

FINDINGS

**Centre for Communication and Information Studies,
University of Westminster**

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CCIS TO RELAUNCH AS 'CAMRI'

The Centre for Communication and Information Studies is to re-launch under a new identity - and the occasion will be marked by a series of high-profile events. CCIS Director Colin Sparks explains the background to the change....

On the first of January 2003, we will change our name. CCIS will become the Communication and Media Research Institute, or **CAMRI**. The new name will better reflect our current interests and ambitions, and our new emphasis on seeking innovative sources of research funding.

When the Centre for Communication and Information Studies was set up in the 1980s, it was designed to address the challenges of the times, notably debates about "information society". The original emphasis of the research was on the production and transmission of information, and the interests of the staff included broadcasting, telecommunications and information science.

Today, our concerns are rather different. The maturing of satellite broadcasting, the diffusion of the Internet, and the changing international situation have all meant that the industries we research into are different today than they were nearly 20 years ago.

We still have a strong interest in economic and policy issues concerning broadcasting and telecommunications, but changes in staff, not to mention the increase in our numbers, mean that we now have expertise in a slightly different, and much broader, range of questions. The people whose primary research was in the field of information science left us some years ago, and in their place have come new recruits with expertise in audiences, in ethnicity, in the press and journalism, in public relations, and in the history of the media. We also have a much wider geographical scope, with expertise on the media in Africa and Asia, as well our traditional focus on western Europe and North America.

Both the outside world and the people who work here have changed, and it is time for a new initiative. CAMRI will build on the strengths of its predecessor. We will continue to produce scholarly work to the highest international standard. At the same time, however, we want in future to put much more emphasis on seeking partners in industry and government, in order to make sure that our research continues to be relevant to the issues of the day.

SALLY FELDMAN

The School of Communication and Creative Industries has a new Head...

Sally Feldman arrives in January, from the London College of Printing, where she has been Dean of the School of Media.

At the BBC, she was the editor of Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, and was responsible for launching and editing a range of programmes for Radio 2, 3, 4, and Five Live. She was previously editor of *Woman's World* magazine, and she continues to contribute to a range of publications including the *Standard*, *The Guardian*, and the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. She is also a frequent contributor to BBC radio. Sally Feldman has published academic work on, among other subjects, the history of *Woman's Hour* (in *Women and Radio; Airing Differences*, Routledge, 2000).

BRINGING BIRT TO BOOK

One of CCIS's visiting researchers played a key role in researching John Birt's recently published autobiography. Emily Seymour describes her role. Next page: Extracts from Jean Seaton's and Steven Barnett's reviews.

There is a point in depicting his early childhood that John Birt poignantly describes the joy he gained every morning by tidying a cupboard drawer into 'serried ranks'. This theme recurs throughout *The Harder Path*, and is perhaps the strongest indicator of John Birt's *a priori* approach to events throughout his life, not least his own memoirs. The process of researching and writing his autobiography was very much a reflection of his personality. I knew very little about the man when I agreed to spend two years of my life studying his. But it was in the hope of finding out where he came from and why he made the decisions he did, as

well as the irresistible opportunity of exploring the recent history of the BBC, that I took on the job with enthusiasm.

We first met in the House of Lords, where John seemed positively sprightly (and slightly bemused at his recent peerage), and immediately hit it off. For someone I knew only through press cuttings as cold and aloof, his excitement about the book and eagerness to involve me in the project was disarming. In effect I was to be his security blanket: to research the past, organise his papers, fact-check, and essentially keep the whole show on the road. For me, it was a unique project and a unique relationship. I was always conscious of the strange nature of this obsession with documenting a life. But I was genuinely driven by a desire to put that life into context, and by a fascination with the development of British television in the last forty years. We were working to a tight publication deadline (autumn 2002). John was wedded to the endgame, and as a result the research process was logical, highly organised and relentless. The book was divided into sections – Liverpool, Granada, LWT, the BBC (DDG) and BBC (DG), each of which would take three months, according to the schedule. A period of research by me would be followed by brainstorming with several of the key players and then, having focussed his thoughts, John would write the first draft. The reality, of course, was quite different. Very soon the book took on a life of its own. John's rigorous perfectionism and his attention to detail made the work incredibly challenging. The paperwork was endless, particularly during the year we spent on the BBC. But the work was truly diverse and never dull. I was intrigued by John's working class Liverpool background. I relished delving into the archives of 1960s Granada and learning about the battles to reform the management and scheduling of ITV in the 1980s, although it was often difficult to balance the resisting demands of the narrative with the academic. It was thrilling to hear politicians and players from the key periods talk about decisions and their consequences. There were unexpected pleasures – an energetic guided tour of the obvious Liverpool highlights, and of the less obvious, including a visit to the flat where John was born and the house he grew up in, where he reminisced about his childhood experiences; and the distracting but fun proposition of holding meetings at Downing Street in what was allegedly formerly Mrs Thatcher's spare bedroom!

On the way I learnt a great deal about the media, but I learnt many other important lessons: about power – and how people relate to it – and about history: how individuals remember the past, and how it is recreated in the mind. I also learnt about two John Birts: the ebullient family man and the single-

minded manager. Despite the demanding nature of the work, I found John, with his lively inquisitiveness and genuine enthusiasm, a rewarding person to work with. The contradictions of his personality and his thoughtfulness about television and public service broadcasting fascinated me. It was riveting to see him interact with various people from the past – childhood and university friends, old colleagues, politicians, and BBC executives who had experienced the most trying of times. At times the work involved so many complex levels that the finished product now seems a strangely condensed version of the sweeping intensity of the experience, and without doubt cannot do justice to it.

Now the book is no longer a conspiratorial project between the two of us, but is in the public domain – launched last month at the Reform Club (ironically for one who writes that he is not 'clubbable') to a noisy rabble of the great and the good enthusiastically dissecting the past with an eye to the future. John Birt is used to being a man under fire, and criticism of the book is hardly unexpected. Without doubt, it could have been a very different book, and it was clear to me during the project that its style, substance and narrative are hallmark Birt. He has been accused of single-mindedly pursuing his own version of the past, although this is a statement of the obvious, and he is not a *mea culpa* kind of guy. This, indeed is why he was able to do what he did, for good or ill. When we first met, John Birt did not promise an Oprah-style confessional; there was history to be written – and to a deadline. Two years on there are still parts of the story left untold. But my experience of *The Harder Path*, both professionally and personally, has been an enriching one.

Jean Seaton reviewed *The Harder Path* in *Ariel*, the BBC's own staff newspaper, and found it 'characteristic of its author – well researched with an element of tunnel vision'....

'... [Birt] arrived at the BBC believing that journalism was flabby, that the organisation wasted public money and that it had lost touch with the outside world. Although he resisted the government assault, he nevertheless believed that much of its critique was right. Many felt that he saw the BBC as the enemy... Birt seeks to excuse his own abrasive style, and that of Marmaduke Hussey (chairman of the governors who had appointed him), on the grounds that the climate was exceptionally hostile. What is clear is that they left a lot of able people bruised and angry.

'In a number of ways the book is characteristic of its author – well researched with an element of tunnel vision. At the same time, for those who may have thought the ex-director general a cold calculating machine, it is surprisingly warm. Whenever family and friends come up sunniness shines through. There is also an underlying passion when he writes about the handling of news, and about the qualities that make a programme good. Identifying the instincts of the period, he is generous and insightful. There is also point scoring – especially over the formidable Hussey, with whom he initially worked well and then famously fell out. There is little admission of error, either of style or content.

How will the Birt era be regarded? Perhaps it is too soon to tell and any student of the period looking for a balanced account will not of course find one here. What is portrayed is a man of energy and refreshing if obsessional vision...'

Ariel, October 29th 2002.

Steven Barnett, writing in the *British Journalism Review* find's Birt's book 'requires a suspension of belief'...

'... Throughout most of his BBC tenure, his negative coverage was relentless and remorseless. So we could all forgive something of an apologia. But was he never slightly misguided or a touch insensitive or a teeny bit stubborn in any single decision for which he was responsible? Apparently not. Indeed, he positively revels in his obstinacy. When his journalistic credo at *Weekend World* faced some resistance he "had an iron conviction" that he was on the right track. The opposition generated by his "bias against understanding" articles with Peter Jay - which attacked the way in which much TV journalism was conducted - "did not dent my conviction in any way". When Michael Grade pleaded with him not to sit on the BBC appointment boards of the two channel controllers to avoid a damaging internal split, "I was stonily resolute". On transforming BBC journalism, "I never wavered"... The tragedy is that Birt's own very real achievements ultimately become victim to such a selective view of history. He did initiate a different and interesting approach to political television with *Weekend World*. He did institute a more rigorous system of checking and editorial control within BBC journalism. He did move the BBC to a more transparent accounting system, eliminating fraudulent practice. He did preside over a much-needed expansion of the BBC's foreign bureaux, back Matthew Bannister's reform of Radio 1, and *Panorama*'s interview with Diana - which may not

have been a mighty feat of investigative journalism, but required the Director General to pit himself against the known opposition of his own Chairman. These achievements, however, are submerged beneath the outrageous puffery which seeks to minimise the contribution of others. When he first arrived at the BBC, Birt was accused by many journalists of "libelling the past" in his comprehensive denunciation of BBC journalism. This book goes further by libelling his own present and appropriating for himself the credit for "saving the BBC" which actually belongs to Michael Checkland - and probably in the end to former Prime Minister John Major...

'This could have been a fascinating book. Birt is a good story-teller, with some sympathetic insights into the evolution of working class Liverpool. A book about his own humble ancestry would be worth reading... I do hope he ditches the tome on management he is allegedly contracted to write and pens instead a witty, properly researched account of 20th century Liverpool. With no scores to settle, it would be more fun and a lot more believable.

BJR, November 2002.

RESEARCH ROUND-UP

Jill Hills' *The Struggle for control of global communication: The Formative Century* has just been published by University of Illinois Press in their series on *The History of Communication* edited by Robert McChesney & John Nerone.

The book traces the development of communication markets and the regulation of international communications from the 1840s through World War 1. It examines the political, technological, and economic forces at work and analyzes power relations within the arena of global communications from the inception of the telegraph through the successive technologies of submarine telegraph cables, ship to shore wireless, broadcast radio, shortwave wireless, the telephone, and movies with sound. Jill Hills demonstrates that control of global communications was part of a complex web of relations among and between Britain and the United States. The book is described by Dan Schiller as 'a stimulating, learned, careful text' and by Vincent Mosco as doing 'an excellent job of assessing the complex and mutually constitutive relationships among political, economic, and technological forces.'

Annette Hill has unveiled findings from her ESRC-funded research into 'reality television'.

She found that viewers are increasingly aware of how people act up in 'reality' TV shows such as *Big Brother* and regard a wide range of popular factual programmes to be entertaining rather than informative. She suggests that programme makers need to regain audience trust in the 'actuality' of factual entertainment. Her research covered the whole range of popular, factual entertainment, including leisure programmes, docu-soaps and documentary gameshows. It found that more than 70 per cent of children and adults aged between four and 65 watch such programmes on a regular or occasional basis.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Hill said: "News programmes, such as those allowing us to witness significant events as they unfold, inevitably shape viewers' attitudes to reality TV. What we have to ask is whether in the future reality TV such as *Big Brother* will shape viewers' attitudes and responses to the news."

The research, carried out in 2000-2001, used a survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews. Funding for the national survey of audience preferences for, and attitudes to, factual entertainment in the UK came from the Independent Television Commission (ITC). A self-completion questionnaire was distributed by BARB to a representative sample of 8,216 adults (16-65+) and 937 children (4-15) during August 2000. Subsequent audience research through semi-structured focus groups was part-funded by Channel 4.

Vincent Porter has recently completed his study of British Cinema in the 1950s, which is to be published by Oxford University Press.

Steven Barnett has written recently on the current state of political journalism in Britain.

Will a crisis in journalism provoke a crisis in democracy?, in the *Political Quarterly* (volume 73, No.4, 2002, pp.400-408), examines whether political journalism has gone too far in hounding government and politicians. The article evolves some of the themes in one of Professor Barnett's CCIS research seminars last year.

A shortened version of the article was also published in *The Guardian* last month, where he suggested that in present-day British political journalism 'a line has been crossed from detached scepticism to derision, cynicism and ridicule. There is real and justifiable concern that we have entered a new and destructive era in political journalism: the age of contempt'. The article provoked a vigorous response in the newspaper's letters page. David

Miller of the Stirling Media Research Institute wrote to blame the politicians rather than the media: 'The problem is not that the corruption, venality and pro-corporate bias of the political system has been over-exposed in the media. Just the opposite is the case'.

Paddy Scannell is currently on a research sabbatical.

He is writing three inter-related books, which bring together key aspects of his work over the past five years. The first is a textbook on theories of communication, the second a book on 'Television and the Meaning of Live' – which develops his study of media events – and the third book will be a study of the 'ontology of voice', which develops from his inaugural professorial lecture.

Peter Goodwin will be on study leave next semester. He will be researching the political economy of digitalisation.

David Hendy is currently on a year-long Leverhulme Research Fellowship. He is writing a 'social and cultural history of Radio Four' for Oxford University Press.

Roza Tsagarousianou co-edits Javnost/The Public on Diasporic Communication

Roza Tsagarousianou has edited recently with Shehina Fazal, London Metropolitan University a special issue of Javnost/The Public on the theme of Diasporic Communication (2002[1]). The special issue contains a selection of papers that were originally presented at the *Diasporic Communications: Transnational and Local Crosscurrents* colloquium held at Harrow in September 2001 and specially commissioned articles. It brings together some of the most innovative and original research on diasporic cultures and communications. The editors are planning a further edited volume to appear in 2003.

Some of the findings of Roza's recent research project on London's South Asian and Greek diasporic audiences are unveiled in 'Ethnic Community Media, Community Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Britain' in *Community Media in the Information Age: Perspectives and prospects*, edited by Nick Jankowski and Ole Prehn (Hampton Press 2002).

consumerism and contempt: politics and television after the Communications Act, 6pm Regent Street. All welcome.

2nd December 2002:

Voice of the Listener and Viewer rally on the Communications Bill.

Speakers include: Steven Barnett (University of Westminster). For further details see: <http://www.vlv.org.uk/02Dec02confdetails.html>

16th December 2002:

Doctoral Symposium - University of Westminster, Goldsmith's College, London School of Economics:

Themed panels, short papers, and discussions, with doctoral students and staff from the three institutions. For further details contact Alison Sorrell or Jo Sayers at the Research Office on Harrow Campus.

16th-18th December 2002: The History and The Media Conference, Institute of Historical Research, University of London (and The History Channel):

Speakers include Jean Seaton (University of Westminster), Simon Schama, Melvyn Bragg, Tristram Hunt, Jeremy Isaacs, Ian Kershaw, Max Hastings, David Puttnam, Laurence Rees, Polly Toynbee, and John Tusa. For further information about this event, please contact: Dr Debra Birch (tel. 020-7862-8740 or email

18th-20th December 2002: MECCSA Conference, University of Reading.

Plenary speakers include Cees Hamelink on 'The World Summit on the Information Society: Whatever happened to Communication?' and Eve-Ann Prentice on 'Aspects of War Reporting' and Stuart Allan on 'The Media and 11 September'. There will be panels on: Audience research, Politics, publics and the media, CelebrityFan and academic cultures, Pedagogy, Religion and the media, Communication ethics, Conversational TV News. Other papers include: Transnational TV in Europe, Rhetorical Masculinity, Asylum and Immigration Discourse in the UK, Representations of Concentration Camps in Hollywood Cinema.

For details and booking, etc: <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/conference/>

19th December 2002: Radio Studies Network AGM, University of Reading.

For details contact Tim Wall, Chair: tim.wall@uce.ac.uk

15th January 2003: IPPR's

"The Oxford Convention: Public Service Communications", Oxford.

Speakers include Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State, and Steven Barnett (University of Westminster).

15th January 2003: deadline for papers for The Radio Conference: A Transnational Forum at University of

Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA, July 28-31, 2003 (see 'Radio Studies item')

THE COMMUNICATIONS BILL:

How Steven Barnett is contributing to the policy agenda...

Over the past year, Steven Barnett has been publishing papers and speaking at a number of important seminars, with the Communications Bill – and the launch of 'Ofcom' – as a recurring concern.

Earlier in the year, Professor Barnett addressed the National Film and Television School debate, chaired by Baroness Kennedy, asking "Can Television afford a social conscience?", and spoke about "Lessons from British media policy for Europe" for a delegation of German Members of Parliament at the German Embassy.

In April, he was a speaker at a Smith Institute seminar at 11 Downing Street on "Is there a future for cross-ownership regulation in Britain?". And in May, he was invited to speak at a seminar for the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Committee on the draft Communications Bill.

In June, he was a Keynote speaker at a BBC Strategy 'awayday', which asked the question: "Can the BBC save political journalism?".

The following month, he presented to the BBC the results of a research project on comparative study of tabloid newspaper coverage of the BBC commissioned in April.

Also in July, he wrote about the Communications Bill in the British Journalism review ("A licence for future media power" in *British Journalism Review*, 2002, Vol 13 No 2, pp 41-45.) and contributed the Introduction to a collection of responses to the Communications Bill, featuring contributions from all the key broadcasting organisations and institutions ("Light touch or Heavy Hand? The New Challenge for Regulation in Communications Policy", in *New Future or Missed Opportunity? Reaction to the draft Communications Bill 2002*, Westminster Media Forum).

Last month, he had published a chapter, "Impartiality redefined: protecting news on commercial television in Britain", in a collection of essays pulled together by IPPR (Damian Tambini and Jamie Cowling, eds, *New News? Impartial broadcasting in the digital age*).

EVENTS

November-January

27th November 2002:
Inaugural Professorial Lecture,
Steven Barnett: "Culture,

RADIO Studies

CCIS is an institutional supporter of the Radio Studies Network. David Hendy reports on three recent initiatives of the Network....

The Network has launched a database of radio research, to be found at <http://www.radioresearch.ac.uk>. It was only launched last month, with additional funding from the Radio Academy, but it is expanding rapidly. At present, most of the research listed is from Britain and Ireland, but it is hoped that links to other research databases overseas will be added in the near future. Any research students working in the field of radio are invited to enter their details on the database – and may find the site useful as an ongoing research tool.

January 2003 sees the first edition of a peer-reviewed journal with a focus on radio: *The Radio Journal - International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*. It is published three times annually by Intellect. The editor is Ken Garner, at Glasgow Caledonian University. CCIS will receive two copies of each journal.

The Radio Studies Network is also co-sponsoring an international conference, with the University of Wisconsin, taking place at Wisconsin-Madison, USA, 28th-31st July 2003. 'The Radio Conference – A Transnational Forum' welcomes proposals for papers, panels, and symposia on all aspects of radio – historical, cultural, critical, and institutional. Deadline: 15th January 2003. See <http://commarts.wisc.edu/radioconference.htm> for more details.

New IAMCR Working Group on Diasporic Communications and Cultures

In response to the increasing interest within Media and Cultural Studies on diasporic cultures and communications, a new Working Group on Diasporic Cultures and Communication will meet during the IAMCR Conference and General Assembly in Taipei, in July 2003. The Working Group which is coordinated by Roza Tsagarousianou, Shehina Fazal, John Sinclair and Anabelle Sreberny, aims to bring together interested researchers to discuss these processes and their broader implications, and to present empirical and theoretical work around the following general themes:

- the interplay of the transnational & the local in diasporic communications
- diasporic communications & diasporic identities

- diasporic audiences & diasporic cultural politics
- diasporic cultural production & consumption
- the tension between integration, cultural separatism & hybridity

It is envisaged that the working group will provide a forum for stimulating research and exchange of views and ideas and will foster research cooperation among researchers from different parts of the world.

IN THE FIELD

CCIS researchers describe the progress of their work. Next page: Tarik Sabry and Ruxandra Trandafoiu near completion. Below, Rosser Johnson on starting the journey....

New Zealand television is best described by an absence – there is virtually no regulation of the industry (except in areas like decency standards). The result is that Television New Zealand (the state broadcaster) has been legally required to make a profit and return a dividend to its 'shareholder' (the government) since the early 1990s. It is therefore no surprise that the boundaries between advertising and editorial content have blurred significantly in recent years. Developments here include high levels of product placement, significant programme sponsorship and a central role for infomercials on most terrestrial channels.

I plan to investigate changes in the advertising / editorial relationship on New Zealand television by using the infomercial as a case study. A full account of the reasons for the rise of the infomercial (including its appeal for broadcasters, advertisers and audiences) would not only be a first within media studies but would also illustrate some of the consequences of an extreme market orientation for broadcasting.

The peculiar challenges I have faced so far have included the design of the research project (which has to balance interdisciplinarity with focus), access issues (especially to commercial information) and the fact very few academic studies of the infomercial have been conducted. Therefore, I have spent the last six months scouring libraries and databases for material for my literature review and developing a coherent framework within which they can be placed. My next tasks are to write the first chapter of my thesis (which will explore the relationship between advertising and regulation and demonstrate the relevance of using New Zealand as a test case) and to

finalise the design of my fieldwork (which I will undertake from June 2003 to January 2004).

Reflections on Doctoral Research, Nouredine Miladi

My topic involves the study of the role of Al-Jazeera TV channel in the construction of a Arab diasporic public opinion. For the last 14 months, Al-Jazeera has grabbed worldwide attention. Its controversial content has earned it diverse attitudes from admiration, to criticism and condemnation. My research has put me, I have to say, under enormous pressure to seize the golden opportunity and publish papers and articles, speak in conferences and attend interviews about Al-Jazeera. In that time, I managed to take active part in some those functions as well as to bring my fieldwork to its final stages.

Factors crucial to the success of a project:

- a) Having a good relationship with your supervisor, meeting regularly, and making use of his/her expertise.
- b) Good planning of fieldwork.
- c) Taking notes and writing draft reports about your research, experiences and ideas along the way.

Establishing a good relationship with your supervisor is vital to the smooth progress of your work. The supervisor is supposed to play a key role in every stage of the research including, helping you to define realistic objectives for each stage of the work, and ensure that these are met. None of us should be so complacent as to think that we can complete a doctorate unaided.

A prime evidence of progress in your research work is the completion of fieldwork and the start of data analysis. The constant assistance of my supervisors (Prof. Vincent Porter and Dr. Annette Hill) eased the completion of my fieldwork and rendered it an enjoyable experience from which I have learnt a lot.

Attending conferences and other events related to my area has provided me with precious opportunities to have my work exposed to experts in the field who might discuss or criticise pitfalls or weaknesses. However, one should resist the temptation of getting too much involved in the broader activities of networking and publishing when these arise. Reference to the milestones of one's original plan of action should constantly be maintained. Surely, one's supervisor is the best check for the progress of one's work. Do not take his/her concerns as over estimated or unrealistic, as his/her fundamental goal is to lead you to successful completion of your thesis.

/THE BACKPAGE/

In The Field... continued

Tarik Sabry, A third year Ph.D. student, CCIS, Harrow (Media and Communication)

Thesis Title: *Exploring Symbolic Dimensions of Emigration: Communications, Mental and Physical Emigrations.*

I was asked by 'Findings' to write few words about submitting a first draft of my Ph.D. dissertation. If I am not mistaken 'Findings' has also been asking a first year Ph.D. student to write something about the process of beginning work on their thesis. I understand from this design that I am at the end of a process; that there is a trajectory with a starting point of reference and a kind of arrival or end point in the middle of which lies what we can call the experience of *being* a Ph.D. student. But am I really at the end of a process? And how important is it to work on a draft rather than working on individual chapters?

When I started work on my thesis, I thought a 'Ph.D.' was an end in itself. I slowly began to realise that this was not the case. I now know that this stage of learning we call Ph.D. is more of a beginning than an end. It is like learning how to walk all over again. I suppose this is the most magnificent thing about seeking knowledge; we stop learning when we die and until then we are all beginners, first years, third years, Doctors and professors are all beginners. Now that I annihilated space between me and the first year Ph.D. student, let me say a few words about working on a draft.

Submitting the first draft is yet another kind of a *beginning*. I am now able to see my thesis in a new light. I see it as a disorganised *whole* rather than *parts* of a disorganised *whole*. This is the stage of writing where things start to make sense. In my experience, the fun here derives from our desire to make sense of and organise what is disorganised. Let us call it the process of gelling and purifying our thoughts, arguments, ideas and findings into a coherent and organised whole.

Ruxandra Trandafoiu, The Finish Line...

I was initiated into PhD together with a fantastic bunch of colleagues/friends. Whoever says doctoral research is lonely and alienating is horribly wrong. The recollection of that Islington café, seeing them all gathered in my crammed living room, or anticipating those veggies fried in peanut butter at Zimbabwe House, makes me 'Proustianly' nostalgic. And it's not just the whiff of hot chocolate. These encounters have a very practical outcome. We often speak about our theses and the process of bringing them to completion. We went through similar ups and downs: how do you design a methodology that would stand up to Colin's scrutiny; do you write a literature review; what structure; how many chapters; how long the conclusion; and especially when, where and how do you manage to write?

The legacy of the last three years, apart from the battered piece of writing in different stages of completion, is varied, but grounded in this wonderfully collective feeling of belonging. We are proud of Westminster, regretful to leave and maybe too critical of other similar institutions. Surprisingly, we discovered, a PhD is actually not that difficult if you stick to it. But of course that's never the case.

It could have been done better or differently, but finishing still feels good. Comparing the 'before' and 'after' for practical purposes, being called 'doctor' is the biggest difference. But with so many 'doctors' around and with so few people giving you 'the name', the 'makeover' is not that obvious. Impractically speaking though, the main gain is meeting interesting people, making friends and enjoying academic life. Once you go outside academia, you understand why you liked it and what you are missing.

'Isn't it amazing when you can see the light at the end of the tunnel?' said one of my friends just the other day. It is and I can, but I could see it all along.

Findings:

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