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**THE TEMPORAL COLLAGE: HOW BRITISH QUAKERS MAKE CHOICES ABOUT TIME AT THE
BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

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This thesis argues that Quakers (members of the Religious Society of Friends) create their own 'temporal collages' through which they balance the competing demands on their time. In order to capture the varied qualities of Quaker time, the author portrays it as 'polychronic' (multidimensional), rather than 'monochronic' (linear). Polychronic time encompasses the paradoxical, cyclical and interconnected nature of Quaker time, and includes both linear 'clock time' and the timeless spiritual dimension that imbues all aspects of Quaker life. The thesis begins, therefore, by considering the transformations in the nature of work, the family and the community in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and their impact on the perception of time. The author demonstrates how social bonds formed in the Quaker community help its members negotiate these changes. Friendships are created and nurtured through participation in the dense network of interlinked communities that make up the structure of the Society. Quakers choose to which of these communities they belong, as well as the level of their involvement and the amount of time they dedicate to 'service' (unpaid work) to the Society and voluntary work in the wider world. In the process, they construct 'polychronic temporal collages' – which reflect the interpenetration of time and spirituality – as a way of managing their time in a complex, changing environment.

Key words: time, busyness, Quaker service, volunteering, discreet witness, bonding social capital, bridging social capital, 'clock time', polychronic time, temporal collage

Key themes:

The effects of social and cultural changes on the perception of time

The Society of Friends as a 'networked community' in which social capital is nurtured and decisions about time negotiated

Of potential interest to: researchers or those with a general interest in the formation of conceptions of time, the make up of the Quaker community, Quaker traditions of service and volunteering

A copy of the full thesis can be downloaded at

<http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/280/1/Frith09PhD.pdf>

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

In this chapter, the author introduces her principal arguments, demonstrating the way they are organised in the thesis, and the previous scholarship she has used as a theoretical basis.

Principal arguments

Despite substantial changes in demography, family structure and work in Britain in the latter half of the 20th and the early 21st centuries (Chapters Five and Six), Quakers still give generous amounts of time both as 'service' (unpaid work) to the Society of Friends and as voluntary work in the wider community (Chapter Four). The author proposes that the social capital generated by the Quaker community supports Friends in their temporal choices. Social capital draws members together – mobilising reciprocity, nurturing skills and facilitating the transfer of information. The way the Society is structured as a 'networked community' means there are a variety of transmission routes for social capital (Chapter Seven). This interlinked structure comprises the scaffolding for Friends' decisions about the allocation of time. Making temporal choices is a complex matter (Chapter Eight). The author therefore believes the accepted 'common-sense' perception of time as linear and forward-facing is too inflexible to furnish an adequate description of Quaker activity (Chapter Three); she argues that Friends create for themselves 'polychronic temporal collages'. These integrate all the complex elements that comprise Quakers' sense of time (Chapter Nine), nesting them within the all-embracing timeless sense of the spiritual that imbues all their activities.

Relationship to previous work

The thesis builds on sociological research into the changing nature of work (Intel 2004; Populus 2004; Gurshuny 2005; the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 1998, 1999, 2001), the family (Williams 2004; Giddens 1998, 1999; Gabb 2008), and the community (Williams and Roseneil 2004). It also uses sociological work on the concept of social capital, drawing on Putnam's (2000) analysis of its functions. The author consulted sociological studies of time – Phipps's (2004) concept of time as polychronic (a model of time that contains its multidimensional and cyclical as well as linear aspects); Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) work on time as a resource; and Fenn's (1997) analysis of the relation of institutional 'clock time' to spiritual needs. The thesis also incorporates research into volunteering in Britain (the Institute of Volunteering 2005; the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2005). Finally, the author consulted a number of Quaker studies, including those of Dandelion (1996) on the distinction Quakers appear to make between 'private time' and 'Quaker time'; Collins and Dandelion

(2006) on Quaker 'wrapping' (see Chapter Four); and Heron (1992) and Heeks (1994, 1996) on the nature of the Quaker community. Quaker publications, such as reports from the Britain Yearly Meetings and Quaker conferences, provided invaluable information on current practices.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Overview

This chapter outlines the author's methodology. She employed secondary textual resources (see Chapter One), as well as group activities and a series of semi-structured interviews. She highlights the fact that the group activities generated valuable data for the composition of the interviews to illustrate the way the research comprised an ongoing process of reflection, analysis and review.

Research procedure

Insider status: The author begins by reviewing her role as a researcher who is also a Quaker. The relationship between the terms 'insider' and 'outsider' in anthropological research is currently perceived to be 'less of a dichotomy and more of a continuum' (Collins 2002). The aim of conducting pure 'objective' research is no longer regarded as a viable one: researchers cannot help but arrive at the process armed with their own perspective. However, the more views the researcher considers, 'the more reason [they] have to be hopeful about [their] conclusions' (Hufford 1999). The author claims that her insider status was balanced by her work outside the Society, managing volunteers in the statutory and voluntary sectors. However, as an insider she had the advantage of understanding the terminology and of being privy to ongoing discussions among Quakers around the issue of time in relation to service to the Society.

Qualitative research: The author used qualitative methods to gain a closer understanding of participants' views – the face-to-face questioning and group activities encouraged the participants to examine their attitudes and values. The activities comprised a study using the vignette of an 18th century Quaker family to provoke reflection on changing attitudes to time, a participatory activity with two contrasting groups, and unstructured one-to-one interviews and email interviews. She made it clear to the participants that her research was not concerned with time management, but with the impact of social change on the perception and use of time.

Data analysis and organisation

The author reveals that her analysis of the data was an ongoing process that helped extend and broaden her theory. Some of the themes emerged during this process. She used diagrams and tables to help conceptualise these themes, as she found the phenomena she was studying often overlapped and diagrams were useful in depicting their relationships. On at least one occasion this resulted in an unexpected shift in her theory and a re-examination of the data.

Chapter Three: Time

Overview

This chapter analyses the nature of time and explores the difference between time ordered by the clock ('monochronic') and multidimensional ('polychronic') time (see below). It shows how clock time has become culturally ingrained in the West, contributing to a sense of 'busyness'. The author comments that although her interviewees used clock time to describe their activities, they stressed the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. A sense of the spiritual, which lies beyond clock time, is the underpinning of all Quaker activity.

'Quaker busyness' and the perception of time

Clock time, which is sequential and chronological, was introduced in the West to order and control a society increasingly organised around the capitalist world of industrial work. It displaced an older polychronic view of time, where everything took place in an extended 'now'. This clock-driven, linear or monochronic time-line is divided into time dedicated to productive work, maintenance activities and leisure pursuits. Individuals often have little choice as to how and when these activities take place, and this exacerbates the feeling that there is a chronic shortage of time. Hence, an awareness has arisen of the need for human beings to now and again experience 'the flow' – a state that occurs outside clock time, when the individual is totally immersed in an activity and 'what [they] feel, wish and think are in harmony' (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Quakers appear to instinctively recognise this need. Despite the fact that their 'holy busyness' is set in the context of a society that is relentlessly driven forward by the clock, they also attempt to live in a harmonious 'God's time'. 'A spiritual thread is woven throughout ... daily life for most Friends'. Their lives are not divided into activity and a 'privatised spirituality', but spirituality is a fundamental part of their daily activities.

Quaker polychronicity

As Quakers make little distinction between the secular, spiritual or religious, the author proposes that Quaker time has its own 'polychronicity', which reflects the interpenetration of time and spirituality. Her research suggests that, although Quakers describe their daily lives in terms of clock time, their perception of time involves other dimensions. The overarching theme of spirituality therefore contains clock time, 'Quaker time' (time for Quaker activities), time dedicated to relationships and 'faith in action' (activities in the wider society), and the interconnection of all these components. The way the pattern of this model changes over the course of an individual's life often depends on the nature of their outside work: whether it is fluid and autonomous or task-driven and externally organised. Therefore, although polychronic time is 'woven into the fabric of everyday [Quaker] life', 'the size and texture of each component is different'.

Chapter Four: Service and Witness

Overview

In this chapter the author analyses the way in which the Society's organisational structures help build strong 'bonding social capital' (the benefits that derive from cooperation among individuals) and 'bridging social capital' (the sharing of these benefits between different groups).

Quaker service: bonding social capital

One of Quakerism's most distinctive features is that all members are enjoined to contribute to Quaker work, a duty described by *Quaker Faith and Practice* (1995) as a 'commitment to the well-being of one's spiritual home'. Thus the work Quakers do for the Society is regarded as 'service' given in 'Quaker time' (see Chapter Three), and is an integral part of the polychronicity of Friends' lives. It includes both formal work they are nominated to do and informal work for the Society. Quakerism initially developed its distinctive structure comprising a complex layering of meetings and activities – what the founder, George Fox, called 'the gospel order' – as a way of bonding a diverse collection of individuals into a coherent religious organisation. Informal participation in the activities of the Society helps nurture these bonds, encouraging members to care for one another both spiritually and materially, as well as creating opportunities for sharing and passing on Quaker values. As Friends participate in shared service, they form multiple social networks, which act as conduits of bonding social capital.

Quaker service: bridging social capital

There is also ample opportunity for involvement in activities outside the national structures but within the Society – partaking in courses or in groups concerned with outreach, special interests or specific social or spiritual concerns. This dense mesh of activities carries strong bridging social capital between members of different local meetings (see Chapter Seven). Despite this, the current problems of a falling membership and the increasingly demanding nature of work and family life have contributed to the fear of a ‘creeping congregationalism’. (This refers to the structure of hierarchical religious organisations where near-autonomous local groups of the faithful appear to have little organic connection to the church as a whole.) Congregationalism risks dissipating Quaker networks and disrupting the bonds that link members into the Society. However, the author suggests that this danger is mitigated by a high level of ‘intervisitation’ – individuals visit other meetings or socialise with members from different meetings. Intervisitation acts as a two-way bridge for the transmission of trust and reciprocity.

‘Discreet witness’

The notion of ‘holy busyness’ encompasses both the concept of service to the Society and volunteering in the outside world. As their faith is woven into the polychronic fabric of their lives, Quakers ‘bear witness’ in the outside world by the manner in which they approach their work; rather than viewing volunteering as an opportunity to proselytise, they seldom mention their faith. Their work draws heavily on the bonding social capital created by the Society – for example, they gain experience through attending meetings or courses to learn about various causes or to deepen their Quaker values. Therefore, although Friends do not express their faith overtly when volunteering, they ‘create, activate and sustain social capital in the world’. However, the author could find little evidence of social capital acting as a bridge between the arena of voluntary work itself and the Quaker community. The Society’s distinctive structure and ethos appear to create boundaries with the outside world – Collins and Dandelion (2006) call this ‘wrapping’. Bridging social capital should ‘unwrap’ these boundaries and draw in their periphery, but this does not appear to be the case. The author suggests this may be due to the tradition of ‘discreet witness’: because the Quaker connection is concealed, there appears to be less opportunity for building bridging social capital between the Society and the outside world.

Chapter Five: Time and Paid Work

Overview

This chapter analyses recent transformations in the nature and structure of work and their impact on Quakers, particularly the implications for their allocation of time.

The changing nature of work

The current preponderance of temporary or short-term contracts, the threat of redundancy and the high levels of unemployment have resulted in increased anxiety and escalating pressures on time. However, the author found its impact on Quakers to be more complex than this would suggest.

Work and service: In most families today both partners are wage earners. Yet the busyness associated with dual-career families does not translate into a decline in Quakers' social engagement. The author believes the fact that they do not consider work and faith to be separate activities contributes to the continuity of commitment to the Society she found amongst her interviewees.

Work and identity: Traditionally a marker of income and status, work no longer appears to be a means of describing identity. Its comparative impermanence means it no longer guarantees a sense of personal security. The author found in her interviews that other roles have come to the fore when constructing a sense of self – for example, family relationships or activities such as peace work or artistic endeavours. None of her interviewees placed paid work first on their list of significant roles.

Time and paid work: Time has become 'unfixed'. The variety of different working patterns – flexitime, part-time, job-shares, zero-hours contracts, career breaks, individual hourly contracts, self-employment – means 'no time demarcations are sacrosanct any more' (Handy 1994).

The impact on lifestyles

The absence of clear time demarcations has had a major impact on lifestyles in general. Work itself has become increasingly demanding due to longer hours and tighter deadlines, resulting in stress and fatigue. Pressure at work is often compensated by intense leisure consumption, which paradoxically contributes to the sense of time-driven busyness. Some of her participants expressed their frustration at the endemic culture of overwork. However, despite studies confirming that financial insecurity and the culture of overwork preclude civic engagement (Putnam 2000), the results of the author's research into the amount of time Quakers feel they have to spare are more

complex. It revealed a wide variety of work patterns among her respondents: some worked long hours in competitive environments; others worked part-time or turned to self-employment in order to free time for service. She argues that the 'gospel order' of early Quakerism, which established a close-knit group with strong personal ties (see Chapter One), still holds good today. The interconnected structure of regular meetings brings individuals together and helps create firm bonds that support Friends in their attempts to balance work with service to the Society.

Chapter Six: Family and Friendship

Overview

This chapter explores how Friends balance the needs of faith, family and friendship. Society is now characterised by a wide diversity of family patterns, and this influences the amount of time individuals are able to dedicate to the Quaker community. In addition, the contemporary valorisation of individual choice has had an impact on the way individuals relate to religion itself. Time for Quaker service is not only shaped by the complexity of relationships and demands of intergenerational care, but also by the opportunity to exercise a greater degree of individual choice.

The family in transition

Giddens (1993) characterises families today as 'shell families', due to the changed nature of what happens within them. He asserts they are no longer insular units but expansive 'networks of intimacy', in which the quality of personal relationships is all-important. Sustaining such relationships, alongside the traditional tasks of maintaining the economic and physical welfare of family members, is time-consuming. Relationships inevitably involve conflicting demands on time. Many Quakers have to balance care responsibilities with their Quakerism: the increase in longevity means that many middle-aged Friends simultaneously care for elderly relatives and grandchildren. The greater range of family and kinship ties also creates a new mesh of relationships. Care is extended across different households, including those of former marriages, reconstituted families and non-resident partners – all demand time and energy. Relationships themselves have been democratised: they depend on negotiation, and are sustained by emotional communication and bonds of intimacy. This democratisation has also created a change in the significance accorded to friendships – to the extent that friendship 'networks of intimacy' have even been characterised as 'the new family'. Quakers are therefore embedded in a web of intergenerational familial and chosen relationships.

Family, friendship and belonging

It is generally believed that the contemporary emphasis on individualism threatens social solidarity because it frees the individual from conventional family structures and allows them to shape their own lives and relationships. By contrast, the author found that Friends easily embrace the evolution of relationships towards greater equality and individuality. They accept it as an aspect of 'continuing revelation'. Quaker communities frequently develop into 'networks of intimacy', where members are encouraged to share their individual 'faith stories' and spiritual journeys. The author proposes that Quakerism's embrace of personalised belief helps Friends accommodate to the changes in their private lives without compromising their sense of Quaker identity.

Chapter Seven: The Networked Community

Overview

The author looks at Quaker communitarianism in the light of the social and cultural paradigm shifts outlined in the previous chapters. It explores the way Quakers work as a network of interlinked communities, and analyses how individuals use these networks to reinforce social capital and deepen their personal 'convincement' (or belief) through shared activities.

Finding a place in the Quaker community

The author asked her interviewees where they felt they were placed on the 'wheel' of the Society – at its 'hub' or 'rim'. The answers she received led her to conclude that Quakerism possesses multiple hubs or centres, each constructed in such a way as to create and sustain an overarching 'network of belonging'. For this reason, she believes the image that best illustrates the Society's structure is not a wheel but a scatter diagram of different interlinked centres. Quakers are positioned on this diagram according to their different life stages, personalities and opportunities.

Individualism, communitarianism and social capital

The author employs the concept of 'polychronic commonalities' to describe how a flexible combination of traditional structures and widespread networks links individualism and communitarianism within the Society. The fact that it is comprised of so many diverse groups enables the Quaker networked community to accommodate the various ways individuals are able to show commitment to the Society, and the different amounts of time they can dedicate to service.

The risk of this degenerating into individualism is countered among Quakers by the friendship networks that are a fundamental part of the Society's structure. The plasticity of these networks means that the social capital of belonging is fostered throughout the Society in many different settings; for example, nodes on the network, such as the Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) or Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, provide the opportunity for temporary meetings or renewal of friendships. The different communities provide the space for exploration of individual spirituality within a communal structure, creating opportunities to access and share knowledge, and encouraging involvement with the wider Quaker community. The author believes, therefore, the charge that a modern post-religious culture has spawned alienated individuals, lacking any sense of sociality, has no purchase vis-à-vis the Society. Quakers are able to access a wide range of communal experiences through participation in both structured and tenuous networks that are bound together by friendship, learning and shared work. These act as 'networks of belonging', which affirm the individual's identity as an integral part of the Quaker community. Individual experience is thus tempered by the experience of participating in the polychronic commonalities created by the Quaker networked community.

Chapter Eight: Making Choices

Overview

The following chapter considers the factors that influence Friends' decisions about the time they spend in service, exploring the notion of Quaker polychronic time in relation to choice. A distinctive element of Quaker polychronicity is the key role the spiritual plays in personal decision-making.

Spirituality and decisions about time

Quakers have a spiritual dimension to the whole of their lives. The notion of 'discernment' (of the will of God) anchors individual temporal choices in the Quaker decision-making process, and distinguishes Friends' decision-making from the way individual decisions are arrived at in the secular world. However, the author also points out that the value given to the 'culture of silence' (Dandelion 1996) can impede the verbalisation of problems. There is often little opportunity for the individual to find a structured, formal environment outside the Meeting for Worship in which they can put concerns over temporal choices to a process of collective discernment.

The challenge of choice – balance and busyness

The demands of the secular world in which Friends spend most of their time can sometimes appear overwhelming, and the question of busyness, feelings of guilt when faced with choices about time, and the need for rest are as prevalent in the Quaker community as in the outside world. Yet, although decision-making is never easy, Quakerism accommodates a fluid approach to choice. The sense Quakers are working under 'divine guidance' generally releases them from the pressure to take on more responsibility than they are able to cope with or to coerce others to do so.

Human capital and social capital

The outer circles of the Quaker networked community (see Chapter Seven) function as places of informal learning. They provide the opportunity for Friends to absorb information and shape their choices regarding service. Readiness for service relies heavily on learning through involvement in these social networks, but it also relies on the skills individuals bring with them from the outside world. Some matters, such as finance, property and employment, require high-level expertise. This raises the difficult question of professionalism: keeping the Society's business running smoothly whilst maintaining its integrity demands a fine balance. An increased emphasis on professionalism runs the risk of a potential loss of Quaker social capital by short-circuiting the slow process of nurturing individual gifts, and diverting attention from the fundamentally spiritual aspect of service.

Choice and the nominations process

The fixed responsibilities at the centre of the Society tend to fluctuate. Nominations for these are decided on by nomination committees, which meet together to discern the gifts of individual members and how these suit them to undertake specific tasks. However, the author found in her interviews that members are neither powerless nor passive in the process – they often position themselves in such a way that they can accept, avoid or decline a role. They decide where they position themselves according to their interests, age, stage of life or the amount of time they feel able to spare. The author concludes that the individual choices Friends make about the time they dedicate to service are shaped by the experience of Quaker practice and spirituality absorbed within the Society's multiple 'networks of intimacy'.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion – The Temporal Collage

Overview

The author concludes the thesis by drawing its findings together in her concept of the 'Quaker temporal collage' – a model that encompasses all the conflicting imperatives of Quakers' individual temporal choices. She considers its implications for future sociological research and for the Quaker community itself.

Summary of the findings

The author's research found that social and cultural transformations in the arenas of work, family and community influence how Quakers make choices about time. The preceding chapters explored the varied aspects of Quaker lives and the complexity of their temporal decisions in the light of these changes, and arrived at the conclusion that time for Quakers is polychronic. This means it is composed of multiple dimensions, and is individualised and flexible – for example, it is adjusted throughout the individual's lifetime. The result is that Quakers creatively remodel their perception of time into individualised, polychronic temporal collages. These collages are 'stitched onto the spiritual fabric' that underpins all Quaker life, and draw upon the web of social capital generated by the Quaker networked community. In this way, they enrich the Society as a whole.

Choice-making as a collage : The temporal collage allows for the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in individual decision-making because it encompasses linear, vertical and cyclical notions of time. The sense of the spiritual that binds this collage together not only embraces Quaker time, but also faith in action (voluntary work), personal relationships and clock time. The spiritual foundation of Quaker polychronicity is a cogent rebuttal of 'rational choice' theory, which proposes that when individuals make choices they balance costs against benefits to arrive at a decision that maximises personal advantage. In contrast, this research shows that the Quaker temporal collage permits the melding of spiritual, religious and secular tasks. It is made up of layers of overlapping or interwoven elements, reflecting the interconnectedness of time. The complex decisions it encompasses are motivated by considerations that appear far removed from the idea of cost versus benefit.

Polychronic pragmatism : Finding a place for the practical matters of life on the temporal collage calls for a complicated balance between life in the outside world and life in the Quaker community. The boundaries between all the various areas of time are not always clearly distinguished. For example, Quaker time contains aspects of holy busyness, and relationships vie for clock time with

each of them. Time, as seen through the monochronic lens that dominates working environments, is an asset to be allocated, spent or commoditised. However, a thread of Quakerism runs through all members' paid work – either work is regarded as service or as an opportunity to generate the spirit. Friends also draw on skills acquired through Quaker networks. The social capital that arises from participation in the Quaker networked community is the overlying mesh that connects the different elements of each individual temporal collage and imbues them a sense of the spiritual. When a member has a demanding job in the outside world, this overlying mesh may appear tenuous or even absent. Polychronic time, however, is shaped to fit individual choices and accommodate such contradictions. If time is pre-set by others or dominated by the necessity to fulfil core needs, the variety of time within the collage will be limited, but time itself is still polychronic. Building a temporal collage, therefore, reflects the way individual choices are made and layered.

Implications of the temporal collage

Sociological implications: Although Quaker polychronic time includes a spiritual dimension, the model itself is available to anyone with choices to make about time, even where these are very limited. The concept of the temporal collage upholds aspects of time that are devalued in, or absent from, other models. As a theoretical model that reflects the way individuals interpret their complex polychronic lives, it provides a potentially productive way to analyse observations about time.

Implications for Quakers: The research uncovers a number of issues for the Quaker community. One example is the way the demands of work impinge on Quaker life, and how the needs of family, friendships and volunteering compete for an individual's time. The negotiation of these needs, and their interweaving with the demands of service, requires Quakerism to be alive to the complexity of members' lives. The idea of the Society as a networked community is congruent with a concept of time as polychronic – it acknowledges the complexity of individual lives and temporal choices. However, the author warns that these networks could become increasingly fragile if the Society's membership continue to decline.

Summary prepared by Fran Cetti (2012)