

The Figure of Authority

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Bio

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Figures of Authority:

The affective biopolitics of the mother and the dying man

Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between authority-production and experience through a consideration of the emergence of certain figures as authorities on particular matters as a result of extraordinary experiences that they have undergone. It argues that analysis of such figures of experiential authority can help us to identify “objectivities”: foundational tenets upon which their authority is based and to which it ultimately refers. With reference to World War One veteran Harry Patch, and Doreen Lawrence, the mother of Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered in a racially motivated attack at a bus stop, I contend that the authority that these figures carry testifies to certain socially produced objectivities which elicit an affective response, an embodied demand that they are listened to.

Keywords: authority, experience, affect, biopolitics, figure

Introduction

This paper discusses the relationship between authority-production and experience through a consideration of the way in which certain *figures* emerge as authorities on particular matters by dint of experiences that they have undergone. In doing so, the concept of experiential authority is introduced, inviting us to pay attention to the notion of the ‘figure’ of this experiential authority as that which elicits the listening that is implied by the authoritative relation. An analysis of these figures can help us to identify ‘objectivities’: foundational tenets upon which their authority is based. Using two examples of such figures – so-called “ordinary people” who have become figures of authority as a result of the valorisation of specific life experiences they have undergone, the paper points to how their authority testifies to certain objectivities and in doing so elicits an affective, embodied response: a demand to be listened to. This takes place through an analysis of what the figure *does* – what affective relations and responses are engendered through the figure, identified as a locus for affective forces that move through and between bodies and media technologies. Through this, attention

is drawn to the importance of affect and embodiment in the production of experiential authority – where the authoritative relation is seen as activated by and in bodies, not just by institutions and structures. The two figures mobilised as examples here are the World War One veteran, Harry Patch, who died in 2009, and Doreen Lawrence, the mother of Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered in a racially motivated attack at a bus stop in 1993.

The paper begins with an introduction to the concept of authority in sociological and political thought, and then turns to a discussion of the production of objectivities, or outsides, in authoritative relations. I then turn to the concept of experiential authority, and the phenomenon of figures such as Lawrence and Patch in contemporary British culture. These two figures are analysed in terms of their affective force, and in terms of the objectivities that they rely on for the authority of their testimonies. Finally, the paper discusses the usefulness of the concept of the figure for exploring these relations. The figure here is introduced as a way of understanding the subject of authority that is at once a material body, a media image and a cultural signifier. As such, it may embody various subject positions that carry specific meanings, through both their embodied subjectivity and through the ways in which their testimonies are received by others. The figure, then, is a way of thinking about the relations engendered by this embodied subject in its social and cultural specificity: what we might think about as *encoded corporeality*.

Authority and the production of objectivities

Authority is considered in much sociological literature as a relation of obedience through an appeal to legitimacy. Weber famously identified three types of authority: charismatic, traditional and legal-rational, whereby the authoritative relation is classified according to the basis of its claims to legitimacy. Hence, the concept of legitimate knowledge is considered by Weber to be central to an understanding of the authoritative relation. What is at stake in

thinking about authority, then, is the question of whose and what knowledge is given the legitimacy that enables its authoritative power. As Foucault has shown us, types of knowledge are always categorised and tied into particular power relations that produce subjects, objects and ways of life (Foucault 1970, Foucault 1972, Foucault 1978). Here, I will argue that what has been called experiential knowledge is one form of knowledge that can and does claim legitimacy in the public sphere, and that this has led to the concept of figures of “experiential authority”: figures who have undergone particular life changing experiences and are positioned as experts through these experiences, and which I shall discuss below. While Weber’s analysis is useful for thinking about the relationship between knowledge, legitimacy and authority, this paper supplements his thought by means of an analysis of the processes through which that legitimation is produced, specifically through attention to the specific affective means through which the figure of authority is produced and listened to.

Hannah Arendt’s essay “What is Authority?” traces one particular articulation of authority (foundational authority) through its Roman legacy via Greek philosophers to contemporary political systems such as that of the USA, and situates it through the idea of a *foundation*, or of a foundational moment (Arendt 1977). For Arendt, authority resides in certain technologies – such as the technologies of testimony and tradition, both written and oral - which link past and present through providing partial access to the excess of the foundational moment. Arendt notes how the word authority, from the Latin *auctoritas*, shares its root with *augere*, to augment. Augmentation of the authority of the foundational moment, through various techniques, technologies and practices, produces and maintains the authoritative relation. Authority then becomes an intermediary between those subject to its power and a foundation upon which that power rests. The practices and techniques of the

authoritative relation are thus performative: authority is dependent on these practices in order to maintain itself.

The authority of the foundation is augmented through the handing down of the testimony of the founders from generation to generation. Authority is thus conceived as a relation that is reliant on an *outside*, on something transcendent that establishes that authority and upon which the authoritative relation ultimately depends:

The source of authority in authoritarian government is always a force external and superior to its own power; it is always this source, this external force which transcends the political realm, from which the authorities derive their “authority”, that is, their legitimacy, and against which their power can be checked (Arendt 1977:97).

This transcendent ‘outside’ in Arendt’s writing might take the form of a religious foundation, or laws of nature, or the idea of the People. Authority appeals to this outside which is considered by those subject to it as exterior to current political and social relations. The transcendent status of the foundation is of course produced immanently – it is a product of current relations that is projected to appear as though it is in a relation of exteriority. The authoritative relation does not *reside* in the outside; nevertheless it relies on the idea of the outside for its legitimacy. Authoritative relations, then, testify to the power of the outside - to the foundation - through the positioning of certain subjects and institutions as having a privileged access to the foundation, and it is this practice of testifying to that foundation through which authority is bestowed and also through which it is augmented:

Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it by their authority throughout the centuries. As long as this tradition was uninterrupted, authority was inviolate; and to act without authority and tradition, without accepted, time-honoured standards and models, without the help of the wisdom of the founding fathers, was inconceivable (Arendt 1977:124).

Arendt's essay points to a decline in authority in modernity. However, I would argue instead that authority has not declined, but its form is changing and it is becoming more diffuse and devolved. The decline of the power of the sovereign, in the form of king, state or church, means that, rather than disappearing, authority emerges through other figures. Whereas the foundational status of God or the supreme power of the king, or the People, the outsiders referred to in Arendt's essay, are indeed invoked less in modern forms of authority, attention needs to be paid to the new foundations which are being invoked as other figures of authority gain purchase. These new foundations are considered here as *objectivities*. Objectivities are values, ideas and knowledges that are considered as unquestionable, or based on a shared external world that is not open to argument of refutation. They are socially produced yet treated as though they are outside of history. As Blencowe points out in this issue,

Objectivity is a particular type, or set of types, of games of veridification. ...But ideas of objectivity come precisely to *collectives*; objectivity names the legitimacy of scientific *institutions*, it justifies legal *systems*. Objectivity is not truth, it is the condition of living, experiencing and acting, in common XXXXX.

Objectivities, then, are particular knowledges that are positioned as outside of what is debatable, contestable, or personal. They are positioned as such through the various relations that produce and valorise certain types of knowledge over others. In doing so, they enable a sense of the in-common: a gathering around particular values that gives a sense of a 'we'. In thinking about authority, the concept of experiential knowledge, and consequently the 'expert by experience' becomes important since it implies a difference in access to a shared external reality or objectivity. Experts by experience, then, are considered as closer to these objectivities than others through the life experiences that they have undergone and are able to speak about, an idea that I shall return to in the analysis below. I argue that the power of the

testimonies of these ‘experts’, or figures of authority is based on their relationship to specific objectivities. So where, in Arendt, the figures and institutions of authority had access to a foundational moment, here, the figures of experiential authority have access and proximity to particular objectivities as a result of certain life experiences. Experiences such as motherhood and the death of others, as I argue here, position these figures as authorities through the way in which the objectivities of motherhood, life and death operate as foundations and augment their authority.

To understand authority in terms of its augmentation is central to understanding it in terms of *practice*: authority emerges in an ongoing self-production, enabling an analysis of the conditions and practices through which it emerges. It positions it as something that *happens*, rather than something that simply exists. As Arendt makes clear, testimony is central to the production of objectivities and foundations, since it provides us with a link to or vicarious experience of that outside through which structures of authority gain and augment their power (Arendt 1977:124). Testimony relies on experience, either first-person or vicarious, but nevertheless an embodied and experiential access to a specific objectivity upon which the testimony relies for its grounding.

Experiential authority and ‘Experts by experience’

The figures discussed in this paper are listened to because of the specific experiences that they have undergone, because of their “experiential authority”. As such, they are considered experts through this experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge has been discussed previously by academics in literature on small group contexts: specifically self-help groups and feminist consciousness-raising groups, both of which are explored below. These and various other groups have pursued the valorisation of experiential, embodied knowledge as a

means of contesting dominant modes of knowledge that produce subjugated subjectivities. They demonstrate forms of authoritative knowledge that are expressly tied to the valorisation of experience as positioned against formal, institutionalised forms of knowledge.

Second-wave feminists have practiced consciousness-raising as a means of producing and valorising experiential knowledge. During the late 1960s and 1970s, consciousness-raising groups were seen as a political tool in the undoing of patriarchy. They acted as sites for the production of experiential knowledge, and for sharing experiences and testimonies (Rowbotham 1973, Allen et al. 1974, Sarachild 1978, Brownmiller 1999, Hanisch 1969). These groups would involve a sharing of personal experiences of particular aspects of women's lives, such as husbands, abortion or childbirth. Consciousness-raising groups also led to more public sharing of experiential knowledge, such as during the "public speak outs" organised by the Redstockings feminist group in the USA (Brownmiller 1999:105-6). Kathie Sarachild wrote in her manifesto for consciousness-raising, printed in the periodical *Feminist Revolution*:

We assume that our feelings are telling us something from which we can learn... that our feelings mean something worth analyzing... that our feelings are saying something *political*, something reflecting fear that something bad will happen to us or hope, desire, knowledge that something good will happen to us. [...] In our groups, let's share our feelings and pool them. Let's let ourselves go and see where our feelings lead us. Our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to actions (Sarachild 1978:202).

Consciousness-raising was about the making public of personal experience in such an environment as to collectively produce feminist knowledge and discourse, which would then lead to the production of a specifically feminist and more "real" consciousness that has not been tainted and made "false" by patriarchal structures.

The second-wave feminist practice of consciousness-raising, then, constitutes a valorisation of *experience* and a production of legitimate and collective knowledge based on

embodied feelings and experience, positioned as counter to knowledge produced through dominant institutions and discursive structures. In the context of the consciousness-raising group, shared testimonies to the experience of oppression were listened to because they resonated with the hitherto unspoken and unarticulated experiences of other group members, and in doing so, produced and positioned an *objectivity* of women's reality as difference from the subjective knowledge of masculine consciousness which then acted as its foundational tenet. This objectivity then becomes, through an ongoing performative evocation, the foundation upon which the authority of women's experiences in consciousness raising groups is produced. So whereas Arendt's discussion is limited to those foundations through which the centralised authority of the state gained its power, we can see how such a model also works through those diffuse forms of authority production that, I argue, proliferate. The consciousness-raising group worked through affective recognition and shared articulation of frustrations that were given voice through the concept of feminist consciousness, as such, this shared consciousness allows for experience to be not only voiced but *felt*.

Turning to self-help and mutual aid groups, the American scholar Thomasina Borkman describes experiential knowledge as a category of embodied, affective knowledge that is based on having undergone specific and affecting life experiences (Borkman 1976, Borkman 1984, Borkman 1990, Borkman 1999, Powell 1990, see also Jensen 2000, Munn-Giddings and McVicar 2006). Borkman distinguished between experiential knowledge, professional knowledge and lay knowledge, arguing that experiential knowledge emerges from a group situation and is based on 'direct' experience, which is then reflected on and agreed on in a group environment. This form of knowledge production, then, is "specialised knowledge, grounded in an individual's lived experience" (Borkman 1990:3). While professional knowledge is understood as being university or institution-based, and grounded

in theory or scientific principles, experiential knowledge is seen as concrete, grounded in lived experience and holistic (Borkman 1976). Referring to the civil rights movements as one way in which experiential knowledge has “taken hold”, Borkman argued that through these movements, and their basis in personal experience, “experiential authority” was claimed, which gave those involved “power to take their own and their peers’ stories seriously. They claimed cultural rights, along with civil and human rights”(Borkman 1990:7). Similarly, Valverde’s work on Alcoholics Anonymous argues that its success challenges the authority of experts, and lies in its practice-based approach of “combining technologies for governing the self with techniques for running democratic organisations” (Valverde and White-Mair 1999:407). Here, authority is produced through specific techniques and technologies, and the recounting of lived experience is central to this. Other writers have discussed how experiential knowledge takes place in other settings, alongside or contra to, other legitimised knowledges, for example in thinking about nature conservation (Fazey et al. 2006), or in pregnancy and childbirth practices (Abel and Browner 1998).

This literature demonstrates how experiential knowledge has emerged as a means through which the authority of professional knowledges can be challenged through direct referral to the authority of experience. Experiential knowledge is positioned as a supplement for, or a counter to, formal, institutional knowledge that is seen as the property of professionals. Experiential knowledge has gained weight in healthcare in the UK through practices of service user involvement. Noorani discusses how mental health service users are regularly invited onto panels and how government policy emphasises that “service users are experts-by-experience who have a privileged understanding of their mental distress, what they need for their recovery” (Noorani 2013).XXXXX

The processes through which experiential knowledge is legitimated and valorised in small-group interaction situations such as the self-help group or the consciousness-raising

group are also apparent in the legitimation of the knowledge of other figures who have undergone particularly upsetting and traumatic experiences, and have gained a voice in the public sphere. This is one aspect of experiential knowledge which has hitherto been neglected in academic discussions. Hence, I now turn to a consideration of the ways in which experiential knowledge is valorised and legitimised through public platforms. This valorisation of experience provides evidence of a pluralisation and decentralisation of authority. While it signals the emergence of new loci for authority in the public sphere, the processes through which authority is produced invoke particular objectivities and as such rely on similar foundations for their authority to the model of authority discussed by Arendt. Through a discussion of these figures of experiential authority I point to ways in which both Weber's and Arendt's accounts of authority can be supplemented in ways that perhaps better explain the complex ways in which authoritative relations are played out in contemporary society.

Victims and other figures of experiential authority

The sociologist Frank Furedi directs our attention to the emergence of a 'therapy culture' which has led to what he calls "therapeutic authority" (Furedi 2004:18, 197). This, he argues, is constituted through discursive and technological developments in contemporary society that have individualised and pathologised social problems such that "victim subjectivities" are produced, leading to a weakening of the resilience of the individual and an increase in the ability of governments to control our emotional lives: "therapeutic culture has helped to construct a diminished sense of self that characteristically suffers from an emotional deficit and possesses a permanent consciousness of vulnerability. Its main legacy so far is the cultivation of a unique sense of vulnerability" (Furedi 2004:21).

He argues that the emergence of therapy culture is central to the cultural valorisation of the

victim and the authority given to the victim, discussing how the “rise of the confessional” involves the erosion of the boundary between private and public self. The practice of ‘sharing’ is promoted in a diverse range of situations: “individuals who have lost a loved one through tragic circumstances have found the invitation to share it through the media difficult to resist. Often, society’s appetite for sharing in someone’s private grief has been welcomed by individuals who believe that talking to the public about their pain is an effective form of therapy” (Furedi 2004:40). Here, the emergence of figures of experiential authority in the public sphere is specifically tied to a range of norms, discourses and practices of individualisation, loss of authority and tradition and neoliberalism that has led to a “therapy culture”.

Indeed it is true that the confessional form has recently emerged in a range of situations, specifically in the popularity of so called “misery memoirs” – graphic tales of abuse, bodily degradation and neglect, and there is an increased focus on feelings both in policy decisions and in reporting of events in the public sphere and through the emergence of what Mark Selzer calls “wound culture” (Selzer 1997). As Furedi argues: “individual emotions and experience have acquired an unprecedented significance in public life... revelations of private hurt and suffering are likely to receive the full attention and approval of the media.” (Furedi 2004:44). However, if the rise of the confessional and in the authoritative legitimisation of experiential knowledge in the public sphere is indeed taking place, then work needs to be done on the *mechanics* of this legitimisation, and its political implications. I now turn to a discussion of two examples of figures of experiential authority who have had prominent public positions, in order to work through the processes through which their authority has emerged, and, moreover, the affective, embodied means through which they operate with reference to specific objectivities through which their authoritative power is augmented and through which their affective power resonates.

In a recent article in the *Guardian*, the sociologist Lynsey Hanley discussed the nature of expertise, arguing that “everyone has expertise in something: it's whether that expertise is socially valued, or considered unique enough to warrant further investigation, that counts in terms of sharing that expertise” (Hanley 2011:30). In doing so, she raises the question of who is considered an expert, and through what means this expertise is labelled as such. Hanley refers specifically here to the “expertise” of community organiser Helen Newlove, now a conservative peer. Helen Newlove’s husband was murdered by three men in 2007, and since then she has been campaigning against the UK drinking culture, setting up a foundation (Newlove Warrington), speaking at various conferences and meetings with politicians and policy makers on issues of family safety and victim experience, and has made a film for Channel 4 in which she argues that young people are given too much protection by the law (*Dispatches: A Widow’s War on Yobs*, broadcast Sat 5th July 2008 at 07:00 pm). Newlove, then, is given a public platform through which to discuss her views on drinking and the criminal justice system because she suffered the traumatic experience of the loss of her husband.

Hanley also pays attention to the activities of Denise Fergus, mother of Jamie Bulger, a two-year old who was abducted by two ten-year old boys, taken to a railway track and murdered. Hanley writes that

unlike Newlove, Denise Fergus has not entered parliament, or been made a "crime tsar", as a consequence of her suffering ...yet the fact that she is called upon to comment each time there is a news story about the case allows her to dominate public debate about the nature of the killing and about where we set the age of criminal responsibility (Hanley 2011:30).

In other words, through the workings of the press and other public institutions, certain figures enter the public sphere which enables their accounts to be listened to by a mass audience, as well as by policy makers. They are able to set an agenda and are considered experts by experience. After 9/11

survivors of the Oklahoma bombing were frequently featured as experts who could be relied on to instruct the public of what kind of reactions to expect. One mother, who lost her 4-year old daughter and served as a Red Cross volunteer in New York, drew on her experience to outline the grief response (Furedi 2004:14).

Colin Parry, whose son was killed in IRA bomb in Warrington has been consulted about the management of the political situation in Northern Ireland and Jayne Zito, whose husband was killed by a mentally unwell person, has also set up a campaigning trust (both cited in Furedi 2004). Furedi suggests that the authority of the therapeutic professions lend legitimacy to language associated with its practices, arguing that trauma discourse in particular, is “well placed to confer legitimacy, whether to authenticate membership in a particular victim group, to enhance public recognition, or in compensation suits” (Summerfield 1996 quoted in Furedi, 2004:375-6).

As Arendt and Weber show us, authority is *bestowed* through a listening which is not coerced. The subject positions produced in the authoritative relation are understood as willingly acceded to (Weber 1964:325). These figures, and those of Harry Patch and Doreen Lawrence have authority: they are listened to, despite not being formally members of an authoritative institution such as education, the police or of the political system. They gain their access to the public sphere through their experiences, suggesting that authority can lie in the valorisation of particular life experiences and the legitimation of the experiential knowledge gained through such experiences. Their bodies have been affected intensely and

horrifically, and their testimonies to these affects can consequently lead to those intensities to be imitated as affects within the bodies of those who listen. As such, the analysis of the affective relation undertaken here focuses on the affective capacities of these figures, drawing on the philosophy of Spinoza, whose discussion of the affects in his *Ethics*, provides us with a clear materialist means of analysing bodies and worlds processually and relationally (Spinoza 1996). The analysis is influenced by recent writing on affect in philosophy and cultural and political theory (Deleuze 1997, Anderson 2006, Deleuze 1988, Deleuze and Guattari 1988, Massumi 2002, Protevi 2009, Connolly 2001, Connolly 2002). As figures, they act as testimonies to specific outsides, or objectivities, mediated through those technologies of communication which enable the movement of affect between and through bodies, such as TV, radio and newspapers, as well as gossip and conversation (Deleuze 1997, Balibar 1998, Massumi 2002, Dawney 2011b). As Arendt points out, authority is produced through practices of testifying to a foundation. Here, certain objectivities are appealed to by these figures that lead to the weightiness of their authority. As figures they can be interrogated in order to consider the ways in which their bodies materialise specific objectivities that work to maintain the authoritative relation. These figures, I argue, act as loci of experiential authority, since their experiences are legitimised through specific media platforms, and through their being listened to by institutions such as the criminal justice system. It is my contention that these figures reveal something of the foundations upon which their specific modalities of experiential authority is based: such as, biological relation (family) and life. In other words, the reasons that they are listened to, and the foundations for their authority, are particular objectivities that they have gained a privileged access to by dint of the intensities of their life experiences.

I now turn to a discussion of these figures, based on press reports, TV footage and interviews. I have purposely chosen this mode of analysis in order to consider the two examples not as individuals, but as ‘figures’: ideas of bodies in the minds of others who have the capacity to produce specific affects. To analyse them as they appear to others then, as testimonial materialities, is central to my discussion of the “figure of authority”. For as well as being bodies, they are broadcasts, and as well as being individual subjects, they resonate with cultural and historical references and significations that also work through bodies, intensifying or altering the affective relations between them. In this way, when I refer to a body, or to embodiment, I consider the body as materialisation of many diverse and competing normative, cultural and social forces. The body can never exist in isolation from these forces. However, the reason that these figures are listened to is precisely due to their capacity to be affected, and to the capacities of those who listen to imagine their own bodies being affected such that empathy is produced. Thus I draw attention to the embodied, sensate features of the authoritative relation. The analysis conducted below, then, does not focus closely on the linguistic content of their testimonies. Instead, I focus on the way in which they operate as affective figures. As such, I discuss the aspects of their personas that, as a result of engaging with cultural and media representations, informal discussion, and taking part in everyday cultural life, I understand as central to their affective force. While for some, this may seem subjective, my aim here is to gain access to those aspects of these figures that are more than representational, and hence a focus on the ways in which they move specific bodies here is more useful than a textual analysis of their testimonies¹.

¹ See Massumi’s analysis of the affective power of Ronald Reagan for a discussion of the way in which the representational is only one aspect of the affective forces that certain figures produce and resonate. Massumi, B., 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: movement, affect, sensation*. London: Duke University Press.

Harry Patch.

Harry Patch was the last surviving British World War One veteran to have fought in the trenches. He died, aged 111, in 2009, having worked as a plumber for the majority of his adult life. After many years of silence on the subject of his war experience, he was asked to contribute to a BBC documentary on WWI veterans, and since then has participated in various remembrance events, TV programmes and BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme and has received various honours. In 2007, his autobiography was published, *The Last Fighting Tommy*. He also made a number of TV and radio appearances (Patch and Emden 2008, Hawtree 2009, News 2009, West 2007, Thompson 2005). I suggest that the figure of Patch can be viewed as a unique constellation of embodied subjectivities and materialities, which, when articulated together achieve the *weightiness* that enables him to be listened to and positions him as a figure of authority. There is no one deciding or overarching factor here that produces his authority. Moreover, the weight of his authority is not just based on the verbal content of his interviews (although this is of course important) but on the way in which the figure of Patch himself enables the production of specific affective resonances that “move” others to listen. Below, I attempt to unpick what is taking place in the articulation of this figure that lends it its weightiness, that bestows upon this specific testimonial account what I have identified as experiential authority.

Broadcasts of Harry Patch's interviews involve the rare witnessing of a testimony of a dying man: the listener has to strain to hear the voice of the very old, and in doing so, a demand is made to pay attention to what he has to say. The vulnerability of the body in this case is instrumental in its being taken heed of – it calls for an ethical response in the presence of proximity to death. Deleuze, in “Immanence: A Life”, discusses how, in proximity to death, “the life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the

subjectivity and objectivity of what happens” through the erasure of the individual and instead its participation in “the anonymous continuity of humanity”(Deleuze 2001:28). I suggest that the authority commanded by Harry Patch in these interviews derives in part from the ethical response that the elderly body commands. In the figure of Harry Patch, discursive articulations of dignity, vulnerability and life are materialised through his body such that he becomes a figure who is listened to.

Harry Patch testifies to the experience of having lived through something that happened long ago, which is at the limit of living memory. In his interviews, as reluctant conscripted soldier, he speaks of the day-to-day experience of war, rather than of bravery and heroism. I suggest that this mundane recounting of war, and the simplicity and directness of his address “war is a calculated and condoned slaughter of human beings” (*BBC News*, 1 August 2007) “war is a licence for murder and nothing else. It’s organised murder” (*The Last Fighting Tommy*, BBC 19 August 2009) is also a part in the constellation of weightiness that constitutes this figure as authoritative. His testimony lies clearly outside of glorifying narratives of war. In *The Last Fighting Tommy*, this sense of the everyday, the mundane, is augmented through his being interviewed in a nursing home, and talking to family, carers and friends.

His testimony also avoids association with a particular political ideology or activist group, and in doing so it is positioned as an appeal to universals, to objectivities, to “plain speech”. As he does not speak from an institution such as a university or government department, his knowledge is constructed and understood as simply experiential. In this way, the knowledge produced in this relation may be considered by those who listen as impure, uncorrupted: it comes ‘from the heart’ – an embodied memory and knowledge from first-hand experience that materialises a message that stands outside of the politics of pressure groups and government. The use of extreme close-up during televised interviews, and the specific staging of Patch’s representation in terms of his ordinariness and his lack of

involvement in political campaigns adds weightiness to his authority. This voicing of experience as knowledge gained through the body rather than through more institutionalised forms of knowledge production, serves to ‘naturalise’ and authenticate the testimony. His class position also contributes to the power of his testimony: Patch is often described as a plumber, or a family man. As a working class, West Country man, he speaks with the ‘authenticity’ that is associated with working-class lives (Skeggs 2003). In other words, the figure of Patch draws upon a number of cultural myths of common sense and stability that position him as a voice of the people, and his knowledge as that which lies above that produced through other ‘non-authentic’ means, such as those of political interest groups.

In considering Harry Patch as an authority figure – not the body of the man himself, but the figure of the man as it resonates through the bodies of others, an outside of *life* is introduced which is augmented through the technologies of his testimony². Patch attests to war as a waste of life, and to the horrors of youthful death. Life is positioned as the constitutive outside, the objectivity to which Patch, through his experience of the intensities of witnessing war, as the outside to life, provides a link to. His authority comes from proximity to death, both in terms of its inevitable coming in one so old, and to the atrocities that he witnessed, underwent and recounts. The figure of Harry Patch, then, is listened to because of a unique constellation of embodied subjectivities – his age and vulnerability, his class, the simplicity of his message and the articulation of his image during the affectively charged representations of Remembrance Day parades.

² In *The Order of Things*, Foucault refers to life as a “quasi-transcendental” which is arguably similar to my concept of an outside Foucault, M., 1970. *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock Publications..

Doreen Lawrence.

The second figure of experiential authority discussed here is Doreen Lawrence. Since the violent death of her son Stephen Lawrence, she has campaigned for reform of the criminal justice system and for formal recognition of institutional racism, which eventually took place after the inquiry that led to the Macpherson Report. Once again, her authority relies on a constellation of subjectivities, capacities and outsides. Here I argue that her experience as a mother who has lost a child, her work as a campaigner, her classed, racialised bodily disposition and her labelling as *dignified* (by, amongst others, the artist Chris Ofili, the Macpherson Report, Tony Blair at the 1999 Pride of Britain Awards and the Vice Chancellor of Staffordshire University, on presentation of her honorary degree) which has led to her position as an authority figure, as someone who is listened to and consulted. Gendered and racialised aspects of Lawrence's appearance as represented in the media are, I think, crucial to this authority, including her smart but demure dress, but moreover her experience of motherhood and loss are the key components in her production as figure of authority. In particular, I argue that one of the objectivities at play in Doreen Lawrence's experiential authority is produced through the valorisation of motherhood: a cultural construction that draws on the idea of life and kinship as objectivities or outsides, sometimes referred to in terms of "biopolitical life" (see Blencowe, 2011).

In Foucault's work on biopower, the mother is positioned as a central affective node in the biopolitical rationalities that produce and maintain population life (Foucault 2003, Foucault 2008, Foucault 2007). As such, the female body as mother has the potential to play a powerful role in the managing of affective responses, as well as the sanctity of the state of motherhood as a valorised and 'safe' femininity. The relation between mother and child, sanctified in legal and political discourse, is brought to play in new terrains of politics through the testimony to the event of rupture of that relationship. It is this rupture, the event

of a child's death – the '*crime against nature*' in the ending of one life before the other, and the intense affective experience that this produces in the mother, that places her in a specific and authoritative position to testify to a wrong. She is listened to in part because of the imaginary identification through which other bodies can feel her distress.

Melissa Wright, in her work on the testimony of mother-activists in Mexico writes of

the creation of an emotional bond linking the audience to the mother-activists via the reception of their testimonies, which so often involve passionate descriptions of loss, sadness, outrage, and desire for change spoken in a mother's voice and on behalf of her child. By presenting their justice demands in terms of a mother's experience, the mother-activists seek to connect to their audiences by appealing to their fundamental humanity, a humanity in which a mother's bond with the child is regarded as central and morally sound ... And the audiences in such events are often moved by the emotional accounts, as tears, the nodding of heads, and other visible reactions of identifying with the emotions presented are common (Wright 2009:219).

Elsewhere, Geraldine Pratt's recognises the affective force of stories of maternal loss in her activist-academic approach to these stories of Filipino domestic labourers (Pratt 2009). The figure of the grieving mother is a particularly powerful vehicle for affective movement and as such provides a specifically affective mobilisation of political messages through its testimony. As Wright points out, the mother is seen to stand outside of politics: her claim is not ideological but fundamental, objective. The bond of mother/child as central to the production of life, and the disruption of the life course through the death of a child, then, are produced as objectivities through which the authority of the mother emerges and through which she is listened to. In this way, life becomes the biopolitical outside to which her testimony refers.

In some cases, these victim testimonies are directed towards vengeance, or retribution (for example, in the case of Denise Fergus). Lawrence's testimony was staged in classed and

racialised ways which conferred on it both dignity and political agency. The figure of Lawrence also resonates with other cultural tropes that contribute to its power: for example the *stabat mater*, the *pieta*. Arguably, too, her sedimentation as authority figure was also augmented through Chris Ofili's painting *No Woman, No Cry*, which featured in his Turner Prize exhibition in 1998 which gained national notoriety due to his use of elephant droppings in his paintings. In every interview Ofili referred to Lawrence's "dignity". Through the figure of Lawrence – as black female body (representing sufferance), as mother (representing life and familial ties) - ideas of what constitutes a dignified response, and the biopolitical valorisation of particular relations of blood and kinship emerge in and circulate. Siobhan Holohan discusses how the figure of Doreen Lawrence was seen by the media as an acceptable face of Black Britain – as a hardworking Christian teacher who valued education. She draws attention to the way in which Doreen's persona was manipulated by the Anti-Racist Alliance, who "suspected that Doreen would come across as more acceptable than Nevill [Stephen's father] because of her greater inclusive identity attributes such as her late entrance into higher education and her representation as quiet, respectful and unemotional"(Holohan 2005:117). Dignity, through its racialised circulation in such representations, has become a normative cultural trope that produces specific resonances of suffering, social injustice and affective identification. To be dignified requires a lack of emotional outburst, a quiet acceptance of injustice and as such, it can be argued, quells the possibility of rage and retribution as a legitimate response.

Discussion

The specific events that produced these figures as subjects of authority – that led to their being *listened to* - are important to the way in which the authoritative relation emerges. The intensity of experience produced through these events, as well as the ways in which this

experience is then relayed affectively through its resonance with discursive regimes around life, suffering, vulnerability and dignity through the mass media, made their voices heard and gave them weight in the public sphere. Patch spoke, from experience, against war. Lawrence participated in campaigns for reform of the criminal justice system and was listened to. Denise Fergus' voice is mobilised in the name of retributive justice. Experiential authority involves the production and performance of particular truths through the testimonial and through the incomplete communication of traumatic experience (Derrida 1986, Derrida 2000, Caruth 1996, Carter-White 2009, Blanchot 2000).

These two figures are involved in the rearticulations of particular political rationalities *through* their positions as figures of authority. In both cases, the authority that emerges, through experience, in the figures of these people provides a sort of rupture, an interruption of existing rationalities, such as the idea of war as glorious, or the racial equity of the police, that enables their authority to take place as legitimate critique of institutions and practices. It grips the audience affectively – affecting the body immediately and non-discursively, pointing to a wrong that has taken place, a wrong which is figured as a disturbance of particular (humanist, biopolitical) objectivities and registers this disturbance in the bodies of others. The figure of authority unsettles these objectivities at the same time as it is produced by these objectivities. As we have seen, there is a degree of normativity to these figures – the cultural idea of motherhood is of course a normative trope – their subjectivities are not politically dangerous or radical, and the outsides upon which they draw are normatively produced. Figures of authority such as these, then, involve the interplay of normativity and counter-normativity, inflected through a particular moment of rupture that enables the testimony to be listened to.

These particular bodies are positioned such that specific responses are enabled in other bodies through movements of *affect*. What this means is that these figures, through their testimony, through their figuration as experiential authorities, *demand* an affective response. The affective response is mobilised here through the testimony of their proximity to the objectivities of life, family and death, through their knowledge of these objectivities that provides these figures with authoritative weight. Suffering is communicated through these figures as mimetic affects resonate in the bodies of their listeners and encourage a sense of empathy (Taussig 1993). Here transindividual flows of affect, such as the experience of trauma and of suffering are augmented through their movement between bodies, through media technologies, through talk and through thought (Massumi 2002, Spinoza 1996, Connolly 2005, Connolly 2002). Affective responses may mimic, or may change as they course through bodies, however the specific power of these testimonies works precisely because of the intensities they produce, and the intensities that they produce occur precisely because of the objectivities that lead to a shared existence to which they testify. The affective response, then, is key to experiential authority-production, and enables that production. The response to an old man or to a mother can work through ideas of vulnerability and dignity- through the experience of sadness and pain and suffering which is met with an ethics of listening. The bodies of these figures thus become technologies of memory – means of accessing the past - which augment and (normatively) valorise the atrocious act. In doing so, they enable an ethical and political response by others to such an act. This embodied response is what enables listening to take place.

In this paper I have discussed the emergence of ‘experts by experience’: particular figures of authority who are listened to as a result of the intensity with which particular experiences have affected them. Unlike Furedi, who suggests that this is a new phenomenon and is tied to a loss of traditional authority, I suggest that this is a form of authority that is related to a

general pluralisation of authority sources in line with a neoliberalisation and devolution of social structures that results in a pluralisation of knowledge practices in general³. The emergence of these figures does not replace the authority of other sources, but it does operate as another means through which objectivities are produced, objectivities that act as foundations for both authority and a sense of the common. It is for this reason that attention needs to be paid to the processes through which these figures are listened to: the processes through which they elicit response and how this response impacts on policies and practices. Furedi considers the emergence of victim culture as "... a stance which continually subordinates the act of reasoning to feeling. An anti-intellectual emotional stance (Furedi 2004:159) and identifies a cultural shift from reasoning to emotionalism. Wendy Brown, too, discusses the emergence of a sense of "woundedness" and the "establishment of suffering as the measure of social virtue" (Brown 1995:70). While this is to some extent true, the pluralisation of voices is by no means as negative as Furedi suggests. The figures of Denise Fergus and Helen Newlove, for example, invite and articulate a politics that valorises an emotional response to wrongs. Their voices are listened to and it is because of this that an analysis of the political implications of a valorisation of experience needs to be interrogated. On the one hand, it can lead to a politics of retribution and vengeance and a mobilisation of mob response, while on the other hand it can draw attention to the human, embodied effects of particular changes in policy and social organisation. As a result, the question of whether the rise in experts by experience is positive or helpful is less useful than a recognition and interrogation of the means through which these figures emerge, the objectivities that they participate in producing and draw upon and the types of political outcomes that they produce.

³ Here "neoliberalisation" refers to a general trend in industrialised regions towards a devolution of state and centralised power towards a privatisation of industry and most importantly for this argument, the saturation of power in all aspects of life as part of its dispersal.

Rather than seeing this as a problematic example of victim culture, they can shed light on the specific processes and constellations of materialities and meanings that give rise to their emergence as authorities. As a political tool, and as a means of critique, these figures should not be dismissed, but subjected to scrutiny. This approach calls to approach these figures through both affect *and* reason: to recognise the response that they engender and also the conditions through which that response is produced: in other words: to interrogate the body's response and ask why these figures grip in the way that they do.

Some thoughts on the figure

The concept of the figure of experiential authority here enables a reconsideration of Weber's understanding of authority as that relies on the status, subject position or charisma of the individual. (Weber 1964). Here, Weber's account is supplemented through a consideration of what is at work in the authoritative relationship – what cultural, normative, material and affective forces move bodies such that some are listened to. In other words, the subject position of the individual is considered as an effect of the specific relations that constitute the authoritative relationship, and it is this relationship that needs analysis. The invocation of the 'figure' enables a move away from categories such as 'body' and 'subject, towards a way of conceptualising the affective capacities that are held by figures that are both material and symbolic, that are produced by and produce the social. Figures that cannot be separated from their embodied materiality, yet whose materiality always includes those cultural and normative means through which bodies come to be subjects (see Butler 2006, Butler 1993). Figures of authority are, of course, gendered, racialised, classed and aged bodies, and an analysis of the authoritative relation enables us to consider how these macropolitical grids emerge out of and feed back into the very material conditions through which bodies operate socially. It is through considering these figures in terms of these imbrications that we can

reveal the various outsides that are invoked through their testimonies. The figure of authority needs to be considered as more than an individual, as that which emerges through the authoritative relation. This perspective relies on a Foucauldian critique of the subject, and approach to the production of subjectivity (Foucault 1982, Foucault 2005, Foucault 1978, Foucault 1992, Foucault 1988), as well as an engagement with ‘new materialist’ thought (Coole and Frost 2010, Protevi 2009).

Figures of authority can be studied as materialisations of the relations that produce their embodiment as subjects of authority. In this case, an analysis of the relation can take place through a consideration of what *holds* the figure of authority – what values are held as foundational outsides, and are co-constituted with the figure in the ongoing articulation of the authoritative relation. This calls for a transpersonal, transindividual account of authority-production, where bodies are materialisations of particular relations. Elsewhere, I have discussed an analytic of experience that refuses to retreat to the phenomenological (Dawney 2011a) in an attempt to situate experience in the production of experiential fields which lie outside of the subject, yet are accessed by bodies through thought. The relational concept of the figure critique of humanism and of phenomenology offered through continental philosophy can open up opportunities to think about authority perspective: from a position whereby it can no longer be considered to be owned by or contained within a subject, but rather produced through relations between bodies, texts and spaces that structure experience in particular ways and in terms of particular political rationalities.

Here the figure is considered as a nodal point, a milieu of emergence that is produced through particular material relations of legitimising and valorising such that it becomes a point at which relations converge, augment and become *sticky* (Saldanha 2010, Ahmed 2004a, Ahmed 2004b). The figure of authority can be considered through a method that primarily examines the conditions through which that figure emerges. In other words, the

figure is part of a distributed set of relations and is constituted through affective forces that bring it to visibility.

These figures emerge from the working through of relations of knowledge and experience. Where bodies are moved close to death, certain ideas about life, death, biological relation and sex emerge as telling in terms of who can speak on these matters. This is not to suggest, however, that experiential authority is a new phenomenon. It is becoming more apparent, however, with the increasing devolution and saturation of power throughout society and with the emergence of cultures of victimhood. This increase in diverse forms of authority means that we need to develop ways of engaging with them and recognising them as such. Experiential authority is considered here in order to highlight the emergence of the testimonial power of experiential authority and to call for its analysis through a concern with that upon which its authority rests. The phenomenon of these figures of experiential authority, as mothers, as victims, as survivors, tell us about the modes through which experiential authority is produced – those values of life and of biological relation that grasp at the affective level and implore of us to listen. These values, as absolutes produced as that which lies outside of politics or ethics or reason, are positioned as sacred and they are the foundations upon which experiential authority relies.

Through a discussion of the work that these figures of authority do: why they are listened to and the affective responses that they enable, I have shown how authority production in these instances is tied to specific objectivities that are produced and augmented performatively through various practices and technologies including those of testimony discussed above. The figures point to objectivities of family, life and suffering. They are positioned as incontestable and that is their ethical call: they demand response. These figures, then, derive their authority from experience: experience of operating within particular

institutions or the experience of some kind of embodied intensity, such as war or bereavement. The coupling of authority and experience in this way demonstrates how authority works through its *embodiment* in particular figures and in the relations between those who listen and those who stand as figures of authority. The mode of analysis discussed above demonstrates how it is produced in and through bodies, just as those bodies are produced as subjects of authority through these relations. The survivor, the witness, the victim – these figures, and the meanings through which they engender authority, testify to an experience, and it is the testimony of embodied experience – *I was there* – that is central to the authoritative relation. The figure of authority, imbricated in the process of authority-production through its role as provider of testimony and as technology of memory is central to the production of particular types of knowledge which function in the service of authoritative relations. Through an analysis of these figures, then, I suggest that the discussion of authority in political and social thought needs to pay attention to the embodied, affective means through which the objectivities which enable a sense of being-in-common are produced. As such, the figure stands as a locus for affective circulation round which this sense of being-in-common emerges. It is produced in and through the technologies of communication and transmission, through and in bodies and texts and in doing so, the figure emerges and is listened to. It is for this reason, too, then, that cultural analysis needs to play a part in work on authority-production. As well as considering the relationship between the state and the individual, or the means through which particular knowledges claim legitimacy, it is also necessary to analyse and interrogate the means through which certain ideas grip us, the techniques through which responses are engendered and the role that these responses play in the production of authority and of lives in common.

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