Smith was particularly illuminating in opening up an area of analysis that had not been included in my initial hypothesis and research questions: the forceful interrelation between social class and art education as conditions of possibility for women's quest for a new self (see Tamboukou, 2010d). As Pen Dalton's study has shown, in the context of the nineteenth century art education was deployed as a gendered discourse, deeply shaped by the needs of industrial modernization. In agreement with Dalton, what I have argued through my ethnographic work in MassArt is that art education has been both classed and gendered and this historical legacy has survived today, as I will further discuss.

In the context of my previous research with women teachers' narratives, art was configured as an alternative real and imaginary space, somewhere to

create, but also to retreat, reflect and reinvent the self (Tamboukou, 2003). My research of writing a genealogy of women artists (Tamboukou, 2010a) has unveiled the dark side of the moon. While some women teachers have leaped into the world of art in an attempt to escape the boredom and frustration of their working lives, women artists have found in education a place to shelter themselves, as they are striving in the harsh realities of the art world.[11] There is a whole history around this reverse movement that has to be considered. The rationale for women's inclusion in all levels of education has been founded on the argument that women had to work; it was an argument revolving around the Protestant ethic of the importance of work and the evil of idleness. Art education was therefore by definition a grey area, since it could not possibly be linked to the prospect of a profession or of real work, particularly so for working-class women.

Middle-class women as well would stay away from art education, since it carried the risk of distancing them once again from the world of professions they were striving to enter. As Dalton has noted: 'Discourses of the "lady artist" have proliferated in the modern period and are continually being reactivated. The ideology of the "lady amateur" has been synonymous with bad art; art that is unprofessional, weak, unskilled, trivial, bourgeois, merely decorative' (2001, p. 47). This forceful interrelation of art and social class that emerged from my work in MassArt was further compared and juxtaposed with ethnographic observations of a group of women artists from Brighton-Eastbourne, formed at the end of their art education degree, as the passage below from an interview with artist Pauline Crook forcefully shows:

> I belong to an art group, we are called FrockArt and there are seven of us, seven ladies, most of them I've known since the Certificate of Art, so that's going back to the beginning of the 1990s. And they are just lovely! They are my best friends, I just feel incredibly lucky. It's a very strong, solid women's group and we really care about each other and when we have our meetings – we usually meet and have lunch somewhere – we discuss all the things we have to discuss. They are such happy times and we laugh a lot. It's just lovely, a lovely, lovely group and they are all really good at what they do … And we exhibit together, usually, well this year we haven't got too many plans because we all needed, we wanted all to experiment and see what happens, so we are hoping to exhibit at the end of the year, but last year, how many times did we exhibit? Three times last year.[12]

I interviewed Pauline Crook in February 2006 as part of a multi-sited ethnographic work with groups of women artists, in Massachusetts, USA, London and Sussex, UK, Athens, Greece and Melbourne, Australia.[13] Crook's interview revealed new layers around the intersection of social class,

gender and art education in the constitution of the female self in art: her story reveals that going to an art college was simply not an option for a working-class girl even in the 1970s. It was after Crook had worked as a secretary for many years and only when her children had gone to school that she became able to follow her dream: become a 'working artist', an interesting term she has chosen to describe herself:

> So I didn't go to art college, instead I did in fact what my mum wanted me to do, I learnt shorthand and typing and worked in offices, until I got married and had my first child which was … 27 years ago now … in 1979 and then I was a full-time mum for quite some years and did all sorts of odd, part-time jobs and what have you to bring a little bit more money in and then when I got to 40 and when my second daughter went off to school, I just decided I wanted to do something for myself, I wanted to … you know, start with art up again … I didn't … I sort of didn't really think I would become *a working artist* and that I would have a studio at that stage, I just wanted to go back into that world, so what I did, I went to Brighton University and got myself on to what was in those days, called the Certificate of Art.[14]

In discussions we held after the interview, Crook particularly emphasized and explained why she had chosen to call herself a 'working artist': 'It took me a long time to accept that I could be taken seriously by others to be an artist (and allowed myself) – that it wasn't just a hobby but what I was (and always deep down had felt I was, even as a small child). So I guess calling myself a working artist was as much for me as anyone else!'[15] What Crook's commentary powerfully highlights here is the importance of art being recognized and registered as a legitimate kind of work and not a hobby of 'the lady artist', as also noted in Dalton's (2001) study above. Crook's approach also strangely resonates with Renoir's decision 'to eliminate the word "artist" from his vocabulary' and instead think of himself as 'a workman-painter', according to his son's memoir (Renoir, [1962] 2001, p. 28). It was however, Renoir's desire to mingle with the world rather than merely observe or understand it that motivated this elimination and not the gendered fear of being taken as 'a lady amateur'.

What was therefore significant with my multi-sited ethnographic field work is that it opened up windows in the lives of contemporary women artists and allowed me to follow genealogical trails of entanglements between education and art.[16] It was actually material and discursive entanglements that created conditions of possibility for counter-discourses to emerge and allowed for new kinds of connectivity to be formed between social class, education and art in women's lives. Revisiting resistance within this milieu of inquiries has emerged as a rich theme of analysis (see Tamboukou, 2010e,

2016).

ETHNOGRAPHY AND GENEALOGY: SYNTHESIS AND RHYTHM

In this concluding section, I want to create a plane of thinking in which genealogy and ethnography can be brought to work (sound) together, as indeed different notes can be composed into a musical piece.[17] I suggest that working with genealogy and ethnography should be seen in the context of music and Novalis's philosophical suggestion that 'all method is rhythm' (in Bowie, 1990, p. 79). As Bowie explains in the context of the early-nineteenth-century philosophical tradition, 'rhythm, like language, is a form of meaningful differentiality; a beat becomes itself by its relation to the other beats, in an analogous way to the way in which the I of reflection is dependent upon the not-I, the signifier on the other signifiers' (1990, p. 79). In the same line of analogies, genealogical and ethnographic practices have, I suggest, the possibility of being used in the 'form of meaningful differentiality', in the sense that any single practice be it gene- alogical or ethnographic could be seen operating in relation to the other practices within the same analytical context. In delineating the ways in which ethnographic practices can be related to genealogical practices, it is the sound of their rhythmical movement that I have tried to listen to. What I think I have discerned in their sounding together is more like a musical piece of improvisation, notes/practices brought together only temporarily and provisionally as an effect of experimenting, inventing, inviting others to contribute, responding or playing alone.

In her ethnographic study on *Music in Everyday Life*, Tia De Nora has discussed a long theoretical tradition in the human sciences that have delineated what she calls 'the music and society nexus' (2000, p. 1). If 'musical organization is a simulacrum for social organization' (De Nora, 2000, p. 2), music I suggest, can also become an illuminating metaphor for method-ological encounters in the social sciences. Educational research after all is a field that has wel- comed and facilitated encounters between art and sociologically driven methods of inquiry: Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's pathbreaking work with school portraits has initiated a series of encounters between aesthetics and empiricism. Published in 1983, *The Good High School* has opened up new paths connecting epistemology and aesthetics, which Lawrence-Lightfoot has followed throughout her research; her most recent publication in this line of inquiry is *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, published in 1997. It is interesting to note here that Lawrence-Lightfoot has used the musical metaphor of 'duet' to introduce this book, which she co-wrote with Jessica Hoffmann Davis: '*The Art and Science of Portraiture* is not a solo, it is a duet' (1997, p. 15), she has written, blending

portraiture and music in the ethnographer's imagination. Working in the archives of women workers' education, I have used Henri Lefebvre's notion of 'rythmanalysis' (2004) to discuss ethnographic approaches to archival spaces (see Tamboukou 2016).

Situating my ethnographic work in the tradition of 'ethnographic imagination'[18] and thinking of and with music, what I have therefore suggested is the need to find a rhythm for a musical piece of genealogy and ethnography to be composed while performing together. As Ruth Boyask (2012) has cogently argued, it is important to rethink C. Wright Mill's ([1959] 1970) notion of 'the sociological imagination' and try to view educational research within it. In this light genealogical and ethnographic practices can be deployed as meaningful differences, complementary methodological practices within a specific analytical context. Within a rhythmic configuration, genealogy turns the researcher's attention to specific regimes of truth that may elude the knowledge terrain of the ethnographer, but yet they are part of the scientific dis- courses through which she recognizes the objects of her ethnographic inquiries and analyses their emergence, constitution and function. However, to follow the genealogical imperative of leaving aside linear and vertical causalities and start charting horizontal connections of multifarious relations between subjects and their worlds, the analyst needs descriptions both of the past and the present. While the dusty genealogical documents can offer glimpses of the past, ethnographic approaches can more effectively illuminate the present: genealogy traces the black squares in the 'order of things' (Foucault, 1966 [2000]), accommodates the invisible, creates uncertainty and points to exclusions while ethnography scrutinizes the visible. The rhythm of their sounding together resonates the contrast between visibility and invisibility, the sayable and the unsayable, pointing to what has been hidden or muted and what has been allowed to emerge or sound.

NOTES

1. See Tamboukou and Ball (2003) for an overview of critical studies. See also Boyask (2012) for a discussion of critical ethnographies in the sociology of education.
2. Sue Middleton's interdisciplinary research has made a significant contribution in the field of critical educational studies: 'for me it works to draw simultaneously on a theorist (Foucault), who posited the "death of the subject" and to employ an ethnographic life-history technique that documents how individual human subjects make meaning of their experiences and perspectives' (2003, p. 38).
3. Foucault's work has been influential in a body of poststructural feminist

literature in ethnographic research in education. For an overview of this body of work, see St Pierre and Pillow (2000).

4. For an explication of the genealogical approach, see Tamboukou (1999, 2003).
5. For a critical overview and discussion of these studies in relation to the genealogical method, see Tamboukou (2003, 2015).
6. For further discussion of life history approaches in educational research, see Clemens and Tierney (2012).
7. See Moore et al. (2016) for a discussion of methodological and epistemological concerns for archi- val research in the social sciences.
8. Women as nomadic subjects has been a recurring concept in my research (Tamboukou, 2003, 2009, 2010b). See also Tamboukou and Ball (2002).
9. For a detailed explication of methodological encounters between genealogy and ethnography, see Tamboukou and Ball (2003).
10. For further discussion of ethnographic practices in education as they have been transferred from the discipline of anthropology, see Mills (2012).
11. For important life history studies of art teachers, see amongst others Sikes et al. (1985).
12. Interview with Pauline Crook, 17 February 2006. I have to note here that Pauline Crook has explicitly asked me to use her real name.
13. During the British Sociological Association (BSA) annual conference in 2007, I organized an exhibition and a round table discussion with the women artists who participated in my ethnographic research. See Tamboukou, (2007).
14. Interview with Pauline Crook, 17 February 2006, my emphasis.
15. Crook, personal e-mail communication.
16. What also emerged from this ethnographic work is a dynamic interrelation between art and political activism, the discussion of which goes well beyond the limitations of this chapter.
17. In blending the boundaries between art and ethnography, I follow trends in qualitative research that incorporate arts methods in research practice. Elliott Eisner has written influentially on the value of doing this (see Eisner, 1981, 1997).
18. For significant contributions in this tradition, see Clifford and Marcus (1986), Atkinson (1990) and Willis (2000).

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