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**"STILL A MINING COMMUNITY":  
GENDER AND CHANGE IN THE UPPER DULAIS VALLEY**

Thesis submitted for PhD Examination

Stephanie Jones

University of Wales Swansea

1997



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## Summary

This ethnographic study of a former mining community in the upper Dulais valley explores how major structural changes, in terms of employment opportunities and socio-economic conditions, have impacted on the everyday lives of the villagers, with particular reference to gender relationships and identities.

Evidence of the structural changes is presented, and relevant feminist literature which attempts to explain gender divisions is discussed to contextualise the data, which was gathered during twelve months' fieldwork carried out between 1994 and 1995, ten years after the major miners' strike and five years after the last pit in the valley closed.

Methodological, epistemological and ethical questions are raised concerning the values of doing anthropology at home, and an argument is made for the need to acknowledge the reflexive and analytical capabilities of the subjects of research, and the contribution which they make to the final academic project, in this case the ethnography.

Utilising the notion of habitus, it is suggested that the practices of everyday life were operating to maintain the identity of the village as a mining community, and that this was facilitated by the retention of traditional gender segregation and identities, albeit that these identities were expressed in a modified form after pit closure.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my long-suffering supervisor, Dr Nickie Charles, for her excellent supervision and encouragement throughout the research process. I would also like to thank the other members of staff and postgraduate students at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Wales, Swansea who have provided intellectual and moral support. Thanks also to my family, which has always provided emotional and material sustenance beyond the call of duty. I will never be able to thank Tim Davies enough, as he has always been there for me and been prepared to share the good times and the bad.

The research could not have been carried out at all without the bursary provided by the University of Wales, Swansea, for which I am very grateful, and of course the co-operation of the people of the community in which the research was conducted. This thesis is dedicated to them, with special thanks to Carol and George.

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## Introduction

When I decided that I wanted to undertake postgraduate research in anthropology, mentors from my undergraduate days sensibly advised me that when writing a thesis, it was a good idea to choose something which would be personally interesting enough to engage the researcher for the whole period of research and beyond, through the high and low points of a gruelling process. With this advice in mind, I decided to do research in Wales, my home country, as I knew that I wanted to do "anthropology at home", and as a feminist, I knew that I had to make gender my main focus of study. When I read about a university being set up in a former mining community in south Wales in *The Guardian* of 1 December 1992, the article by Francis Beckett attracted my attention as the village featured, Blaengwyn, in the Dulais valley, seemed to be an ideal location for my research.

The article outlined the development of the Community University of the Valleys, an initiative of the Department of Adult Continuing Education at Swansea University. It was suggested that new educational opportunities were being made available to a community devastated by unemployment following pit closure, and that women who had supported miners during the strike were facilitating these opportunities through the DOVE workshops which had been set up to provide vocational training courses for local women. Beckett cited the 1991 Labour Force Survey predictions that by the year 2000, 24% of men in Wales aged 15 to 65 "will either be retired or have simply given up hope of ever working again" (Beckett, 1992).

My attention was engaged by the possibilities for research in the village. I was interested in how the DOVE workshops had been set up, what impact the Community University might have in the area, and what effect the 1984-5

miners' strike had had on the village. All three events could be argued to be about changing gender relations in the wake of the decline of the mining industry.

I hoped to be able to explore how major structural changes are translated into everyday life by carrying out research in an area previously associated with heavy industry. Clearly changes were going on, as demonstrated by the establishment of the DOVE workshops and the Community University, but I was interested to see whether these impacted on the everyday lives of people in the village, and if so, to what extent. Beckett's article implied major changes in the village in the wake of the 1984-5 strike and local pit closure, and I wanted to explore whether things had changed as much as people claimed. Beckett noted that during the strike, many women became politically active outside the home, organising food distribution, attending and speaking at rallies, and picketing. Men on strike often stayed at home to look after their children while their wives were involved in such activities. Jean Stead (1987) claims that this role-reversal in mining communities is irrevocable, and that gender relations will never return to the traditional sharply segregated roles apparent before the strike. Waddington *et al* (1990) however, maintain that enthusiasm for political change, especially in terms of gender relations, endured within these groups only as long as the strike and that they are now back to pre-strike conditions. However, the women's group established in the Dulais valley during the strike *is* still active in running the DOVE Centre.

The strike therefore seemed to give a taste of what life would be like in the village after what it was trying to prevent, pit closure, happened. I wanted to see how the closure of the main local industry, the industry which defined what the community was, a "mining community", would affect day to day activity in that community. I was particularly interested in gender relations and gender

identities, and how these might have changed since pit closure. I thought that these identities might be tied up with local identity too, and since the village was known as a mining community, and therefore had a certain masculine identity through its association with men's work, I thought it would be interesting to explore how the demise of the dominant male industry locally affected gender and community identities.

Having been fortunate enough to secure a University of Wales studentship, I was able to pursue my studies at Swansea and carry out research in the village. This thesis has therefore come about as the result of a chance reading of a newspaper article, an article which alerted me to a locality in which all my research interests could be explored, and by the support of the University of Wales at Swansea whose bursary enabled me proceed with my studies.

All my hopes for the possibilities of interesting research were crystallised when I first visited the village of Blaengwyn, and its neighbouring villages of Coedwig, Glanllwybr and Cwm Glân. I was immediately struck by the poignancy of the derelict shell of the large Coedwig Inn with its broken windows and missing roof tiles. The size of the pub building and its dilapidation alerted the visitor immediately to the fact that this was somewhere which was once a thriving, affluent community, but which had evidently hit upon hard times in recent years, and the pub seemed to me to symbolise the structural changes in the valley. Here were mining communities which were built up during industrialisation, first through iron furnacing and then through coal mining in the nineteenth century. The last mine in the valley, Blaenant, had closed in 1990, thus my period of fieldwork coincided not only with the fifth anniversary of the closure of the last British Coal pit in the valley, but also the tenth anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike, which prophesied and protested against large-scale pit closure nationally.

The time seemed ripe therefore for my study, a study which attempts in the following chapters to analyse how major macro-processes affect micro-processes, how structural changes over which local people have no control articulate with day-to-day lived experience, and the importance of gender in this experience.

This thesis begins by reviewing the relevant literature to give a context for the ethnography which follows. In Chapter 1, empirical work on gender segregation in paid employment and in the home are discussed, as are previous studies of mining communities and south Wales. Chapter 2 goes on to explore possible theoretical explanations for the development and persistence of gender segregation. Feminist debates about patriarchy, capitalism and ideology are introduced. I also discuss Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, concluding that this is a useful way of considering the situation I encountered during my fieldwork in Blaengwyn. Issues of epistemology and ethics are also raised, and the implications of these for an anthropological study conducted "at home".

Leading on from this theoretical chapter, my chosen research methods are discussed and defended in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, data on the socio-economic context is presented to give a background for my study, while in Chapter 5 my ethnographic data is presented. This representation of data gained during participant observation continues in Chapter 6, while Chapter 7 explores the data obtained from my semi-structured interviews. Chapter 8 describes a particular event, a rugby match, which occurred during my year's fieldwork in the village, and I use this event as a metaphor to aid understanding of life in Blaengwyn. Chapter 9 examines the themes and links strands which recur throughout the chapters. As my concluding chapter, it summarises my presentation and posits some possible implications.

## Chapter 1

### Contextualising communities and gender divisions

#### Introduction

As highlighted in my introduction, my fieldwork was carried out in a community which had been built up during industrialisation, first through iron furnacing and then through coal mining in the nineteenth century, and had witnessed a period of de-industrialisation beginning in the mid twentieth century and culminating in the last pit closure in the valley in 1990.

Because I wanted to look at how things have changed, I needed to compare my fieldwork experience with the past. This is difficult, because my year of fieldwork was only a "snapshot" view of the villages, and most of my research was conducted in the village of Blaengwyn, so it is even more localised.

However, I am fortunate to have four written resources on which to base my comparisons: a history of the upper Dulais valley written by a local historian in the 1970s, charting the growth of the villages during industrialisation (Evans, 1977); an MSc dissertation about Coedwig written by an anthropologist in the 1960s, based on fieldwork in the late 1940s and late 1950s (Evans, 1963); and a PhD thesis about the upper Dulais valley based on fieldwork in 1967 - 68 prior to the closure of the large Cefn Coed pit in the valley, and a subsequent book by the same writer. (Sewel, 1970 & 1975). In addition to the written sources, during fieldwork my attention was drawn to a radio programme which was made in the village during the 1984 - 85 miners' strike. My transcription of this programme appears in Appendix 2.

This chapter reviews the written work and also discusses the wider



literature on mining communities, gender divisions of labour and patterns of employment.

### **Community studies**

Situated, as this study is, on the borders between anthropology and sociology, it is necessary to mention the aspect of sociological discipline known as “community studies”, which has taken small-scale groups of people in villages or towns as its focus of study. Whereas anthropologists have conducted similar studies in usually exotic locations, sociologists have called this type of study conducted in the researcher’s own culture “community studies”. Such studies have tended to use participant observation as the main research method, though like my study, they have also used interviewing and surveys to complement the method irrevocably associated with social anthropology. Is there then a difference between “anthropology at home” and “community studies”? I believe that it is more a question of where one starts out as a student than a difference in the study itself. Although community studies have become unfashionable, anthropology at home has become more widely, though perhaps begrudgingly, accepted as a legitimate area of study amongst social anthropologists and perhaps students who would have done a “community study” in the 1960s now choose to do “anthropology at home”.<sup>1</sup>

One of the first anthropology at home studies, also respected as an exemplary community study, is Ronald Frankenberg’s *Village on the Border*, first published in 1957, which, unlike most community studies in Wales, looked at an industrial, or rather ex-industrial village (Frankenberg, 1966 & 1990, Davies & Rees, 1962 and Rees, 1950). Frankenberg’s book could equally well have been

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<sup>1</sup> My discussion of “anthropology at home” in Chapter 2 examines this point further.

called *Study on the Border*, crossing as it does the boundaries between sociology and anthropology. This classical study has been my model, and almost forty years after Frankenberg's work, many of his experiences have been echoed by my own, and are discussed in more depth particularly in relation to methodological problems in Chapters 3 and 9.

Whether my study is pigeon-holed into the sociological or anthropological tradition does not really worry me, as, although my background is in anthropology, I am prepared, like Frankenberg, to sit on the borders of each discipline, recognising that they have far more in common with each other than is sometimes acknowledged. As W. M. Williams states in his introduction to a collection of essays emanating from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in Swansea, it is an academic environment where "there was a deliberate intention from the outset to blur the disciplinary boundaries" (Williams, 1990, p.3), and I am fortunate enough to have been able to study in a department where there is co-operation and respect between the two disciplines.

Community studies has attracted criticisms, some of which can also be levelled at anthropological studies, whether conducted "at home" or abroad. Bell and Newby's critique of community studies points out that it is problematic to "treat communities as isolates" in either discipline (Bell and Newby, 1971, p.63), and that more notice should be taken of the wider social context.

Bell and Newby also point out that an adequate definition of "community" is perhaps the most problematic aspect of community studies, as it is a word which can mean so many different things to different people. Like them, I concur with Butterworth and Weir's definition, that community is "a territorial area, a complex of institutions within an area, and a sense of belonging" (Butterworth and Weir, 1970, p.58, quoted in Bell and Newby, 1971, pp.15 -16). This sense of "belonging" has been explored in recent "anthropology at home" studies,

including a collection of essays edited by Anthony Cohen (Cohen, 1982). The essays discuss studies conducted in the Shetland Isles, Essex, Northern Ireland, Tory Island, the Outer Hebrides and Wales, and as Cohen points out in his introduction, what is common to all the essays is an attempt to analyse how people "belong" to a community, what are the "nebulous threads running through the life of a culture which are felt, experienced, understood" and make up the common identity of a group of people in a given geographical locality (Cohen, 1982, p. 11). The term "belonging" is expanded as an analytical device to look beyond the immediate locality and contextualise it within a broader national framework (Cohen, 1982, pp. 199 - 201). I attempt to do something similar in this thesis, as I look at the consequences of major structural changes which are beyond the villagers' control, and also examine the inter-relatedness of gender, community and national identity.

### **Mining communities**

Mining villages have traditionally been paradigms of communities with sharply segregated gender divisions both at home and at work (Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter, 1969, Evans, 1963, Sewel, 1970 & 1975, Stead, 1987, Waddington, Wykes *et al*, 1990, Wight, 1993), at least since the Mines Regulation Act of 1842 banned women (and children) from working underground.

In his discussion of the Dulais valley mining communities and the closure of Cefn Coed colliery, John Sewel (1975) describes gender divisions between married couples:

The husband's world is centred round the exclusively masculine institutions of the colliery and the pub. Life for the wife revolves around the home and the family...The traditional exclusion of the wife from much of her husband's social world meant that her own social satisfaction had to be found in the home and among her kin.

(Sewel, 1975, p. 53)

Norman Dennis and his colleagues found the situation similar in a Yorkshire mining community in the 1950s:

A man's centres of activity are *outside* his home; it is outside his home that there are located the criteria of success and social acceptance...The wife's position is very different. In a very consciously accepted division of labour, she must keep in good order the house-hold provided for by the money handed to her each Friday by her husband.

(Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter, 1969, pp. 180 -181)

These observations suggest that mining communities such as Blaengwyn were divided asymmetrically along gender lines, into what Michele Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974) identifies as domestic and public spheres. Rosaldo takes a cross-cultural perspective, and concludes that women's universal subordination is linked to their being tied to the domestic sphere by child-care responsibilities. Whilst I think that in some cases anthropologists have eurocentrically devalued women's activities when this may not be the case in the women's own culture, Rosaldo does make a good case for linking women's oppression with their domestic association in Western Capitalist society. She points out that this association is not "natural", but does relate to biology because women bear children. She suggests that in places where there is a marked division between the public and domestic spheres, women will have lower status, but that women's positions can be improved if they establish their own social ties outside the isolation of their own homes and "create a public world of their own", or alternatively enter into the men's public sphere (Rosaldo, 1974, p.36). Rosaldo's ideas are relevant to the upper Dulais valley because of traditional gender segregation in the mining community and subsequent changes following the coal industry's decline. Rosaldo calls for gender equality through changes in such sharply defined public and domestic spheres: "men who in the past have

committed their lives to public achievement will recognise women as true equals only when men themselves help to raise new generations by taking on the responsibilities of the home" (Rosaldo, 1974, p. 36).

Studies conducted in south Wales (Harris, 1987, Leonard, 1980, Morris, 1987 a & b, 1990, Rosser & Harris, 1965) have found that strongly defined and segregated gender roles do predominate in the area, so it is not only a mining community phenomenon. There are of course differences between couples, especially in terms of class, but when evidence suggests that sharp segregation of men's and women's lives features strongly in an area, it is worth asking why this should be so, and under what circumstances if any these sharp divisions may be broken down. It is also worth noting that these studies show that women do have their own social networks, albeit sometimes located in the domestic arena, and so women, in Rosaldo's terms, improve their position by creating an autonomous, separate sphere outside of men's control.

### **Gender segregation and social networks**

Elizabeth Bott's work (1971) analyses the sharp division between men's world of work and leisure, and women's world of domesticity. She suggests that where couples have highly interconnected social networks of kin and friends, they are more likely to have sharply segregated gender roles, and that this is associated more with working-class communities. Bott suggests that factors associated with the working class lead to sharply segregated gender roles in an area, notably: limited geographical mobility; a limited range of work opportunities for men and different limited work opportunities for women; and continuity of population and personal relationships which allow for highly connected social networks. She argues that highly connected networks are also highly segregated,

and that segregation in marriage is linked to segregation in general (Bott, 1971, p.302).

Bott cites the example of mining as an occupation where there is likely to be a high degree of social interaction through such kin and friendship networks, and hence a distinct separation of gender roles. This is because a mining community, for example, has a combination of factors likely to produce high connectedness in social networks: a "concentration of people of the same or similar occupations in the same local area; jobs and homes in the same local area; low population turnover and continuity of relationships; at least occasional opportunities for relatives and friends to help one another to get jobs; little demand for physical mobility; little opportunity for social mobility"(Bott, 1971, p.112).

Bott's thesis has been supported by evidence in other studies, such as Young and Wilmott's famous study of working class families in East London (1957) and, more relevant to my own study in terms of geographical proximity, in the study of Swansea by Rosser and Harris (1965). The two authors of the latter study found that kinship networks (based around the "Mam" of the family) and strictly defined gender divisions were a prominent part of life in the city, but that these were becoming less evident due to increased geographical mobility as adult children moved away from their parents' areas. The kinship networks were more often maintained by women, and they argue that:

...it is the social position and attitudes of women which most determine the structure both of the elementary family and of the extended family. The more domesticated the women, the more involved they are in domestic affairs, the more 'homely', the greater likelihood of a sharp division of roles between husband and wife inside the home and the greater chance of their involvement externally in frequent contacts with their relatives in their kinship network and in mutual help and interests.  
(Rosser & Harris, 1965, p.208)

Diana Leonard also found kinship and friendship networks in Swansea, claiming that a man's, or more usually, woman's mother holds the elementary family together through financial help, child-care and other unpaid work after her son or daughter has married, thus enabling herself and her husband to continue to participate in the lives of their children and grandchildren (Leonard, 1980, p. 64). She says that women's networks comprise family and female friends of differing ages, while men's relationships outside the marriage also consist of a network of kin but also a group of men centred around their employment or leisure activities, and of a similar age. In concordance with Bott and Rosser and Harris, Leonard too finds that these networks are gender segregated (Leonard, 1980, p.85).

Mining communities, as well as being characterised by the separation of gender roles and close-knit networks, identified in these studies, also exhibit sharply defined divisions between men's and women's work opportunities. This has not always been the case, however, as a very brief consideration on mining in the nineteenth century indicates.

In the Dulais valley, mining was the main source of employment from the second half of the nineteenth century until the mid twentieth century. And women *did* work down pits until 1842. Chris Evans, in his history of the upper Dulais valley describes them pulling coal to the surface in the early 1800's (Evans, 1977, p.54). Jane Humphries points out that women and children were "rescued" from their work in the pits as much out of Victorian bourgeois philanthropists' and moralists' concern with these women's familial roles and sexuality as with the exploitation of them as workers (Humphries, 1981).

Harriet Bradley also charts the change from women's employment in mines in Britain and like Humphries, concludes that attitudes to what was acceptably "feminine" played a larger part in the exclusion of women than

concerns for their safety or inability to do the physically demanding work (Bradley, 1989, pp.104 - 114). The converse result for men is that coal mining is considered as "the most exclusively and essentially masculine of occupations" (Bradley, 1989, p. 104).

When the concern for morality led to the exclusion of children from mines, it was necessary for someone to look after them, and as women were also precluded from mine work, the task fell to them. Thus by excluding women and children from mine working, the Victorian philanthropists also achieved a division of labour which fitted in with their ideology of women's "proper place" and what an "ideal family" should be. As Humphries notes, this ideology was linked to the male ruling class's concern with property inheritance and was imposed through law on the working class, resulting in gender segregation of the domestic and employment spheres within mining families. (Humphries, 1981, p.27).

Such segregation is still apparent in Sewel's data on women and employment in the upper Dulais valley which shows that in the late 1960s the majority of married women did not have paid employment: over 70% of his sample of married women were not working outside the home (Sewel, 1970, p.196). However, when I did my fieldwork in 1994 - 95, all of my women friends<sup>2</sup> were working, most of them part time, though some of the other women informants who I did not know so well were not working. This represented a major change from the situation which predominated from the 1860s through to the 1960s. As would be expected when the major source of men's employment ceased, the men in the community were also experiencing changes in work: some of the men I met were working too, but for many ex-miners in the community it has not been easy to find a job since the last valley pit closed, a

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<sup>2</sup> By which I mean my main informants, with whom a relationship of friendship was developed during the course of my fieldwork.



situation reflected in the official unemployment statistics and also the results of my questionnaire survey, both of which are discussed in Chapter 4. Before discussing the factors that have been identified as influencing continuity and change in gender relations, it is useful to look at the major ways in which the relation between gender divisions and structural change have been theorised.

### **Gender relations, structural change and ideology**

The gender division of labour has been the focus of much feminist investigation and is acknowledged by feminist scholars as one of the main structures of patriarchy, the means by which women, and some men, are oppressed by powerful men (Charles, 1993, pp. 88 - 90). Louise Tilly and Joan Scott chart the historical changes in women's work, from the family economy based around work divided up between family members at home, to early industrialisation characterised by a family wage economy, through to advanced industrialisation and a family consumer economy (Tilly and Scott, 1973). They see industrialisation as the cause of married women's withdrawal from the paid work force (Tilly & Scott, 1973, p. 228), acknowledging that women have participated in paid employment to lesser and greater degrees according to their household's and the economy's needs at various times.

Marxist feminists argue that it is not industrialisation *per se* which is responsible for the division of labour between men and women, but Capitalism. It suits the requirements of capitalists to get labour reproduced cheaply within the family: the costs of feeding, clothing and housing workers and their children, the new supply of labour, have to be met out of the worker's wage. Women receive no wages for their labours in the domestic sphere which are so essential to maintaining the facilities for this reproduction to take place. Because Capital

does not provide child care, women with children who want or need to work tend to work part-time, in low paid, insecure jobs. Beechey argues that married women receive wages below the value of their labour power because of their dependency on their husband's wages: it is assumed in the capitalist mode of production that the labour reproduction costs will be met out of the husband's wage (Beechey, 1977, p.53).

The Marxist feminist argument is that women are required for the domestic task of reproduction of labour power and social reproduction, whereby the labour force is not only reproduced physically, but by its socialisation into acceptance of the values necessary for capitalism to continue (Robertson Elliot, 1986, p.64). This concept has been applied specifically to the Yorkshire mining community studied by Dennis *et al* : "Clearly the function of the family is as a mechanism for perpetuating the social structure, not only in terms of biological reproduction, but in terms of the production of the social personalities required by such a community as Ashton."(Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter, 1969, p.245) Although the family may well be important in the process of social reproduction, one must not forget the importance of educational, health, religious and cultural institutions too (Charles, 1993, p.91).

This gendered division of labour based around idealised notions of the family is conceptualised as arising from a process of class struggle in which the working class demanded better working and living conditions while it accepted the bourgeois values of the family discussed by Humphries (1981, p.28).

Michèle Barrett (1986) also argues that it is the ideological model of the family in our society which defines women as responsible for child care and their husbands as the breadwinners, which explains gender inequalities in pay and rights at work, even for women who are not married and/or do not have children (Barrett, 1986, p.157). She sees the reallocation of child care as vital to

ending women's oppression (Barrett, 1986, p.226), and emphasises that whilst a consideration of material factors, such as the relations of production within capitalism and historical social relations prior to capitalism, is necessary for analysing gender divisions, one must not forget the importance of ideology to the creation, maintenance, and reinforcement of gender relations. In developing her concept of familial ideology, Barrett draws on the work of Althusser (1971), arguing that ideologies are rooted in material practices. Thus gender divisions of labour within families both reproduce and are reproduced by familial ideology. In the context of this thesis I use the term "ideology" to mean a set of ideas, but continue to recognise that some ideas carry with them more legitimacy than others, and that they influence people's behaviour. For example, ideas about what it is "normal" for a man or woman to do in Blaengwyn influence people's attitudes to work and leisure, and what is acceptable feminine or masculine behaviour. One aspect of ideology is how one perceives oneself in relation to the dominant ideology, and thus ideology affects one's sense of identity. Whereas these issues are explored in more depth in Chapter 2 during the discussion of my theoretical framework, it has to be mentioned here as notions of identity and ideology are vital to an understanding of why changes in structural employment opportunities are not matched by changes in divisions of labour outside or in the home.

For example, Catherine Hakim's discussion of women's employment recognises the link between gender ideology and segregation in paid employment (Hakim, 1995, pp. 429 - 455). She argues that there has not been an overall increase in women's participation in paid employment since the second world war, and that one should not over-simplify gender segregation as women of different classes and ages have different attitudes to paid employment (Hakim, 1995, pp. 434 - 435). However, she distinguishes between two groups of women:

those committed to paid careers and those committed to their marriage career, and concludes that the latter group feels stronger responsibility for their domestic duties, and maintains the traditional ideology that the husband is or should be the "breadwinner" (Hakim, 1995, p.434). What is missing from Hakim's essay, I believe, is a consideration of material factors such as economic necessity, which often conflict with gender ideology and identities, as I found in Blaengwyn.

Alison MacEwan Scott, in her work on the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative, is more aware of these issues (1994). In a major survey of gender segregation in employment conducted in six British towns between 1985 and 1988, responses on attitudes to different types of jobs were sought to supplement the more objective data comprising employment statistics and details of employment history. MacEwan Scott states that some jobs are perceived as being "naturally" men's jobs, and some as being women's (MacEwan Scott, 1994, pp. 12 - 18). Gender segregation in employment, she concludes, is less a result of material factors such as economic and domestic concerns, than of perceptions of what it is appropriate for men and women to be doing, or in her words "gender segregation is strongly associated with social roles and traditional customs" (MacEwan Scott, 1994, p.18). The findings of the extensive research carried out as part of the Initiative, although it is notable that no Welsh locality was studied, suggest that inequalities in the division of labour at home, together with gender ideology, have prevented desegregation in the labour market outside the home (MacEwan Scott, 1994, p.35).

Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard are radical feminists who point out the importance of both the material and the ideological to gender divisions, and they too recognise the links between the division of labour in the domestic and market spheres (Delphy and Leonard, 1992). They concede that capitalism functions well because of this division of labour, but argue that men "are the

major, direct beneficiaries of the familial oppression of women" (Delphy & Leonard, 1992, p.18). They too focus on women's dependency, arguing that women get married out of economic necessity. Wives can partially escape this dependency by working, but like Beechey, Delphy and Leonard state that women do not obtain their full labour value in wages (Delphy & Leonard, 1992, p.118). The two authors argue that men as a class exploit women as a class, extracting labour from them in the form of housework, sex, fertility and emotional support; even when wives work outside the home in paid employment. The ideology arising from and creating this exploitation is strong enough to maintain gender segregation of labour in the home, and women's wages do not necessarily enable them to achieve economic independence.

### **Continuity and change in gender relations**

This has been explored further by feminists analysing power relations within the home, and the way that employment and unemployment, and consequential access to money, affect gender relations. Such research shows that even when women seem to have increased personal income through paid work, it does not necessarily always give them financial independence, or change the domestic balance of power. Thus Jan Pahl suggests that even when wives do earn money in the labour market, it goes towards the household budget, whereas men tend to reserve a portion of their wages for personal spending money (Pahl, 1989, pp.151-2). This means that earning money in itself does not necessarily increase women's power in the home.

However, Rae Lesser Blumberg argues that relative "male/female economic power is the most important of the independent 'power variables' affecting overall gender stratification" (Blumberg, 1991, p.100). She therefore

concludes, in opposition to Pahl, that if women can become equal economically, gender inequalities will disappear.

P. Blumstein and P. Schwartz suggest that when women do earn money, they can only obtain power within the domestic sphere if they keep it separate and maintain control of it, concurring with Pahl's conclusions (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1991). This control over, as well as access to a source of income is important in changing gendered power relations.

Further light is thrown on the relation between income, employment and gender inequalities by Marion Tolbert Coleman's study, which demonstrates that in households on subsistence-level incomes, men are likely to take on a greater proportion of housework and child care (Tolbert Coleman, 1991). This theory seems to be backed up by the work of Jane Wheelock (Wheelock, 1990). She conducted a survey amongst unemployed men in the North East of Britain, and argues that when men are unemployed and their wives working, gender divisions of labour within the household are broken down (Wheelock, 1990, p.119). She shows that the number of hours wives work affects the amount of participation of their husbands in domestic tasks, and she stresses that such changes are only likely to occur in the case of employed wives whose husbands are out of work.

However, Lydia Morris, in her study of Port Talbot in south Wales, comes to a very different conclusion. She found that following redundancy from the steel works in the town, changes in domestic divisions of labour were not apparent. She found that men did not take on responsibility for housework and child care, and argues that households had little choice regarding strategies since external factors such as gender ideology restrict choice. Thus unemployment "seems to constitute a threat to male gender identity, and this threat is heightened if the man assumes what are commonly regarded to be essentially

female tasks" (Morris, 1990, pp. 86 -87). She quotes Mrs Barton, wife of a redundant steelworker, on her husband's attitude to housework:

He doesn't like housework anyway. I suppose he thinks it's not manly. He won't clean the front windows in case the neighbours see him.

(Morris, 1987a, p.142)

Morris suggests that while men's identity has been based around their paid work, women's has been based around the home with child care and housework (Morris, 1987a, p. 138). Just as men's sense of masculinity is threatened by not having paid work any more, a woman's is threatened when her own sphere is invaded by her unworking husband, suggesting that women's feelings about their domestic responsibilities are ambivalent:

the home is their personal environment, and the running of it is something which they simultaneously resent and value. It is their domain and the location of their identity. The very presence of a husband at home during the day is seen as disruption, and his taking over their customary tasks as a threat to their identity.

(Morris, 1987a, p.144)

This suggests that notions of femininity as well as masculinity can preclude changes in the domestic division of labour between the genders.

S. Fenstermaker, C. West and D. Zimmerman (1991) reach similar conclusions about gendered domestic roles. They argue that in doing housework, one is also "doing" gender, and social relations are imbued with notions of identity (Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman, 1991, p.304). If housework and child care are seen as feminine tasks, a man's sense of masculinity is threatened by undertaking such tasks. In a former mining community in central Scotland, Daniel Wight came to similar conclusions: "Losing their principal masculine

role within the household, that of the breadwinner, made men defensive of gender boundaries rather than open to change" (Wight, 1993, p. 200).

Teresa Rees found similar problems of identification with masculine and feminine jobs. She writes about the association of skills and machinery with masculinity, and cites the example of an ex-miner having difficulty in working alongside women. There is a difference, however between the attitudes of younger and older men. Rees quotes an electronics plant training officer in south Wales:

...young males will do the work which is very similar to the women's work. But it is very difficult to put a forty year old man, who's come out of the pits, on a fiddly little job, especially amongst a group of women...You can attempt to make the job more masculine by putting them on machines. It could be even a more simple job than the woman is doing on the line, but as long as he's using that machine, something powerful, he'll assume that's a man's job and he'll do that.

(Rees, 1992, p.144)

It would appear that masculine and feminine identities are jeopardised when a man or woman does tasks traditionally associated with the opposite sex. Erving Goffman has formulated a useful theory of identity, and this will be discussed in the following chapter.

Lynne Segal's discussion of masculinity also recognises the relationship between labour and gender identity. She acknowledges that unemployment produces low self-esteem, and that the "dismantling of old industries creates new crises in traditional patterns of male authority" (Segal, 1990, p.97). This links up with Morris's findings in Port Talbot: the "norm" of masculine identity relating to "man as breadwinner" is challenged and so men do not want to stigmatise themselves further by taking on "feminine" tasks at home.



Mining has been perceived as a particularly masculine job. Sewel records men's identification with their work in the mines: "It was not unusual for miners to claim that mining was a real man's job and that it produced a qualitatively superior breed of man..."(Sewel, 1975, p.23). He quotes a miner who emphasises the importance of mining in the community for socialising boys into men and for male group identity:

The pit makes a good citizen out of a man. The older men will turn a long-haired youth into a man. There's nothing like the atmosphere you get in a pit, there's the comradeship - you can be cursing a man one moment, but if there's a fall you are in there getting the rocks off him. You can tell a man off, but the next moment you are working together and it's forgotten.

(Sewel,1975,p.22)

Segal does suggest that retaining traditional hegemonic masculinity "enables men to remain cushioned and privileged in relation to women" and that women must force men to change (Segal, 1990, p.41). She also suggests that personal renunciation of the hegemonic ideal by men is not enough. There have to be social, economic and political changes too. I believe that it is very difficult to separate out the material factors from the ideological ones, and that all are interrelated.

Segal says that as women's lives have changed, so too must men's (Segal, 1990, p.280). In this former mining community, the lives of both men and women have radically changed as structural forces have impacted on the village to remove the main source of masculine employment and the focus around which much of life in the village has traditionally been centred. However, one could expect traditional gender values to have lasted longer because of the highly segregated division of labour and gendered networks, as proposed by Bott (1971), together with attempts to maintain masculine and feminine identities despite

changes in employment, as established by Morris in Port Talbot (1987a & b, 1990).

## Summary

In this chapter I began by situating my study in the field of community studies and anthropology at home, and went on to discuss relevant literature on mining communities and studies of south Wales. These emphasised sharp gender segregation, and the significance of gendered networks, first identified by Elizabeth Bott. Subsequent studies confirmed the importance of these networks, and led on to a discussion of feminist analyses of gender divisions. Tilly and Scott suggest that these divisions arose during the period of industrialisation and rise of Capitalism in the last century and have been maintained even through the recent period of de-industrialisation. Feminists have pointed out the relationship between inequalities in the domestic and public spheres, and have alerted us to the need for consideration of material and ideological factors in attempts to explain such inequalities.

I have surveyed this literature in an attempt to provide a context for my own study, which centres on gender relations and identities in a former mining community in south Wales. There have been major changes brought about by de-industrialisation in the village in which I conducted my fieldwork. What I wanted to explore in my research is how such changes are experienced in the everyday life of the people living there. I wanted to investigate possible relationships between gender identities and structural change in this area, exploring how gender identities change or remain the same when the dominant, masculine industry with which the whole community is identified ceases.

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that traditional gender relations are maintained even when their material basis, in terms of men's and

women's employment, the demise of heavy industry, and employment opportunities in general, has changed drastically. In the following chapter, I examine theoretical questions to develop a conceptual framework to consider the "lag" between the radical change in structural factors and gender relations. I consider whether the notion of gender ideology is adequate to explain the disparity, and ask how it relates to notions of social reproduction and habitus.

## Chapter 2

### Concepts considered

This chapter is theoretical and explores the concepts of identity, gender ideology, habitus and patriarchy. I investigate how these concepts can explain the relationship between structural change and changes in identity, and I also discuss epistemological questions and their relevance to my research.

### The macro and the micro

I wanted to investigate how structural changes affected everyday life in Blaengwyn, or in other words, how macro-processes affect micro-processes, so therefore my theoretical framework necessitates structural and interactionist perspectives. Of course this is not unusual in social science investigation. As C. Wright Mills first wrote in 1959: "Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure'" (C. Wright Mills, 1970, p.14). Questions of structure and agency have long fascinated social scientists, and my study follows in this tradition.

As gender is the primary consideration of my research, I want to continue the macro/micro focus and attempt to outline the feminist contribution to understanding gender relations and identities in these terms, suggesting that Sylvia Walby's analysis of patriarchy can be complemented by Henrietta Moore's work on gender because Walby's approach is macro, and Moore's micro (Walby, 1990, Moore, 1988 and 1994). This chapter will thus lead on from Chapter 1's brief over-view of feminist accounts of gender

divisions by seeing how Walby's and Moore's contributions to the debate on gender and patriarchy can complement the review of empirical studies on gender divisions in Chapter 1.

I will then discuss Bourdieu's notion of the habitus and why I consider it to be relevant to the situation in Blaengwyn (Bourdieu, 1977). This again shows my concern with the macro and micro, and addresses the issue of why things do not automatically change in everyday life when major structural changes occur, as I believe to be the case in Blaengwyn.

Although I find Bourdieu's notion of habitus useful, I disagree with his views on epistemology, and go on to discuss the relationship between Bourdieu's, and other social scientists' views on native anthropology and native knowledge, and how this relates to my own work and the impetus for doing it.

This chapter, then, attempts to link theory and methodology by looking at issues of gender (divisions and identity) and patriarchy, change and continuity, traditional and native anthropology, through the complementary lenses of the macro and the micro.

### **Theories of identity**

In my introductory chapter I discussed the sharply segregated gender divisions identified in mining communities, including those of the Dulais Valley. I would now like to discuss broader feminist accounts of gender relations and theories of identity.

In looking at identity in Blaengwyn, I want to use the work of George Mead (1934), Erving Goffman (1963) and Anthony Cohen (1982, 1985, 1986, and 1994) as the theoretical framework for my discussion. I will consider the first

two only briefly and discuss the latter in more depth to avoid repetition since Cohen is the more recent and is heavily influenced by Mead's and Goffman's work himself. All three analyse the ways in which the self and society interact in identity construction, and used together, can, I believe, offer a useful means of understanding how gender, community and ethnic identities are made and remade in Blaengwyn.

George Mead suggests that one's sense of self derives from social interaction, and he characterised the self as consisting of an "I", the active social actor, and a "me", the passive means by which a group's values are internalised:

In a social 'Me' the various attitudes of all the others are expressed in terms of our own gesture, which represents the part we are carrying out in the social co-operative activity. Now the thing we actually do, the words we speak, our expressions, our emotions, those are the 'I'; but they are fused with the 'Me'.... the 'I' in the social situation is a source of unity of the whole, while the 'Me' is the social situation in which this can express itself.

(Mead, 1934, p.279)

In this sense, the structure and agency are inter-linked, since society constrains the individual through the "Me" whilst the individual creatively acts upon society through the "I". The self recognises oneself as social by taking on the attitudes of the "generalised other" and acknowledges that the group's needs, as well as personal needs, have to be considered. Mead suggests that people are able to make appropriate social symbols through continuous reflection of the self as others see them, by objectifying themselves (Mead, 1934, p.152). Thus, for Mead, one's sense of self, or to put it another way, one's identity, is based upon the interplay between the individual and society. Since the major concern of my research is how micro-processes are affected by changes in macro-processes, his theory fits into my exploration of the interplay between society and the individual, but also the interplay between structural changes and the

community's identity.

Goffman's theory of identity is similar to Mead's, but he conceptualises identity as being made up of three, not two elements: the "social identity", which is based on relationships, the "personal identity" which is based on biography, and "ego identity" which relates to a person's subjective feeling of her/himself (Goffman, 1963, p.105). Goffman offers an elaboration of Mead's notion of the "I" and the "Me". Goffman's "social identity" equates with Mead's "Me", I believe, while his "ego identity" corresponds to Mead's "I". The "personal identity", however has elements of both the "I" and the "Me", since one's biography consists of individual creative action carried out within the constraints of one's position, for example, class, gender and geographical locality, within society.

### **Gender identity**

Goffman calls discrepancies between ideological and actual selves "stigmata" (Goffman, 1963). He points out that the "general identity-values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast some kind of shadow on the encounters encountered everywhere in daily living" (Goffman, 1963, pp.128-9). Stigma, he says, results when people do not match up to the ideological "norms" for identity. Goffman says that when identities are under threat, people feel stigmatised and must somehow manage their stigma, either by placing themselves outside the normative category, or by alienating themselves from the community in which the norm is upheld, or by controlling their image and "passing" as "normal" (Goffman, 1963, pp.129-30). I think this concept is particularly useful for analysing gender identities, and exploring how stigma brought about by structural changes beyond the villagers' control are dealt with in Blaengwyn.

Whilst both Mead and Goffman examine the relationship between individual and group identity, as would be expected from symbolic interactionists, I think that their emphases are different. Mead emphasises the individual's creative capacity within the group, whereas Goffman emphasises the normative pressures of the group. The removal of oneself from the category or the community or "passing" are the measures Goffman identifies as being necessary to deal with the stigma which results from not meeting the group's ideal.

Stigmatised masculine identities and methods of "passing" have already been encountered in my consideration of the work of Lydia Morris, John Sewel and Teresa Rees on south Wales in Chapter 1. When one looks at gender identity in terms of the social, personal and ego identities that Goffman suggests exist separately, I believe that one can begin to understand the complexity and ambiguity surrounding notions of gender identity, and why gender relations are so difficult to change.

In the case of a former miner, for example, masculinity would be influenced by social relations, with work colleagues, friends, family etc. Personal identity would be influenced by the major biographical aspect of being a miner, and ego identity would be influenced by how he feels in relation to dominant or "hegemonic" views of masculinity. Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee (1985) formulate the concept of hegemonic<sup>1</sup> masculinity because they recognise that while there are a number of different masculinities, the dominant one in a society is the one against which men are judged and judge themselves, and are stigmatised for not meeting this "norm". Even though there may be no real basis for the "norm", hegemonic masculinity is, according to Carrigan, Connell and Lee, one of the vital "political techniques of the patriarchal social order"

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of hegemony was formulated by Antonio Gramsci to describe the way in which one class dominates others through political and ideological means (Gramsci, 1971).



(Carrigan, Connell and Lee,1985,p. 594). They suggest that hegemonic masculinity is constituted through three main apparatuses: 1) the media, especially advertising; 2) the gendered division of labour whereby some work is seen as women's, some as men's, with heavy manual labour being the most masculine; and 3) the state, by, for example, the criminalisation of homosexuality. Although the role of the state and the media should not be under-estimated, I believe that it is the second apparatus, the gendered division of labour, which is most important in terms of analysing gender identity in Blaengwyn.

Whilst feminists have been challenging notions of femininity for many years, masculinity has been problematised only fairly recently through the men's movement and feminist writing such as Segal's (1990), already discussed, and Andrea Cornwall's and Nancy Lindisfarne's (1994).

Andrea Cornwall's and Nancy Lindisfarne's collection of essays on masculinity demonstrate the vast number of masculinities which can challenge the hegemonic "norm" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994). They recognise that masculinity is not just defined in opposition to femininity, but that "the ways in which men distinguish themselves and are distinguished from other men must be an important aspect of any study of masculinity" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994, p.19). Hegemonic masculinity, they suggest, disadvantages some men as well as women, and this no doubt contributes to men's reluctance to change (Cornwall and Lindisfarne ,1994, p.10).

They suggest that by deconstructing the monolithic terms "men" and "masculinity", alternative masculinities can be recognised and the hegemonic version "dislocated", leading to empowerment of men and women.

They point out that gendered identities, like other identities, are multiple and depend on context. This is very important for my own research, which builds on Goffman's notions of social, personal and ego identity in order to

examine gender identities in the Dulais Valley. It attempts to identify hegemonic and alternative gender identities in Blaengwyn, and to contextualise them within the social, economic and political situation of the villages.

Cynthia Cockburn also investigates gender identity in her work, integrating her discussion of identity with broader theoretical concerns (Cockburn, 1983 and 1991). In her work on technological change in the printing industry, she explores how identity relates to capitalism and patriarchy, and suggests that individuals, as social actors, actively construct the social relations within which they are situated, and can, by their actions, maintain or transform the *status quo*. (Cockburn, 1983). Thus for Cockburn, identities are formed through practice, and are a two way process in the way that Mead and Goffman suggest.

### **Community identity**

In *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, Cohen criticises Goffman's analysis because he considers it places too much emphasis on the self performing reactively to structure-induced situations and not enough on individuals' creativity (Cohen, 1994, p.27). Although he admires Mead's thesis for its ability to pinpoint social interaction as the defining element of identity, he suggests that a new way of looking at identity needs to be devised. He suggests that instead of starting with society and then looking at the individual, we should look at the individual first and then move to society, "paying attention to the ways in which people reflect on themselves, and then see in what ways these reflections are indicative of social and cultural context" (Cohen, 1994, p.29). Whereas Mead says that cultural symbols arise out of self-reflection as if through others' eyes, and express an

individual's identification with the group, Cohen takes this further and says that cultural symbols "enable individuals to experience and express their attachment to a society or group without compromising their individuality" (Cohen, 1994, p.19).

Throughout his book, Cohen wishes to explore how attachment to a group by an individual is always mediated through the individual's own agency and stresses "individuals' consciousness of their difference from each other, of their distinctive identities, even though these may be masked by the social glosses of stereotype, orthodoxy, category or collectively imposed identity" (Cohen, 1994, pp. 65 - 66). His ideas are relevant to my later discussions of gender, community and ethnic identities in Blaengwyn, especially in analysing how self identity and social identity converge and diverge. They are also relevant because they fit in with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, although Cohen does not mention this in his book, since identity, in Cohen's view is part of what is "culture". As with Bourdieu's discussion of the practice of everyday life, Cohen acknowledges that culture is "continuously remade through people's behaviour" (Cohen, 1994, p.98).

Cohen's earlier work is pertinent particularly to a discussion of local and ethnic identity, through his concept of "belonging" (Cohen, 1982), and of how symbolic boundaries and communities are constructed (Cohen, 1984 & 1985 respectively). However, I will also apply them to my analysis of gender relations in Blaengwyn to consider how men and women "belong" to their gender, and to analyse how boundaries between the genders are constructed. As gender, local and national identities are all linked in Blaengwyn, it is impossible to look at one particular aspect of identity in the area without also considering the others.

Cohen's earlier work emphasises the collectivity of experience, while his later book recognises the danger of attributing an all-encompassing

generalisation onto a community. I hope to be able to discuss how community ideals were presented to me as researcher, and how these related to groups' and individuals' particular circumstances and so were either conformed to or rejected. Sometimes I was told something which accorded to the ideal, an "official version", but through participant observation in village life and talking to villagers, was able to realise how complex the issue of identity in such a village is.

When I arrived in Blaengwyn, I told people that I was interested in finding out how things had changed there since pit closure. The most common response was something like "oh, it's changed out of all recognition, there's no jobs up here now, there's so much unemployment, isn't there?" The statistics quoted in Chapter 4 bear this out, but what I was struck with was the fact that most people would add something like "but we're still close-knit up here, mind, we're still a mining community".

The concept of "community" is a difficult one in the social sciences, as it is a word which can mean something or nothing. I do not hesitate to use the word in this context, however, as several of the villagers used it themselves and emphasised to me on many occasions the strength of "community" values in the village. Of course, my job as an anthropologist is to find out what exactly "community" and "mining community" mean for the people of Blaengwyn, and I am using their term unapologetically, following Cohen's admonishment that "as ethnographers we should begin to make the cultures we study intelligible to us through the terms in which they are meaningful to their members, rather than by attempting to isolate their putatively 'objective' manifestations" (Cohen, 1982, p.3).

There is another dimension to identity in a community like Blaengwyn: it is not only men's masculinity which is associated with work, and work

particularly perceived as "manly"; the whole community is associated with mining and therefore the men's jobs. The links between gender and community identity, and how these relate to ethnic identity, are explored further in Chapters 7 and 8.

## **Two feminist approaches**

It is important to contextualise my data into the literature on gender, and the discussion in Chapter 1 was an attempt to outline the empirical material relevant to a mining community like Blaengwyn. I now turn my attention to the work of Sylvia Walby and Henrietta Moore, the first a sociologist, the second an anthropologist, to see how their analysis of gender relations, and particularly their discussions of patriarchy, can inform and contribute to my own research.

Walby identifies six main structures which make up the system of patriarchy in Western capitalist societies: "paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state" and says that the interrelationships between these structures create different forms of patriarchy (Walby, 1990, p.16). She thus recognises that patriarchy is not a monolithic phenomenon, but a system which changes over time and in different contexts. Echoing Rosaldo's notion of gender segregation within the domestic, or private, and public domains (Rosaldo, 1974, already discussed in Chapter 1), Walby concludes her analysis of patriarchy by suggesting that two significant historical events during this century, women's suffrage in the 1920s and their increased entry into paid work after the second world war, have resulted in a shift from private to public patriarchy (Walby, 1990, p.193), but that the "private and public forms of patriarchy constitute a continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy" (Walby,

1990, p.180).

She also discusses how patriarchal relations in sexuality have changed from Victorian times when women were "supposed" to be asexual and conform to strict moral codes to today when women are more pressurised to be sexually active (Walby, 1990, p.194 - 6).

The issues of women entering paid employment and sexuality are vital for my research, as women have increasingly entered the job market in Blaengwyn since pit closure, and when I started my fieldwork, one of the first things I noticed were the number of sexual jokes made in Blaengwyn. Most of the joking I heard involved women making fun of men, but there was also almost incessant flirting between the sexes and suggestive comments made by men and women on a cross and same sex basis. This will be explored more fully as I discuss the relevant data in Chapter 5. However, Walby's identification of sexuality as one of the main structures of contemporary patriarchy accords with my own research, as does her acknowledgement of the importance of paid work in gender relations. Related to her emphasis on paid work is the household, as gender divisions in paid work and unpaid work in the domestic sphere are mutually reinforcing. Of her other three sites of patriarchal relations: male violence, culture and the state, I would suggest that the threat of male violence is always with women, and was hinted at through some of the sexual joking, particularly in Mark's comments to me, in Blaengwyn. Culture, as defined by anthropologists, is the way of life of a group of people and could be argued to be everywhere in Blaengwyn, but is in Walby's terms more narrowly confined to "high" and "low" cultural institutions such as theatre, television and music. Although "high" cultural events were mostly absent from Blaengwyn, music and television did play an important part in the life of most villagers and no doubt reinforced patriarchy;

this was through portrayals of men and women on TV, and the roles played out by men and women in support of the male voice choir, for example. State intervention or lack of it was also apparent in Blaengwyn with, most obviously, the pit closure programme and absence of an alternative employment strategy, but also in regulations concerning social security benefits and health care facilities.

I do not apologise for the fact that I will not be discussing Walby's patriarchal structures at length. This is where my emphasis on the macro and the micro comes into play. Walby's book is an excellent summary of feminist theory and her own theoretical analysis of patriarchy. But, I believe that theory should be grounded in research practice. As Moore says, feminist anthropology has deconstructed the term "patriarchy" itself. She argues that while this "does not mean that women are not oppressed by patriarchal structures," it does mean that "the nature and consequences of those structures have to be specified in each instance, and not assumed" (Moore, 1988, p.189); also that there is "nothing useful to be said about gender outside the concrete specificity of gender relations" (Moore, 1994, p.26). She suggests that there are competing discourses on gender through which people take up multiple gender positions, and like Walby she says that women take up positions of submission and resistance within the system of patriarchy (Moore, 1994, p.56 and Walby, 1990, p. 200). These competing gender positions could be said to be linked to the competing identities suggested by Mead, Goffman and Cohen outlined above.

Moore's insistence that analysis of gender should always be based on contextual data complements Walby's more general theoretical discussions. They illustrate well the necessity of considering both the macro and the micro, and confirm that the two are inextricably linked. I would argue that Walby's

theory of patriarchy and Moore's theory of gender are both valuable, but taken separately are partial views which need to be brought together. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as Moore acknowledges, can link structural and interactionist analysis (Moore, 1994, p. 78).

## **Habitus**

Moore uses the work of Bourdieu in her discussion of gender, pointing out the usefulness of his recognition of structural factors. As she says: "Bourdieu makes it clear that actors' interpretations of the material world, and the kinds of activities they perform in socially structured space, are governed by their particular position within social relations and dominant cultural discourses" (Moore, 1994, p.78), but that he also suggests that "sets of activities conducted in structured space, can be used to 'read against the grain' of dominant discourses, to expose the arbitrary nature of their construction" and that even if "one cannot resist by placing oneself outside dominant structures and discourses, one can none the less displace oneself within them" (Moore, 1994, p. 82). This again alludes to the structure/agency debate, the issue of the relationship between the macro and the micro, and individuals and society.

I would like to draw on Bourdieu's concept of the "habitus" to analyse why certain aspects of life in Blaengwyn have remained unchanged, or been merely transmuted into another, very similar form. I would go so far as to say that patriarchy itself could be defined in terms of the habitus, since habitus is a way of defining the cultural practices which reproduce personalities with particular orientations which support certain structures within society. As Moore says, "Gender identity is both constructed and lived" (Moore, 1994, p.49). The structures and identities are mutually reinforcing and reproducing,



and change in one can induce change in another. As Walby acknowledges, this can happen with patriarchy, although she argues that it happens at the structural level, whereas I would argue that patriarchy operates and is experienced at both the structural and personal level (Walby, 1990, p. 16).

Bourdieu defines habitus as "cognitive and motivating structures", the "durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" which produce "practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78). Put more simply, one could argue that he is updating Durkheim's notion of what it is in society which constrains individual action (Durkheim, 1938, p.13), but he goes further than Durkheim to recognise the importance of the actor's participation in contributing to the dominant discourse through what s/he does. The obsession in the social sciences with the relationship between structure and agency, or in my terms, the macro and the micro, is no doubt fuelled by Durkheim's original interest in it. Bourdieu develops the idea by realising that *practice* is vital in this, and that therefore actors create the habitus as it is creating them, that it is a two way process.

My interest in Bourdieu's concept is aroused because I believe that the concept of habitus can help us understand how practices carried out in everyday life affect and are affected by social reproduction or transformation. Whereas Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatuses is useful for determining how institutions such as the family, religion, education and the media inculcate domination of the capitalist class over others, and has obviously influenced Walby's conception of how patriarchy, or the domination of one class, women, by another, men, is reproduced through such mechanisms, these structural arguments ignore the everyday practices

which make up social life (Althusser, 1971 and Walby, 1990).

Klaus Eder has recognised the validity of combining the macro with the micro, in his critique of Bourdieu's analysis of class (Eder, 1993, pp. 63 - 80).

Eder suggests that Bourdieu has been able to move on from a materialist conception of social class, to a "constructivist" model which takes into account how that class's characteristics are reproduced by social actors (Eder, 1993, pp.65 - 69). The relationship of an individual or class to what Bourdieu terms "cultural capital" has become more important than her/his/its relationship to "economic capital", as defined by Marx, although of course the two are inevitably related (Eder, 1993, p. 68).

Eder claims that as well as superceding Marx's analysis of relations under capital, Weber's notions of class have also been surpassed by Bourdieu's notion of class habitus (Eder, 1993, p. 69). Whereas Marx formulated the idea of collective class consciousness, and Weber identified differences in class as being expressed by subjective opinions and practices, Bourdieu's notion of class habitus is orientated towards "the collective schemata of experience" (Eder, 1993, p. 69). Eder says that habitus consists of "the rehearsed self-descriptions and practised modes of perception and experience" of a class (Eder, 1993, p. 72). It is precisely these "practised modes of perception and experience" which I want to investigate in Blaengwyn. Extending the notion of habitus from social class, my focus of research is the everyday practices whereby gender relations and identity are constituted and reproduced by a group of people living in a village formerly associated with one male-dominated working-class occupation, mining.

## Epistemological considerations

I would now like to turn to problems of epistemology, or how one can know something. When conducting my fieldwork I asked people in Blaengwyn how they thought things had changed since pit closure. "So what?" you may ask, "that's what social scientists do, isn't it?" Well, yes and no. They often ask people about their lives and for their opinions, but they seldom take their answers at face value, always looking for the "real" meaning underneath. This is my epistemological problem. When I asked the people in Blaengwyn what they thought about something, I respected their answers and noticed that they were very analytical of their situation. I believe that people in Blaengwyn have a very good grasp of their situation. Daniel Wight has a very different view of the people of Cauldmoss in Scotland, where he too did a study of a former mining community. He states that discussions including "abstract ideas and overt politics were minimal" and that "political consciousness in national or ideological terms was very limited" (Wight, 1993, pp. 65 & 66). Based on my experiences of Blaengwyn, I find it hard to accept this view of the people of Cauldmoss, despite the geographical distance between the two locations. Perhaps it was Wight's self-admitted cultural differences from those he studied which made it difficult for him to talk to the people of Cauldmoss about political and abstract topics as well as the small talk which as a middle-class English intellectual he found so difficult (Wight, 1993, pp. 16 - 17).

Sociologists and anthropologists alike have all too often taken it for granted that the native point of view is partial and needs to be expanded and expounded by the social scientist. I vehemently dispute this notion, partly because any view is partial, and partly because it does not acknowledge people's understanding through experience. For example, Gordon Marshall

claims that sociological research can demonstrate as false the widely held belief that many unemployed people "are work-shy scroungers", but fails to recognise that the unemployed people *themselves* know this is not the case, and it is only by observing them and questioning them about their own lives that sociologists are able to refute the myth (Marshall, 1990 ,p.204).

Marian Kempny and Wojciech J. Buriszta remind us that the founding father of anthropology, Malinowski, said that scientific anthropology's goal was "to discover the laws which governed culture and social life, whereas natives had no idea about them" (Kempny & Buriszta, 1994, p.122). Bourdieu concurs with Malinowski, claiming even that native theories "are dangerous" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.19) and that natives' views are too subjective and fragmentary: "Native experience of the social world never apprehends the system of objective relations other than in *profiles*, i.e. in the form of relations which present themselves only one by one, and hence successively, in the emergency situations of everyday life" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.18).

Bourdieu says that anthropologists' questioning prompts reflexivity on the part of informants, but he says that this reflexivity can not perceive the whole picture. My experience in Blaengwyn leads me to disagree with this view. Firstly, anthropologists now generally concede that their views are partial in the same way that a native's or another academic's are, and that all views are subjective. Judith Okely makes the point well when she says that the ubiquitous anthropological fieldwork method, participant observation "enables the anthropologist to make interpretations through vicarious knowledge" which she insists "is of course always partial" (Okely, 1994, p.49). Secondly, when I asked questions in Blaengwyn I was often given the reply, "I've been thinking about that a lot", or "We were talking about that down the club the other day", and I am not arrogant enough to put this down to my own

presence in the village. Of course people knew I was interested in changes there, because I did not conduct my fieldwork "under cover" as I would have been unable to do so on ethical grounds. But men and women who have experienced major structural changes brought about by the decline of the coal industry, who have been through a fierce industrial dispute during the 1984-85 strike, and who have a local tradition of political involvement through the presence of a once powerful union, are, I believe, to use Gramsci's phrase, "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971, p.6), and have a very real understanding of their situation through their own experience. Anthony Giddens has pointed out that an aspect of the situation of late modernity in which we live is that people are knowledgeable, reflective and aware of the conditions which make up their social life (Giddens, 1979, pp. 5 and 72 -3). My data will show this to be the case in Blaengwyn, and back up the views of a spokesperson for Bolivian tin miners, Domitila Barrios de Chungara, who acknowledges "the wisdom of the people" (Barrios de Chungara, 1978, p. 204) who have no formal education but learn from their own life experience.

Feminist social scientists have taken what women say into account, but built upon it in different ways. For example, Dorothy Smith argues that women's experience must be the starting point for a feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1987), whereas Joan Scott has seen a danger in doing this as it ignores the processes which feed into experience and how discourse constructs experience (Scott, 1992, pp. 25 - 26). Sasha Roseneil argues however that it is a two-way process: "Discourse is produced by actors, and it is at the same time productive of those actors" (Roseneil, 1996, p. 88).

I am adamant that the "natives" in Blaengwyn could analyse their own situation and it was my task merely to collect their views, participate as much as possible in their lives, observe their actions, add my *own* analysis and

present my version of life in the community informed by academic debates to which I have privileged access as a student. It is therefore an academic endeavour, and as such an ethnographic construct which I admit is mine rather than the people of Blaengwyn's. But I hope I have given their opinions, analyses and experiences due respect in my ethnography.

My fieldwork methods are discussed more fully in Chapter 3, but at this point I would like to discuss the methodological implications of my research.

### **Methodology and epistemology**

Methodology and epistemology are linked in my research because an important issue of how one can know things is at stake. I have given examples above of how social scientists such as Malinowski, Marshall and Bourdieu dismiss native knowledge. I have defended my faith in it as far as the people of Blaengwyn are concerned, but where does this leave my *own* knowledge as a "native" anthropologist carrying out research in my country of birth and residence, Wales? As a "native", can I understand what is going on in Blaengwyn?

When I decided to do research in the Dulais Valley, I met with some opposition within the anthropological world. A well-known professor in one of the most prestigious and highly thought of anthropology departments in Britain, where I had studied for my Masters degree in Social Anthropology, said: "You don't want to do that, and if you do, this is not the place to do it; there are plenty of other places doing things like that", by which I believe he meant alternative academic departments, not other anthropology departments. He encouraged me to do anthropological research, as long as it was in an acceptable geographical area i.e. somewhere "exotic", and he

suggested the Caribbean.

Claude Lévi-Strauss expresses the same doubts about anthropologists studying their own cultures: "When it is practised by members of the culture which it endeavours to study, anthropology loses its specific nature and becomes rather akin to archeology, history and philosophy" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p.126).

But recent critiques of anthropology have brought attention to the problems of research carried out predominantly in the Third World. Talal Asad points out a serious neglect within anthropological discourse: "there is a reluctance on the part of most professional anthropologists to consider seriously the power structure within which their discipline has taken shape" (Asad in Huizer and Mannheim, 1979, p.90). The volume in which his essay "Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter" appears, *The Politics of Anthropology*, is an attempt to undertake such consideration, asking "Why is it that we are concerned about human peculiarities in faraway places rather than confronting ourselves with those in our own street?" (Huizer and Mannheim, 1979, p. 20).

Trinh T. Minn-ha criticises the discipline from outside, and like Asad, focusses on the uneven power relations within anthropology (Trinh, 1989, pp. 47-76). My own Black friends have alerted me to the racist undercurrents in "traditional" anthropology, and I did not feel morally able to conduct fieldwork in a developing country, although I believe that anthropological insights have made and can contribute to make valuable contributions within and without academia.

I have found some support for my stance on this. For example, Henrietta Moore says that the "idea that anthropology is concerned exclusively with studying the Third World is a common fallacy" (Moore, 1988, p.186), and

Judith Okely holds no punches when she says that the "exotic should be displaced" within anthropology and that the "avowed aim of anthropology to study all of humanity is spoiled if it excludes the Western 'I' while relying mainly on the Western eye/gaze upon 'others'" (Okely, 1996, pp.1 & 5).

So, my project also carries with it a personal crusade, that anthropology should not just be concerned with the "exotic", and that "anthropology at home" is a worthwhile academic pursuit, not just a second best alternative when research funding is tight or political situations prohibit research in other countries! (see Jackson, 1987).

I argue, therefore, that "natives" *can* understand what is going on in their lives, and that as a "native" anthropologist, I can make a small contribution to the discipline. I agree with Diane Lewis, who as early as 1973 said "I feel, along with a number of other Third World anthropologists, that the time has come for the study of culture from the inside, by the insider" (Lewis, 1973, p.588). But the fact that "native" or "insider" anthropology has never really been accepted by the discipline is demonstrated by the publication over twenty years later of articles debating the merits or otherwise of "insider anthropology" (Cerroni-Long, 1995) and a scene I witnessed at the Association of Social Anthropologists of Britain and the Commonwealth conference in 1996.

The conference was held in Swansea and featured a paper on the Welsh National Eisteddfod by Charlotte Aull Davies, discussing how different identities are presented at this cultural event, and was illustrated by slides and video clips (Aull Davies, in press). Many delegates laughed at the video of the ceremony announcing the winner of the main poetry competition, evidently finding it very amusing. The discussion following the paper included speculation as to why this particular representation prompted such mirth,



although I missed this as I had to leave the conference before this took place to do some teaching. Reports of the discussion advise me that several delegates apologised for the offence they may have caused inadvertently. Others remained unapologetic, saying that the spectacle was "just funny", particularly because of the outfits of the participants shown in the video clip, and that they had the right to laugh at something if it struck them as comical.

I must admit the insensitivity of the ridiculing delegates shocked me. The conference was taking place in Wales, and they were openly laughing at a Welsh cultural event. Could this be anti-Welsh racism at work, or a more subtle revelation of how anthropologists secretly view customs "other" than their own, from which ever culture they derive? Or was it that the Eisteddfod was taking place in Wales, and that this is a culture not quite "other" enough? Whatever the true reasons for the laughter, the event made me regret for a while my own association with the discipline because, quite frankly I was ashamed of the delegates' response. It may be inappropriate to include this observation in this thesis, but acknowledgement of subjectivity in the discipline and the encouragement of reflexivity suggest that an important experience like this, which seems to confirm my doubts about anthropology's acceptance of "anthropology at home", should not be omitted from my discussion.

The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology bulletin *Insider Anthropology* (Cerroni-Long, 1995) acknowledges the marginality of such research within American anthropology too. In the introduction, a distinction is made between "native" and "insider" anthropology (Cerroni-Long, 1995, p.8). Cerroni-Long argues that native cultural knowledge is so internalised that it "remains knowledge without understanding", while the "non native anthropologist, on the other hand, may well reach understanding

but can never acquire true knowledge" (Cerroni-Long, 1995, p.10). She suggests, like the writers in Huizer and Mannheim's edited collection (Huizer and Mannheim, 1979) that the issue of power is vital in the debate about "insider anthropology" (Cerroni-Long, 1995, p.12), and concludes that it is a goal worth pursuing and amounts to "a reflexive form of native anthropology" (Cerroni-Long, 1995, p.11).

This notion sums up what I have striven for in my own research: I have tried to be a reflexive native anthropologist. But I must at this point concede that the concept of "native" or "insider" anthropology is not unproblematic in itself. In *Insider Anthropology*, Walter Goldschmidt reflects on his research in Californian rural communities and asks if he was really studying his "own culture" as he was from a different area of the United States and had a German-American background (Goldschmidt, 1995, p.18). I am Welsh, and from a working class background, but am from a different geographical area of Wales and have a vastly different life experience from most people in Blaengwyn, having lived in London and East Anglia as well as Wales, and having spent nearly seven years in higher education. But, as Delmos J. Jones points out in his contribution to the bulletin, "The native anthropologist must be seen in relationship to a native population, but the native population must not be viewed as a homogeneous and cohesive entity" (Jones, 1995, p.59). He also warns that native anthropologists can end up serving native elite interests (Jones, 1995, pp. 61 & 67), so that echoes of colonialist Western anthropologists' research in Third World cultures can resound in native anthropology too.

In my own research, I recognise that I am in a privileged position in that I was able to spend a year living in Blaengwyn conducting my fieldwork, and obtaining living expenses from the University of Wales as part of my

studentship. The fact that I am a Welsh woman certainly made it easier for me to be accepted into the village. In addition, the fact that both my grandfathers worked in coal mining facilitated an entry into relationships in the village, as it was seen as proof that I was somehow similar to the villagers themselves, despite the fact that I was a student and therefore in most respects very different from them.

Although not a native of Blaengwyn, and not even a native of a mining community, my research does, I believe fall into the category of "native" or "insider" anthropology and that is why it met with much resistance in certain academic circles, though, I am happy to say, encouragement in my present department. Throughout the ethnography, however, it is apparent that my "insider" status was dependent on specific circumstances, and that on many occasions I was definitely an "outsider".

### **Self identity**

My position as "insider" or "native" leads back to the issue of identity, but in this case, in true reflexive fashion, to *my* identity as a researcher, which I believe calls for scrutiny. I would therefore now like to discuss my own identity and how it bears on my research.

If I were utilising Mead's or Goffman's theory on identity, my "self" when arriving at Blaengwyn consisted of a "Me" and "I" or "social, personal and ego identity" who had learnt to be part of a community through growing up in a small town in west Wales, moving to London to work and going to university as a mature student, encountering generalised others during all these walks of life and being aware that my life history, and particularly my class, gender and ethnicity, all had a bearing on how these generalised others perceived me. This

reflexivity, which in Mead's thesis allows each individual to recognise group membership, was to be put to more professional use as a novice anthropologist arriving in Blaengwyn for a year's fieldwork. By focussing on my own identity first, it is more because I believe that I should set out for the reader how my own background, experiences, nationality, gender, age and other aspects of my identity affected my data than because I concur with Cohen that one should start with a self-conscious approach. But he is right, in as much as I have affected how people responded to me during my fieldwork and thus affected the data I collected, my own self-consciousness has of course affected my analysis of that data. So by presenting some relevant information about myself here the reader can assess for her or himself how this may be so. At the Association of Social Anthropologists' conference in 1996, the distinguished guest Raymond Firth made a speech at the annual dinner in which he said that he thought there was "too much ego in the cake" nowadays in anthropology. But I do not believe that *any* research can be objective, and I am thus "laying my cards out on the table" at this juncture so that this is evident throughout my ethnographic description. In any case, the inter-linking between autobiography and anthropology, and the advantages of using a "personal lens"<sup>2</sup> in ethnography, have already been argued convincingly in a collection of essays which acknowledges the merits of reflexivity in social research, as it allows for identification of all the factors likely to affect the research, such as gender, class and ethnicity (Okely and Callaway, 1992).

## Summary

This chapter has been an attempt to link theoretical and methodological concerns within my research. I have attempted to demonstrate the links between

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<sup>2</sup> A phrase used in Okely and Callaway, 1992, p. xiii.

the two, noting that the reason why I wanted to carry out research in Blaengwyn, to explore the affects of major structural changes on a small mining community, is also motivated by my own understanding of the ethical and political implications of anthropology. I have introduced the main theories that inform my analysis of social life, particularly gender relations and identities in Blaengwyn, which appears in subsequent chapters. I have suggested that a macro and micro perspective must be taken, especially when one is considering the affects of the macro on the micro, and that the analyses of gender put forward by Sylvia Walby and Henrietta Moore are complementary in this respect.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus can help explain why there are major areas of continuity in everyday life in Blaengwyn, despite major structural changes, but I reject his theory that social actors are unique in having a partial view of reality, since my epistemological position is that *any* knowledge and understanding is partial. I have defended my decision to carry out "anthropology at home", but recognised that the notion of "insider" or "native" anthropology is problematic. I trust that this chapter has demonstrated that my main area of interest is in the practices of everyday life which make up and are influenced by what it means to be part of the community in Blaengwyn, and how this articulates with gender identities and relationships. Thus the concept of habitus is a useful analytical tool for examining social processes in the village.

## Chapter 3

### Methodological applications and applicability

#### Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach to my research in Blaengwyn. As my research is centred around changes in the upper Dulais valley following the closure of coal mines, and how the community's, and individuals' gender identities have been affected by the disappearance of the industry with which the community is strongly identified, I am looking at the interaction of structural and everyday, localised processes. Before starting my fieldwork, it was my assumption that gender identities and relations are closely linked to work. I wanted to investigate what happens when an industry associated with a "macho" type of masculinity no longer provides employment for men in the area: will the former miners feel less masculine, either in other jobs, or out of work, and will this lead to alternative methods of reasserting masculinity, possibly in other spheres, for example the home?

I would like to highlight why I believe ethnography to be the most appropriate method for my research. I am fortunate in that although my background is in anthropology, my research has been carried out in a joint sociology/anthropology university department, and I am being supervised by a sociologist. I have been encouraged to challenge the taken for granted assumptions that a particular method is the most appropriate for a given research project just because it is the one most associated with a given academic discipline. Consequently, I am aware of the benefits of ethnography, but also that this method is not without criticism and practical difficulties. I

did choose to use ethnography as my data collecting method in the end; hopefully this discussion demonstrates why it was an appropriate choice for this particular research project.

Despite my defence of qualitative methods in this chapter, perhaps I should point out that I do not believe that qualitative and quantitative methods are necessarily mutually exclusive research methods. Indeed, as Heidi Hartmann's study of housework shows (Hartmann, 1987), quantitative research can, in the words of Sandra Harding's appraisal of Hartmann "reveal patterns of social thought and behaviour that are invisible to us from the perspective of our daily experience" (Harding, 1987, p.110). This is borne out by the wider perspective I gained by looking at the relevant 1981 and 1991 Official Census data for the ward in which Blaengwyn is situated. In fact I have used three different primary research methods: firstly, a questionnaire to provide details of the villagers' socio-economic background, secondly participant observation, and thirdly interviews. Together these have provided a rich ethnography which situates Blaengwyn in its wider socio-economic and cultural context.

### **Why ethnography?**

My research topic choice reflects my preference for qualitative research, though one could approach the same topic from a quantitative angle, sending out survey questionnaires to villagers in Blaengwyn and analysing government and other statistics. Because I had decided to concentrate my attention on a small community, the logistics of such an approach would have been possible. Indeed I did use these methods, but in a minor way and as a means of complementing my ethnographic data. I decided that the best way of

gathering the data I wanted would be to carry out an ethnographic study of the area. This involved living in Blaengwyn for a period of twelve months, engaging in participant observation and conducting unstructured interviews between October 1994 and October 1995.

In my research, I wanted to look at the every day life of a community deeply affected by macro processes. It is only by looking at the minutiae of everyday life that one can gain a picture of what is going on, and an extensive period of study benefits the research by allowing observation of people in different contexts within the same community.

The ethnographic method is not of course the exclusive property of anthropologists: sociologists too have recognised its benefits. There has been more debate about its value as a research method amongst sociologists, I believe, precisely because they do not accept it as the *only* method in the same way as anthropologists, who should more often consider the relative merits, disadvantages and ethical considerations of ethnography.

What then are the merits and disadvantages of ethnography and qualitative research?

### **Advantages of ethnography**

Graham Allan argues that the qualitative research process lends itself to research which requires "a substantial appreciation of the perspectives, culture and 'world-views' of the actors involved" and that it is often useful for examining social processes and relationships (Allan, 1991, pp.178-9). These are precisely the things which interest me, and which need to be analysed in order to gain an understanding of the changes or continuities which have occurred in Blaengwyn since the closure of the coal mines.



D.H.J. Morgan has noted that in analysing gender, participant observation contributes to the "way of seeing gender as something shaped and patterned in interactional contexts rather than as something unchanging that is brought to every encounter" (Morgan, 1981, p.91), and I believe that this is also the case when analysing such issues as ethnic and community identity. Morgan also concurs with feminist views that one should not forget that the researcher too has a gender identity, and that this will have an important bearing on the research.

Interactionist sociologists such as Erving Goffman have stressed the importance of context to behaviour, and Goffman notes that the "working consensus", which he defines as the unspoken but mutually agreed terms upon which an interaction is to take place, "established in one interaction setting will be quite different in content from the working consensus established in a different type of setting" (Goffman, 1976, p.21). He suggests that people are constantly giving "performances" and that these serve "to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman, 1976, p.26). Goffman not only reminds us that observation of a number of contexts is important because people act differently in different situations, but also because the researcher will have an effect on the "performances" s/he observes, an unavoidable problem which can only be alleviated gradually through familiarity.

In any case, the researcher should be aware that her/his presence is bound to affect those s/he is observing, and reflexivity is necessary in the research process, a point which has been developed by feminist researchers.

### **Feminist methodology**

Sandra Harding (Harding, 1987) notes that feminist critiques of methodology

have led to a greater awareness of the contribution of reflexivity to the research process generally. She suggests that

The best feminist analysis...insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint.  
(Harding,1987,p.9)

Whilst she does not limit such benefits to qualitative research, she does acknowledge that "fragmented identities are a rich source of feminist insight" (Harding, 1987, p.8), and I believe that such fragmented identities are best observed in the different spacio-temporal contexts afforded by ethnographic study.

Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (Millman & Moss Kanter, 1987, p.32) argue that the qualitative approach can give access to women's perspectives from the private and informal domains, whilst Dorothy E. Smith argues that by taking account of what happens in the everyday lives of previously ignored or stereotyped women, social scientists can become aware of their own position in the research, avoid maintaining a mythology of objectivism, and, in accord with Harding, suggests that they instead utilise the reflexive process as a strategy for transforming sociology (Smith, 1987, p.91).

Ann Oakley also calls for the acknowledgement of subjectivity in research. She suggests that we recognise "that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (Oakley, 1981,p.58).

Although feminist critiques have challenged the omission of women

from anthropological and sociological research, or their inclusion solely in the roles of wives and mothers rather than as social actors in their own right, it must be remembered that one cannot redress the balance by similarly omitting men from analysis. In my research, I collected data from and on men, as gender is not just about women! My aim in the ethnographic approach was to gain an understanding of as many aspects of life in Blaengwyn as possible, but I was acutely aware of my own gendered position, and the limits this placed on the research. This problem, and how I attempted to address it, is discussed later in this chapter under "Practical Aspects".

### **Disadvantages of ethnography**

The re-evaluation of subjectivity in qualitative research by feminists has in some way answered the criticism of inherent bias in such research, if only by making one aware of bias inherent in *any* research, and indeed many criticisms of qualitative research could be aimed at *all* methods of research.

Graham Allan summarises the two main criticisms of qualitative research as its being "impressionistic and non-verifiable" (Allan, 1991, p.180). But good qualitative research needs to be impressionistic, he says, and an open mind is essential so that one can ascertain which questions to ask and what to look for. Systematic analysis, by which I presume he means rigorous organisation and searching of the data, can ensure that the research is not only impressionistic, however (Allan, 1991, p.181). He also argues that a systematic approach to data analysis can generate research which can be replicated and therefore verified (Allan, 1991, pp.182-3). He acknowledges that the researcher's own position will have a bearing on the research, but as pointed out by feminist methodologists, this can be an advantage rather than a

disadvantage and can obviate false claims of objectivity which are often associated with quantitative research.

Martin Hammersley's essay "What's Wrong With Ethnography?" problematizes ethnographies written as though they are "descriptions of reality 'as it is'" (Hammersley, 1990, p.607), noting that ethnographic accounts are modelled by the ethnographer. He challenges the assumptions that ethnographies are theorised descriptions, claiming that theories are about universals and descriptions about the particular, but that all descriptions are "structured by theoretical assumptions" (Hammersley, 1990, p.598). He says that ethnographic research is in fact similar to experience, and analyses are in danger of relying on insights and intuition (Hammersley, 1990, pp.599&603).

Liz Stanley's reply to Hammersley points out that while ethnographic description is framed by theoretical assumptions, so are all types of research, and concurs with Allan that quantitative research is certainly not "objective" either (Stanley, 1990). Stanley says that ethnographic description "is actually not, and cannot be, literal description: rather it is a gloss, a summary which contains and indeed is an interpretation which provides a partial selection of 'what was' within the description" (Stanley,1990,p.624). By being aware of the shortcomings of ethnography, we can better appreciate its potentialities.

Roy Wagner sees the anthropological process as one of "invention" of culture, not in the sense of a miraculous discovery or of fabrication, but "rather in the manner in which a scientific hypothesis is subject to the judgment of 'testing'" (Wagner, 1981, p.xvi). He says that differing theoretical approaches may result in contradictions, but that these should be made explicit in the resulting analysis, and that other contradictions raised by the ethics and research methods should be noted (Wagner, 1981, pp.158-9).

John D. Brewer argues that such "deconstruction" of ethnography

should be seen as a possibility for *reconstruction* (Brewer, 1994, p.242), and he makes a number of suggestions for good ethnographic practice and integrity. These include contextualising the research; identifying the research aim and theoretical framework within which it is based; outlining how the knowledge was gained; discussing problems encountered in data collection and analysis; confronting the issue of power relations within the research project; and acknowledging that the research is a representation of how things are, and only one possible representation at that (Brewer, 1994, pp.235-6). I have attempted to do all these in my study.

Brewer's essay offers helpful suggestions for improving ethnography. In this respect I am reluctant to say that I was using a "feminist" methodology, since I believe that good ethnography should take account of the feminist and post-modernist criticisms of the method which are outlined above, and whilst my research is bound to be affected by my position as a feminist, an attempt to do *good* ethnographic research has necessarily incorporated awareness of feminist and other critiques.

Another difficulty related to the interviewing aspect of my methodology was that when one asks how things have altered, one relies on the memories of the interviewee for information about the past. Much of my data records how people in Blaengwyn themselves have perceived how things have changed in the village since pit closure. Also, my ethnography is based on my own memories of fieldwork, aided by notes and transcriptions of taped conversations, and is only one representation of what goes on in Blaengwyn. Although some may see the reliability of memories as a problem, I think it is more useful to analyse what is remembered and why, and acknowledge that the memories presented to me are worthy of consideration because they were presented at all as much as for what they claim.

In the introduction to *History and Ethnicity*, Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman discuss how important it is to recognise "not only how the past has led to the present, but also how history is used, experienced, remembered, or created" (Tonkin, McDonald and Chapman, 1989.p.1). Two recent studies of Melanesian societies have observed how important memory is for constituting the present reality of lived experience. Susanne Kuchler and Walter Melion argue that "memory is actively constructed as a social and cultural process" (Kuchler and Melion, 1991, p.4), while Nancy Munn assumes that "biographical memory is culturally/symbolically constituted in its ongoing social production in daily life" (Munn, 1995, p.87). These writers suggest that reliability of memory is not the issue, and that we should see memories as part of the social process which helps us experience the present. The fact that some memories may in fact be "nostalgia", looking back to a happier time when the village was more prosperous may well be the case, for as Nauright states:

In times of rapid social, cultural and political shifts, people frequently draw on elements of their past cultural identity in order to cope with societal changes. They often retreat into nostalgic recollections and reconstructions of a happier past time when their world was more stable and organized and when they had more individual or collective power. (Nauright, 1996, p.228)

Thus happy memories of Blaengwyn may be exaggerated in order to provide comfort in a less affluent era, but they are nevertheless an important source of information about how the villagers perceive the past and experience their lives now.

### **Practical aspects**

Because of my decision to use the ethnographic method, it was essential that I

be able to live in Blaengwyn during the period of my fieldwork. As I did not know the area or its inhabitants before starting my research, I did not have any contacts from whom I could seek advice on the matter. I had called at the DOVE centre once the year before commencing my PhD programme, and had talked with one of the women there, but apart from her I knew no-one in Blaengwyn. Ideally I would have liked to have found lodgings with a family in the village, and so I put advertisements in the local post-offices and in the Community Centre. I believed that lodging with a family would be the best way of meeting members of the community, as I could perhaps join their network of family and friends. Frankenberg's discussion of how difficult it is to penetrate housing estates "with each family shut up in a little box" warned me how difficult it would be to get to know people and participate in and observe their lives (Frankenberg, 1990, p.197). From my lodgings request notices, however, I received only one response and this was from a man in another village who offered to put me up for free. I declined his offer because it sounded as though although I would not have to pay rent, I would have to "pay in kind" for the accommodation, and in any case the village was too far away from Blaengwyn for the purposes of my research.

Without the kindness of the village baker's wife, Gillian, in agreeing to taking me in, I might still be looking for somewhere to live in Blaengwyn. The fact that I was living above a baker's was instrumental in meeting many of my informants, as Gillian allowed me to work in the shop and I met many local people when I was serving them. She also accorded me a certain amount of credibility within the village as she was a respected member of the community herself. She also introduced me to my key informant, her husband's uncle, Jack, who became and remains a good friend.

My relationship with Gillian and the dynamics of living in the bakery are explored in Chapter 5. The first six months of my fieldwork were spent living at Gillian and Mark's. For the last six months, I lived on my own in a rented bungalow in the village. By this time my experience in the bread shop meant that I knew many local people, and I was invited to "join in" various aspects of village life. While staying at the bakehouse I had started going to women-only aerobics classes in the local Welfare Hall, and had been invited to go to Bingo sessions in the same Hall by Jack and in the Rugby Club by women friends whom I met in the bakery. These, plus working in the bread shop, were all ways in which I attempted to participate in and observe community life.

When I first moved to the bakery, I distributed a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to households in the village. This was done as a means of introducing myself and my research rather than for the sake of the responses on the questionnaires themselves. However, the data collected on the questionnaires does give a useful overview of employment and household composition details. Out of 140 forms distributed, 68 (just over 48%) were returned. I knocked on doors in the village and people often filled in the form there and then. Some people asked me to complete the form because they could not read and write. If there was no reply when I knocked on a door, I posted the questionnaire through the letter box. The forms were either returned to me immediately, in the cases where I had met the respondents, or were handed back to me via the bread shop. I made a box with a slit in it to maintain confidentiality, but most people handed them to me or the other shop assistant. The majority of respondents confirmed that I could contact them again for further information, and the questionnaires were thus useful not only for acting as a medium for initial introduction, but also for providing



contacts willing to be interviewed in a more in-depth way.

The interviews were used to complement my fieldnotes. Most of the interviewees were men, and this was because most of my time participating and observing was spent with women, so I attempted to balance the gender of my informants by targeting men as interviewees. As I am a woman myself, I could talk to, work with, go out with and visit women, but I found it much more difficult to meet men because of the sharply segregated gender divisions in the village. Interviews were used then not only as a means of gaining data, but also as a means of gaining access to informants I would not have been able to meet otherwise.

The interviews ranged in length from forty minutes to three hours, but most lasted about an hour. Twenty five were conducted in all: seven with women on their own, three with married couples, and the remainder with men on their own. About 25% of the interviewees were contacted after they had indicated on the survey questionnaires that they would be willing for me to contact them again, about 25% were people I met during the course of participant observation who agreed to be interviewed, and the other 50% were introduced to me by my key informant, Jack, to facilitate arranging interviews with men. Details of the interviewees' ages and employment backgrounds are provided in the context of the discussion of the interviews in Chapter 7.

When I began conducting the interviews, I started off by fairly rigidly adhering to a set of topics that I wanted to cover, but decided in later interviews to treat them more as a "chat" and they were in effect taped conversations or, one could say, taped participant observation. These tapes have all been transcribed and analysed along with my fieldnotes reflecting my other participation and observation in the community.

The interviews were able to complement the participant observation in many ways. They provided the opportunity to talk to men, and to widen my circle of informants, both men and women. Another advantage was that they helped me deal with an ethical dilemma faced during my fieldwork. During the participant observation, I felt relieved that people in the village were accepting of me, but on the other hand I felt that I was using their openness to explore the intimacies of their everyday lives. I hoped that the interviews would alleviate this situation as they would be conducted with a tape-recorder and I could state my intentions before each interview, reminding the interviewee that I was doing research and that s/he did not have to answer any question that s/he felt uncomfortable with.

It was not until I had been living in Blaengwyn for a few months that I felt that I knew what questions to ask in the interviews, as I became aware of the preoccupations of the villagers gradually whilst chatting to them casually at the bake-house or whilst out socialising with them. Clearly I had some idea of what I wanted to find out about the village before I went there, and my questionnaires confirm that I was primarily interested in how a major structural change, the loss of a major local employer through pit closure, affected the every day lives of people in Blaengwyn.

During my participant observation, however, I noted that the changes experienced in daily life were expressed through a number of inter-related means. My analysis of the ethnographic data suggests the following areas which may elucidate what "identity" means in Blaengwyn, in terms of gender and community, and how these are inter-connected: with regard to gender, how it is articulated through gender-based social networks, sexuality, work, education and leisure; and with regard to community, how agencies such as the changing coal industry, local pressure groups, and work and leisure

activities, influence a sense of the community's local and national identity.

I tried to bring out such issues during my interviews, which, as I have already said, were more like taped conversations than interviews. This was because I found it impossible to ask all the questions without answering those also put to me. I also felt obliged to give information about myself, including opinions when the circumstance for such discussion arose, as I felt that it evened out the power relationship in the interview. Ann Oakley alerts us to how a feminist approach to interviews necessitates such involvement by the interviewer in the interviewing process, contrary to the supposedly bias-free, non-responsive tactics encouraged by several text books on interviewing methods (Oakley, 1981, pp. 30 - 61).

Apart from the practical difficulties of finding somewhere to live, I experienced emotional difficulties while doing the fieldwork too. I missed my husband, and fortunately the relatively close distance (about 22 miles) between Blaengwyn and Swansea, where our home is based, meant that I could visit him occasionally. Gillian preferred me not to stay in her house at week-ends, so I spent them in Swansea. However, I was conscious of not wanting to miss out on village life at the week-end, and got around this by staying with newly made women friends in the village after evenings out on Friday or Saturday nights. When I moved into the bungalow on my own, I was able to stay in Blaengwyn for more week-ends, but this was difficult because I also wanted to be with my husband. I compromised and saw him sometimes in the week and sometimes at the week-end.

I also missed my family and was particularly upset when my sister had a miscarriage and the demands of the research meant that I could not visit her. I also missed seeing my young nephew, but felt able to take time off from my research to go with my sister when she had to take him to hospital for some

tests. And when my parents or my sister and her son visited Swansea, I did meet them and spend the odd afternoon with them.

Carrying out fieldwork so near to my home means that for some in the profession, I will not be classed as a "proper" anthropologist, and the fact that I was able to visit my husband and family is probably further ammunition against me because I have not had to experience the "true hardships" of fieldwork. I would argue that if emotional deprivation is part of the initiation ceremony into the anthropology profession, then I did suffer to some extent because I was very lonely for much of my fieldwork. But in any case, the people of Blaengwyn visit Swansea regularly, and therefore I was still doing something that fits in with life in the village. The people of Blaengwyn would have thought me very strange indeed if I had not wanted to see my family, and my acknowledgement of my need to do so is another reason why I was able to "fit in" in the village.

### **Ethical aspects**

My ethical problem, alluded to briefly in my discussion of interviews, above, arises because I realise that I am in a privileged position in being able to do the research at all, and my research is intrinsically concerned with how people live following the closure of the largest local employer: the community is facing hardships which I am attempting to analyse to further my own academic career. A volume edited by Diane L. Wolf attempts to address such problems, and in her introduction she suggests that such issues of power relations in field-work are often contradictory and irreconcilable (Wolf, 1996, p1). Indeed she suggests that such dilemmas can lead to the question "should we do fieldwork at all?" (Wolf, 1996, p1). This is a difficult question and one

that I can only answer by saying that I am carrying out this research because I believe that what is going on in Blaengwyn is important, the people who live there are important and their story is important. These villages deserve to be taken seriously and the issue of de-industrialisation and its consequences needs to be addressed. This is why I am doing the research, but these "noble ideals" do not alter my feelings of voyeuristic privilege, and as Sasha Roseneil also experienced during her own ethnographic research, for most of my time in Blaengwyn, I felt like a spy (Roseneil, 1995, p.13).

Whilst there are practical benefits from carrying out research in an area close to the university where I am a student, there are difficulties attached to such a project, and I am wary of my research making "the commonplace complex, its systemizations not revealing anything more than everyone knew anyway and amounting to a set of unnecessary mystifications" (Strathern, 1987, p.17). There is a danger in studying one's own society of either taking things too much for granted, or of overcomplicating things, and I know it will be difficult to strike the right balance. I trust that my previous unfamiliarity with a mining area afforded me an outsider's curiosity and openness in observing everyday life in the village, whilst my own working-class Welsh background has meant that I have not been too distanced from the people of Blaengwyn.

While carrying out my fieldwork, I let people in the area know what my research concerns were in the broadest sense, so that they were aware of my position and reason for being there. I also involved informants in the research process by asking their opinions of my ideas about the research. Throughout this thesis it is apparent that I believe that the people of Blaengwyn have a very good understanding of their situation, and that they engage in sophisticated analysis of their experience. However, to people in Blaengwyn

my interpretation may seem, in Stanley's words "off the mark" because differently placed people "will experience 'there' rather differently from each other" and because "the project which drives the writing of ethnography is different from that which drives the doing of social life" (Stanley, 1990 ,p.624).

I am aware of the problems of confidentiality: in order for the research to mean anything, it will have to be contextualised, but if I identify the village, I can not realistically maintain confidentiality. I have therefore kept the names of the surrounding villages and geographical features, such as the valleys in which the villages and nearby places of work are situated, but I have given pseudonyms to the villages in which my fieldwork was carried out, and to all the people mentioned. I promised confidentiality to all the individuals I interviewed, and I feel morally obliged to retain anonymity for those who let me spend time with them either in the more formal context of a taped interview or in everyday life situations. In some respects I wish that I was able to name the villages because most people responded to my question about what they thought about my research by saying they thought it was good that someone was taking an interest and that the more people who knew about it the better. However, as I promised confidentiality, I feel that it would be unethical to identify the villages, but hopefully a satisfactory compromise has been reached by situating them in their real geographical locations.

Although the ethnographic approach could be argued to be the most exploitative form of research, since informants are exposed to the researcher for a lengthy period of time, informants agreed with me that in order to get to know what was really going on in the village, it was necessary to live there. From Malinowski onwards, anthropology has taken this need to live amongst natives and see things as closely as possible from their point of view as an unquestionable canon of the discipline. Whilst I have used this method

myself, I hope I have shown that it is not unproblematic. However, as I wanted to gain as broad as possible a picture of what life is like in Blaengwyn, I believed it was necessary to do ethnographic research over a long period.

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the merits and problems of using an ethnographic approach in social science research. It has outlined the three methods used in my study: a survey questionnaire, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires provide information on household composition and employment patterns. The participant observation provides information on gendered networks and identity in Blaengwyn, including how identity is maintained in the absence of the pits. The interviews provide material on the nature of community, different ideas about community, political involvement, the welfare system provided by the miners during the period when the pits were working, and the subsequent withdrawal of welfare services.

By these means I was able to see how people behave in different contexts, and discover what was important to them, both through observation and discussion, and also to relate the position of the village to a wider structural context. In the next chapter, I analyse relevant socio-economic data to provide a context for the information gathered during the participant observation and interviewing stages of my research, which are presented in Chapters 5 - 8.

## Chapter 4

### Setting the scene

#### Introduction

In this chapter I provide information which enables the reader to locate Blaengwyn in terms of geographical and socio-economic situation. I also discuss the findings of my own questionnaire survey for comparison with the official statistics quoted. Finally, a glossary is provided to introduce the reader to some of the most important cultural institutions mentioned in the ethnography which ensues.

#### Locality

Firstly, I would like to situate the village in which my study was based geographically. This I do with four maps. The first is a map of the British Isles showing the situation of the upper Dulais valley in south Wales. The second shows the villages Blaengwyn, Cwm Glân, Coedwig and Glanllwybr, and the other locations which feature in my ethnography. The third shows the collieries that were in operation in the Dulais valley at the time of nationalisation in 1947, and the fourth is a street map of Blaengwyn/Cwm Glân/Coedwig. This shows the sites of the bakery, where I stayed for part of my fieldwork, and the other important social institutions which feature in the ethnography which follows.



Figure 1.

Map of the British Isles showing fieldwork area (adapted from Cohen, 1982, frontispiece)



Figure 2.

Map of Dulais, Neath and Swansea valleys showing location of villages studied

(adapted from Sewel, 1975, opp. p. 3)

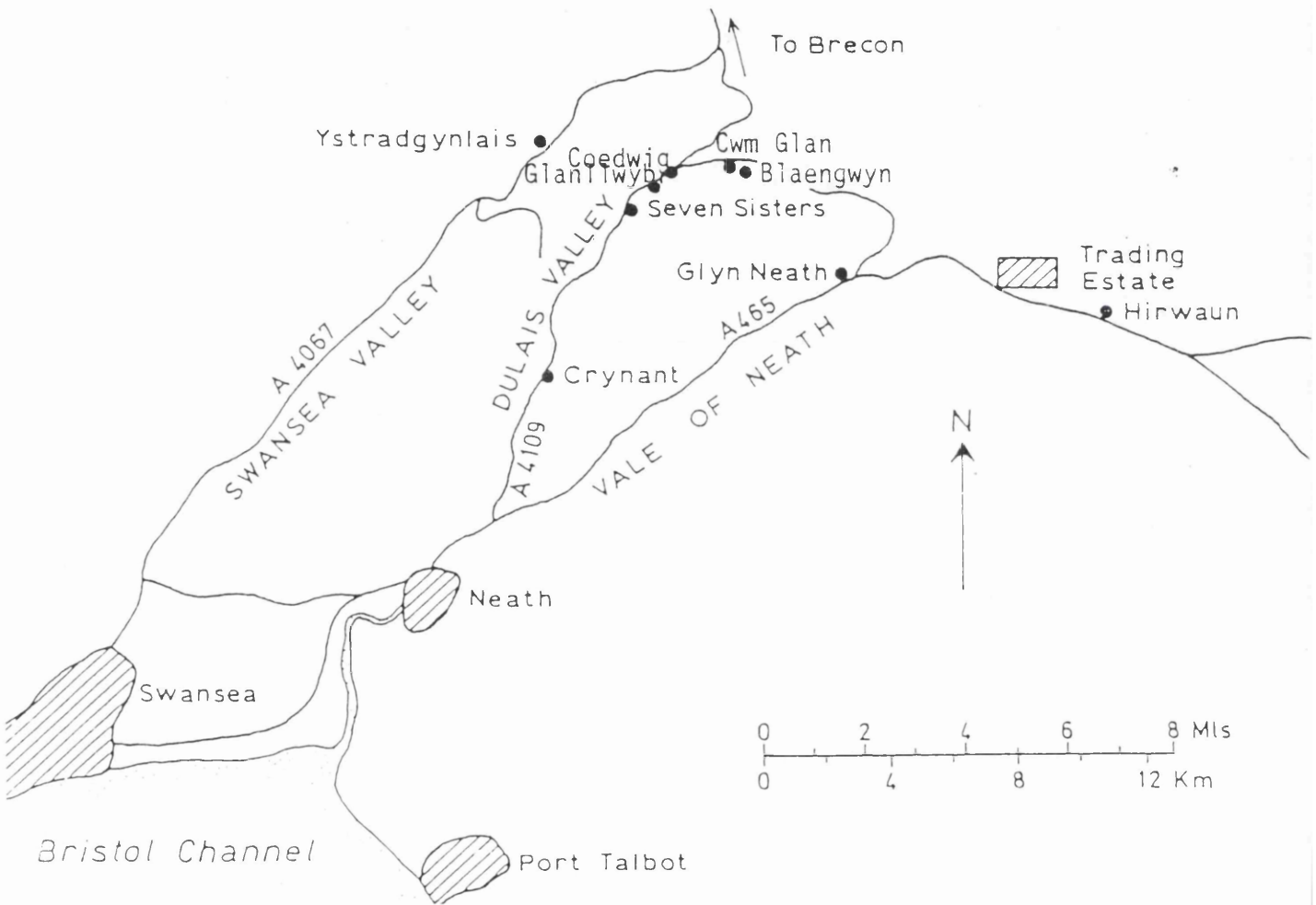


Figure 3

Map of the Dulais valley showing location of the nine mines which were in operation in 1947 (adapted from Thomas, 1983, p. 67)

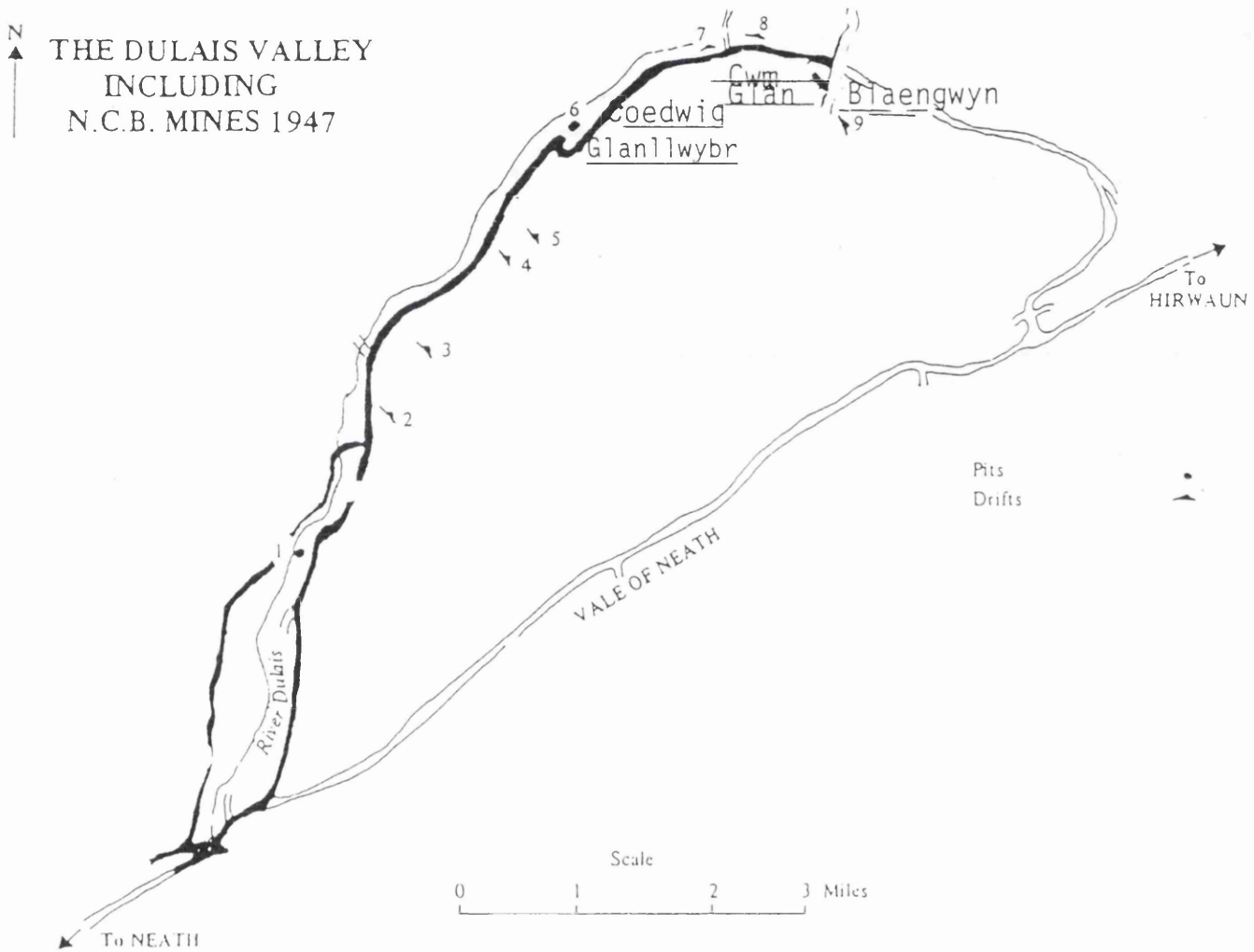
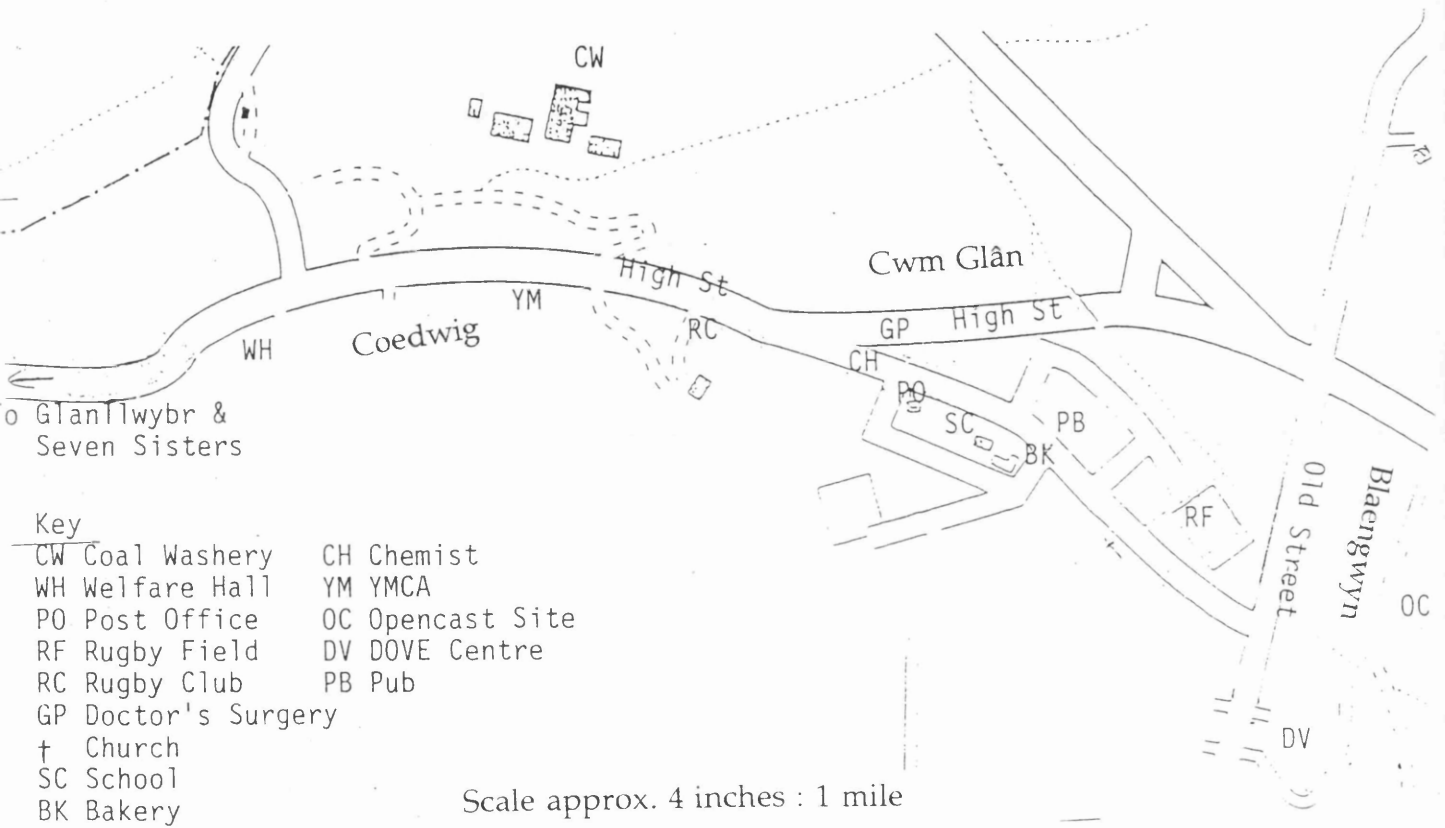


Figure 4.

Map of Blaengwyn/Cwm Glân/Coedwig (adapted from Street Atlas, 1995, p. 14)



## Employment

South Wales is undergoing a process of de-industrialisation, with the closure of the pits and the decrease in the importance of heavy industry in the region. A recent economic survey summarises the major shift which has taken place in Wales over the last twenty years:

For well over a century the economy of Wales has traditionally been identified with coal mining and steel making. As late as the 1970s coal and steel were seen as the backbone of the industrial economy...(now)many mining and steel communities are still struggling to replace lost jobs.  
(Blackaby, Murphy & Thomas, 1994, pp.246-7)

The jobs that have been lost are, by and large, men's jobs. The same survey reveals that when jobs are found, wages in Wales are significantly lower than the average in Britain as a whole, with male wages being 15% lower and female wages 9% lower (Blackaby, Murphy & Thomas, 1994, pp. 209-10). These low wages and reliance on state benefits result in a situation whereby "In 1994-95, average household income and expenditure in Wales was the lowest of all the UK regions." (Church, 1996, p. 26)

The relationship between gender and employment patterns has also been radically affected by the de-industrialisation of Wales. Between 1981 and 1993, the number of female part-time employees rose by 44% in Wales as compared with 25% in the UK as a whole, as part-time service industry and light industrial jobs expanded and jobs in heavy industries such as mining and steel contracted. Whilst this was happening in Wales as a whole, the county in which Blaengwyn is situated experienced this change more dramatically than elsewhere in the principality. Thus "between 1981 and 1991 male employment fell more quickly, than in Wales as a whole, in West Glamorgan (down 23%)" (Blackaby, Murphy & Thomas, 1994, pp. 193 and 195).

The high number of part-time jobs was reflected in my experiences in fieldwork. It was apparent that the main local employer of women in the area was the Lucas factory in Ystradgynlais, in the Swansea valley, known as the "Tick Tock" because a watch factory had been based on the same site before the new Japanese owned car electronics works opened. Many of the women I knew worked there. I asked the company for employee details, and received employment information from the Personnel Officer (Lucas SEI Ltd, Private Correspondence, 4 September 1995). There were two factories within commuting distance of the village, one at Neath and one at Ystradgynlais.

The total figures for employees from the Dulais valley at the Neath factory were 10, of which 7 were women, and at the Ystradgynlais factory, 172, of which 141 were women. The total workforce at both plants was 2270, of which 543 (24%) were men. Female employees tended to work on the full-time dayshift, Monday to Thursday 7.30 am - 4 pm, Friday 7.30 am - 12.30 pm, or part-time swingshift (also known as the twilight shift), Monday to Thursday 4.30 pm - 8.30 pm, Friday 3.30 pm - 7.30 pm.

The letter says that "Lucas SEI do not target any particular gender for its vacancies". However, "Historically, females have been attracted to the Swingshift and Dayshift Assembly Operators as well as Administrative positions. Whilst men again, are attracted to Dayshift Assembly work, the majority of male employees are employed on 3 shifts (6 am - 2 pm, 2 pm - 10 pm, or 10 pm - 6am Monday to Thursdays, with Friday shifts being 6 am - 1 pm, 1 pm - 8 pm or 8 pm - 3 am) as Setter Operators, Storekeepers as well as Engineering/Management positions."

Thus, although fewer men were employed, they tended to be working shifts and to be in higher paid jobs. The wage rates were given as:

Assembly Operator (over 18)	£152.85 per week (dayshift)
	£ 82.62 per week (swingshift)

Storekeeper	£169.94 per week
Setter Operator	£185.20 per week
Multi-skilled Craftsperson	£221.03 per week
Administrative Assistant	£8,000 - £11,000 per annum
Engineer	£13,000 - £16,000 per annum

All of the women I knew in the village who were working at the Ystradgynlais factory were assembly operators, the job attracting the lowest weekly pay. The women in the Dulais valley organised their own transport to the site, hiring a coach to collect and return them at the appropriate shift times.

The letter demonstrates a clear gendered division of labour which corroborates the literature on gender segregation in work as outlined in Chapter 1. Even though the major male employment provider, the collieries, have disappeared from the valley, shift work and its association with male employees at the Lucas factory remains as a mechanism by which gender divisions at work are maintained.

However, employment opportunities in general in the surrounding area are slight, and 41% of households have no car (West Glamorgan County Council, 1993). In contrast to the boom period described by Evans when transport facilities were "very good" and comprised frequent bus and railway services towards Dowlais, Aberdare, Ystradgynlais and Brecon as well as Neath and Swansea, there is now only an hourly bus service towards Neath and Swansea which does not run at all on Sundays (Evans, 1963, pp. 1 - 2). These circumstances add up to problems in finding work and getting to work if a job is found.

Over the years the population has, not surprisingly, shrunk. Sewel charts the rise of the population with industrialisation and the fortunes of coal mining in the area. In 1901 the population was 1806, in 1911 it was 4569, by 1931 it was 6629, and it reached a peak of 6864 in 1951 (Sewel, 1970, p.21). The 1991 census

shows a total population of only 3666 for the same villages (Sewel's figures include Seven Sisters, the next village down the valley). The total population for the villages in which my research is based is 1320.

With regard to social class, the 1991 census showed a total of 760 households in the ward, of whom none were classified by head of household as professional, 170 were classified as managerial and technical, 70 as skilled non-manual, 170 were skilled manual, 270 were partly skilled, and 40 were unskilled and 40 classified as other (West Glamorgan County Council, 1993). Thus most (40.79% as opposed to a county mean of 22.6%) were classed as skilled manual or partly skilled, reflecting the legacy of the dominance of the mining industry in the community. Twenty-one point two five per cent of males were unemployed whereas the county mean was 13.37%, and only 6.19% of females were classed as unemployed, very near the county mean (West Glamorgan County Council, 1993). I believe that the much lower figure for females reflects the high proportion of women who would have classed themselves, or been classed by their husbands as "housewives" and simply would not have registered as unemployed, or who could not claim benefit as only one partner is entitled to claim.

Twenty-five point eight per cent of the ward's population spoke Welsh and 24.9% of the population was aged 60 or over. Over a quarter (26.59%) of the population was classified as having a limiting illness, and 16.5% were classified as having a permanent illness. These last two statistics again, I believe, reflect the legacy of ill-health associated with the mining industry and the more recent effects of poverty on health (West Glamorgan County Council, 1993).

The levels of poverty in the ward were reflected during my fieldwork by the distribution of EC surplus food, which is described in Chapter 5. This is administered by the Intervention Board Executive Agency for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the fact that Blaengwyn was successful in



obtaining permission to distribute some of the surplus indicates the level of poverty in the village. The Surplus Food Scheme was introduced "to reduce the surplus intervention stocks and to contribute to the well-being of the most deprived EC Citizens by distributing certain stocks until they have been run down to a normal level" (Intervention Board Leaflet LP 46, August 1994, p.4). The leaflet defines eligible recipients as "homeless and destitute people; people living in welfare hostels; people in receipt of Income Support; people in receipt of Family Credit; people in receipt of Disability Working Allowance" (Intervention Board Leaflet LP 46, August, 1994, p, 5). The organisations wishing to distribute the produce had to be "a registered charity or a non-profit making organisation (including local authorities) involved in providing services to the needy" (MAFF Leaflet LP 45 revised 8/94, p.1) and had to apply to the Intervention Board Executive Agency, with estimates of numbers of eligible recipients, for designated distributor status. The Old Street Action Group's application would have been approved by the Welsh Office Agriculture Department.

The European Community has recognised ex-mining communities as being areas of specific need, and the RECHAR<sup>1</sup> initiative, launched in 1989, was developed to channel funds to areas affected by pit closures, providing financial assistance for "infrastructure and environmental schemes, the promotion of new economic activities including tourism and training for new employment opportunities" (Thomas, 1992, p.222). The DOVE workshop was successful in obtaining RECHAR funding, and a sign acknowledging support from the European Regional Development Fund hangs on the entrance to the Blaengwynn Community Centre in which the workshops are based.

The statistics point to an economically deprived area which has changed dramatically since the days when coal mining in the valley provided full

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<sup>1</sup> REconversion des bassins CHARbonniers/Reconversion of coal basins.

employment. The 1984 - 85 national miners' strike was an attempt to prevent pit closure as it was recognised that communities which relied on the industry for jobs would be devastated if the collieries closed. It was a bitter fight, with the Thatcher-led government introducing police squads into the mining villages and towns of Britain to attempt to quell picketing and demonstrations. The strike support activities have been documented in a BBC radio programme made in the village during the strike. This gives a flavour of the mood in Blaengwyn at the time, and efforts made to survive economic hardship during the strike (see Appendix 2).

It would appear that the striking miners and their supporters were right about the devastation that would follow pit closure. I now turn to my own findings from the survey questionnaire to discover whether they confirm the official statistics.

## **Survey Questionnaire**

I reproduce the survey questions in Appendix 1, and summarise the answers below. As mentioned in Chapter 3, 140 questionnaires were distributed, and 68 (just over 48%) were returned. I had no intention of carrying out a survey or drawing a representative sample; the questionnaire was used more as a way of meeting people, as I have discussed in Chapter 3. However, the data it generated does provide a picture of how many people were involved with mining in the village.

### **Gender**

Twenty-two of the questionnaires were completed by men, twenty-six by women, and twenty were returned anonymously with no contact details supplied, so it is impossible to identify the respondent's gender.

## **Age**

Thirty-three of the respondents were under 60, and the same number were 61 or over. Eleven of the respondents identified as women were over 60, and fifteen of them 60 or under. Eleven of the respondents identified as men were over 60, and the same number were 60 or under. Two of the respondents did not give their age. I attribute the larger percentage of respondents being over retirement age than in the 1991 census to the fact that older people were more likely to be at home when I called and thus constituted a larger proportion of my sample than in the case of the census data.

## **Numbers in households**

Eighteen respondents were the sole occupants of their households. Seven of these can be identified as women, and three as men. Fifty respondents were sharing their homes with at least one person.

## **Numbers of children**

Forty-seven households had no children under 16, and twenty-one households had one or more children under 16. There were two households where a single parent lived with a child or children under 16, the respondents both being women, one aged 25 and one aged 37.

## **Numbers working in mining prior to local pit closure**

Only twenty-one households did not have anyone working in mining whereas forty-seven (69%) did have someone working in coal mining before local pit closure. All of the mining jobs had been full time. This confirms the point that mining was the major source of male employment in the valley, as of the total twenty one households without any one working in mining prior to local pit closure, five respondents had moved to the area *after* the last pit had closed and four of of the respondents were widows whose husbands *had* worked in mining, so the more realistic figure, if one takes into account the widows' husbands, and deduct those households whose members were not living in the village when

the pits were working, is that fifty-one out of sixty-three households had someone working in mining (81%). This concurs with Gwyn Evans' figure of 88.4% in his study in the 1940s and 1950s. (Evans, 1963, Table 11).

### **Numbers working in mining after local pit closure**

Confirming that there has been a major structural change brought about by pit closure, and a change in emphasis in occupational opportunities, there were only three households that had one person each working in mining jobs at the time of the survey, and I established that these were all full-time jobs, in the Coal Washery at Coedwig. They were also jobs that were done by men.

### **Numbers working in jobs not relating to mining**

Forty-four households had no-one working in any job (65%). Of these, twenty-nine had respondents aged 60 or over (66%), so the number of unemployed is not as high as it might at first seem. However, whether through unemployment or retirement, the households of these respondents would have been on low incomes, dependent on state benefits or pensions. Of all the jobs not related to mining (30 in total), 9 were part-time (30%). Of all the jobs counted in the respondents' answers, only three out of thirty (10%) were in mining, a stark contrast to the figures before local pit closure.

### **Residency**

Thirty seven of the respondents had lived in the upper Dulais valley for all of their lives (54%), and nineteen had lived there for the majority of their adult lives. This shows that there was a high level of stability in the community.

A further four respondents had lived there for between ten and twenty years, but less than half their adult lives. Only six of the respondents had lived there for less than ten years and through questioning I established that the main reason for moving into the area was marriage to a local person.

## **Glossary**

I am using a glossary as a shorthand means of describing the social and cultural institutions which are important dimensions of south Walian culture and provide the focus of the villagers' social networks. When no reference is quoted, I am providing information given to me by informants or gained from my own experience.

### **Bingo**

This is a gambling game in which numbers must be ticked off a card as they randomly come up on numbered balls and are called out by the "caller". It is a very popular recreational pursuit in Britain, mainly amongst working class women, and was played in the Rugby Club in Blaengwyn and the Welfare Hall in Coedwig during my period of fieldwork.

### **Catalogue Clubs**

Mail-order shopping catalogues offer a means of making purchases of clothes and household items on credit terms, and were often referred to as just "clubs" in Blaengwyn. An agent collects the weekly payments due from the shoppers who have ordered goods and makes commission on items sold. They were frequently used in the village during my fieldwork, as they enabled people to buy items without having to find the total cost straight away. All the agents and shoppers that I encountered were women.

### **Chapel/Church**

There is now only one place of worship in the village: St. David's, an anglican church in Wales which shares its vicar with the church in Seven Sisters. It is made of corrugated iron and was opened in 1925. When I attended it, there was a very small congregation of about four elderly women, and me. The main focus of worship in the village, the nonconformist Congregationalist Chapel at

Coedwig, built in 1846, was demolished in 1992 because of fungal rot in the building, although I was told that the number of attendees had steadily decreased since the 1960s, so that by the time of its demolition, the congregation was small in any case. Other small chapels in the area had been made redundant or demolished also.

### **DOVE**

The Dulais Opportunities Valley Enterprise Workshop is a co-operative based at the former British Coal opencast site in Blaengwyn, and was established in 1984 by women from the Miners' Support Group in the Dulais Valley. It provides educational and vocational training to women, and works with other educational providers, such as Neath College, the Workers' Education Association, and the Community University of the Valleys, who all provide similar training and educational opportunities for men and women at the same site. The building is also Blaengwyn Community Centre, and the Community University and DOVE workshops hire rooms from the Community Council who run it, but it was always referred to as "The Dove" when people spoke to me about it.

### **Eisteddfod**

This means literally "to be seated", and is a cultural event, where musical, literary and performing competitions take place, usually in Welsh. They range from small scale events held at schools, to the large national festival held annually. The year before I did my fieldwork, the National Eisteddfod of Wales was held in the Neath Valley, a few miles away from Blaengwyn.

### **Health Services**

The local general practice had surgeries which operated at different times in Crynant, Seven Sisters, Coelbren and Coedwig. During my fieldwork, a public meeting was held to discuss the problems arising from the practice's inability to attract a new doctor to replace one who had left shortly before; this meant that

surgery hours had had to be cut. The nearest hospital is in Neath, about ten to twelve miles down the valley.

### **Male Voice Choir**

All-male choirs are very popular in Wales, where they usually sing a repertoire comprising classical choral pieces, hymns and popular songs. The Coedwig Welfare Male Voice Choir, also known as Cor Meibion Coedwig (the choir of the sons of Coedwig) was founded in 1969 and as well as being closely associated with the Welfare Hall, is linked to rugby too, as it was established to improve the singing of supporters of the Welsh rugby team going on trips to Scotland for international matches.

### **National Coal Board**

This was the body in charge of mining when private collieries were nationalised in 1947, and was later named British Coal. When the coal industry was re-privatised in 1995, Celtic Energy took over the running of British Coal opencast sites in Wales, including the ones near the village. The former British Coal colliery at Tower, over the valley and visible from Blaengwyn, was taken over by a workers' co-operative and was the only former British Coal mine left in south Wales at the time I was doing my fieldwork. With the subsequent closure of the last pit in north Wales, as I am writing this, Tower is now the last former British Coal colliery in the whole of Wales.

### **NUM**

The National Union of Miners is the trade union of miners, and took over from the South Wales Miners' Federation after nationalisation of the industry in 1947. It called on its members to strike in 1984 as an attempt to prevent wide-scale pit closure throughout Britain. The strike lasted over a year, and was unsuccessful in preventing pit closures, including the last pit in the Dulais valley, Blaenant, which closed in 1990.

### **Old Street Action group**

This is a local pressure group which was set up primarily to monitor local opencast workings. It gets its name from the street nearest the new site to which its establishment was a response. It is made up of both men and women.

### **Open cast mining**

What was to become the largest anthracite opencast site was opened near Blaengwyn in 1949, and though this site has now been “reclaimed” and landscaped, three other sites were in operation in the area during my fieldwork. Open cast mining involves excavating coal from the surface, blasting and digging down mechanically to reach the coal seam. This is in contrast to pit mining, when shafts are sunk down to reach the seams, and drift mining, when shafts are dug out from the side of seams, and miners work to dig the coal out underground, nowadays mechanically. The opencast method requires a smaller workforce to obtain large amounts of coal, and is controversial because of its environmental and employment consequences.

### **Pubs**

A derelict building stood on the outskirts of Coedwig, the Coedwig Inn which was subsequently demolished. During my fieldwork another pub closed down, the Glan Hotel in Blaengwyn, but another, the Cwm, opened on the site of the Ex-Servicemen’s club, often called “The Uniform”, in High Street.

### **Rugby**

This ball game is played throughout Britain, and can be either League, with thirteen players on each team, or Union, where there are fifteen members on each team. Rugby League used to be differentiated also by the fact that it was a professional game, but now Rugby Union also has professional players. In Wales, the latter is most popular, and it is the national sport. The game can be played by men and women, but in Blaengwyn there is only an amateur men’s team, which was started in about 1948. The all-weather surface on which matches are played



and training takes place was provided largely by British Coal Opencast.

### **School**

There is one combined infants and primary school in the village. There are 103 pupils registered at the school at the time of writing. Older children attend a secondary school in Neath, and are bussed down to it daily.

### **Shops**

When I did my fieldwork, there were two post-offices, a chemist's, the bakery, a grocer's and a newsagent's and a small supermarket, both the latter of which closed during the time that I was there. There was also a hairdresser's which opened part-time. A butcher's van, green-grocer's van and mobile chip shop also called at the village. This was in stark contrast to the situation described to me by my chief informant, Jack, who remembered there being about twenty shops in Cwm Glân alone between the 1930s and 1945, including two cobblers, two drapers, a barber's, an iron monger's, two butchers and a chip shop.

### **Welfare Hall**

This building was opened in 1955 by the Coedwig Miners' Welfare Association, which was itself established by the local lodge of the South Wales Miners' Federation in 1922. The Welfare Association provided a football field, changing rooms, a bowling green, tennis courts, paddling pool, playground and children's tea parties (Chris Evans, 1977, p.120). The Hall itself used to show films and is currently used as a bar and community facility for political meetings, concerts, aerobics classes and choir practices.

### **YMCA**

(Young Men's Christian Association, commonly referred to as "The Y M".) It was founded in 1937 to provide recreational facilities for boys and girls, and as the name suggests, had strong links with the chapels. It comprised a gymnasium, billiard room, table-tennis room and library (Evans, 1963, p. 119). Refreshments were also available. During my fieldwork period, a grant from the Sports

Foundation and British Coal Opencast enabled it to be refurbished. Joanne worked in the cafe on a voluntary basis, and her husband Raymond worked there in gym training on a voluntary basis also.

## Summary

The official statistics and surveys of the economic situation in Wales in general, and West Glamorgan and the Dulais valley in particular, suggest that a major structural change *has* occurred in the village over the last century during a period of de-industrialisation. The responses to my questionnaire generally correspond with the official statistics, and emphasise the former importance of mining in the village. The over all macro-structural context of a village experiencing de-industrialisation has been presented in this chapter, demonstrating how the situation in Blaengwyn accords with the broader de-industrialisation of south Wales. I now move on to discuss the micro-level through a description of the data gathered by participant observation and interviews, and trust that my glossary provides a useful reference for understanding the important institutions in the village which feature in my ethnographic description.

## Chapter 5

### “Fitting in” in Blaengwyn

#### Introduction

Having given a brief analysis of the structural context of the village, in terms of employment patterns and de-industrialisation in south Wales, and the way in which these patterns were reflected in Blaengwyn households, I now turn to a discussion of the ethnographic data collected during my fieldwork, recounting the material as a story. This narrative begins with how I first visited the village, and goes on through the subsequent three chapters to describe my experience of everyday life in the village, including data collected by means of participant observation and interviews, highlighting important analytical points which will be taken up in the discussion later. I unashamedly place myself at the centre of this narrative, aware that the whole research enterprise has been subjective. This first ethnographic chapter focuses on identity construction, and on women’s networks in the village, the second focuses on men’s networks. The third ethnographic chapter presents data gained through interviewing, while the final one recounts and analyses a major event in the village, a trip to Cardiff for a rugby match, which I read as a metaphor for the village’s situation, and which can be used as an analytic tool to sum up gender identities and relationships in the village. An illustration of the men’s and women’s social networks appears in Appendix 3. This gives information on where I met the informants featured prominently in the ethnography, and locates them in the context of the main social/cultural institutions with which they were connected.

## Constructing identities in Blaengwyn

Having read about the Community University of the Valleys in the Guardian, and decided that Blaengwyn would be an interesting place in which to do my fieldwork, I first visited the village prior to starting as a postgraduate research student at Swansea. I had spoken to one of the Community University lecturers on the telephone, and corresponded with and spoken to Meryl, who worked at the DOVE Centre. In the Spring of 1993 I arranged time off from my job in Norwich, stayed at Haverfordwest with my parents and arranged appointments with the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Swansea and with Meryl. My mother and Auntie are loathe to miss an opportunity of a trip to Swansea, so they accompanied me in the car to Blaengwyn before being dropped off in Swansea city centre while I visited the University. It was good to have their company on the trip to Blaengwyn, as I was feeling nervous about the possibility of embarking on PhD research, and also of visiting a place which would potentially play such an important role in my life over the next few years.

We took the right road from Neath but ended up missing the turning for the Dulais Valley and continued up the Neath Valley, so had to stop and ask directions. A woman in Resolven advised us to go straight up to Glyneath and then back towards Blaengwyn. Because the journey seemed to be taking so long, I asked an elderly man at a bus stop for further directions. He volunteered to show me the way, as his house was *en route*. "What do you want to go to Blaengwyn for?" he said, "it's always cold there, even when it's Summer". Despite his warning, we carried on, and were grateful to receive a warm welcome at the former British Coal office building which housed the Community Centre and DOVE workshops. My Mum and Auntie were offered a cup of tea in the kitchen area by some other women members of staff, while I was shown round by Meryl. She took me to see the crèche, work rooms and the small Community

University library, which she advised was predominantly made up of books from Miners' Welfare Associations' libraries. I was impressed with the range of books available, noting that there were several old anthropology books in the collection. Meryl advised me that the premises were soon to be extended as the Centre had been successful in obtaining EC funding. She told me about the activities of the DOVE, explaining that it provided education and training for women in the locality, and had been started following the 1984-5 miners' strike as a means of furthering opportunities for women in the area. She wished me luck with my application at Swansea, gave me some DOVE Workshop reports and my mother, aunt and I drove back to Swansea in the pouring rain so that they could shop and I could have an informal chat at the Department.

Although my travelling companions were delighted at the prospect that I might be moving back to Wales (and, more importantly, to within visiting distance of them), they echoed the feelings of the man at the bus stop. "What on earth are you going to do up there? - it's such a long way away (the journey time from Swansea was doubled because of the wrong turning) and it's so bleak", my mother said. The landscape did appear quite desolate, and our circuitous route had meant that we missed most of the village, driving through only one street. It seemed as though the village was in the middle of nowhere, but I was not put off because if nothing else, the DOVE Centre was clearly an interesting phenomenon, made more interesting by its apparently isolated position.

The informal meeting at the Department went well, as did my formal interview, and I was fortunate enough to receive a grant from the University of Wales to study there. So the next time I visited Blaengwyn it was as a postgraduate student about to embark on fieldwork. As part of the preparation for going to the village, I took Welsh lessons in Swansea as I knew that Welsh was spoken in the valley. Although Welsh myself, I did not learn the language as a child, as Haverfordwest is predominantly an English-speaking town, neither

of my parents speaks Welsh, and educational policies were not as encouraging of the Welsh language when I was at school as they have since become, with each child in Wales now learning Welsh as part of the National Curriculum. One of my fellow students in the Welsh classes in Swansea knew Blaengwyn through his friends in the male-voice choir there. He was bemused by my choice of fieldwork site too. He said "It's like a nuclear waste ground up there, it's like a moonscape - what are you going there for?" These comments only made me more anxious to go, as I was curious about how people could live in such a reputedly unattractive place, although it had not seemed so bad when I had made my first visit.

When the time came for me to organise accommodation for my year of fieldwork, I arranged a lift with Ann, an ex-student at Swansea who worked in the Community University library and whom I had met in the coffee bar near the Department on campus, so that I could be shown the most direct route from Swansea. The journey this time took only forty minutes, so suddenly the village did not seem so far away. Also, we approached it by driving up the Dulais Valley, and so passed through three villages which lined the side of the road, as well as the remains of the last colliery in the valley, on our way to Blaengwyn at the top of the valley. When we arrived at the Community Centre the building work was completed, and the crèche and teaching rooms had been extended. Having had a brief chat with Meryl again, who showed me the new improved facilities with pride, I decided to go for a walk in the village so that I could get my bearings and put up cards asking for accommodation.

I left one card at the DOVE on a notice board, walked down Old Street, the one street which, strictly speaking is Blaengwyn, past the large pub known as "The Glan" and turned into High Street, which is in the village of Cwm Glân. I could not see any distinction between the two villages since they seemed to run into one another, and this was something which would later confuse me as

people sometimes referred to them as the same place, and sometimes as being quite separate. I walked past the the empty paddling pool next to the rugby field, the small corrugated iron church, and a row of council houses which led to a few shops. A hairdresser's was on one side, near a closed-down pub, opposite a bakery which I called into to get a bread roll. The shop also sold tinned food, cold meats and cheese, and was very busy, packed with customers who all seemed to be chatting with the shop assistant. On paying for my bread roll I walked onto a piece of grass outside the school, which was quiet since it was Summer during the holiday period, and sat down on a bench to eat my bread roll, which turned out to be excellent. Looking around me I noticed a couple of streets going off from the High Street, and made a note of their names. Then I went over to the small Post Office which was also a sweet shop, and asked if I could place a card in the window seeking accommodation. This I did, and carried on walking past a small grocery shop, a chemist's, a disused chapel with a pony grazing in the grounds outside it, more houses, the rugby club, another, larger grocery shop which I went into to buy some chocolate. The shop's shelves were almost empty, with hardly any stock. I carried on past the Medical Centre next to the senior citizens' flats, some bungalows, a dilapidated large pub and a stretch of grass and fields until I reached Coedwig, another village consisting of more houses on each side of the road, the Miners' Welfare Hall and another Post Office, where I left another card. I carried on for a bit past more fields and a few houses, and then turned back in time for my lift back to Swansea with Ann. It was my first real visit to the villages, and I gained a sense of the spatial arrangement of the buildings. I noticed some run down buildings, the remnants of coal along the edge of the road by the fields which had once been host to open cast workings and entrances to small collieries, but also that people said "Hello" to me in the street, and that the weather was good, in fact it was warm! I was optimistic about finding somewhere to live, and felt that I would enjoy living in a village where I

could see across to the Brecon Beacons and where people spoke to strangers in the street. I went back to Swansea and waited for replies to my "accommodation wanted" cards.

I got only one reply. A man from Seven Sisters telephoned. He offered me a room in his house, but I explained that I wanted to live in Blaengwyn. He phoned a second time offering free accommodation, but I again explained that it was to be Blaengwyn or nothing, and was slightly alarmed by what would be required in lieu of rent. When no-one else responded, I began to get desperate, thinking that I would have to choose another area of study, but I telephoned Meryl at the DOVE asking for suggestions. She gave me the number of Gillian, the baker's wife "She knows everyone in the village and will know if anyone takes in lodgers". So I telephoned Gillian, who said she did know someone who occasionally had lodgers, and that she would ask her on my behalf if I could stay there. I was to phone back in a week, which I did, only to be told that the woman in question was having major work done on her house and that having a lodger would be impossible. I asked if Gillian had any other suggestions and she asked me to phone back in a week. I did, and she said that she had a couple of possibilities but that I was to come up and meet her on a day when she was not so busy, in the afternoon. So I drove up to the village by myself and called in at the bread shop. I was led into the room behind the shop where Gillian was wrapping cakes in cellophane, using an iron to seal the plastic around the cakes. The shop assistant who had served me before, Rose, was there too, and made me a cup of tea. Work carried on while Gillian asked me what I wanted to live in Blaengwyn for, my age, what I was going to do about my husband, and other questions about my family background. While this was going on, several people came through the back entrance of the building, and I learned that these were the bread delivery staff who were "on the vans" and were bringing unsold bread and cakes back into the shop, making themselves cups of tea and chatting. Gillian



told one of them, another Rose, "This is Stephanie, you know, the student who wants to come up here and live, I think she'd better stay here with me, don't you think?" and Rose (van) nodded. Gillian told another woman, Mary, that I wanted to study the village to see how things had changed since the pits had closed. Mary said, "Well, love, it was dull and boring before, it's shit now" and everyone laughed. I had been scrutinised without my being aware of it, but realised that my offering to help clear away and wash up had probably helped my case, my gender and class making it easier for me to be accepted and "fit in". This was clearly a very busy business which required everybody to help out, and as I had without thinking washed up all the tea cups and wiped the table down once all the cakes had been "ironed", I would be a suitable paying guest at the "Bake House". I also had the advantage, because of my class background, of being skilled in the sort of small talk which Daniel Wight found so difficult as an English middle class intellectual in a former mining community in Scotland (Wight, 1993, pp. 16 -17). I asked Gillian if she was sure she didn't mind having me, and she said that she would like to think if one of her daughters (the eldest of whom was two years younger than me) was in a similar position, that someone would help her out. A moving-in date was negotiated, and Gillian introduced me to her husband Mark by saying "This is Stephanie, she's going to be living with us for a while". I asked if he minded, to which he replied "So long as you wash my back in the bath, I don't care". We fixed a price for the rent, Gillian saying "Just give me what you can afford".

### **Gillian's daughter**

On the October day I arrived in Blaengwyn it was sunny but windy. The open moorland provided little shelter from the wind, and I could see now how the village had got its reputation for being cold. The nuclear or moon-scape

metaphor did not seem warranted, although I came to realise that the landscape had changed dramatically over the previous twenty years, and my fellow Welsh student, Alfred, was thinking back to his visits before the village was “greened”, as villagers were later to explain to me. Gillian was busy making Welsh cakes in the bakery when I arrived, so told me to go upstairs and sort out the room where I would be sleeping. It was the room above the old kitchen, the area where Gillian had been “ironing” the cakes during my previous visit. It contained two single beds and many personal items belonging to her children. I was to put them on the second bed in her room. Upstairs there was Mark’s bedroom, Gillian’s bedroom, the room where I was to sleep, and a sitting room full of boxes of receipts relating to the business which needed to be sorted out into different years and classified for accounting purposes. As she showed me this room later, Gillian said she hoped I might be able to help her clear this back-log. Downstairs consisted of the sitting room with television, a dining room and a kitchen. There was a shower and toilet downstairs next to the old kitchen, and a bathroom upstairs.

Gillian said “I hope you’re not bloody vegetarian”, and because I did not want to put her to any trouble as she had been kind enough to let me into her home, I lied and said that I was not. She said that she would do all the cooking, but that I could clear away, which would not be a very onerous task since she had a dishwasher. After unpacking I joined Rose in the shop, who immediately said “Let’s put the kettle on and make a nice cup of tea, shall we, love”, so I did, and hung about the old kitchen until Gillian had finished baking and packing the Welsh cakes. Mark had by this time come into the house, his duties in the bakery having finished, and went to lie down on the settee in the sitting room and watch a video. I asked Gillian if it would be all right for me to hang around the shop and help serve if possible, so that I could meet the customers and the other employees. She agreed that this would be fine, and said, “I hope you’ll settle in

all right: I'll treat you like my daughter, I don't think I can be fairer than that". She then went back to her duties in the bakery and her paperwork in the dining room. So I watched Rose serving and wrote down prices of all the different types of bread and other food stuffs which had no prices marked on them. Thus I set about inventing a new identity for myself, as a surrogate daughter of Gillian, as a non-vegetarian, and as a shop assistant, all to facilitate my "fitting into" the community and negotiating an identity as unchallenging as possible to what was considered acceptable in the village.

I met the other Rose (Rose-van) and Mary again, plus other delivery van drivers, Kim, Gail and Robert. They brought bread back, and deposited their money bags on the table. Gillian asked if I would count the money and leave eleven pounds in change in each bag ready for the morning. Rose cleared up the shop, the van drivers went home and Gillian started making tea while I counted the money. Rose's uncle called to pick her up so that he could give her a lift to Coedwig, the next village down the valley after Cwm Glân, where she would pick up a lift from a worker at the large opencast site, Nant Helen. Gillian, Mark and I sat in the lounge eating our tea on our laps while watching the television, Gillian having been assured by me that I loved Emmerdale and Coronation Street, another means of identity construction which I hoped would further my "fitting in". They went to bed at about nine o'clock, and not wanting to disturb them I did too, making my field notes in my diary and reflecting on my first day.

The next morning I got up at about 8.30 to find Gillian and Mark long gone to the bakery, and Rose already in the shop, sorting out bread on the shelves. I made a cup of tea for Rose and myself and Rose gave me a bread roll for my breakfast. "How was your first night then, love?" she asked, "did Mark behave himself?", to which I replied that everything had been fine. I helped her in the shop. Some customers mistook me for one of Gillian's daughters, but Rose introduced me to customers as a student from Swansea who was "interested in

the village and the pits". One customer, Alice, a recently qualified teacher who was looking for a job, asked what I was studying. "I'm an anthropologist, and I'm interested in looking at how things have changed in the village since the pits have closed." "Oh, you've come to study the natives, have you" she said laughing, wishing me good luck.

Some tasks in the bread shop were not straight forward, such as cutting ham and filling bread rolls for people, mostly contractors at the open cast sites, or students at the Community Centre (known as "The DOVE") who wanted to buy ham or cheese rolls for their dinner. I had to be instructed by Rose on how to cut the ham "nice and thick" and to be generous with the fillings. I realised that some customers asked for their loaves to be sliced, and this had to be done in the bakery on the medium or thin slicer. I was taught by Rose how to use the medium machine, but the thin one was considered too dangerous for me. I was also introduced to the other bakers, Hywel, Andy and Martin. Rose brought them out tea at about nine o'clock and eleven o'clock, and they finished at lunch time. Over the next few days I soon discovered that if I was to be around the shop, I would be expected to bring out tea for them too, and I was frequently asked to "Put the kettle on, Steph" when I entered the bakery to collect loaves for customers.

The bakery was a hive of activity in the mornings when the van drivers and their helpers loaded up their vans, and a local shop owner collected his order, whilst Rose attempted to secure enough bread for her customers in the shop. Inevitably it was Rose who lost out, never quite managing to obtain sufficient bread for all her customers, and that is why the bread shop in Blaengwyn has the reputation amongst some as "the bread shop without any bread".

I passed the first few weeks in the shop, talking to Rose and customers, making cups of tea, warming up pies and pasties, getting to know the delivery

workers and eating and watching TV with Gillian and Mark in the evenings. On Monday evenings Gillian went to the slimming club, Weight Watchers, at Aberdare, with her friend Babs, and Mark and I were left alone to watch TV or read the local evening paper. Mark's exchanges with me were mostly a type of flirtatious teasing, things like: "I'm going up for a shower now, I expect you to come and join me in five minutes" or "Are you going upstairs now? I'll come and keep you company". I felt that the best way to deal with these comments was to laugh at them, as I felt that they were Mark's way of making me feel at home. I noticed that if Gillian was going to treat me like a daughter, Mark's approach would be to treat me like a potential sexual partner, even if only in a joking way. These jokes were, in retrospect, a good indication of the relationship which would develop between Mark and me, as whatever Gillian may have thought about me, it was clear that Mark did not envisage me as a daughter, as would soon be reflected in his sexual joking and the tension which would develop during my stay at the bakery. This type of sexual joking would be something that I would notice frequently during my year in Blaengwyn, as will be recounted during my description of my fieldwork experiences.

One day another friend of Gillian's called round with a type of curtain that she had made from netting for Gillian and Mark to place in the bakery's driveway to stop birds entering the area and causing a health hazard. I was introduced to her by Gillian with the words:

This is Debbie. She's another who hates her husband. We all hate our husbands around here but we're too cowardly to do anything about it.

I learnt that Debbie worked part time in the Lucas factory in Ystradgynlais, that her husband was employed in the coal washery at Coedwig, and that she was in her early forties and had grown up children and a three year old son. As I was asking her about herself I felt as though I was being too nosy, and began to realise

how difficult the whole research process was going to be since I would have to keep invading people's privacy if I were going to get any data. Debbie did not seem very keen to answer my questions about her family, so I dropped the questioning and just joined in the chatting about the well-made net curtain and her little boy.

Children were clearly loved by Gillian. A little girl, Mandy, was left in the care of Rose and Gillian after school by Rhian, another Lucas worker who worked on the twilight shift. A bus called to collect women from the village, and Mandy's young mother Rhian would wave to her four year old daughter from the bus as she went off to work. The little girl was the daughter of a previous boyfriend of Rhian, who was now living with the son of Rose (van). Mandy stayed in the shop until Rose (van) came back from her van delivery and took her to her (Rose van's) home. While waiting for Rose, Mandy would be given a cream cake or some chocolate by Gillian. She would sometimes come into the shop area and talk to customers or just watch Rose (shop) and myself working. Occasionally, when Rhian could not collect Mandy from school, she would ask Rose (shop) to collect her and I would be left in charge of the shop while Rose walked the few hundred yards to the school entrance and back.

So this is how I spent my first few weeks in Blaengwyn, getting to know people who were somehow connected to the bakery through work or as customers. I was eventually asked by Rose (shop) if I would mind running her down in my car to meet her lift, to save her uncle doing it. I of course agreed, as I was eager to repay her tolerance of me in some way. If I was going down to Swansea to see my husband, I would give her a lift to her house in Neath, for she commuted from there to the village where she was brought up and had spent most of her life, having moved to Neath after her divorce. I was also asked by Gillian to run her down to Neath once a week so that she could go to the bank, buy lottery tickets, do some shopping, and sometimes meet with the business's

accountant. I felt that both women were being very kind to put up with me hanging around their places of work, and in Gillian's case, of course, her home. This was an opportunity for me to return their favours. That Gillian thought of me as a daughter was confirmed for me in Woolworth's in Neath one day when she was looking for a compact disc for her new stereo system. She asked me what sort of music I liked, and when I pointed out an Ella Fitzgerald disc, she immediately responded: "Well have it then, I'll..", stopping herself just in time, as if realising that she was treating me like a daughter but that in fact we were landlady and lodger. It was as if we were doing all the things she did with her daughters and was about to extend her maternal generosity to me when she thought that this would overstep the formal aspects of our relationship.

Through living with Gillian and Mark, I had access to their kin networks, and met Mark's uncle, Jack, who was to play an important role in my research. I also had opportunities to meet the women working in the shop and on van deliveries, and so was gradually beginning to be accepted into some of the women's networks. But I knew that the number of people from the village that I was meeting was limited.

After about a month of just "hanging around", I felt that I should be getting out more in the village. Although my help in the shop was undoubtedly appreciated by Gillian and Rose (who could sneak a quick "fag break" while I served customers), and I felt that I was meeting a lot of Blaengwyn people and hearing local gossip, I was conscious of the fact that I should try and meet more people.

I had prepared my survey questionnaire, and decided the time was right to distribute them. In this way I would meet people outside the networks I came into contact with through the bakery. I asked Gillian if she minded me suggesting to people that they could return them to the shop if they wanted. I started knocking on doors and asking the people the questions on my form. It

was a good way of seeing different streets in the villages, as I knocked on every door. Some houses were newly decorated with tidy gardens, but more were in a state of dilapidation and appeared quite run down. I noticed the smell of coal burning in the air, and saw piles of coal spilling out from bunkers into gardens, a remnant of the local industry and concessionary prices for miners. I knew that some people were in but did not answer, and I could not blame them really since I probably looked like a double-glazing salesperson, Department of Social Security spy, or a religious representative. When people did answer, they were usually willing to help once I had explained what I was doing. One of the questions was whether they would mind if I contacted them again, and I eagerly noted down prospective interview candidates for later. Some people answered my questions on their doorsteps, some invited me in and gave me tea and sandwiches.

I started off in Old Street, the street which strictly speaking comprises Blaengwyn. It was during a chat with a woman in this street that it became clear that the “village” was not the homogeneous unit that I thought. She mentioned the opencast site situated behind her house. She said:

I don't like it - we have to put up with the dust and the mess and we get nothing out of it. At the start there was no local boys having jobs. I was against it. Mind, it's caused some trouble between Blaengwyn and Cwm.

When I tried to get her to explain what sort of trouble, she said “I've said enough”, so I did not pursue the issue further, but made a mental note to find out more about it later. I was curious enough about the Blaengwyn/Cwm divide however to ask Gillian and Rose about it when I got back to the shop. I said “If Old Street is really the only street in Blaengwyn, how come this is called the Cwm Bakery, but it sells Blaengwyn bread? And how come that Spar down the road is called ‘Patel's Blaengwyn Stores but it's really in Cwm?’” They both suggested that it was because they were both the same place and it didn't matter,





or that possibly it was because Blaengwyn was more famous because of the rugby club or because it was the terminus named on the bus from Swansea and Neath. "But the rugby club is called the Blaengwyn rugby club, but it's in Cwm" I said. "Oh, don't worry about it, it's not important" Gillian said, and so I had to forget it for the time being, although it was a question that I often thought about during my fieldwork.

Despite my worries about being too inquisitive, I found that elderly people in particular were keen to talk when I was distributing my questionnaires, and three different elderly women said that if they had known it was "a lovely little girl" like me who had placed the card requesting accommodation, they would have had me as a lodger. If there was no answer at the door, I pushed a questionnaire through the letter box, hoping to return later to pick it up or receive it at the shop.

One elderly man gave me a chance to practice my Welsh, since I heard him saying "Dera mewn" (Come in) to his dog just before I arrived at his house. When he realised that I was a learner, he said that he would help me practise, and true to his word, every time I saw him in the shop or in the street, he conversed with me in Welsh.

So, during my second month in the village, I started to make my presence known to every household by distributing my questionnaire and talking to people who were prepared to spare a few minutes there and then, though I also carried on working in the shop, going back to warm up after walking around the village for a few hours with my survey.

One elderly man whom I had missed when I called at his house came into the bread shop when I was out elsewhere in the village with my questionnaire. When I arrived back Rose told me "Pierre has been in and you've got to go and talk to him - he says you've got to go and visit him", so I arranged a time with him when I could interview him. I had met him before in the shop. He was in

his eighties and used to be the school caretaker. I looked forward to my first interview which had been forced on me, because I had wanted to wait a little longer to get to know more about the village so I felt that I would know better what to ask. But if Pierre wanted to talk to me, I figured that I should go and hear what he had to say.

When I arrived at his house, he invited me in and sat me in front of his coal fire. I turned on my tape recorder and asked him to tell me about his life. When it was time to turn the tape over, he said "Shall we have a break now?", and I agreed, thinking that at his great age he might be getting tired. But he went out to the kitchen and made some tea and brought in a bowl of crisps and a plate of biscuits. After consuming all these treats, we carried on with the taped conversation. Unfortunately I was using my own tape recorder, which did not pick up everything he said, but I made notes and can recall that he reminisced about his time as a miner underground, that a chest complaint had meant he had to work above ground but still in the colliery, and then that he became a chip shop owner and finally a school caretaker before he retired. I asked him what he thought were the biggest changes in the area since pit closure and he said that the biggest changes had come about not since pit closure but since the NCB had sold off colliery houses. He thought that since most people now had responsibility for their own homes, they were more worried about the upkeep of their houses and did not have enough money or time to enjoy themselves as much as people in the village had done in the past. I asked if he had enjoyed working underground and he said he had not, since it was a dirty and heavy job, though it had some advantages like the concessionary coal which arrived in large lumps which had to be broken down into small domestic-sized nuggets. He said that he received so much coal that he could not use it all, and had in fact thrown some over into his neighbours' garden for them to use.

Pierre's kindness in talking to me and entertaining me encouraged me. I

had felt before then that I was imposing on people by asking too many questions, but his insistence on being interviewed made me realise that my research could be interpreted as giving the people of Blaengwyn a chance to air their views about their situation, of showing an interest in their lives. I had hoped that this would be the case, but until villagers like Pierre invited me into their homes and made me feel so welcome, I had still felt like an intruder exploiting the people of Blaengwyn for my own academic ambitions. I think this feeling had been exacerbated by the “hanging around” in the shop. Although I was working hard there, it did not seem like “real” work since I could choose when to do it and not, when to go out with my questionnaires or not, when to go up to my bedroom and read or make notes. Academic work has never seemed like “real” work to me, something probably influenced by my family who would never dream of expecting me to take a day off paid work to see them, but who frequently arrange to visit when I am studying or “writing up” since this is somehow not considered to be important. I think the interview with Pierre was a turning point. Despite the faulty recording, which prompted me to ask the Department for the loan of a better machine, I felt that this was proper research now. I decided to embark on a series of interviews, though I would leave it until after Christmas so that I did have a better idea of what to ask.

I also decided to attend aerobics classes in the Miners’ Welfare Hall, since I was meeting plenty of elderly villagers of retirement age, many women my own age (mid thirties) and older who worked in or shopped in the bread shop, but few younger women. A poster advertising the classes was stuck in the shop’s window, so I resolved to go the following week on a Thursday evening. My first two months of fieldwork had passed and I was beginning to feel settled in the village, and I felt that I had at least made a start on my fieldwork.

Having given an introduction to how I settled into the village, and met informants through social networks, the following depiction moves away from a

chronological narrative towards a more thematically based description of everyday life in Blaengwyn.

### **Women's networks**

In this section, the women's networks which I became involved in during my first few months of fieldwork, as outlined above, are described. I have organised my discussion into the three areas in which the networks expressed themselves: women's leisure activities, women's sexuality, and women's work and community activities. What follows is a description of how these three manifested themselves to me through the women's networks I was associated with.

#### **Leisure activities: aerobics**

As I have stated, I saw the aerobics classes as a means of meeting younger women in the community. The aerobics class was held in the main room of the Welfare Hall at Coedwig. About twenty women turned up to the first class I attended. Most of them were in their twenties or thirties, a few in their forties. I recognised a couple of women from the bread shop, and they came over to speak to me. One was May, a home help whose husband worked in the Camgears motor parts factory in Resolven. She was in her forties, and as it was my first ever aerobics class, she advised me to join her at the back with one of the other older women, Jan, who I had not met before. After an exhausting session where pop music was blasted out over the Hall's public announcement system, and to which were added amplified instructions from the teacher, Felicity, on movements which choreographed us into a type of fast sequence dance, most of the women went

into the bar area of the Hall, ordering drinks and crisps from Ruth who was working behind the bar with another woman called Dot. As we sat in a circle in the bar, I started to ask those who I had not met before where they lived, and discovered that they came from various villages in the valley and neighbouring valleys. Some also attended aerobics classes led by the same teacher in Glyneath. At one point the conversation turned to lycra shorts, and one of the women shouted out to Ruth behind the bar "These new shorts feel so lovely and soft, do you want to come and have a feel Ruth?", to which she and all the other women laughed. I realised that this was a reference to the lesbian relationship of Ruth and Dot, and talked about it with Gillian when I got home. She informed me that Ruth's relationship with Dot was accepted in the village and was not seen as a big scandal, saying "what they do in private is their own business, isn't it?", having a dig at me, I suspected, for being too inquisitive by far.

Whilst we were in the bar, the women from the aerobics class asked me where I lived, and what I was doing. When I explained that I was living with Gillian and wanted to find out how things had changed in the area since pit closure, Ruth went upstairs and got me old copies of the Welfare Club Rules. She gave me copies of the Rules for 1961, 1963, and 1978. From only these three years' copies, one could chart the demise of the coal industry in the area, and indeed some of the changes in relationships between men and women, changes which were also commented on by a former National Union of Mineworkers official in his account of the changing nature of clubs and gender in the area in the 1960s, and which is recounted in Chapter 7. The earliest Rule book I was given stated the objects of the Association, known as The Coedwig and District Welfare Social Club, to be "to afford to its members the means of social intercourse, mutual helpfulness, mental and moral improvement, and rational recreation", and membership was open to "All miners of Coedwig and District who contribute to the Welfare Funds" together with other member-nominated persons. Men could

become honorary members if they belonged to similar institutes or workingmen's clubs. Female members, who had to be the wives or "lady friends" of male members did "not have voting power at any meeting", despite the Secretary of the Institute being a woman, Sandra Jones, who I interviewed later.

Even by 1963 it was recognised that though men living in the district may still be working in the coal industry, they would not necessarily be employed in local pits. Membership was open now to all "workers in or about coal mines resident in the neighbourhood of Coedwig and District", while the objects remained the same.

By 1978, the lack of mines was recognised in the the objects of the Society, which were "providing facilities for recreation (including physical exercise) or other leisure-time occupation in order to improve the conditions of life of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood thereof and in particular, but not exclusively, of such inhabitants of the area as are members of the local mining community". Membership was extended to include "all persons who are inhabitants of Coedwig and District and the neighbourhood thereof", divided into ordinary and associate members. Ordinary members comprised any "person employed at Blaenant and Treforgan Collieries" or formerly employed there before retiring due to age, illness or disability, while associate members were those not employed in these two pits. Those employed at Treforgan and Blaenant were still paying a welfare levy from their wages towards the club, but if they left the collieries they could become associate members instead. There is no mention of female members not being allowed to vote in the 1978 Rules.

There were more women than men in the bar that evening, after the aerobics class, but I was assured that there were still far more men than women members of the Welfare Hall club. While we were chatting in the bar after the class, some of the few, mostly retirement aged men who had been in the bar, disappeared into the Hall from which we had just emerged. Eventually no men

were left at all in the bar, and the sound of harmonious hymn singing wafted in from the Hall. It was the Coedwig Welfare Male Voice Choir practising. The other women started to leave, so I left too, leaving the singers to their rehearsal, chuckling to myself at the huge contrast in sounds which had emanated from the Hall within a couple of hours. Before going, I asked Ruth how the Welfare Hall was run, and she told me that it was all done on a voluntary basis. When I asked how it was financed, she said that groups which used the facilities were asked for a nominal fee, and indeed I had seen a part of our aerobics fees being handed over to Ruth by Felicity. Profits from the bar were also put back into the running of the building. I was to find out more about the Welfare Hall from the Chair of the choir and the Chair of the Hall Committee soon after Christmas during interviews. I arranged the interviews with them after introductions by someone who was to play an important part in my fieldwork, as a key informant, and a good friend, Jack. It was Jack who introduced me to the men's networks in Blaengwyn, and these are discussed in Chapter 6.

During the first half of my fieldwork I would spend most time in the shop and help out by serving customers, washing up and counting the money for Gillian. Driving Rose to meet her lift in Coedwig became a daily occurrence. I would wait with her and chat until her neighbour from Neath, Malcolm, drove over from the nearby Nant Helen opencast site in the Swansea valley. We waited by the former Coedwig Inn, the now derelict pub where Rose had her wedding reception thirty years before. Rose had got pregnant when she was 19 and was made to leave her home by her mother and father to avoid embarrassment. Her parents wanted her to marry the father of the child, but Rose decided she did not want to and was taken in by her grandmother (who lived a few doors away) for a while before eventually being accepted back into her parents' home. Rose subsequently married another man with whom she had another child. After her divorce she had moved to Neath and had a boyfriend who lived with her, but

this relationship had broken up too and she frequently talked about wanting to meet a new man.

It was getting near Christmas and I felt that I had made a start at meeting people in the village. My social circle was limited to those who I had met through the shop, but I was on speaking terms with many customers and closer to those who worked in the shop. In addition I had finished my survey of the village, having knocked on every door in an attempt to ask people my questions. Of course I had not had an answer at every door, but I was pleasantly surprised by the number of questionnaires returned to me at the bakery. In addition, I had interviewed Pierre and was looking forward to arranging follow-up interviews with Robert, the opencast site manager, Jack, and several of the women who worked in the shop. I went back to Swansea to spend Christmas with my husband, vacating the bedroom in Blaengwyn so that Gillian's and Mark's children could visit for the holiday season. Rose (van) had invited me to stay at her house one Friday after Christmas so that she, Rose (shop) and I could all go out for an evening, and Debbie had invited me to bingo in the rugby club on Thursday evenings. It seemed that I would have plenty to keep me occupied after Christmas, so I returned to Swansea hopeful that I would get to know more people, get to know those I had already met better, and have new opportunities for participant observation.

One day just before Christmas when I was looking through the survey questionnaires in Swansea, I had a telephone call from Rose. She said "Get your arse back up here!" as I was needed to cover for her in the shop while she did Christmas shopping. I drove up on the arranged day and served in the shop as requested. Rose (van) invited me back to her house afterwards for a coffee and a sandwich. She told me a little about herself and her family. Her husband had been a miner, and Rose showed me the colliery plates representing the different pits he had worked in. He had died about ten years earlier in a fire in the house.



Rose had four sons who she saw regularly. Rose (shop) had told me that they were “cowering wasters” who took advantage of their mother. One of them lived at home with her, two of them were living with girlfriends in the village, one of whom was Rhian, Mandy’s mother, and the fourth was lodging at one of his brother’s houses. But they all came back home on Sunday for dinner, an example in Rose’s (shop) view of how they exploited their mother. But Rose (van) told me that she enjoyed their coming over on Sunday as she loved to see them all at home.

The fact that I had been called back to Blaengwyn to work in the shop encouraged me, as I felt that I could give something back to Rose (shop) and Gillian for their kindness towards me. It made me feel as though Gillian was treating me as she would have her daughter, expecting her to help out when necessary, as she had on one occasion when she asked me to help Kim with the deliveries. I felt that the two Roses were accepting me as a friend, and that the bingo sessions also had potential for making friends with Gail and Debbie.

### **Leisure activities: bingo**

I was introduced to bingo in Blaengwyn by Debbie, a close friend of Gail who was one of the van drivers. Debbie called round for me one night, and we both went to the rugby club to the bingo session upstairs. We sat down at a table surrounded by women whom I had met in the bread shop. They were all friendly to me, asking how my work was going and laughing at my decision to only buy three cards instead of their usual five. Although I had played bingo with my Aunt at a club in Haverfordwest, I did not feel confident to mark off so many cards, and in any case wanted to leave some concentration left to observe what was going on.

I noticed that the caller was Mary’s father-in-law, that is the rugby club steward’s, father. There were about twenty players all together, most of whom

were women my age or older, and about two elderly men played as well. They were sitting with their wives, and apart from them, the room upstairs was full of women chatting, drinking halves of lager and eating crisps. Debbie and I sat with Margaret. She had a note-book in which she was putting the names of women who gave her small amounts of money (about £2). She was running a club for hampers and shop vouchers, and the women were saving regular amounts weekly towards their next Christmas expenditure.

I had noticed that some of the women who worked for Gillian asked her to take out some of their earnings before they got their pay packets. Sometimes they were saving up by this method, and sometimes they were paying her back loans which she had made. Gillian acted as an unofficial bank in the shop itself too, cashing cheques at no charge for customers who either did not have bank accounts themselves or had not had time or the means to get to their banks. There had apparently been two banks in the valley, but now the nearest one by public transport was in Neath, or by car in Glyneath or Ystradgynlais.

The bingo progressed with universal groans when a house, usually of about £5 or £10, was won by someone else, laughter at joking and discussions of news in the village. I went back to Gillian and Mark's at about ten o'clock, anxious not to come in too late as they had to get up so early in the morning. So I missed the last house, but did not miss out on any winnings if my luck during the rest of the evening was anything to go by.

The next time I went out socially with people from the village, it was to belatedly celebrate Gillian's birthday, the event having been postponed because she had had bronchitis. I asked if Mark would be coming, but she replied "What would I ask him for, we don't want men coming do we?" and so it was that all the female employees of the bakery and I went off for an evening meal in a nearby village. I took my own car because of my travel sickness, knowing that Rose (shop) at least would be smoking in the minibus Gillian had hired to take

her and the other six women to the pub in Pontneathvaughan. Rose always smoked in my car when I gave her a lift to meet her neighbour's car in Coedwig, and also on the rare occasions when I drove her down to Neath myself, and I knew that a journey of even a few miles in a smoky minibus would probably make me travel sick, so I missed out on the undoubted fun and joking in the minibus. In any case, the evening was a success, with lively joking and chatting in The Angel.

Apart from my trips out with Jack, which I discuss in the next chapter, all my socialising in Blaengwyn was done in women-only groups, even if the venues had men and women in them. The women kept themselves separate from the men, acknowledging men that they knew, but keeping to their own group. During the birthday party of another woman who I became friendly with, requests from men to dance were seen as irritations, and although the women did not refuse to dance when asked, they seemed much happier when returning to their women friends. It appeared that although evidently husbands and wives did occasionally go out together as a couple, the majority of socialising in Blaengwyn was done in single gender groups.

## **Sexuality**

I now move on to the theme of sexuality in the village, and begin by describing a party that I was invited to by Joanne. I met Joanne through Gillian. A poster in the bakery shop window advertising a distribution of stewing beef by the Old Street Action Group caught my attention, and when I asked what the group did, Gillian said:

Fuck all. No, I'll tell you what they do. They ask for things and when they get them, they moan they're not right. Don't talk to me about them

which of course made we want to know all about them. Gillian told me the

name of one of the members who worked part time in the newsgent's shop and I resolved to go and ask her about it. I called into the paper shop when I knew Joanne would be there, and arranged to go and interview her. She lived in Old Street with her husband and two secondary school-age children. There was a bar built into the corner of her lounge, but there were no drinks in it. Her husband Raymond made us a cup of coffee in the kitchen. I noticed several photos of "muscle men" on the lounge walls, and realised they were actually Raymond. Joanne told me that he was a former Mr Wales body builder. After the interview, which is discussed among the interview data in Chapter 7, Joanne invited me to a meeting of the Old Street Action Group, which I discuss later in this chapter, and also her birthday party at "The Uniform".

I had arranged to call at Joanne's house on a Saturday night at about 7pm, and we walked down to The Uniform together. We paid our £2 entrance fees and went downstairs to the function area. Joanne's fortieth birthday party was not a private function, however. Entertainment was laid on at week-ends in the downstairs room, and this night the entertainment consisted of bingo played with playing cards and a disco. Joanne's other friends, about eight altogether, were sitting downstairs and cheered as she entered. I offered to buy her a drink and she asked for Coke, but she later drank about seven Malibu and Pineapples. All the friends were women, all of whom I had met before in the bread shop. We occasionally danced in a circle when popular songs (mostly from the 1960s) were played. During the dances, individual women had to dance in the middle of the group while the others clapped their dancing skills.

I recognised several of the other people in the pub as well as Joanne's friends. The conversation was light-hearted for most of the evening, but one of Joanne's friends, who had arrived late, apologised by saying that she was not sure whether to come as her teenage daughter had threatened to take an overdose of paracetamol because her boyfriend had finished the relationship. Marion, who

was in her early twenties and is the wife of one of the bakers, joked that if her husband decided to leave her, she would throw a party, not kill herself. She later said "I love my husband, but Raymond's body, I'd be all over it, can you imagine feeling it?", to which Joanne laughed. Joanne told us about Ultra Orange, a vitamin drink which was being "investigated by the Government" because it was possibly dangerous. I asked how it was dangerous and she said "It causes men's willies to shrink", but said that despite these possible side effects, Raymond found it very helpful when he went to the gym. Marion suggested that it would be "good fun to play a trick on a man and give him Ultra Orange and wait to see his face when his willy shrunk". Joanne said that she had tried Ultra Orange once and "it gave me a real buzz - my fanny was going like this", pressing her hands together in a vibrating motion.

During guitar solos in songs, Joanne parted her legs and mimed the strumming of her clitoris to the music, something she did while standing on the dance floor or sitting at the table. Her friends laughed and teased her, saying "Raymond's here", and explaining to me that he had "gone mad" when he'd seen her doing this on one of the rare occasions they had gone out to a disco together.

When I was going to the bar to buy some drinks, Arthur, a regular customer in the bread shop, who I knew to be divorced, and darts team colleague of Andy, insisted on buying me a drink. He also asked me to dance, which I agreed to as I thought it would be rude to refuse. He had given me a present of "fool's gold" from the local colliery where he had been working in the 1960s, and always passed the time of day with me in the shop. I offered to buy him a drink back, but he refused, instead buying me another whisky, despite my protests that I did not want any more to drink. He asked me if he could see me later, which I assumed meant at his flat, and I said no. He disappeared to the bar upstairs, much to my relief, and I continued dancing and talking to Joanne and her

friends. One of them said to me “you want to watch him, he thinks you’re single” and I bore this advice in mind when we all went upstairs for an after hours drink after the downstairs room had closed. Arthur was upstairs and bought me another whisky and asked if he could see me later. I said “you know I’m married don’t you”, to which he replied that he didn’t believe it. I pointed at my wedding ring but he said “you’re too young and happy to be married”. He also asked me to go to Cardiff to see the Blaengwynn rugby club play at the national stadium with him, as the game was to be on his birthday, and promised me an “all expenses paid experience” that I would “never forget”. Although I was flattered, I was also anxious to avoid Arthur’s advances. I checked with Debbie, Joanne’s sister, that I could stay the night with her as arranged, and she said “Of course, it’s no trouble”, and I was relieved to have someone to leave the pub with when we eventually all drifted away at about one o’clock. Joanne was supported by three of her friends who lived in Old Street and they staggered off in that direction while I staggered off with Debbie and into her absent daughter’s bed.

On Monday morning I was the focus of a lot of teasing from Andy about my dance with Arthur, and he insisted that I should go with Arthur to the rugby match in Cardiff. “Why don’t you go and interview him?” he said, winking in the bakery, to which Mark added “You can interview me in bed”, at which I hurried back into the shop clutching my sliced loaves and wondering whether I had damaged or at least altered my reputation in the village by dancing with Arthur, who apparently had discussed this with his fellow darts team members.

In contrast to my deliberate avoidance of sexual activity in the village, Rose (shop’s) desire for male companionship “and a good jump” were often discussed in the bakehouse. The conversations in the shop between Rose and Gillian and the other staff were comprised mostly of joking and innuendo. Bodies and their functions were referred to in an open and humorous fashion.

In the first week after arriving I was shocked to hear Rose saying that she would have to leave work early and “I’ve got to go home and wash my toot” before a visit to the doctor’s for a check-up. Later, when she was looking forward to a date with a man she had met the previous week at a friend’s birthday party in Neath, she described her emotional state and aspirations for their next evening together:

I feel like I’m 16. He was tidy mind, not just after a one night stand. He was very romantic, he held my hand close to his chest when we danced. But he did say one thing - he said ‘Oh, I’ll have to stop this, something is moving between my legs.

Mary brought her club catalogue into the bakehouse and said “Look Rose, some nice sheets for you to romp in.” When Babs asked Rose “I’m not saying you will have sex, but if you do, will you be nervous? Rose replied “I’ll be shitting myself” and “I’ll have to trim my toot so it’s nice and neat for him”. She hoped that he would not be like her last boyfriend who she described as “nothing but a long string of piss”. When Rose (shop), Rose (van) and I went out one night for a drink, Rose (van) asked a male friend who had worked with her husband underground if he would “give Rose a rebore ready for her date”.

Rose was not the only person connected to the bakery involved in talk about sex and bodies in an open way. Mary came in from the bakehouse one day laughing about Andy:

He’s complaining because he isn’t getting any. I’ve just seen his wife and she says that she’s been on for eight weeks since she had the baby. Well, I told her, she’s got a mouth and a hand and she should get to it. Now I’ve just told Andy and he’s got a hard on. He can’t stand all this talk of gobbling.

On another occasion, Mary complained “my womb is touching the floor, those cakes are so heavy, I hope he (her husband) doesn’t want nothing tonight.” On another day Rose had an itchy thigh and asked the van driver Robert to

scratch it, to which he responded, evidently referring to something other than Rose's leg as part of the on-going joking about her wanting a new boyfriend: "It must be healing up. It itches when it's healing, doesn't it?"

One morning there was a lot of beeping coming from one of the vans and then Robert shouted

My horn works now. When I took it to the garage I said 'Give me a horn like Ryan Bowen',

this being the local butcher who had a reputation for being "a ladies' man".

Another exchange between a woman customer, Rose and Mary occurred when Rose was getting some sausages out of the fridge. The customer (Jo) said "No wonder Rose is smiling", to which Rose replied "Yes, but I wish it was a bit thicker". Jo:

She's taking it home to freeze, you see. Look Mary, look at the size of that sausage, yes, that one you've got your hand on.

Mary:

It's only my hand on it these days. My husband's been on a promise all week. Last night I put some vick on and he said it was like sleeping with a cowing chemist.

The word "cowing", which is used in working class Swansea and Neath areas generally, has a meaning like "bloody" and when someone is called a cow (a man can be called a cow as well as a woman) as in "Oh he's a cow" it is pejorative which can vary in strength from something like "rascal" to "bastard" depending on the context.

One day Rose (van) came in laughing with Mary. Rose said that she'd wet herself in the van and that Mary was "crying laughing, saying I should buy some



cowing Huggies or incontinence pants." Rose (shop) recounted the story of her trip to a pub in Neath to play darts:

I was laughing all night. I wet myself too. I was too ashamed to get up from the seat to the wet patch. I told my friend and she got some water from the loo. She put it in her glass and she pretended to spill some wine on the seat. On the way out we apologised to the woman behind the bar for spilling the wine!

Another day, Gail was in the shop when one of the regular customers, a man in his early fifties, came in with a walking stick made from the branch of a tree. At the top the stick forked into two parts and Gail successfully embarrassed him by saying "That's great Dai, you can tickle my fancy and scratch my arse at the same time", to which he walked out of the shop with his loaf, his face blushing bright red.

I was on the receiving end of some teasing myself. When I brought out tea to the bakers, Andy said things like "Thanks Steph, you're an angel - is there anything I can do for you in return?" with a wink. He also offered to take me to north Wales on the back of his motorbike to see the local rugby club play, and frequently asked me "How's your sex life?". Mark continued his teasing too, asking, for example "What's for afters?" with a glint in his eye when I brought him his tea in the evening. The Scottish man who looked after Gillian and Mark's greyhounds in Crynant, Billy, did not have quite the knack of the banter as he came straight out to me with "Will you have an affair with me?" one day in the bakehouse. I found it difficult to know how to respond to the different sorts of sexual joking, but generally when suggestive comments were made to me I said "I'm a happily married woman, thank you" to which Mark invariably replied "You're not married when you're up here." He also said sometimes "Thanks for the tea, Steph, I'll do the same for you later - I'll bring you one up in bed."

Although most of Mark's remarks were inoffensive, he sometimes went over what I considered was the line of joking. When I first started giving out my questionnaires in Old Street he warned me "They're rough up there mind, you might get raped", and one day he said to me "I'm in a bad mood today so don't be surprised if I rape you." When I was sent down to Neath to do the banking for Gillian one day, Mark reminded me: "If you don't get my lottery ticket I'll give you twins" which I took to be a similar threat but with double the intensity. On the one hand I felt as though the joking was a way of making me feel 'included' in the bakehouse community, but these comments about rape also seemed to me a way of Mark making me know my place as a woman in that community.

When the sexual joking was about consensual sex, I think it was about the relationship between men and women in Blaengwyn. Joking was undoubtedly used as a tension reliever too, whether sexual or otherwise. The openness with which women spoke of sex was a positive expression of their sexuality, I believe, although it was sometimes used by women to embarrass men, as in the case of Dai and his walking stick. In this particular example, I felt that his embarrassment was increased by my witnessing the remark, as I was a relative stranger and to his eyes possibly a lot younger than him or Gail. I was assumed by many people in Blaengwyn to be about ten years younger than I was, for example one of Gillian's friends, Heather, a home help, was surprised to find out that I was married and did not believe that I would be celebrating my tenth wedding anniversary whilst living in Blaengwyn: "It must be because she hasn't got any children" she said to Rose in the shop. Age seemed to be a factor in these joking relationships. Ruby, Gillian's mother, came to clean and iron for Gillian twice a week, and there were few sexual jokes when she was present. Likewise, when Jack was in the shop, no innuendoes or sexual jokes were made. It was people in their twenties to fifties who participated in this joking, in my hearing anyway. I think that this was because I was roughly in the same age band and that sexual

joking between age peers was a means of including one into a social group.

The joking was one of the first things that struck me when I moved to Blaengwyn. When I spoke to my supervisor about it, she thought that it may be an expression of patriarchal control over women. Although I felt that this may be an appropriate interpretation of some of Mark's and Andy's comments to me, I felt that the jokes between women and those aimed at men by women were not. Rather, it seemed that women were celebrating their sexuality and using it to embarrass men in a way which gave the women more control in a situation. It would seem fair to suggest that in fact this type of joking could be used by either gender to embarrass or verbally threaten a member of the opposite gender, and thus gain the advantage, or it could be a means of breaking down tension between the genders and within the genders as a form of inclusiveness. When Ruth was offered a feel of the lycra shorts after the aerobics class, this was a type of flirting which could potentially embarrass her, but it also meant that she was included in the conversation and incorporated as "one of the girls". The comment to Ruth threw light on the other joking for me; perhaps it stood out as so unusual and yet so typical. It was an innuendo which welcomed her into the group of women there in the bar, and when similar remarks were made to me, they included me as a member of the social group based around the bakery.

Anthropologists have stressed the necessity when analysing joking relationships to look at who is joking with whom, and in what situation, but have come up with different theories as to what joking represents. For example, Radcliffe-Brown sees joking as a mechanism for avoiding conflict and maintaining distance between individuals (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940 and 1949). Goody, on the other hand, suggests that not all joking relationships are the same. He states that joking relationships are either symmetrical, between persons of the same status, or asymmetrical between people of different rank or status (Goody, 1977). In either case conflict can be avoided by joking, so his thesis is a

development of Radcliffe-Brown's theory.

I think for the Blaengwyn case, the notion of different status is relevant: Goody suggests that superiors tease inferiors, and that inferiors can have licence to joke with superiors, but that in any case humour has a value as a mechanism for social control and conflict management. Mary Douglas takes the argument further and states that hierarchy can be attacked by joking, which can also be a means of "expressing community" (Douglas, 1978, p.104). She argues that a joke can challenge the status quo, but makes the important point that "the strength of its attack is entirely restricted by the concerns on which it depends for recognition" (Douglas, 1978, p.107). She also distinguishes between jokes and obscenities, remarking that unlike jokes, obscenity causes offence by opposing the status quo (Douglas, 1978, p.106). However, as the reader will have noticed, it was not so easy to distinguish joking from obscenity in Blaengwyn. In fact, many of the jokes would have caused offence because of their sexual nature, and the deliberate offence sometimes caused. But I think that something can be gained by looking to all three authors' contributions to the understanding of joking. Radcliffe-Brown's suggestion that it is a means of keeping a distance and conflict avoidance could be applied to Mark's joking remarks to me, although they could equally well be interpreted as a means of including me and making me feel part of the community, as Douglas has suggested. I think that the teasing of Ruth in the Welfare after the aerobics session also fits into this category. Goody's thesis concerning status is relevant for the joking between men and women in general in Blaengwyn, and of course the jokes between Mark and me. It depends on the situation: men's jokes often seemed to me a means of keeping women in order, and I certainly felt that Mark's sexual threats, though expressed in jokes, were a means of showing disapproval at my being away from my husband.

Ann Whitehead's analysis of sexual joking in a Herefordshire village suggests a similar situation in that women's behaviour there was controlled by

men's "'joking' abuse" (Whitehead, 1976, p.179). However, in Blaengwyn, the women's teasing also seemed to embarrass the men, and perhaps the obscenities were a challenge to the gender hierarchy and notions of femininity. Although they may have been a *challenge* to the status quo, they did not change things and could be interpreted rather as a means of avoiding *real* conflict. Whitehead makes the valid point that whatever interpretation one puts on the type of sexual joking I witnessed and indeed engaged in myself in Blaengwyn, it suggests a "consciousness of gender difference between the participants and a consciousness of sexuality" in most of the interactions between men and women (Whitehead, 1976, p. 170).

### **Women's work and community activities**

This section focuses mostly on the domestic work of women, and more on women's paid work appears in Chapter 7. Domestic labour was women's main work, even if they worked outside the home as well as in part-time jobs at the bakery or at the Lucas factory. It was also evident that women often talked about their domestic work while doing their paid work, and the data presented here reflects this.

#### **"A woman's work..."**

As well as sexual joking in Blaengwyn, there was much consideration of work in the village, and this was often discussed in the shop and bakery. Ruby often remarked after her journey up the valley from Crynant to do housework for her daughter Gillian that no-one would want to buy all the houses that were for sale in the valley since there was no work around for anyone to do.

The women who worked for Gillian and Mark often complained about

how hard they had to work, not only in the bakehouse or on the deliveries, but at home or in second jobs too. For example, one day Mary told me that she had fallen asleep on the couch the previous night because she was so tired. Talking about the tasks awaiting her return home after the bread delivery she said:

I don't know what to do first. I've got washing in the washing machine I put in this morning, I've got ironing to do and cleaning and then I'm going up the DOVE to clean. You might as well stick a brush up my arse and I'll clean the ceiling. I fall asleep every night between twenty past six and seven and the kids think it's terrible. I say 'it's not surprising, is it, with all that I do?'

When I asked if her husband did any housework, Mary laughed. He had recently got a job as steward of the rugby club after being unemployed since Blaenant pit closed. Mary said that she even had to make the rolls and sandwiches for the club, he was so useless.

One day when one of the other workers was off sick, Gillian asked me to help Kim on her delivery round. Kim did the driving as she knew the route, and told me which loaf or cakes to take to each house. We went over to Glyneath and stopped at several houses en route. Sometimes we would serve people who came out of their houses to ask for bread who were not regular customers. One such woman who was in her seventies came to get bread and exchanged pleasantries with Kim, who she obviously knew from similar encounters. The first thing she said to Kim was "What do women do, only work, isn't it?" and this struck me as similar to the feelings of Mary who was about half that woman's age. When I asked Kim if her husband did chores around the house, she said that he was "quite good", but that he would only do them if she asked him and he would not think of doing them himself.

One day after I had moved out from the bakehouse, I called in for bread at the bakery, and Rose (shop) told me that Rose (van) had had to draw a map to

show her son where the coal shed was, joking that her friend Rose (van) had to do everything for her sons, adding that they were "cowing wasters" for not helping their mother more. Apparently it was Rose's (van) sons' female partners who cleaned the house while she was in hospital, undergoing a hysterectomy, though one day when I called to see how she was, the one who still lived at home, Lee, aged about nineteen and a bouncer in a club in Neath, was cutting the grass with great reluctance. Rose told me that she had had to nag him to do it. After he finished she asked him to strip his bed so that she could put his bedclothes in the washing machine. He said "I'll put a broom up my backside and emulsion the hall as well if you like!" Rose was told by doctors at the hospital that she was not supposed to do any housework for several weeks while recovering from her operation, but she said that she had had to put clothes on the line as Lee refused to. She had asked him to put the washing out one day, and he did put some of it out. But he refused to put her knickers on the line so she had to do this herself. Of course I offered to help and told Rose that she should just telephone me when she needed me to do something, but she said that she would ask her sons' partners. She told me that her sister, Lily also helped out, and she insisted that she would be all right. I felt that Rose wanted to rely on people she considered to be family, although I knew a few close friends also did errands such as shopping for her. Rose herself had often been on the other end of help, as she told us in the bakehouse on many occasions that she had "been on the shit run today", helping an elderly widow on the bread round onto the toilet and helping to clean her afterwards. Although she joked about it, she never failed to help when the woman asked her. Her attitude was in contrast to her sons, who Rose (shop) told me "never lifted a finger, the wasters". It was clear that Rose (shop) did not care much for her friend's sons. This feeling was exacerbated when Lee called in the shop one day and said:

I don't know what all the fuss is about. I could have stuck my hand up her fanny and pulled a few tubes down, that's all that's happened. Why all this rubbish about resting?

Rose replied

Don't speak about your mother like that. And you're only ever resting anyway, lying on the settee watching television, so what can you say about it. Show her a bit more respect.

although privately she told me that "Rose has brought it on herself because she didn't have to do everything for those boys".

### **Community activities**

After Joanne's birthday party I went to the small corrugated metal church in High Street for the morning service, as I knew that religious activities had played a prominent part in the social life in the village (Evans, 1963, p. 116). However, they were seemingly not as important when I did my fieldwork. I was one of only five women attending, and the only one who appeared to be under 70. I was surprised at the beautiful wood on the interior of the building, which belied the prefabricated exterior. The vicar was based at Seven Sisters and I had met him at Welsh classes. He was very pleased to see his congregation swelled by one, as were the other women. They all stopped to have a chat with me on our way out after the service, three recognising me from the bread shop and others asking me who I was and how I liked it up in Blaengwyn.

There had evidently been a shift away from involvement in religious activities in the village over the last thirty years, reflected in the demise of all the chapels, and the small congregation at the church service.

Another community activity which I felt that I should investigate was the



Old Street Action Group. I have recounted already how I came to hear about the group through a poster in the bake-house, and met one of its members, Joanne. She invited me to the next meeting and food distribution.

The stewing steak distributed by the group was provided by the Food Intervention Board. The distribution and meeting both took place at the Community Centre in Old Street, site also of the DOVE workshops and Community University.

The EC Surplus Food Scheme 1995 was administered by the Intervention Board Executive Agency for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and is outlined in more detail in Chapter 4. Steven, chair of the Action Group, discussed the scheme with me. I asked if the food could only be distributed to people in the immediate locality. Steven said:

I have a list of regulations giving out this EC free food, and only people from your catchment area that you stipulate on the form. Well, if someone comes up from Crynant and they haven't got a lot of money, and they show me their book, I've given it out (laughs), say from Colbren, you know, you can't put no borders on poverty.

I was invited to another Old Street Action Group meeting. It was held at Steven's house. Joanne explained "It shouldn't be in his house because he's a community councillor, and the Group is against the Community Council". I was again asked to keep the contents of the meeting confidential, but do not feel that I am giving away any secrets by saying that the items under discussion were the local opencast site and its landscaping reclamation scheme, and a protest by women in Old Street about the tarring of their street pavements. The council workmen had been stopped from doing the job by women standing in the way, who were concerned that the "tarmac" would melt on hot days and ruin their carpets. Although it was considered that the Council were trying to improve the road, it was felt that it was not taking into consideration that Old Street was the

only street in the village not to have front gardens, and that therefore the houses were more likely to be soiled by the tar. I heard later that a compromise had been reached whereby the paving stones directly in front of the house doors were left, while the remainder of the pavements were “tarmacked”. I was again thanked for coming to the meeting, although I was the one grateful for being allowed to attend.

The meeting and the food distribution which I had attended before were quiet affairs. At the distribution, people queued up behind desks, showing their proof of eligibility for social security benefits and other identification to either Raymond or Steven, who then ticked off their names from the DSS lists and gave them four tins of stewing steak, although you would not have known it was stewing steak as the tins were not labelled.

Although women were actively participating in the action group, as indicated in the response to the proposed tarring of the road, and my interview with Joanne, which is discussed in Chapter 7, it was noticeable that men held the prominent positions. For example, the position of Chair was held by Steven, the position of Secretary was held by Raymond. Men were the public figure-heads of the action group. This leads into my discussion of men’s networks in the next chapter, as they operated in the public domain where men held powerful positions, and were much more formal than the women’s networks.

## **Summary**

This chapter has focussed on the networks of women I knew in Blaengwyn, and indeed shows which of those networks I was invited to join. Gillian’s network became my network, both in terms of family and employees, and through her I made contact with Joanne’s network too. In the following chapter I discuss the men’s networks and how my friendship with Jack allowed me a certain amount

of access into them, although as a woman I could not gain acceptance into these networks as successfully as I had the women's.

Having started by recounting my initiation into fieldwork and the identity construction required for the task, this chapter has recounted my experiences in the bakehouse in Blaengwyn and introduced some of the people I met during my time spent there. I took on an identity akin to being Gillian's daughter, in a similar fashion to that described by Jean Briggs in her account of fieldwork amongst the Utkuhiksalingmiut in the Canadian Arctic, and with some of the same problems that adopting the role of daughter can raise, such as disappointment in the "child's" inappropriate behaviour and conflicts between wanting to carry out research and fulfil a "daughter's" responsibilities (Briggs, 1986, pp. 19 - 44). Despite the tensions that developed in our relationship, through Gillian I was able to negotiate access to her networks.

The women's network in which I was able to take part is then discussed in relation to leisure activities, sexuality, work and political activity. It is apparent that in both leisure and paid and unpaid work, there were sharply segregated gender divisions, as the literature discussed in chapter 1 suggests would be the case. The issue of sexuality was raised both in women-only situations, where women celebrated their sexuality, and in same and cross-gender situations where sexual joking was used sometimes as a means of incorporation. Sexual joking was also used by men on occasions in which behaviour of women was disapproved of, or by women to challenge gender relations to a certain extent by embarrassing members of the opposite sex. I now go on to describe men's networks and the relationship of both the men's and women's networks to the community.

## Chapter 6

### **“Fitting in” and not “fitting in” in Blaengwyn**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter describes how my method of data collection expanded as my accommodation circumstances changed, and how I was able to meet more men through my relationship with Jack. He became a father-figure to me, replacing Gillian as the chief facilitator for making contact with people in the village. Through him I was able to examine men’s networks, work and leisure activities. As with the women’s social networks which featured in the previous chapter, the men’s social networks are illustrated in Appendix 3, with details of the social/cultural institutions in the village with which they are associated. This chapter also shows that my involvement with women’s networks which had been established in the first half of my fieldwork continued, and that I was able to become more involved with community events.

#### **Men’s networks**

After Easter my association with women’s networks lessened, and I was able to talk with more men. There was an important reason for this: I moved out of Gillian and Mark’s house. Gillian no longer wanted me to stay. She said that it was because she and Mark did not socialise and therefore I was not meeting enough people to help with my research. I think it was more to do with them wanting their privacy back and the tension that had developed between Gillian and me. I was conscious of the need to do my interviews, but to balance this with

working in the shop so that I could meet as many people as possible and do my participant observation. Gillian had come to rely on me more and more to run errands for her: going to the bank or accountant in Neath, working on the bread deliveries or working in the shop all the time. Because with my interviews I was not always available to do what she wanted, I think she felt that I was becoming more of a burden to her than a help.

I was worried about where I would go, as I still had six months of fieldwork to do. Luckily, a bungalow became available. It belonged to the village chemist and was situated behind the pharmacy and shop. The chemist formerly lived with her husband (another chemist who worked in Seven Sisters) and son in the bungalow, but they had recently bought a larger house opposite the shop. I went to see her after Gillian asked me to leave, and she was keen for me to move in. It was unfurnished, but she said that they would be able to find some old furniture for me, and so we agreed that I could rent the bungalow. Suitable furniture was provided, and the only problem was that I did not have a refrigerator. But I decided that I would just have to be careful about what I bought and make do without one, as I could not afford to buy even a second hand one. I moved in and tried to adjust to the quietness of living on my own in the village. Gillian had said that I could still visit the shop, but apart from going to buy bread there, she did not encourage me to stay around. I usually had a chat with Rose and anyone else who was in the shop, but I did not feel able to stay around for long.

Although this meant that I could no longer rely on the bakery as my participant observation focus, by this time I had established enough contacts to be able to go out and about and chat. It also meant that I could concentrate more on my interviews, which were another form of participant observation in any case, since I was participating in conversations and observing people in their homes

or other chosen meeting point, and the environment in which the interviews took place. I was able to speak to more men in the interviews, and Jack introduced me to many of his contacts who he thought may be able to help my research. After leaving the bake-house, my friendship with Jack became closer, and at the same time my fieldwork methods developed.

Jack was able to introduce me to men's networks, although on a more formal level than my involvement with the women's networks. I first met Jack in the bread shop. Gillian told me that I should talk to him, since he was so interested in local history that he would be able to help me with my research. Most people in the village who had met me thought that my research was historical, an understandable presumption based on my interest in changes in the area, I believe. So Gillian assumed that Jack's knowledge of local history would be useful to me, as indeed proved the case. He was about the same age as my father (late sixties/early seventies) and had been a miner from the age of fourteen, but had left the pits following an accident underground when he was in his thirties, in which he lost one of his eyes. Following this accident he had worked in an administrative job in a hospital before moving to the job he retired from, working for Wimpey in the large opencast site behind the village on the hill known as Maesgwyn. Jack was related to Gillian and Mark through his marriage to Mark's mother's sister, Elaine, who had died from cancer about six years before my fieldwork. Rose (shop) told me that he was a lovely man, and I first met him when he called in to buy a loaf. He promised to help me in any way he could, and was interested to learn that I was originally from Haverfordwest, since he and Elaine had spent a lot of time there visiting their eldest son who used to live and work there. Jack offered to take me around the locality, and to show me local places of interest and to help me "get a feel of the land around here" as he put it.

We went on trips to the Henrhyd waterfalls, and to Dinas Rock, famous local landmarks. After our second trip out Jack asked me to drive his car as he said he did not like driving very much and that Elaine had always driven him when she was alive, so he preferred being a passenger. I was often invited into his house for a coffee after our trips out, and this usually turned into something to eat too as we chatted about the news, his family or mine, or the latest story that he was writing. He also showed me some of the pictures he had painted before he lost his eye, and the sculptures which he had found easier to make after the accident. When I told him that my husband was a visual artist, and had won a prize in the National Eisteddfod which had been held in the Neath valley the previous year, he asked what he had exhibited and immediately remembered the installation. He had visited the Eisteddfod with Gethin, his eldest son, and they had remarked on my husband Tim's work at the time. Jack was delighted to find out that I was the wife of the artist whose work he had admired, and we found that we could chat for hours about art, or politics, or how the various members of our family were getting on. He had heard about anthropology before, as one of his friends had been the local GP, the late Dr Aubrey Thomas, who, according to Jack had been a keen amateur anthropologist. Jack had many reminiscences of his time in the pits and at Wimpey, and told me many stories of the "good old days". He also asked me to proof read the short stories he now wrote in preference to making his visual art work. He wrote fiction based on his own experiences in the village and in Burma during the war. I enjoyed reading the stories and found them a useful way of discovering what Jack thought life in the village had been like when he was a boy.

### **Men's work**

One day Jack suggested that he could arrange a trip to the open cast site behind

Old Street. I was keen to go, since one of my first meetings during my door to door survey questioning had revealed that the workings were a contentious issue in the village, as discussed in Chapter 5. Jack knew the manager of the site, Bob, and telephoned him to arrange a visit by the two of us.

Jack and I drove up to the site and went into the British Coal office. Bob gave us helmets and took us out in a Land Rover to where the latest digging was going on. It was a very misty day, but through the fog we could see a huge pit being dug out of the ground in a rectangular shape by digging machines. There were a few men working with shovels around the edge of the hole, clearing the top soil and rocks to the side. We were allowed to walk in an area not being worked at the time, and Jack showed me the wooden struts belonging to old underground mine shafts. We were taken back to the office and shown a plan for landscaping the site after all the coal had been dug out. This was known as “reclamation” of the site and was to involve landscaping through the planting of grass and indigenous trees. Bob agreed that I could telephone later to arrange an interview with him. Before Jack and I left he gave me some British Coal Opencast public relations material and two miniature coal trucks carved from coal with the words “Opencast Executive” embossed on their sides.

Jack used to recount his experiences as a miner underground. He told me once about his witnessing a horse dying in a pit. He said “It was a terrible place for men, let alone horses.” The sight of the horse’s death had moved Jack to make a sculpture of a horse being pulled back by the weight of a cart loaded with coal, just before it died. He told me proudly that the writer Bert Coombes had written about the sculpture (his favourite of all Jack’s sculptures) for the Neath Journal. On another occasion Jack had witnessed a pony being caught in a tunnel collapse. Jack crept through a small hole to see if the animal was still alive. Jack



was small and agile, but he had had to take off his lamp belt to crawl through the small opening, and one of the other men threw it down after him so he could see the pony. It was quivering, but seemed uninjured. Jack clambered back and got apples, sandwiches and cake for the pony from the men's snap tins, crawling back through the hole to give the food to the pony. He said that there was then a shift change, and by the time Jack was back on shift, the pony had been rescued. A man had encouraged it to go down on its haunches to get out. Jack explained that if the pony had stood up and knocked the tunnel, both the pony and the man would have been killed. Jack concluded

But he didn't get commended for bravery or a medal. Duw (God) they were brave men, but it was just part of everyday work, no-one made a song and dance out of it.

Jack often used war imagery when discussing work underground. He told me that he thought the camaraderie underground was due to its "being like a battlefield" and the men not knowing when they would need each other's help in an accident. He also said that the village's being a close-knit community was because of its being like a war zone with tragedy likely to happen at any time. He referred to the bodies being carried through the streets after pit disasters, and the need for "every one to pull together" when someone had lost a family member, or someone had been injured in a pit accident. Of course Jack himself knew the dangers of working underground, having lost a eye in a pit accident.

Whilst I was doing my fieldwork, a protest was taking place in the next valley over the proposed Selar opencast site. Environmental protesters had built tree houses in an attempt to stop clearance of the area for the workings. These self-styled "Eco-Warriors" were the subject of much discussion in the village. Jack even wrote a story about them. He told me that he could see their point of view, but "they talk about deep mining, but none of them know what it's like

underground". He argued that mining was a dangerous, dirty and unhealthy occupation, and the Eco-Warriors should not be advocating it when they did not know the reality of having to do it. Ruth said to me once in the Welfare Hall after aerobics that she was hoping that her 18 year old unemployed son would get a job on the proposed opencast site. She said "People do say about the opencast, but it's work, it's a job; that's a big thing for a man today, to have a job". Gail had also said to me "It's all right for people to go on about the opencast, but it's food on the table for a hungry family, and that's what counts." Jack had of course got a job in opencast after his accident, so had benefited from this type of mining. The ambivalence felt towards opencast was symbolised by the washery which cleaned coal derived from opencast mining and which employed local men who were thus indirectly engaged in the industry. It seemed that people in the village were opposed to it more if they lived nearer the workings, but in general, they were tolerant of it because it was one of the rare employment opportunities in the locality. Some, like Jack, felt that it was a more humane form of mining since working underground was unhealthy and dangerous. He reminded me

There weren't any toilets underground, you know, Steph. You imagine the unsanitary conditions. Your butty may have had too much to drink the night before, he'd be sick, or he might have a stomach upset and you'd put your hand in diarrhoea. And the rats were everywhere.

A young man who I went to interview gave me a bleak picture of contemporary mining too, convincing me that things underground had not changed much for the better since Jack's day, at least in private mines. He was talking about private mines in which he had worked during work experience as part of his mining surveying course at college. He said that since the nationalised British Coal pits had been closed down, apart from Tower, there were only small private mines in south Wales now. He had worked in Blaenant before it closed,

and the conditions in the private mines were much worse than those he had encountered there or as a fireman for British Coal near Manchester. He said that wooden struts were used to support the shafts, and that gas levels could be as high as 5%, whereas British Coal had a maximum level of 2%. He also said that dust level machinery was placed in non-dusty areas so that the reading looked satisfactory:

But in the areas where the men are actually working, you can't see 3 feet in front of you, the dust is so thick. Their attitude to the men, excuse the language, is 'Fuck them'.

I asked if he would be able to improve conditions underground in such private mines once he had finished his degree, if he were to get a job in one of them. He shrugged his shoulders and said "If you don't go along with what they want, they'll just sack you and get someone who'll agree with what they're doing". He said that he felt a conflict between his job in the office and what the men were doing underground. He said that the men were earning only £190 per week basic, but could make as much as £400 with their bonus. But because sick pay is based only on the basic wage, men were now coming into work with cuts and other injuries. Also, if they did not achieve the targeted tonnage, they had to work an extra hour each day until the target was met. Evan had decided that he would rather work in opencast mining than a private pit after he had qualified, if he had the choice.

### **Men's leisure**

It was very difficult for me to enter into the men's leisure networks, but Jack did introduce me to some of his friends and acquaintances. He called round to the bungalow occasionally, and we continued our trips around the area. I also went

with him and his friend Alyn to Neath every Tuesday afternoon. Alyn is Mark's father, and Jack's brother-in-law, since they had married two sisters. Now both widowers, they went to do their weekly shopping together, and always enjoyed a meal of fish and chips while in the town. They invited me along and I enjoyed chatting to them while they looked in the shops and also enjoyed the fish and chips. Jack would collect me in his car, then move over to the passenger seat so that I could drive to Alyn's bungalow in Colbren, which overlooked the Brecon Beacons. Both men gave me cuttings and plants from their gardens to take back to my garden in Swansea, and insisted on taking it in turns to buy my lunch in Neath, never once allowing me to pay. Apart from Jack, no-one else visited me at the bungalow, everyone preferring me to call at their houses, whether for an interview or just a cup of tea and a chat.

Although I felt vulnerable sometimes at night in the bungalow, no doubt because of all the sexual joking which had gone on at the bakehouse, I did not feel lonely. After I had been away from the village for a couple of weeks during the Easter period after I moved out of Gillian's and before I had moved into the bungalow, one of the regular women customers in the shop said "Hello, stranger" as we walked past each other on the High Street, and I realised that I was *not* considered "a stranger", and was pleased to see that my absence had been noticed. One evening after returning home from an interview at one end of the village, I was walking back to the bungalow past the rugby club. Debbie, Nancy and Karen, who I knew from the shop and bingo, were sitting outside on the bench having a drink. They shouted "Come on over Steph and have a drink." I did join them, and we sat chatting for a while, the conversation mostly centring around the forthcoming rugby match at Cardiff. While we sat outside the club drinking our lagers and eating our crisps, two of the women's children played in the concrete area in front of the club. When I went in to buy my drink, I noticed

that most of the customers inside the club in the downstairs section were men. Since I was relying on my women friends to introduce me to their pastimes, I did not feel comfortable when going into the club on my own. This would not have been in keeping with what my friends did, who were after all sitting outside the club, and though some women did go into the club to drink with female or male friends, as none of my acquaintances did, I did not either, except for buying a drink and then going outside to drink it.

### **Community identity**

Jack's recollections and companionship kept my spirits up during my fieldwork, and I do not think I would have been able to complete the year's research if it had not been for his kindness to me, although other villagers' friendliness and acts of involving me in community events were also comforting as well as useful for data collection.

Denise the chemist told me one day that there was going to be a public meeting at the Welfare Hall concerning the situation of doctors in the village. There was a rumour going around that the surgery in Cwm Glân would be closing. I went to the meeting and entered at the same time as Gail and Kim, van drivers from the bakehouse. They invited me to sit with them. The Hall was packed with people as this was clearly a sensitive issue to the villagers. I remembered Jack telling me about the GP provided by the miners:

Dr Thomas, we had our own surgery and his own clinic, we had a physiotherapist in attendance, you could have wax treatment, and we used to pay poundage on that, four pence in the pound, but mind, many old people who weren't working, we never used to say, 'oh, you're not paying', everybody was welcome to go, the miners were paying but anybody could go. Say you and Tim were living up here, you know, they

wouldn't stop you and Tim going. Or the ambulance, if you wanted the ambulance, you could use the ambulance.

and I could see why the villagers felt that they were being let down by the National Health Service.

The County Councillor, Elwyn Pritchard, chaired the meeting. There was also a representative from the West Glamorgan Family Health Services Authority. One of the GPs had left the partnership, which operated out of surgeries at in Cwm Glân, Seven Sisters, Colbren and Crynant. The senior partner in the practice, Dr Birla, had advertised for a replacement but after several months had not found one. Because of the pressure of work he had decided to temporarily suspend the evening session at Cwm as well as some in the other surgeries.

Elwyn Pritchard suggested that it was a problem about which Dr Birla could do nothing. He was being overworked, so would have to cut down his hours. He used a mining analogy to illustrate his point: "You know what it's like, if you've got a team of four men working underground and one of them's off sick, the three left can't do the same amount of work", and also a rugby analogy: "If a team's only playing with fourteen players week after week, you know something's going to give."

The representative from the Family Health Services Authority spoke about the problems of recruiting GPs to the area. He suggested that the situation would be helped if more money could be offered to induce doctors to come to the valley, but that it was unlikely that extra funding could be found. After he finished speaking he was applauded and then questions were accepted from the floor.

At first men asked questions, going through the Chair. It occurred to me that the men were used to this formal procedure in meetings from their days of

union involvement. Then women started asking questions, including Joanne. They did not ask questions via Elwyn, but asked the FHSA official direct. All the questioners acknowledged the situation and agreed that it was not Dr Birla's fault. But they asked how people were going to manage if the surgery was closed. How would people without cars cope? In the end, they thought, Dr Birla and his colleagues would be more pressurised, as the result of having a closed surgery in the evenings would inevitably be more house calls.

The meeting closed with nothing resolved, as it could not be. It had been called by Elwyn Pritchard to explain why Dr Birla (who was absent from the meeting) "had decided to close the surgery in Cwm during the evenings, and to reassure the villagers that everything possible was being done to attract a new GP to the practice", as he told me afterwards when I went up to meet him.

Most people then left the Welfare Hall, but Jack had been in the meeting and he invited me to go into the bar and play bingo with him and his friend Don, and about twenty other people. Most of the players were over sixty, and this time the group was more evenly mixed, with equal numbers of men and women. After a few games we left the Hall, but not before Jack had introduced me to the Chair of the Welfare Hall committee, Geraint, and the Chair of the Welfare Hall choir, Jonathan. Both agreed to be interviewed by me and gave me their telephone numbers so that I could arrange appointments. The fact that Jack was introducing me no doubt helped with their agreeing to be contacted, as he was very highly respected in the village. He was perceived to be a trustworthy and generous character who "always chooses to see the good in people rather than the bad", but also when people found out what I was researching, they often suggested that I should speak to Jack as "he's a font of knowledge".

A few weeks later I was back at the Welfare Hall with Jack to celebrate the success of the village rugby team. Every year there was a fund raising concert for

the team, led by the Club's president, Derek. He was a comedian from the village who had now moved down to Seven Sisters with his wife and children. He had given up working underground to become a professional comedian, touring the working men's club circuit and achieving television exposure on the programme "The Comedians" during the 1970s.

When Jack and I arrived in the main hall of the Welfare Hall, tables were positioned all around the room and were surrounded by chairs occupied with villagers, who were seated in groups of friends who were married couples. Jack and I found a seat near to his friend Don and his wife. I offered to get Jack a drink, but he insisted that he should buy our drinks. Derek came onto the stage and said how delighted he was to be hosting this fund raising evening which was also a celebration of Blaengwyn's win of the Prysg Cup. There was this year no entrance fee to the concert as the sponsors had made a donation to the Welfare Hall, and paid for the artistes, and he was very grateful to them all. Although he did not mention them by name, I knew that Gillian and Mark from the bakehouse were amongst the sponsors of the club, as I had seen a commemorative photograph of Gillian with Derek and Jeff, the team manager, when she had presented jerseys to them. Proceeds from the evening's bar takings would be going to the club, however.

There was a raffle for which Derek said the first prize was a week in Nantes, the second prize two weeks in Nantes. Everybody laughed, but I did not get the joke as I thought that visiting Nantes would be a pleasurable experience. Then Jack reminded me of the tiny village in the valley between Seven Sisters and Crynant which comprised two houses "Nant it is, Steph, there's nothing there" he explained, and I could see the funny side after all.

The evening's entertainment consisted of a series of performers singing songs, interspersed by Derek's joking and making the introductions. The groups



comprised a young male singer from Neath who sang chart songs of the time, a country and western group, and a woman vocalist who had won the television competition "Stars In Their Eyes" with her impersonation of the American singer Diana Ross. Most of her set unsurprisingly comprised hits by the star, and a few other standards made famous by singers such as Barbra Streisand, Shirley Bassey, and others.

During the evening I got up and bought drinks for Jack and myself, much to his discomfort. He said "What are people going to think, Steph, of a young woman buying me drinks?", but I bought them anyway as I felt that he was already treating me to many things. Some of the people in the audience mistook me for one of Jack's daughters-in-law, asking "Now is this Gethin's wife or Sean's?", to which Jack would reply, "No, this is Stephanie Jones from Haverfordwest and she's doing research on the village".

The entertainment went on until about eleven o'clock, and then we all departed in good spirits. Throughout the evening I noticed that Derek made references to the fact that he was a "Blaengwyn boy". On our way out, Jack collared him and introduced us. He too agreed to be interviewed, and gave me a business card with his telephone number to arrange a meeting.

## Summary

The description of events in this chapter has focused on community events such as the celebration for the rugby team's victory, the meeting about the GP's surgery, and men's work and leisure activities. The data presented again emphasises the gender segregation in Blaengwyn, and the methodological problem of not being able to meet many men as a woman researcher. This problem was overcome by making formal arrangements to interview men. Jack

helped me arrange many of my interviews, through his contacts with men in public positions of authority. These are analysed in the next chapter, along with interviews with women. It includes a further discussion of an issue introduced above: community identity and the way that men's and women's networks take a different organisational form at community level. Finally I return in Chapter 8 to another community event which derived from the major men's leisure interest in Blaengwyn, and discuss how a trip to see a rugby game at Cardiff symbolises the most important aspects of gender identity and relationships, as well as community identity, in the village.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Projecting their voices: the interviews**

#### **Introduction**

My participation in everyday life in Blaengwyn was causing me some ethical dilemmas. On the one hand I felt relieved that people in the village seemed to be accepting of me, but on the other hand I felt that I was using their openness to explore the intimacies of their everyday lives in a way which was exploitative. I hoped that the interviews would alleviate this situation as they would be conducted with a tape-recorder and I could state my intentions before each interview, reminding the interviewee that I was doing research and that s/he did not have to answer any question that s/he felt uncomfortable with. This chapter explores this ethical dilemma, and presents the interview data as they relate to gender relationships and community identity. Information related to the number and length of interviews, together with details of how contact was made with the interviewees, appears in Chapter 3.

#### **Problems with participant observation, problems with interviewing**

As I said in my discussion of methods used during my fieldwork, participant observation was complemented by semi-structured interviews. It was not until I had been living in Blaengwyn for a few months that I felt that I knew what questions to ask in the interviews, through becoming gradually aware of the preoccupations of the villagers whilst chatting to them casually at the bake-house or whilst out socialising with them. Clearly I had some idea of what I wanted to find out about the village before I went there, and my questionnaire questions

demonstrate that I was primarily interested in how a major structural change, the loss of a major local employer through pit closure, affected the every day lives of people in Blaengwyn. During my participant observation, however, I noted that the changes experienced in daily life were expressed in a number of inter-related ways. My analysis of the ethnographic data suggests the following areas which may elucidate what "identity" means in Blaengwyn, in terms of gender and community, and how these are inter-connected; gender identity is articulated through gender-based networks, leisure, work and education, agencies such as the changing coal industry, local pressure groups, and work and leisure activities, influence a sense of the community's local and national identity.

By the time I conducted the interviews, I was well-known in the village. My position was ambivalent, since in order to be seen as a "proper" researcher I had to carry out the interviews to give an air of validity to my research. As I mentioned in discussing my relationship with Gillian, "hanging about" was not considered to be real work and certainly not the sort of thing which a serious researcher would do. Participant observation was unheard of in the village, and to be honest, though acknowledging the ethical dilemma, this was to my advantage since I am sure it meant that people were more unguarded in what they did and said than they would have been if they had known that I was making notes about their actions. On the other hand, when I did my interviews, I was seen to be carrying out my research, but by this time I was known to most of the interviewees. They did not feel unguarded and, I am sure, did not feel free to say exactly what they believed. This was either because they knew me or, even if they had not met me before, because they knew that I would still be living in the village and might bump into them on the street. Of course I have no way of testing out my instincts here because there is no control position possible for comparison. The relationship between me and the villagers also meant that I felt

unable to question my interviewees on the topic of sexuality or sexual behaviour. This is presumably always a potentially difficult area of research as embarrassment can ensue even if the interviewer is previously unknown to the interviewee. However, I was unable to ask any questions in this area because I felt that to do so would have been prying into taboo territory. This, I am sure, was partly to do with my position as someone who was living in the village but not really a part of it. Had I been better known to the villagers the subject would probably have come up in conversation as it had done on the occasions I witnessed during my participant observation. But there was something about turning up with a tape recorder which, while legitimating me as a researcher, distanced me from my interviewees and made the topic inappropriate in the particular circumstances. There is one notable exception to this, when I interviewed one of the women running the DOVE centre, and she clearly demonstrates the view held by some men of women who run an autonomous group in the village. These women are seen to be transgressing the “normal” accepted heterosexual behaviour of women and are accused of being lesbians because they do not involve men in their activities.

The data which I have collected is the best that I could come up with under those circumstances, however flawed they may be. I believe that the interviews were worth doing, however, as they not only legitimated my research in the eyes of the villagers, but they also gave me a chance to talk on an informal level with a number of people with different opinions on various topics of interest in the village. They also gave me access to a wider range of people than I would have met in the course of my participant observation. The chance to tape conversations was also useful, as I could not hope to record accurately every word spoken during the course of my ethnographic study. For these reasons I believe that the participant observation and interviews were complementary, and each informed the other during my fieldwork and in my subsequent

analysis. This is why I am now going to discuss the themes which emerged during my participant observation in terms of what my interviewees said during our recorded conversations.

My theoretical position as informed by Bourdieu, Moore and Cohen suggests that different people in Blaengwyn will have different views of their circumstances and identify themselves differently according to their particular positions within the village. Thus it is impossible to find identical views on topics emerging from my interview data. However, in some cases there is a broad consensus on particular issues, in some there are many different views. I can not therefore simplify my data by saying something like "people in Blaengwyn think...." or "in Blaengwyn everybody does.....". The following discussion therefore attempts to classify similar responses in the interviews where this is possible, but acknowledges the different perspectives of individuals within the village.

## **Gender**

My discussion of gender focusses on the areas outlined above, that is gender-based networks, work, education and leisure. From the discussion in Chapters 5 and 6 of the data obtained during participant observation, it should be apparent to the reader that the way in which I met men and women in Blaengwyn was very different. I was informally introduced to women by other women through their established networks of family and friends. In contrast, I met men primarily through formal introductions, often facilitated by Jack, who was himself introduced to me as a family member by Gillian, but a family member with expertise in local history and contacts who might prove useful for my research. The network aspects of gender, particularly the single-sex networks as discussed by Bott, were therefore apparent in the method of meeting people as well as in

the content of the data gained from them. During my interviews with people in Blaengwyn the following emerged in relation to gender-based networks in the village.

Many of the women I spoke to said that they relied on other women friends or family members to help with child care. This is something I had witnessed myself, with Rose (van) looking after her son's girl-friend's daughter after school, and Debbie's son being cared for by Joanne, her sister-in-law while she was working at the electronics factory in Ystradgynlais. But male family members also looked after children, as when Joanne was working herself her husband, Raymond, Debbie's brother, cared for the little boy. Mary's remarks demonstrate that informal networks of friends and family, in her case a fellow bread delivery worker or her parents-in-law, tended to be used rather than public facilities such as the crèche at the DOVE centre:

You know, if I needed anyone, I know there's loads I could turn to like, if I needed to leave the children, I know I've got Gail up the road there. Like her children come down here, mine go up there, but if I needed anything and Hilda and Powell weren't available, I know I could go up there then to Gail. If Gail wasn't there like, then I know of others.

When Mary and Gail went out "with the girls" to a night-club in Swansea while their husbands were on an all-male trip to Scotland to watch the rugby international game, Mary said of her children "Jason then, kept my mother-in-law company, and Andrea stayed over in my niece's in Glynneath."

Similarly, Joanne stressed that she would not consider leaving her children in the care of anyone but her family: "It's the family, family it would be, if I had to leave the children or I needed somebody to have them for the weekend, it would be family."

## Leisure

It was apparent that many couples in Blaengwyn led separate social lives, a point confirmed by my participant observation experiences. Some said that they went out as a couple for a meal or to the pub or club, but most of my interviewees said that they went out with friends of the same gender. Tim and Pam Evans said that they sometimes went out for a drink or meal together, but more often Pam went out swimming with women friends and Tim went out to the rugby club with his male friends. Gail initially said that she and her husband tended to go out together more than separately, but when she thought about it a little more she realised that her husband John went out more because of his involvement with the local rugby club: "He goes out Tuesday and Thursday training and then he goes out on a Thursday night because they pick the team, and he goes out on a Friday because they all go out on a Friday."

Mary's husband Sam also regularly went out with his fellow rugby players, but since he had taken over the stewardship of the rugby club, Mary spent even less time with him:

Well, before Sam had the rugby club, Sam used to go out on a Friday night, and a Sunday night with the boys, see. But now he's out all the time because he's running the club, and I don't see any difference now.

The biannual rugby trip to Scotland was a mainly men only event, but some women were going with their husbands. But as Mary explained to me, women did not travel on the same coach or stay in the same hotels as the men:

Well, no women go on the men's trip. If the women go, it's like, a couple of women have gone this year now, but their husbands organised a different place to go, a different place to stay, you know, so they stay totally different, they go on a different coach as well, the men'd go bloody mental if they were on the same coach!



The Scottish rugby trips went back at least as far as the 1950s. Jonathan, Chair (although he was referred to as the Chairman locally) of the Coedwig Welfare Male Voice Choir, told me, in an interview arranged after an introduction by Jack, that he arranged for a plane to be chartered for the 1959 game. He also explained that another male preserve, the choir itself, was started as a result of the trips to Scotland organised by the Welfare Hall when a few of the members suggested that it would be a good idea to form a choir to improve the singing on the journey and in the Scottish pubs:

*'Mr Chairman, you know, we've been going to Scotland now for quite a number of years, and all the good singers we've got here,' he said, 'and that's all we sing together is Calon Lan, Welsh hymns and what have you, you know, when we're up with the Scots he said. 'We sing Calon Lan, it's great' he said, 'and we do harmonise, now, do you you think you could make us, us by here now, we're thirty odd, make a sort of a choir, like, just not regular, but just for up there, when we're away, learn one or two little songs, you know.'*

While many men in Blaengwyn socialised together at choir practice or darts matches in the Welfare Hall, rugby training and visits to the rugby club for a drink afterwards, women tended to socialise together at the same venues but for bingo sessions, aerobics classes or, like some men, just a drink and a chat. In my experience, which is of course influenced by my making friends with mostly women in the village, women often popped into each others houses for a chat and a cup of tea.

Sometimes men would go out to visit friends' houses rather than go out for a drink, in order to save money. This was in contrast to the culture of consumption described in a former mining community in Scotland by Wight (1993). He found that even though there was little money to spare in this area of high unemployment, it was desirable to be seen to be spending a lot publicly, especially on alcohol, to maintain a sense of affluence: "villagers who wished to

live within the moral community of Cauldmoos had to meet certain standards of respectability and reproduce the principal cognitive categories of the culture by conforming to customary consumption" (Wight, 1993, p. 195). Danny, an unemployed former lorry driver at Blaenant told me that he had resigned from the rugby club committee and did not go out as often as he had done:

It was going a bit expensive you know, when you're on the committee you've got to be out four nights out of seven, as you can imagine. I used to play darts on a Monday night, but that has gone out the window now like. I don't mind a drink at all you know, lovely, enjoyable. I go and have a drink now with my friend every Friday, with cans like, but I don't really go out.

This was clearly in contrast to when the pits were open in the valley, and employed miners could afford to go out drinking after work. Jack told me about his memory of being a young boy selling the local newspaper in the Glan pub in the late 1930s: "I remember when I was in school, I went to help an older boy to sell the Evening Post, you couldn't get in the place; we were small boys and all these men were all standing four deep at the bar, you know, so you just had to sell your few Evening Posts there in the porch or in the hallway, like."

Peter, the former NUM steward at Blaenant also spoke of the changes during his life-time, with people not being able to afford to go out as much, and he also remarked that women would now be more likely to go out to the pub with their husbands. His interview data provide a good example of the type of analysis and awareness of the impact of structural change on the every day life of people in the village:

The Coedwig Welfare is struggling, just about every organisation as far as a club is concerned is struggling because of the people that haven't got the surplus money. Of course, the price of beer has gone up as well. There's a culture change of people's outlook to enjoying, as compared with the early sixties, then. I wouldn't say they stay at home more, I think they do go back and fore to people's houses and have a sort of chat and drink where, you

know, it was customary when I was younger, that if you went to somebody's house, you'd sit down and have a chat to be polite in the first instance, the two blokes would sort of whisk themselves away to the local pub and have about a dozen, then. But now, it's cheaper to bring in a few drinks, perhaps. Now there's a culture change in that as well, in that if they did whisk away, that the women would have to whisk away with them, like, you know, so there's a difference.

He recalled the times when women were not expected to go into pubs: "the wife wouldn't be seen in the pub, you know, you wouldn't get my mother near a pub, and in fact any woman that went in the pub, there was something wrong with her morality, like". Along with many people in the village I spoke to, Peter thought that the 1960s had brought about a shift in expectations of how the different genders were expected to behave. Certainly women did go to pubs and clubs when I was doing my fieldwork, but even so, they did not frequent them as often as men and even in 1995-6 women were not strongly represented in the Coedwig Welfare Hall. Although Dot and Ruth worked there, their status was not entirely clear. Geraint, the retired oil industry worker and "Chairman" of the Coedwig Welfare Committee, another contact introduced by Jack, told me that the two women were committee members too who helped out when necessary and were a good help to the rest of the committee. When I asked if anyone minded there being women on the committee, he said "Oh no, we'd like to see more." However, Jonathan and Janet, who was invited to the interview by Jonathan along with her husband James, who was bookings secretary of the Coedwig Welfare Male Voice Choir, told me that women were not welcome on the Welfare Hall committee, and that old rules were used to bar them from full membership. Jonathan said:

There was a meeting now about women coming on committees, and it was thrown through the door. They're not allowed to go on Coedwig Hall committee, there was about 1001 points of law that they took advantage of.

Janet added:

With our Hall here, the lady members are just lady members, they're not allowed a vote at the AGM and they can't hold any position. You just become a lady member to enable you to go in on your own if you wish and buy a drink.

Jonathan went on:

And that's only come about, not that long ago, about 15 years ago, something like that. No, in any club you wasn't allowed, if you walked in the club, you weren't allowed up the bar, your husband or boyfriend had to go, to purchase a drink for you.

The ethnographic and interview data suggest that there is still a strong division along gender lines to the leisure time activities in Blaengwyn. Men's sporting activities are the domain of most male socialising, focussed around rugby and darts matches, although the male voice choir also provides a focus for older men in particular to meet. The venues for these activities, the rugby club and Welfare Hall, are still male dominated areas, but they do also act as meeting places for activities which are exclusively attended by women, or in which women form the majority of attendees, such as aerobics and bingo.

## **Work**

I was also interested in finding out about gender divisions in work, in and outside the home, and asked my interviewees questions to complement the data gleaned from my participant observation, which led me to believe that there were many local women working in part-time jobs, and that even where women were working outside the home in paid employment, they were still responsible for the majority of household tasks and child care duties, most clearly

exemplified by the case of Rose (van) and her sons.

The local perception was that it was easier for a woman to get a job than a man. For example, Evan, the 27 year old Surveying student, recalled how things had changed with regard to men's and women's employment in the valley during his life-time, noting that more women seemed to be going outside the home to work, especially in the electronics factory, still known as the "Tick Tock", at Ystradgynlais:

There's more jobs for women, low paid. Tick Tock, you know, sometimes when I go to work I go past, every bus stop from here down has got women waiting to go to Tick Tock. It used to be ten years ago, when the collieries were open, it was completely the reverse. You'd never see women waiting there to go to work, if you know what I mean. The colliery bus would pick up men.

Peter, the former NUM official currently employed in the Steel plant at Port Talbot, saw the changes with regard to women's employment as starting back in the 1970s, when women would accept low wages to supplement their husbands' wages, but that the situation was now different since many families had to rely on the woman's pay only following pit closure. He said: "Since the beginning of the '70s, then, when factories opened up, where women's labour was required more than the man's labour because of the wages, low wages, and women were prepared to go out, girls were prepared to go out and take these jobs on because it was without doubt a second income."

Eric, an unemployed former washery worker held the same view:

There are more jobs for women, and they put them all part time. It's all right for part time jobs to be part time jobs, but there's people taking part time jobs to survive, you know. It's about survival now, not making a living.

Derek, the professional comedian, blamed Margaret Thatcher for the situation in the valley. I quote him at length because his views of how jobs are changing reflects the older men's attitudes towards women's and men's work. He said:

She created an underclass, I remember now there was a high society thing, there was middle class, right, working class, now there's an underclass. I've got friends, their missus are working in these super stores, Somerfields, Gateways, Tescos, Asdas, whatever, Sainsbury's, guaranteed 40 hour week, that was the unions and Labour Party right, if you're on £4 an hour, you was guaranteed 40, you had £160, whether you worked, or nothing, that was all right. Then they dropped it down to 38 hours a week, now what the supermarkets have done, now, my mate was telling me about his wife, they've dropped her hours to 28, you can't work any more, pay your own stamp, pay your own holiday pay, the responsibility of management has been put back onto the working man and working woman, but they haven't increased the money. She can't work more than 28 hours, and what they've done, they need 56 a week so they've had two to do it, at single rate, working, you know, say 9 'til 2, and then somebody working 2 'til 9, do that say four days a week and get the other three off, that's 28 hours. And the bulk has gone down, her wages have dropped by about 35%, she's got to pay her own stamp, right, and then no holiday pay, there's no benefits or nothing in the work like there used to be, and yet they've cut their earning power by a third, and if she doesn't want it, there's a queue waiting for it, so they have created an underclass. At least when we were in the colliery and I was a young boy, we knew what we had coming at the end of the week because it was standard rate. They are going for the woman, 'cause the woman will accept a lesser wage than a man, I don't know why, it's a known fact, oh well, a man, see how can a man who's capable of doing physically more work than a woman, be on the same level, bring the woman up to a man, yeah, but they're bringing the man down to the woman now. I mean you've got all these clothing factories, you've got Dewhurst's in Ystradgynlais, you've got these electrical appliances, there's Sony and things like that of course, it's all women. It's all women, there's the odd guy there that does the heavy work, the store-rooms and shifting big lumps of this and that or what have you, otherwise it's all women.

Derek conceptualises the changes in employment opportunities as being dominated by the lack of real jobs for men, who refuse to take the low wages which women accept. He does not question why it might be that women are

prepared to take the low wages, probably because, being in his mid fifties, he could remember a time when, as Peter said in his interview, local women started to go out to work in the 1970s to get a second income. The low-paid, part-time jobs became known as “women’s jobs” and still attract a female workforce, as suggested by the information provided by the Personnel Officer at the Lucas factory in Ystradgynlais which is discussed in Chapter 4. Although relatively affluent himself, because of his highly paid television appearances and night-club bookings, Derek was clearly conscious of the poverty levels in the valley and the material hardship experienced by his friends.

With regard to work inside the home, my interviews confirmed my observations. Almost every-one I spoke to said that women spent more time on housework and taking care of the children than their husbands did. I got the impression that the men who said they did do housework were giving me what they thought was the “correct” answer to my question, but the few who did say they did domestic tasks may well have been telling the truth. But, because of the reactions of wives and husbands in joint interviews, I tend to believe that women were doing most housework in Blaengwyn. Some men freely admitted this, but I obtained more details from the women I spoke to. For example, Danny, the unemployed former lorry driver at Blaenant colliery told me that he and his wife Phoebe, a part-time home help aged about 50, split the housework equally. But Phoebe was more specific:

He hoovers in the morning and then on the weekend I give it a good clean. He doesn’t do the corners, see, just in the middle. So the week-end is my what you call for cleaning, isn’t it, ‘cause I don’t work on the week-ends, see, just the week.

Further questioning revealed that Phoebe cleaned the bathroom, did all the dusting and ironing too, but she did not seem to mind this arrangement as she suggested that it was part of her duties and that doing the housework made her feel needed, when she added “If he learns to iron, I can go home to my mother.”

Anthony, an ex-miner of about the same age as Phoebe told me that his wife did all the housework and added categorically "I'm going to say something now and I'm going to be upset; I'm old fashioned, as far as I'm concerned a woman's job is in the home...I expect her to do the housework in the house, that's the way I was brought up."

This attitude seemed prevalent in the village, and had not changed with the demise of the dominant male industry, coal, and increased work opportunities for women outside the home. Pam told me "there's a few women I know up here whose husbands aren't working and the girls are working, and like you said, they still come home and they've got to do the housework; they're still expected to do all they did before, and the job, you know."

Many women said that they did not mind doing all the housework as long as the husbands contributed by gardening or doing "Do It Yourself" tasks around the house. Gail, for example, said that she did "every inch" of the housework but she did not mind because her husband John, who was employed in a motor manufacturing factory in the next valley, contributed in other ways: "If he wasn't doing things around the house, then I'd expect him probably to do a bit more, but, like it is now, we're still doing the house and he's not lazy, like, he carries on doing his bits and bobs."

Gail's friend Mary, suggested that although her husband Mark did little housework, she would be bringing her 10 year old son, Jason, up differently. I was reminded of Rose (van) and her sons as Mary described her husband and his brother. She thought that her husband had been spoiled by his mother, who had done everything around the home:

Sam never done a thing, he didn't know how to cut a bucket of coal until he got married to me, nothing at all, because his mother just did everything for him. They didn't have to move off the couch. His brother's like that now, and he's 27, 28, and he doesn't have to do a thing. But with Jason, he's got a tray, and as soon as he has finished his food, you don't



have to tell him, he automatically picks the tray up, he puts the things in the sink and puts the tray down. Jason does a few things round the house, you know, he'll go up the shop, he'll do the coal. He pulls his finger out, he's got to.

## **Education**

When it comes to education, my interviews included a focus on the DOVE centre which is absent from my participant observation data. This is because the centre was one of the things which drew me to do research in Blaengwyn in the first place. But when I was living in the village, the people I mixed with did not have much to do with it. The exception was Mary, who worked there in the evenings as a cleaner. Most people who I knew in the village did not make use of the facilities there, although I visited it myself for Welsh lessons run by Swansea University. Strictly speaking the classes were held at the Blaengwyn community centre, in rooms leased from the community centre by the University. However, the entire building was known as "The Dove" in everyday conversations, and when I met people for the first time and told them that I was a student, they always assumed that I was based at the DOVE centre, which was also the base of the Community University of the Valleys, an initiative of the Department of Adult Continuing Education at Swansea University.

The DOVE centre, based at Blaengwyn Community centre was started by a group of women following their involvement in the 1984-5 miners' strike. The acronym stands for Dulais Opportunities Valley Enterprise Initiative, and as well as running a crèche on the premises, the organisation specialises in women only training in Information Technology. The group works with further and higher education agencies such as the Community University and Neath College in providing education and training, and these agencies also provide mixed gender classes at the same location. The DOVE has been successful in obtaining funding from the local borough council and the European Union. Kim, one of the bread

delivery employees who I knew quite well from the bakery was one of the DOVE's instigators. She explained how it had started:

There were seven of us here. We decided that when the strike was over we didn't particularly want to go back and do nothing at all, we wanted something to come out of it for the women, really. The men had gone back to work, of course we didn't foresee then how long it would last, but there you are. So we got together hoping to make something ourselves. We didn't really have anything in mind, but we thought, well, we've all got different skills, I'm sure if we could put them all together I'm sure we could make something saleable. There were lots of ideas going round, but then talking to the people in Glyneath, (a similar training organisation) that's when the whole idea of training people came out of it, and then it really took off then, but that was when I wasn't involved then. It started here in my house, it was I that started that off, but unfortunately I didn't continue, you know, and carry on with it. I'm sorry I didn't now, but at the time, the children, after the strike, had to take priority, and you know, I didn't get involved as much as I should have done really.

So in Kim's case, it is interesting to note that even though she was anxious to further opportunities for women in the locality, she felt unable to become too involved herself because of her own child care responsibilities. She was in her early 40s when I interviewed her, but her opinion was similar to a woman twice her age, Mrs Barton, who I was introduced to by Jack. She told me that she had gone out to work briefly at an armaments factory during the second world war, but "I didn't work much there, because I tell you what it was, I was thinking I was neglecting the children, so I'm sure only about three months I worked."

One of the other women at the meeting at Kim's house, who was also involved in setting up the DOVE, Meryl, still works at the Centre however, and it is she who I met on my first visit to the Centre. In an interview conducted during my fieldwork year, she outlined the philosophy behind it:

The first idea was the co-operative, and actually setting something up that women could earn a wage from...there was a realisation that the pits would never be the same, that maybe one or two would stay open, but that the whole idea of us depending on a man going out to work for ever was changing...we faced the fact that the employment situation was going to change in the valley and also that women were doing something

different and getting a lot of confidence out of that.

I asked Meryl if she thought that the DOVE was providing something new for women in the locality, something which they had not had access to before. She believed that they were, and they were able to do this because of the structural change in the valley:

Their lives were so difficult at home, they were working so hard, most of their time was spent looking after men coming on and off shifts...although there was that tradition of working class education, it was all the men who went to the miners' institute and the libraries to read, it wasn't the women who were encouraged to do that really. It was very much a male domain. For working class women there was the expectation that you just got married and looked after your family, that was your role. So what we do here is, we call it an alternative choice, because it's women who are running it, are organising it.

She mentioned that some men had given the women in the centre "flack", and she explained that they were suspected of being lesbians:

We hear different stories, you know, about hanky panky going on up here. In my naivete I thought they were talking about people in cars, you know....months later it dawned on me what they were saying. You know, 'a bunch of women together', you know, hurtful things really. I was so naive at the time I didn't realise what he meant, and we're all lesbian of course, because women getting together, and just women, and not including men, are lesbians. But I mean, that's for them to decide, you know, we think it's a hoot, we just laugh about that, it shows their ignorance really.

Since most people assumed I was based at the DOVE, it is perhaps unsurprising that nobody ever criticised it in front of me. However, in one of my interviews, with unemployed community councillor and Chair of the Old Street Action Group, Steve, a less than wholehearted endorsement of the organisation was expressed. Remarking that there was no real central social venues apart from pubs and clubs in the village, he forgot or chose to ignore the fact that men were

educated and trained at the site too, when he said:

We have a great example of our community centre in Blaengwyn, in Old Street here, where nine tenths of it is used for education. Which, now don't get me wrong, I think it's a marvellous idea for the ladies to have a second chance, I think it's a brilliant idea, but the community centre is one room which is rarely used for meeting points in the community, so you have no meeting points.

Perhaps the stories of lesbianism reflects the perception in the community that the centre was predominantly for and used by women, and suggests that an autonomous women-only organisation was perceived as stepping outside what was acceptable for women in the village.

Meryl confirmed that more women than men did use the educational and training resources at the Community Centre building. In the previous year the figures for attendees being women 84%, men 16%. She attributed this to the different attitudes towards education held by men and women that she had come across at the DOVE, influenced strongly by men's desire to return to employment and women's child care responsibilities:

Men see education differently from women, they're very vertical in their view. They're going to come on a course and it's going to move them upwards and it's going to get them a job within a year, and probably they'll come on a full time course, usually....women see it more horizontally. Women will say 'I've got four or five years to work on a course while my kids are growing up, and then I'll be ready to work full time'.

Tim, an ex-miner who retired due to ill health before Blaenant closed was the only man on his course, which was a foundation class run by the Community University to prepare mature students for a degree course. He confirmed Meryl's view when he suggested that the reason why men did not enrol was "there's just no general interest, they just think 'why?', 'what's the

point?', 'there's no work to go to afterwards, you won't get a job'." His suspicions were borne out by the views of Anthony, the ex-miner who now worked in seasonal employment on a barge: "By the time you've finished studying through it, you've got nothing out of it anyway...when you've got your qualifications, you've nowhere to go anyway."

The DOVE centre was developed as a response to the miners' strike of 1984 - 85, and many people in Blaengwyn identified the strike as a turning point in the village, and spoke of it as being more important than the subsequent closure of the last British Coal pit in the valley, Blaenant, in 1990. This brings me on to my discussion of how concepts of community were talked about in my interviews, and although I am separating gender and community out into separate sections for analysis, it should be borne in mind that there is no clear-cut distinction, and in fact the two are inter-related.

### **Community: consensus**

As well as being perceived as a major focus of change within the valley, the strike was identified as an example of how close the community was, since, in Mary's words "everybody pulled together, everybody in the community pulled together". From my casual conversations during participant observation, it became clear to me that women had been involved in the strike, and it was often said that without the women's support the strike would not have held as strong for so long. Many of the women I spoke to played down their activities, however, and I often had to probe them to find out what they had been doing.

The local-born head of the Department of Adult Continuing Education at Swansea University, Dafydd, also husband of the DOVE worker, Meryl, described the organisational structure in operation in the area during the strike to distribute food to striking miners. He was directly involved in the miners'

support group himself, working closely with Peter, the NUM steward for Blaenant. Dafydd said:

The way in which we did things during the strike was different. You had three valleys all brought together and there were ten food centres. The Uniform in Blaengwyn was one of them. Coedwig was the eleventh in the sense that there was no food distributed there other than to the centres, but in every centre, the coordinator was a woman. That was a deliberate, critical decision, and the NUM was respectful but also on one side. It didn't control the distribution, and the women's support group that existed within the support group, had its own autonomy, and it was probably the most political part of the whole operation.

Kim, the co-ordinator for the three valleys and wife of Blaenant NUM

Chair Peter described her involvement, when she was a housewife, as follows:

I would find out how much money we had come in during that week, because lots of donations were sent to us, were sent to the four people on the committee, you know, so money was coming in from all directions, and there was also a lot of food donations. Now anything that was donated had to be taken to Coedwig Welfare, from wherever it was, and I had to find out how much money I had. I would then work it out, I'd know how many parcels were needed per week, which was about 1500, roughly. I'd sort out how much there would be per parcel, and then order all the food. So the food was delivered, I would sort it out into each centre.

When I asked Kim if she had got "involved with any of the political side of the strike" the answer was a definite "no". But when I asked her if any other local women had spoken at meetings or gone picketing, she revealed that she had herself, although she did not appear to view this as "political". Hesitatingly she said: "Well, I spoke at a few meetings as well, just to try and raise support for the families," and when I asked her where she had spoken she said "I went to Nottingham, north Wales, Swansea, Neath".

Pam and Tim also talked about their activities during the strike. Tim was a miner at the time, and Pam was a housewife. Tim said he was involved with

Food parcels mainly. I was picketing in the mornings, and then Tuesdays and Wednesdays we used to go with Kim to pick up the food from one of the big warehouses, back to the Coedwig Welfare, sort it out there into different districts and then the following day we'd be giving it out to people from Blaenant.

Pam was involved in fund raising, selling clothes donated from supporters from all over Britain. She said:

And the women had a second hand clothes shop, in the front room of the Uniform to start with, because the club was empty at the time. We kept it going round the back...and we used to sit out there, and it was full, wasn't it, and we used to sell second hand clothes. I was pregnant at the time and I had all Laura Ashley maternity clothes. I've never been dressed as well as I was in the strike...I think the women did a good job in the strike. I don't think it would have taken off so well up here if we'd left it to the men...I don't think the men would have given up the time the women did to make sure that every miner had a bag of groceries every week.

It is interesting that Pam credits women with maintaining the strike and also looking after the welfare of the miners, something of course which the women did during non-striking times too. Indeed, most people I met saw this type of "pulling together" during the strike as a heightened manifestation in extreme circumstances of something always present in the village. The sense of being a "mining community" meant that people would look out for one another. People in Blaengwyn talked of two main ways of doing this, and I think it is important that for women, looking after children and caring for the sick was emphasised, whereas for men, official male-dominated organisations, associated with the union, such as the Miner's Welfare Association, were stressed.

In my discussion of women's networks, above, and in my depiction of my experiences during participant observation, I hope that I have demonstrated how the informal women's support networks were in operation during my time in the village. Specifically, child care was an important support area where women

assisted friends and family. Also in cases of illness, women friends would make food and clean the houses of their sick friends, and when she was a single woman, sometimes staying overnight to ensure the ill woman was "all right". This happened when Rose (van) was recovering from her hysterectomy.

The examples of how men had contributed towards the closeness of the community were usually spoken of in terms of how once the village had looked after itself, but now had to rely on outside assistance to survive. The village's past as a mining community was often spoken about in terms of self-sufficiency and strong communal feeling. My seventy year old ex-miner and retired opencast worker friend, Jack, told me about the health and other services operated by the local miners' union in the village, and stressed how this related to the community spirit and facilities in the village. He talked about the ambulance service and Doctor's surgery provided by the miners, as well as the donations made from wages for Dr. Barnardo's and towards charities for the blind, as well as contributions from the miners for welfare facilities such as libraries, halls, cinemas and sporting facilities like bowling greens and tennis courts. He said:

Because people relied so much on each other, you know, and they helped each other, well, they had to help each other. Say a boy's father was a butcher. They wouldn't stop him and say 'you can't come in because your father's a butcher', he just went in the cinema like everybody else, he just paid his thruppence and in he went. Whatever, if people were strangers in the village or on holiday, everybody was, and the park, the bandstand, all paid for by the miners, the men paid for them. The council never supplied any of these things see, miners supplied them for themselves. This is what makes you a bit sick about people like Mrs Thatcher saying people should look after themselves. They used to look after themselves, even down to the ambulance car service, and not only did they look after themselves, but they were extremely generous to anybody that lived in the valley or anybody could use these facilities. All that was paid for, these people paid for it themselves.

A borough councillor, Sandra, a former youth worker in her late fifties,



also told me about the facilities provided by the miners and the associated difficulties of maintaining them following the pit closures and related decline in the Miners Welfare Association: "All the leisure activities in the valleys, children's playgrounds, football fields, what have you, were provided by the Miners' Welfare Association....we're suffering a lot because communities can't sustain those facilities up here."

Although the last British Coal pit in the valley was closed in 1990, many people in the village still identified Blaengwyn as a *mining* village. Mining was largely responsible for people moving to the area at the beginning of the century. The ex-miner Danny summed it up when I was chatting with him and his wife about changes in the village with the words: "I think we ate and slept mining, you know, it was all that we talked about, wasn't it?" But coal still plays a major part in the lives of people in the village. At many points along the road side, you can see coal exposed through the grass on which sheep graze, and you can still detect the bumps in the landscape which testify to small mine entrances and outcroppings. Many people still use coal in their homes, and one of the first things I noticed when arriving in the village was the smell of coal burning in grates and oven ranges. When most of the village's men were employed in the industry, subsidised coal would have been the cheapest form of heating, and though some people I spoke to had converted their ranges to oil, coal provided the warmth in most Blaengwyn homes. I did overhear a woman in the bread shop talking about possibly changing to oil: "£3.50 a ton we paid for coal, because my husband worked down the pit, and he just won't pay a lot for it, because he had it so cheap when he was in Blaenant". The other alternatives are electricity or bottled gas, since the village was too remote for piped gas, but converting the ranges is expensive. So coal cutting was still a part of domestic duties in the village, though mechanical feeder machines have recently made this job less arduous.

So physically, coal is still present in the village. But it is also economically important too, with the washery at Coedwig employing about 120 men and opencast sites in the valley and in the two neighbouring valleys each employing only a handful of men but having an imposing presence on the landscape. The opencast sites have been an area of contention in the village, with the environmental disadvantages having to be weighed against the few jobs available for local men as labourers on the sites and financial gains for the village secured in return for the inconvenience of associated dust, noise and heavy traffic. As I have already mentioned, the Old Street Action Group was set up in the street backing on to the latest opencast site, and the implications of this for the "community" are discussed later.

All but the last pit in the valley have been taken down, although it is opposite the remnants of Cefn Coed colliery, which has been turned into a mining museum. But Tower colliery, the last deep pit in Wales, can be seen in the distance from the top of the Dulais Valley, and the Miners' Welfare Hall still stands in Coedwig, testament to a time when the pits were flourishing and miners' subscriptions and voluntary labour built the club.

Souvenirs of the industry are also to be found in the villagers' homes. I was shown countless old brass miners' lamps and commemorative plates with pictures of collieries when I visited houses. When people knew I was interested in changes since the pits closed, these souvenirs acted as a connecting point for people with the past and acted as a catalyst for stories of male household members' connection with the industry at the various pits depicted. It is interesting that it was assumed that I was interested in men's involvement, or that somehow only male associations with the industry would be relevant to my research. One of the women who worked on bread deliveries responded to my question about possible people to talk to with "Who do you want, somebody who's worked in the colliery?" Another example, is a woman who became a

close friend during the period of my fieldwork, Rose (van), who showed me her commemorative pit plates and brass lamps the first time I visited her house. But it was not until almost twelve months later that I discovered from someone else that she herself had worked in the canteen at Blaenant colliery. She was however keen to tell me about the various pits in which her late husband was employed, as if her own involvement would be insignificant to me.

Mining was also referred to as a part of the village's history and used as a metaphor, as when, in the public meeting to discuss the problem of the local surgery not being able to recruit a new doctor, the local councillor, in asking for tolerance of the closed surgery sessions reminded the people at the meeting how difficult it was when a team member was missing from a group of miners underground. Recollections from working underground was a common topic of conversation amongst men and Geraint, a 58 year old ex-miner who was unemployed but was Chair of the Miners' Welfare Hall and worked voluntarily to keep it going told me when we were chatting about the Hall "I mean, you get in here, the first thing you start talking about when you get a few of the old element together is underground and what happened". Similarly, Anthony told me about his visits to the rugby club with an ex-colleague:

Ted, we worked in the same colliery, he's only living next door but one, we go down the rugby club, we talk about rugby, somewhere along the line someone will bring up something about the mine, and we just sit there, not just us two. We're all involved in the mines, and we can just sit down and talk about things that were going on.

But what particularly seized my attention was the way in which many people spoke of coal mining as if it were still a part of everyday life in the village, something identifiable in Anthony's use of the present tense "*We're all involved in the mines*" in the quote above. Another example came from Mary, a woman in her thirties who worked on bread deliveries. She told me about her

husband and his friends talking: "Like now, the boys that he sees from the other valleys, over in Cwmtwrch and everywhere, they always talk about 'I remember this happening, I remember that happening underground', and you know, *they all still think of themselves as being underground*"".

Evan, the Surveying student, told me what he hoped for his children's future:

I suppose a good education, a half decent job. If they wanted to go underground to work, fine, I wouldn't have any problems with that....Let them decide *if they want to to go and work underground*. (My emphasis)

It seems as though the idea of working in pits is still in his mind, even though he has experienced for himself local pit closure and mining is not really a feasible job opportunity for his children. Other people recognised the structural changes taking place as far as the pits were concerned, but identified elements of the mining community way of life still existing.

When I was talking with two women friends, Gail the bakery van driver, and Kate, who was in her twenties and commuted to work in an office in Swansea, we were discussing differences and similarities between the various local villages. The younger woman said "I think we're all on the same wavelength...because it's a mining community, isn't it?" and the older woman said "Like in a mining community they know whatever's going on like, everybody mucks in together, you know, it's closer I think". This point came up again when I was talking with Anthony, who told me

I'd still say it was still a mining community in thought. There isn't any mines left, obviously, and it's quietly dying out as far as we would know it as a mining community. The community's still hard and fast mind.

The point that I would like to emphasise here is that many of the villagers

identified themselves as still belonging to a mining community, yet the pits and facilities provided by the miners had more or less all gone, the only exception being the Welfare Hall which was described as "hanging on by a cord". I think the village is still seen as a mining community not only because of the still existing links with coal, and the memories of ex-miners, but crucially because the women in the village are still doing what they did when the pits were working. They are still helping each other out, "mucking in together".

The women's networks provide a focus and cohesiveness in the village. But women are also active in other aspects of the community, notably in local pressure groups and in support for the local rugby team. The former reveal some splits within the community, whilst the latter does provide an institution around which people in the village were able to identify, not only on a local, but a national level too.

### **Community: conflict**

Pam, the part-time secretary and wife of a former miner retired through ill health told me about a pressure group, the Blaengwyn and Cwm Support Group, which started to get an improved rugby pitch as compensation for the local opencast workings. She stresses that the impetus came from a group of villagers, not the community council, who only became involved when it looked as though something beneficial would happen, which in itself confirms the notion that a community is not an homogeneous entity, but as Cohen says, will be perceived differently by different individuals in it:

We put a sign up that we were going to have a meeting for anybody that was interested, and would they come along. We must have had about 20, wasn't it, turned up at the first meeting in the rugby club?...To start with there was quite a few turned up, and the we elected a committee. And I was elected the secretary, Tim was elected vice-chair person, Gillian was

the chair-person, and we just wrote to various people, to West Glamorgan, the County Council, to British Coal, we wrote to Peter Hain, asking if he would come, Neath Borough Council, and we organised a meeting, and when we got there, we said we didn't know where to start, 'but this is what we want, and how do we get it?' And that's it really, virtually how it came about. Tom Smith from British Coal, he said he'd do a feasibility study and draw up some plans, and costing and things, and see how much it would cost. And when he had all that done, we had another meeting, and we were all shocked knowing how much it was actually going to cost, but then we heard that there was a Sports Council grant available, and they would put half....In the beginning, when we first started it, we didn't get a very good response from the community council, they were hostile....they couldn't give us any advice until we formed an official group that had got a name, and then perhaps they could tell us where to apply for grants...When they actually saw the drawings, you know, what the drawings looked like and they were all in colour in a big glossy portfolio thing and they were quite impressed then and I think they thought yeah, we'll jump on this one, and they did, didn't they?

Pam's husband Tim added "We even had a quarterly circular from the Community Council as it was then, stating on it the work they had done with the help of Blaengwyn and Cwm Support Group, and of course it should have been the other way round."

The manager of the site, formerly employed by British Coal but now working for Celtic Energy after the privatisation of the coal industry, Bob, told me that he felt the villagers were hostile to the opencast site:

I think they all didn't want it, I think the reason it was accepted was because we were prepared to put the money into the community and the Community Councillors and the Borough Councillors and County Councillors could see the good of having the money. It was only a short term life and they could see there wouldn't be much disturbance with it, and as it happened there wasn't that much sort of disturbance.

However, the issue of opencast caused disagreement between different villagers, those living nearest to the site perhaps not surprisingly objecting most strongly to the scheme.

Joanne said:

Well, the Action Group Started from the day we heard that there was opencast mining coming here. What a lot of people didn't like was that we had a meeting in the Coedwig Welfare which the Community Council organised, and British Coal was there, telling us what we were going to have after they had been there. Now people didn't like that, a lot of people didn't like that because they didn't ask us if we wanted it, they just told us what they were going to give us after they finished, and we realised how close it was to the houses, like the boundary fence is just eight yards away from my back gate, and a lot of people said 'No, we don't want it'. So we had a petition and, well, we tried to stop it but of course, when you're talking to British Coal you're talking to the Government, and there's nothing much you can do about it, but that's how the Action Group started.

She was referring to The Old Street Action Group, already mentioned in Chapter 5. It was based in the one street which makes up Blaengwyn, the street nearest the most recently exploited open cast site. Joanne described its activities:

Since the open cast has come here, there's three members of the community have gone on to the liaison committee, and we found out exactly what's going on over there, or if there's any complaints, we get in touch with the liaison committee, see...when they showed us the map in the beginning, they turned and said when the reclamation was put back we'd be having green grass and footpaths, well, as far as we were concerned, that wasn't enough. They, British Coal, have been on this mountain up here for 50 years, and we have never had a penny back. So, it was decided that we fight for more. So we've been to British Coal and they've promised that they are going to give us a big lake, we've also asked for tennis courts, we're hoping to have a bowling green, we've managed to have a recreation ground for the children, we've had more out of them. Now if we'd sat back and nobody'd taken notice of this opencast, wouldn't have had a penny. They have given the all weather surface to the community, which is a big help, you know, but I don't think we would have received anything if nobody had taken notice and let them carry on like they have all the years they've been here.

So, some of the people in the nearest street to the site were going further than the Blaengwyn and Cwm Support Group, asking for more than the all-weather surface. They used the inconvenience of the workings to negotiate with

British Coal for amenities similar to those which had previously been provided by the Miners' Welfare. In her interview Joanne told me about the history of the Action Group and what they wanted from British Coal (now Celtic Energy), and how the Action Group had not appreciated the way the council and support group had presented the negotiation for an all weather rugby field surface in exchange for the right to work the open cast site as a *fait accompli*.

Tim and Pam saw this more militant attitude amongst the Old Street residents as typical of their wanting to be seen as separate from the rest of the village.

When I was asking for clarification as to what exactly made up the village, I was mostly told that the community, in the sense of the community council, was made up of Blaengwyn, Cwm Glân, Coedwig and Glanllwybr. However, the top two villages, Blaengwyn and Cwm Glân were usually identified as being "the village", with a shop in Cwm Glân being called "Blaengwyn Stores" and the bake-house selling "Blaengwyn Bread", for example. Coedwig and Glanllwybr were considered as separate villages, as there was a distinct geographical distance with a road separating the houses in these two villages from those in Cwm Glân, but "part of the community" in the sense that everybody knew each other, whatever village they lived in. Also, the facilities in each village, such as the shops, Welfare Hall, community centre and pubs and clubs were used by people from the neighbouring villages as well as the ones in which they were physically located.

Pam said "when there have been street parties or bonfire night or something like that, instead of it being the whole community joining in and going over the rugby field, Blaengwyn have always had their bonfire and things up behind their houses purely for Old Street children, which seems to me silly because it's just a street," and Tim added "they want to keep their own identity".

Tim described how one woman from Old Street had dropped out of the



Support Group's activities to secure the all weather field "when she knew that we were going to have opencast, and it was generally known that we'd have to have the opencast to get the facility, she dropped out and made a song and dance about it."

Some of the people in Blaengwyn "proper" may have wanted to "keep their own identity", but most of the people I spoke to saw Blaengwyn and Cwm Glân as one village, and certainly people living in what would officially be Cwm Glân gave their address as Blaengwyn. Mary put it like this; "We're all one, yes, a very friendly village...they all pull together if something happens, you know, they're there." An elderly widow summed up the majority held view when I asked if she thought of herself as being from Blaengwyn or Cwm Glân: "Well, the same, isn't it?".

The rugby team seems to be something which people from all areas of the village identify with, as demonstrated by the huge turnout to support the team when it played in the final of an all-Wales competition in Cardiff, the subject of the next chapter.

## **Ethnicity**

The issue of ethnicity, in this case "Welshness", was something that I was conscious of during my participant observation and, as I mentioned in my introductory remarks, as a Welsh woman myself, through my own life experiences. I wanted to investigate ethnicity in my interviews as well, although recognising the difficulty in defining something like "Welshness".

My data confirm that notions of "Welshness" were important in Blaengwyn. For example, one day Jack told me that Mrs Patel had left her husband and was now living in a housing association house nearby. Jack had gone into the Patels' shop one day to find Mrs Patel crying. Jack asked Joanne to

see what was wrong, as Joanne used to work there and knew Mrs Patel quite well. She told Joanne that her husband, evidently a Muslim, had gone out to India and had married another bride. Mr Patel was waiting a couple of months to meet immigration requirements, and the new wife would be joining them soon.

Joanne told Jack and he said:

Make sure she gets all her rights, Joanne. She's a Welsh woman now, not an Indian woman, make sure she gets all the Welfare she's due.

Joanne had helped her make arrangements to get the house and benefit entitlements so that she could leave her husband. I asked Jack what he thought it meant "to be Welsh" and he answered

Well, Steph, they talk about Welsh nationalism and Scottish nationalism, but it's more a case of English nationalism. That's why the Welsh and Scottish are complaining, because they're left out of things so much.

Jack often dropped Welsh words into his speech, apparently unconsciously, because he claimed not to be able to speak Welsh. He would say "Ble mae..?" (Where is..?) when looking for something, use "Iesu Mawr" (Great Jesus), "Iesu Grist" (Jesus Christ) or "daro, daro" (damn, literally, "struck") as a term of exclamation, and said "Pat would always clecs (local Welsh dialect for "chat") with Elaine, see". Jack was not the only person in the valley to do this. In fact many customers would drop Welsh words into the middle of a sentence of English. One day in the shop a customer was explaining who someone was, "You know, the cochgin (red head)," she explained. Similarly, when Rose (shop) asked a customer how her decorating was coming on, she replied "Oh, mae'n dod nawr, (it's coming now) thanks." One of the women I sat with outside the rugby club started a sentence "Dim yn licio" (I don't like), and Gillian said "I'll put the money in this little cwttch (hidey-hole) over here". All these phrases were spoken

by people who said that they could not speak Welsh. They clearly had known some Welsh at some time, and particular phrases stuck in their minds. Jack said that he could understand some Welsh, and I think much of the villagers' denial of being able to speak the language was more to do with their lack of confidence in being able to speak it "correctly" than in their lack of knowledge of the language at all or their not considering it of value. Many people congratulated me for going to Welsh classes, saying that they wished they could speak Welsh. Many said that Welsh had been "knocked out of" them at school, and they were glad that their children now had the chance to learn it.

Jack told me a joke which nicely illustrates the comic and creative possibilities of whole or partial bilingualism.

It's about a group of miners from the valley going to a posh restaurant in Swansea for a treat one night. The waiter said 'Do you want to see the menu?' 'Menyw? (woman), it's food we want!' they replied.

Whether it was the odd Welsh words slipped into English conversations, people helping me practise my Welsh when they found out that I was learning the language, or Jack's definition of Welsh citizenship in relationship to Mrs Patel to ensure she received all her rights, or his belief that English nationalism had led to Scottish and Welsh nationalism, the issue is complex. Like the concept of "community", the notion of what it is to be Welsh means different things to different people, and the notion of a "Welsh" identity is problematic.

The village is unmistakably geographically situated in Wales, and Welsh is still spoken there by some people. Of those who did not speak Welsh, the majority, many people in the village expressed regret at not being able to speak the language, and some saw the ability to speak the Welsh language as a positive identifier of Welshness.

For example, Anthony, an ex-miner in his 50s, employed seasonally on a

barge, told me that when he in the services, his Welsh language ability was a source of pride when he was stationed abroad and met other Welsh people:

No matter what country you went to, there was always a group of Welsh people, and the first thing they would do was sit you down and start speaking Welsh. Now, if you couldn't speak Welsh it was such an embarrassment and I had many of my mates felt that when they sat in a group with me.

I asked Anthony why he thought Welsh was no longer the majority language in the valley, and he said "It should never have been stopped in schools". Phoebe, the part-time home help, also in her 50s had experienced a similar situation in her education, and also blamed the schools for her not being fluent now. Her mother was a fluent Welsh speaker, and Phoebe can understand some Welsh still and said "I can speak to somebody in Welsh as long as it doesn't go too deep, you know." Phoebe said that when she went to school "you were learning a little bit of Welsh but it was nothing, no it was all English spoken, you know."

Apart from the language, some people identified character traits as being typically Welsh. Pam, for example, said that she thought that the Welsh men she knew were chauvinistic, linking their socialising habits to their work in coal mining and love of rugby: "It's their work ethic and their rugby club, and you know, the rugby on a Saturday afternoon and a drink with the boys after, and I think that is a Welsh tradition, a Welsh mining tradition...I don't think it will change although the mines have closed, the sons of the miners are doing what their dads did, and I think that will carry on."

Kim identified a distinct Welshness in the solidarity she experienced during the 1984-5 miners' strike. Comparing the situation in south Wales with another mining community she had visited in Nottingham, she said:

It was totally different, I mean the Welsh people stuck together in communities far far stronger than they did up there. They were fighting against one another, in families as well...one brother was working and another brother wasn't, they didn't stick together as communities at all, in fact they were completely split. Whereas down here, you very rarely had anybody that was against the mining communities at all. Everybody tried to help, no matter how small the amount....In Ireland the community is very similar, although it wasn't a mining community, they all tended to pull together the same as the Welsh people.

Eisteddfodau were discussed during my fieldwork, and of course the year before I arrived the National Eisteddfod of Wales had been held in the next valley. Joanne mentioned competing in eisteddfodau in school, and the male voice choir regularly competed in various eisteddfodau, such as the south Wales Miners' Eisteddfod.

When I asked local people if they were Welsh, everybody said "yes", or in the case of Gail, "Well, I'm not bloody English!", but I realise now that it was a meaningless question. Ethnicity is similar to "community", in the sense that it is about "belonging", and boundaries which come to the fore during different circumstances. So for people in Blaengwyn, most of the time they would not have to think about whether they were Welsh or not, they would just *be* Welsh. Gail saw herself as Welsh as opposed to being English, Anthony's Welshness was emphasised when he was stationed abroad. Jack considered Mrs Patel Welsh, as a means of getting out of a predicament borne out of her own Asian ethnicity and the laws regarding marriage in India.

## **Summary**

When Gwyn Evans wrote his dissertation at the time that pit closures in the Dulais valley were beginning, he suggested that the "mine is the heart of a mining community and with its closure the community will cease to be a mining community and may disintegrate" (Evans, 1963, p. 132). But my

interview data, collected thirty years later and after the closure of the last mine in the valley, reinforces my participant observation data by showing that the villagers have not experienced the situation this way. Both sets of data reveal the strength of feeling that the village is still a “mining” community, and that this identity is maintained through strong gender segregation which operates through men’s and women’s networks. These are most clearly defined in terms of paid and unpaid work, and leisure. The Welsh identity of the village is evidently important in Blaengwyn, and co-exists with the class and occupational aspects of the village’s identity. The fact that the community was dependent on the men’s employment for so many of its facilities in the past, such as sports, healthcare and socialising through the Miners’ Welfare organisation, is emphasised strongly in the interview data, which again confirms the findings from my participant observation.

It has been a very difficult process for me to try and combine an analysis of my interviews with my ethnographic material, and I think this is because the two research methods proved problematic for me. As I have said, I needed to do the interviews to be a “proper” researcher in the eyes of people in Blaengwyn, as opposed to just “hanging about”. But my relationships with the villagers were such that I felt as though I was being too inquisitive in the interviews. The dilemma has resurfaced in my attempts to combine the data collected by the two different methods, but I hope that in the end they have proved complementary rather than contradictory or too awkward, and that all the research methods, the statistical analysis, the questionnaire survey, the participant observation and the interviews, together with the review of relevant empirical and theoretical literature contribute to an ethnography which gives a fair, though inevitably partial and subjective representation of Blaengwyn during my fieldwork year. The next chapter explores a distinctive event which for me captures the essence of that year, and it is used as a metaphor to assist my analysis.

## Chapter 8

### The ethnographic metaphor

#### Introduction

I have situated this description of a rugby match as my penultimate chapter because it brings together many of the themes explored so far in the ethnography, and I want to use the trip as an analytical device to explore my data. It seems to me to sum up what life in the village was like when I did my fieldwork, and even though it is an exceptional event, it captured for me the fundamental nature of everyday life in Blaengwyn.

#### The Rugby Trip

The Blaengwyn rugby team reached the final of the Prysgr Whitbread Welsh Districts Cup during my year of fieldwork. I had witnessed the commitment of team members training on the all-weather surface provided by British Coal Open cast, in “all weathers”. Although not interested in sport myself, I could not help but notice the high regard for the game in Blaengwyn. The previous Saturday's match was discussed each Monday in the bake-house, and I was invited by Gail, who worked on bread deliveries, to a match in Rhigos. She was regarded as the loudest supporter, screaming at her husband and other players from the edge of the field to play better. Unfortunately even her enthusiasm could not prevent the Rhigos match being cancelled due to torrential rain. So, in the end, the first match I saw Blaengwyn Rugby Football Team play turned out to be their finest hour, and the first rugby match that I

ever went to in my life happened to be in the National Stadium at Cardiff Arms Park. The final of the Cup was played at the end of April, about half way through my fieldwork. The week before the match, whilst out celebrating a woman friend's 40th birthday in the one surviving pub in the village, the club coach said to me about the final: "You must go, if you're interested in the village, it'll be a great day out."

As a dutiful anthropologist, I knew I could not miss the match, but I did not look forward to the trip for a number of reasons. Firstly, I had no interest in the game itself and I thought that the match, though ethnographically interesting, would be boring in itself. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 5, a male admirer from the village attempted to use the game to entice me to Cardiff for his "birthday treat"; but I was anxious to ward off his advances. Thirdly, I knew that from the anthropological point of view I should travel to the match with most of the rest of the village, that is, on one of the coaches. But, I am very travel sick, and was dreading the journey itself.

However, I am now very glad that despite my hesitations I went to the match in Cardiff. Anthropologists usually take a society, village or group of people out of context for consideration in their ethnographies. I am also doing this of course, but in this case, the village took itself out of context to Cardiff for the day and thus, I realised when analysing my data prior to starting to write up my thesis, has provided me with an apposite metaphor for exploring community and gender identity in the village. By recounting the events of the day as experienced by me, an interesting analysis of the community, including my own position in it, can be achieved.



## The Day Out

Seven coaches left the village from the Rugby Club, and two from the pub, on the morning of the Cup Final. They were full of supporters going to the game in Cardiff. In addition, some villagers went in their own cars. In all, about 1,000 people went to the match from the village. At this point it is worth reminding the reader that the total population is only approximately 1,300.

I had put my name down for a seat on one of the Rugby Club buses. This cost £2, and the match ticket cost £4. I had to go into the club to find my coach allocation details, and ascertained that I was on bus number 5. The club was full of people, and about thirty were standing outside drinking beer when I arrived at the club at about 10am. Children were running around excitedly, drinking cola and eating crisps. Many of their faces were painted with stage make up: one half vertically up to the middle of the nose red, the other side black, the team colours. There were notices in the back of the coach windows: "Jeff Rodgers' red and black army" and "The Blaengwyn girls are on the piss again".

When I joined my women friends by pushing through the crush of drinking bodies in the downstairs bar and climbing the stairs to the first floor bar where women were painting their friends' and children's faces, the Blaengwyn girls were indeed "on the piss again". Alcohol was being consumed by adults in this bar as well, which was full of women, mostly sporting red jerseys and black, red and white mining helmets, and children, the men remaining downstairs. After having a chat with my friends and enjoying a beer with them, it was time for the coaches to leave so we all took our places and left the village in a convoy onto the M4. From my vantage point at the front of the coach I could see an enormous whisky bottle (it must

have held at least five litres) being passed around in the coach in front.

I sat in the front seat because of my travel sickness, next to a middle-aged man from a neighbouring village. We talked about where I came from, what I was doing in Blaengwyn, and about his job as a carpet supplier. He had supplied carpets to the Halls of Residence at my university.

We also chatted about the rugby team. He emphasised the achievement of the team to get to the final, as it was made up entirely of local men, and that it was a boost to morale to what was a very deprived area. The opposing team was also from a deprived area, he advised me, a large council estate in Cardiff. He also laughed about the unofficial use of the large open cast site for dumping and burying cars involved in insurance claim fiddles.

The coaches soon became separated in the busy motorway traffic, but we all ended up at about half past twelve in the centre of Cardiff at a hotel where the Rugby Club had paid for all those travelling by coach to have a buffet reception prior to the match. It had cost £2.50 per head, and there was much grumbling at the "cheek of it" because the buffet consisted of one chicken, ham or cheese sandwich each, and these were made from sliced white bread and presented on cardboard plates covered with cling film. There was also outrage at the price of drinks, for example "bloody £2.20 for a bottle of Budweiser, ridiculous, mun". However, the prices did not stop the "hwyl" (fun) and people chatted, laughed, posed for photographs and drank their drinks, children ran around and danced to background music. It was a fine day, so some chose to carry their drinks out onto the terrace. By about two o'clock everyone decided to leave the hotel to walk round to the Arms Park.

Cardiff shoppers looked on askance as a line of people snaked round the corner to the ground's entrance. As we went, the group of supporters I was with, comprising women and children, sang songs and chants such as "Seven

Sisters went to Rome to see the Pope, Seven Sisters went to Rome to see the Pope, Seven Sisters went to Rome to see the Pope, and this is what he said: "Fuck Off!" and "Who are, who are, who are we, we are Blaengwyn RFC!"

As we neared the grounds, we were directed by grounds officials into the stand in which both sets of supporters would sit. It was immediately apparent that although the other team was local in the sense that it was from Cardiff, it had about a third as many supporters as Blaengwyn. Club committee members were sitting in specially reserved seats near the front. As we were arriving, the son of one of the team members and one of my friends from the bakery who delivered bread was kicking a ball around the pitch, dressed in Blaengwyn's colours. His mother was sitting next to me. Her daughter Andrea was upset because her friends were ignoring her, and she started crying as the teams came onto the field amidst horn blowing and clapping. Andrea's mother, Mary, said "Look, Andrea, this is a very important moment for your father, he's playing on the national stadium, so just shut up". One of the Blaengwyn players kissed the turf as he arrived on the field.

During the match there was much shouting, singing and booing from both sets of supporters. Despite trailing at half time, Blaengwyn eventually won. The supporters were screaming, and some of them were crying with joy. Both sets of supporters clapped when the teams went to collect the cup, medals and tankards. As we left the stadium, to go back to the hotel, the "Who are, who are, who are we, we are Blaengwyn RFC" chant started up again. When we got back to the bar, drinking continued until we got back on our coaches in the early evening.

My front seat had been taken by a teenager, and the man in the next seat, whom I did not know, said "Come and sit by me, love". Two young men sitting near by said "You'll regret that" and he replied "I won't molest her" as

he squeezed my knee. He then lit up a cigarette and said "You don't mind if I do, do you" but it made me feel instantly nauseous so I went to sit behind the two young men, explaining that I feel sick on coaches and that cigarette smoke makes it worse. "Good move" the young men said.

I was joined by a man who introduced himself as "Whizzo", otherwise known as Owain, from Glanllwybr. I noticed that he had one finger missing from his right hand, and guessed correctly that he was an ex-miner. During the trip back to Blaengwyn, he asked me about my research, and we talked about his political views and his experiences living in the valley. He had been unable to get a job since Blaenant closed in 1990:

They saw us as pit fodder, so they didn't educate us too well. Now they complain that we can't do anything else, we can't retrain. Well they can't expect us to read and write well because they never educated us for that.

He told me he was a "Welsh nationalist, almost a communist", though really he had had enough of politics: "We need a revolution, not elections, and I hate that Margaret Thatcher" he said, spitting on the floor of the coach to emphasise his disgust. As we passed the Cefn Coed colliery museum, opposite the entrance to Blaenant's derelict pit baths, he told me "That's the deepest anthracite mine in the world - go down there and after three days you speak with an Australian accent - they don't have pit ponies down there, they have kangaroos".

During our conversation, an elderly man, friend of my neighbour for the outward journey, asked me in Welsh if I was all right. I smiled. He then asked me in English, and I replied "I'm fine, thanks". He overheard the young men in front of me swearing and asked them if they spoke Welsh. "No" they replied, and he said "Well, you don't speak proper English either". The young

men apologised to me and said they thought that I couldn't hear them. The old man also told off the middle aged and younger men who got off the bus to relieve themselves behind some bushes "Don't you know there are ladies on the bus?"

As the bus slowed down to let the old man off outside his house, because he had decided not to return to the club, he said to me "Fancy coming from Haverfordwest and not speaking Welsh". I answered "'Dw i'n dysgu" (I'm learning) and Whizzo said "Well, you're doing better than me then". "Dych chi'n trio" (You're trying), the old man smiled as he struggled to get off the coach with his two walking sticks. Whizzo remarked "As for the language, well, you can't change what's happened over hundreds of years overnight". Then the bus drew up outside the rugby club, and we all went into the club, myself relieved that I had not been sick on either journey.

I again went upstairs to join my friends from other coaches. Two women with painted faces and miners' helmets were dancing on chairs. We chatted as a group of women and occasionally got up to dance to the disco music provided by a Disc Jockey. We were waiting for the victorious team to return. They had been entertained to a meal in Cardiff, but eventually they turned up with the club committee, all dressed in their team blazers, and a loud cheer went up in the upstairs bar.

The disco was interrupted by speeches in which the club president and coach thanked everybody for their support. The coach particularly thanked the players, the sponsors and especially the supporters who had travelled all over Wales to watch the team play. He ended his speech with "Thank you girls" and provoked laughter by sipping champagne from the trophy, and passing it round amongst team members, emphasising that the Spar shop in *Seven Sisters* had provided the bubbly.

The celebrations continued all night, but some of my friends and I left at about eleven o'clock. On my way out I met the man who had invited me to Cardiff, and I said "Happy Birthday". He asked me where I was going and looked disappointed when I told him I was going home. I found out later that some men had not left the club until Sunday night, such was their enjoyment of the celebrations.

So much for recounting the day's events as seen through the eyes of a researcher ignorant of sport in general and rugby in particular. How can this help us understand the complexities of life in Blaengwyn and in particular community, ethnic and gender identities? What relevance does this have to the ethnography presented in the previous chapters?

### **The Rugby Metaphor**

I believe that by looking at an event like the rugby outing, and the things that occurred during it, and by contextualising it within my whole research experience, useful insights into life in Blaengwyn can be glimpsed.

I want to look at the symbolic aspects of the rugby trip as well as the material events of the day, and combine these with data obtained during the whole fieldwork process in order to analyse the various and overlapping identities in the community.

### **Rugby in Blaengwyn**

The rugby team in Blaengwyn was not formed until 1948. This is comparatively late compared to other villages in the valley. Crynant had a rugby team as early as 1890, Seven Sisters by 1897 (Evans, 1964, pp.149 & 152).

Support, I am informed, for the team in Blaengwyn was strong when the team first started, but it has never been stronger than it is now. One of the players told me that the team was struggling fifteen to twenty years ago: "struggling for support and players, the bigger clubs were taking the better players but now they're sticking to Blaengwyn". I think it is interesting that support has increased locally during the period when the mining industry has contracted. The same player agreed that there might be a link between the two "Yes, when the pits were going strong the club was not very strong, but now the pits have gone, it's thriving".

References to rugby came up during my interviews, taped conversations and during day to day chats. Following international matches, the national team's performance was discussed, and the Rugby World Cup was a common feature of conversation in the village amongst men and women. One man advised me that I could definitely not interview him until the World Cup was over. Readers are probably not surprised by this, because my fieldwork was based in Wales, after all, and it a common stereotype that *all* Welsh people like rugby.

This is clearly not true, as I myself am Welsh, and am not at all interested in the game. I have in fact agonised over whether I should even be including a chapter on rugby at all, since I am aware that it may be seen to confirm the stereotype. But, as in all stereotypes, there is a basis of truth in the representation, and I decided that it would be an unjustifiable misrepresentation *not* to include a discussion of the rugby match and its sociological metaphors. As the team coach had emphasised, if I was interested in the village, I had to go to the Cup Final. A member of the community was giving me a very clear pointer to how to find out about life in the community.

Rugby is undeniably the national sport of Wales, and to some it is

almost a religion. It is also a very masculine game. This point was stressed to me when Gillian, my landlady, once asked me if my husband liked rugby. When I replied "Not really" she said "Well, what sort of a man is he then?".

I believe that in Blaengwyn, masculine identity formerly associated with mining in the community has been transmuted into a masculinity expressed through playing and supporting rugby. The identification of the rugby team with the village is vital here, as is the fact that rugby is the national sport of Wales. All three identities are interwoven in this way, and women's identities as supporters are also expressions of gender, community and national identities.

Smith and Williams (1980) chart the rise in popularity of the game in Wales during the period of rapid industrialisation in the late nineteenth century (p. 15 & 29) and dismiss the various claims that it as a traditional Welsh game (pp. 17-19), but through their book go on to demonstrate that it is undoubtedly a Welsh game now. When I was growing up in the 1970s, the Welsh team was very successful, winning the Triple Crown and Grand Slam more often than any other national team during that decade, and uninterested in the game as I was, even I used to boast at school of how my brother had been in college with one of the stars of the Welsh team, Gareth Edwards. When I moved to London after leaving school, my work colleagues presumed that I would be watching all the international games on television, and one manager even asked me to obtain a ticket for a Wales-England match in Cardiff through my family contacts with a local club in Pembrokeshire. So, though I am not a rugby fan myself, I am well acquainted with the passion that rugby arouses, and is expected to arouse in Welsh people.

Rugby is linked to Welsh identity amongst Welsh people and elsewhere, through stereotyping and through real enthusiasm for the game.



My moving to London at eighteen was instructive in making me aware of how English people see Welsh people. When people learned I was from Wales, they assumed, as already stated, that I must like rugby, and that my father must be a miner, and that I must be from the valleys. There is an element of pure ignorance in these perceptions of course, and in my case, none of these was true. However, my own experience of seeing how others see the Welsh has alerted me to how national identity is formed by the inter-relationship of those bearing it and by those witnessing it through media representations and cross-border contact.

At the time of writing this, three Welsh rugby team members have been among the celebrities used by the supporters of a Welsh Assembly to encourage a "Yes" vote in the Referendum on devolved political power to Wales, considered influential enough, and important enough "Welsh" personalities, to persuade voters on this important decision. David Andrews sets out the historical relationship between masculine and national identity as articulated in playing and supporting rugby in Wales (Andrews, 1996, pp. 50 - 61). He suggests that during the period of industrialisation in south Wales in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "a maturing, male-dominated, Welsh industrial middle class sought to create a united, harmonious and livable present through the creation of a unifying Welsh national identity which was relevant to the modern industrial experience", and claims that the game of rugby was the main conduit for this (Andrews, 1996, p.53). He notes that the new national anthem "Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau" ("Land Of My Fathers") was first sung in a large public gathering at the international rugby match between New Zealand and Wales in 1905, indicative of the development of the game into "a high-profile symbol of a vibrant, and self-confident, male-oriented Welsh national ideology" (Andrew,

1996, pp. 59 & 53). Andrews discusses the identification in the popular media of successful Welsh rugby players with Celtic warrior ancestors, a construction of a certain type of "Welshness" popular at the time (Andrews, 1996, pp. 54 - 61). This image is still present in Wales today. As Nauright and Chandler say, rugby is viewed as "one of the most masculine and manly of sports", and this association between a Welsh national identity and a masculine sport is important for an understanding of both nationalism and gender (Nauright and Chandler, 1996, p.2). At the micro level, it is also interesting to examine how this relationship between a gendered identity, expressed and constructed through a masculinised sport, and ethnic and community identity, is articulated.

Blaengwyn is in Wales, and therefore as in many other towns and villages, rugby is an important point of focus in the community. This cross over between national and local identity is very important, I believe, and is emphasised by the occasion of the Cup final match because it was played at the national stadium in Cardiff. The significance of this is demonstrated by the player kissing the turf before the match, and Mary's comment to her daughter about how special an occasion it was for her husband. It is also significant that the local team had reached the final of a national cup competition by playing teams from all over Wales at their level. This was regarded as the icing on the cake of their nine consecutive championships in the Neath and District league, a timely demonstration of the team's optimistic future as they were moving up to the next level just a few leagues below Seven Sisters.

I had wondered about the derogatory chant about the nearby village, Seven Sisters and thought the reference to the Pope may have some relationship to the "Plant Marie" (Mary's children) insult directed at people one does not like, and which one of my Welsh teachers explained had its

origins in the ill feeling between nonconformists and Catholics in Wales. But the song about Seven Sisters was not real animosity between the two villages, but rather "happy niggling" for their side having poached many good players from the village in the past, as the Blaengwyn Rugby Club president explained to me:

You see Seven Sisters have had a first class team always, as far as I can remember. In the WRU, which is Welsh Rugby Union, we've always been a junior league side, which, there's a big gap between the two of us, because I mean they're in the upper bracket, especially now in, they're in Division 3 or 4 of the Heineken League. Well, we've won the cup now, the Prysg Cup, at the National Stadium, well, we were just having a little rant over them like. And of course they have actually took a lot of our players, when I say took, I mean a lot of our players went to better themselves, which they did by going to a higher bracket club, but now we are in the bracket they are in, because they're three leagues above, it'll take us three years hopefully and we'll be in the same league as them. Well, a few of their players now, which are our players, can go back to us. So we're just rubbing a bit of salt in the wound.

This friendly rivalry which expressed a sense of "belonging", as discussed in Chapter 2, could manifest itself in people's choice of where to live, the rugby club often being quoted as a reason for wanting to live in a specific village. For example, an ex-miner who is now disabled and is studying part time explained why he and his wife refused to live in Seven Sisters:

It's the camaraderie attached to the rugby, isn't it? There's like a stigma attached to it, I'm not going to live there and play with them.

I asked him about my idea that the rugby clubs were taking over as a focus for community identity now that the mines had closed, and he strongly agreed:

The communities you had years ago when you had a mine, you were held together by the pit. Each village had a pit and you were held by

that. Now I think what keeps the communities together is the actual rugby teams, the rugby clubs, 'cause everybody can identify with them, be involved with them.

An ex-miner who now works in seasonal employment on a canal in the Neath valley recognised the importance of rugby in bringing members of the community together:

The community spirit is still there, as you've found yourself from the rugby, the whole village, if I was a good thief, that's the very day I would have come up here, 'cause there was nobody here.

The former NUM chairman at Blaenant, Pete, talked about a rugby metaphor associated with industrial disputes in the mine:

If you had two stubborn heads together it was 'ok, let's go, we're not doing it, ok, we're on our way'. And the call would go out then, you know, 'the ball is in the river', that meant that people wanted to walk, like, you know, and out they'd go.

I asked what that meant and he explained:

The ball was in the river and that was to signify everything's over, the game has stopped. I think it came from, we were playing, this goes back to when we were playing rugby, I'm not sure if it was in Hirwaen or not, and obviously they had two balls, they had two match balls in the club and they had this full back that could kick it from anywhere. But when he caught the ball and kicked it into touch, it went in the river, about 20 yards away, you know. And he kicked the first ball in there, the first ball floated down the river, everyone was trying, they couldn't get at it you know, so they brought the second one. About 10 minutes later he kicked the second one in, so the two balls were in the river and everyone had to come off the field and try to get the balls, you know. But in the end we didn't, the game was called off, you know, so it went from that, like, you know.

This demonstrates how the sporting imagery infiltrated the pits, and he

also described how rugby was a topic of conversation underground. He associated the two spheres, the rugby field, and the pit, with a certain type of masculinity and talked about the situation (importantly in the present tense) underground: "It's very macho, it's men and it's men and boys and we talk about rugby and women and things like that, it's a very macho outlook in that sort of set up".

Despite the game itself being very "macho", Peter thought that the rugby club was a means of women being more involved in social activities in the village, and he spoke of the 1960s as a time when women were encouraged to go to the clubs to increase support and revenue:

About the '60s, the clubs started opening up, you know, the rugby clubs pushed on things as far as women were concerned because you had, you know, women's committees being involved, you know, supporters' committees, you know, so they wanted their enjoyment then so they wanted their big bands, and of course the situation of being a loose woman in the clubs went and just died a death, like. There were business pressures from all directions, there were pressures coming as far as, obviously if you wanted a thriving rugby club, I mean, you're not going to have blokes in a rugby club with their macho image dancing with themselves, are you, they need someone to dance with, and that was it, of course. The '60s did make a big difference, a big impact, 60's wasn't it, changes going on all over the place.

This quotation is significant because it refers to women's emerging role as important supporters in the rugby clubs, a role still recognised today and valued in the coach's victory speech at the club after the Cup win. It is not only on the edge of the field that women in Blaengwyn support the rugby team. Women voluntarily clean the club's kitchen area, one of the women working on bread deliveries washes the kit, the baker's wife arranged sponsorship of the team by supplying their kit. Even the steward employed by the club has unpaid help from his wife Mary who butters and fills all the rolls which are

on sale in the club.

The game is important thus for national, community and gender identity. When the Welsh team plays international matches in Scotland every two years, local men go up to Castle Douglas to spend the week-end with long established friends who make a return visit to the area when Scotland's team play in Cardiff on the alternate years, a tradition at least 25 years old.

The quotation about the trips from Mary reproduced in Chapter 7 confirms that they were very much a men-only event, and something which her husband had done every two years since their marriage in 1982. During the interview I asked Mary what she thought went on during these trips and she answered "I don't care as long as they go; I enjoy myself, I don't care" and explained that she and her female friends went out to a nightclub in Swansea on the Saturday night that the husbands were away in Scotland, one of her children staying at her mother in law's, the other at her niece's, adding "Oh, I would have farmed them out anywhere, Steph; he's gone, so I'm going".

Rugby trips to watch international matches were important in the establishment of another male only preserve supported by women in the community, the local male-voice choir. The chairman of the choir told me that supporters singing whilst away on rugby trips suggested at a Welfare Hall meeting that their musical talents be enhanced by the formation of a choir, as was recounted in Chapter 7.

The choir was established in 1969 and went on to perform regularly, not just on rugby trips to Scotland but at concerts throughout Britain and Europe. It is also interesting that although an all-male choir, the support of women for it is apparent in catering, fund-raising and secretarial tasks.

## Identities

I believe that rugby in Blaengwyn is important in itself for analysing ethnic, community and gender identities. By looking more closely at other aspects of the trip to Cardiff and the prior and ensuing celebrations one can also gain an insight into understanding these identities and how they are inter-related.

My own identity is relevant here, as I was categorically told that as a researcher interested in the village, I ought to go on the trip to see what the village was like. My position in the community as a married woman whose husband was living else-where was considered as somewhat dubious, as reflected in the invitation to go to Cardiff with a single man who was quite blatant about wanting to have a sexual relationship with me. His advances were different from those of the man who squeezed my knee on the coach or the men working in the bakery who propositioned me frequently but in jest. These incidences were kept very much on a joking level, and I felt able to answer back in a joking manner myself. The invitation to Cardiff, however, set in the context of regular "chatting up" by this man was more difficult to handle, though in the end when I insisted that I was happily married and not interested, I was left alone. The situation was difficult because the man had given me a present shortly after my arrival in the village, a lump of coal from the colliery he had last worked in, and I did not want to appear ungrateful. A recent volume of essays addresses how problematic such situations in anthropological fieldwork can be, and Eva Moreno's essay in particular, which recounts her experience of rape in Ethiopia, alerts one to how dangerous doing fieldwork as a woman can be (Moreno, 1995). As a researcher I needed to maintain good relations with members of the community, but as a woman living for half the fieldwork time on my own, I felt vulnerable and to be

honest sometimes fearful for my safety when I was alone in the bungalow at night. Moreno points out that rape is often used as a means of punishing women who do not conform to the sanctioned notion of femininity in a society, as was the case in her experience (Moreno, 1995, pp. 219 - 222). This was partly why I felt vulnerable, I think, but I was also concerned that any resentment towards me in the village caused by the fact that I was carrying out the research could result in an attack on me. However, I have and had no evidence of any ill feeling towards me, so it was probably a completely irrational response and just caused by nervousness at being on my own after living with my husband for over 15 years. My guilty feelings about doing the research at all undoubtedly played a part in my fear, my feeling that I was exploiting the community being reflected back onto punishment of myself. These feelings also made me realise that I was far from feeling "at home" in the village, and that this had implications for the "insider anthropology" status of my research.

My gender's part in the research process is evident throughout in that most of my informants were women, as it was much easier for me to make friends with them without speculation about my possible sexual motives in getting to know them. My chief informant was a man, a man in his seventies, at a similar age to my father, and I was mistaken for his daughter-in-law during my fieldwork. But even he was teased about our friendship and his friends joked that I was his girl-friend. I do not think anyone really thought that we were having a sexual relationship, but the mere fact of the joking does indicate that suspicions would have been aroused had I been as friendly with younger men.

This closeness to women rather than men meant that apart from my time on the coach, all my time during the "big day" was spent with women,



the Blaengwyn girls who were "on the piss again". Women in Blaengwyn tend to socialise together, and women's identity as supporters of men's activities is emphasised by the placing of this notice on the back of all the coaches. The notice was placed by young women and alludes not only to the women's enjoyment capabilities, but identifies them with the team and the community, and in a way claims the trip as their own since they isolate themselves on the notice from the male supporters on the coach.

The painting of faces and wearing of miners' helmets identifies the women with the rugby team and the dominant industry which was associated with the village. This identification as a mining community is part of the 'habitus' discussed in Chapter 2. The community is still identifying itself as a mining community, but the women are now its signifiers through their supporters' helmets: they have become substitutes for the men whose focus of identity is now the rugby team as players and supporters, through committee work and celebrations in the club house lasting days at a time. The women, who support in a different way, by attending matches and doing catering and cleaning jobs, are complementing the men's masculinity through their gender crossing dress: in a way they are symbols of the industrial past of Blaengwyn and recognition that the mining industry has gone for ever but has not been forgotten and is still identified with the village.

The deprivation suffered in the area was discussed by neighbour on the coach on the journey to Cardiff, and the real experience of this was expressed in shock at the price of drinks in the Hotel and the paltry buffet provided for the supporters at a cost of £2.50 each.

My neighbour on the return trip, Whizzo, personifies the tensions between gender, community and ethnic identity in the village, and he demonstrates a clear analytical understanding of his own position amongst

the major structural changes which have impacted upon the village. He was despondent about his future prospects and realised that the educational system had not prepared him for anything but mining. In a meeting with the former NUM Chairman some months after the rugby match, the union official happened to mention Whizzo, during a discussion on the union official's personnel role and danger in the pit, and I then understand that Whizzo had got his nickname through his wizardry as a repair man underground. The former union leader told me:

He's probably one of the best repairers I've ever come across. Well, inevitably in Welsh coal mining you'd have problems, roof problems, and they would start off with a little trickle in front of the face until it would open into a huge chasm. And these could be anything up to about 20 or 30 feet. Now you put a novice in there, or a person that's a little bit nervous, and he would go in and probably kill himself because the stones would be coming down all over the place, he wouldn't know where to start. Well, this particular bloke, Whizzo, terrific, and just about the only one I could put in there.

Five years after Blaenant closed, it was no wonder that this brilliant repairer was feeling bitter towards the Prime Minister who had progressed the closure of pits and was seen as the figure-head of opposition to the miners during the 1984-5 strike. He had not lost his sense of humour, as demonstrated by his jokes about the deep pit going down as far as Australia, and it is significant that he used the present tense to talk about the pit too, again 'habitus' from the past is imposing on present perceptions and identity.

Whizzo's inability to speak Welsh and his recognition that this is due to hundreds of years of historical events is a reflection of the tensions within Welsh identity, and the old man's conversation with me and the young men sitting in front of me highlights the ambiguities inherent in a community situated in Wales, where some people are able to speak the native tongue but

many others can not.<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

I hope this chapter has demonstrated the worth of focussing on one event encountered during research and exploring different aspects of that event as well as how it fits in with other elements of life in the community. I have used the rugby metaphor to consider the implications of the game itself, but also its wider implications in Blaengwyn, and have argued that it is a means through which masculine and therefore community identity has been transmuted from an association with mining to the rugby team. National identity and women's identity is also linked to this, and whereas women were supporting the mining community identity through their domestic work, they are again in a supportive role, but this has expanded to include not only the domestic sphere, but also in some cases paid employment and supporting men's activities connected to rugby.

The next and final chapter draws together the various strands of the data presented so far, and relates it to the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 2, and the possible implications of my findings are proposed.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1536 decree that Welsh was to be "utterly expired" following the Act of Union and the introduction of compulsory English language education in 1870 (Berresford Ellis, 1968) are key points in the history to which Whizzo refers.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

This study has investigated how major structural changes have impacted on the lives of people in a former mining community in south Wales. The main focus of investigation has been gender relationships and identities, and how these relate to the identity of the community.

The concept of "community" was problematised, and acknowledged as being a difficult term to define (Bell and Newby, 1971), but its utilisation was defended as it was used by the people of Blaengwyn themselves. This study was situated within the context of previous community studies, an area of social science now unfashionable and also within the context of recent "anthropology at home" studies.

The impetus for the research was a newspaper article which suggested that the setting up of educational opportunities in the village by a group of women who had been politically active during the 1984 - 85 miners' strike was a reflection of major changes in the valley brought about by the pit closure which soon followed the unsuccessful strike action (Beckett, 1992).

Preliminary reading suggested that a mining community would have sharply segregated gender divisions in terms of paid work outside the home and unpaid domestic work, and that there would be networks of family and friends which were also divided by gender (Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter, 1969, Bott, 1971). Studies of the area also came to the same conclusion (Evans, 1963, Sewel, 1970 & 1975).

Literature which analysed gender segregation suggested that such divisions arose with industrialism and capitalism (Tilly and Scott, 1973). The divisions are maintained by material and ideological factors, such as women's economic dependence on men and gendered identities (Barrett, 1986, Delphy & Leonard, 1992, MacEwan Scott, 1994). Whilst some feminists argue that an increase in women's involvement in the paid labour market will lead to greater equality for women (Blumberg, 1991, Wheelock, 1990), others suggest that gender identity, an aspect of gender ideology, prevents change (Morris, 1987, Fenstermaker, West & Zimmerman, 1991, Segal, 1990, Rees, 1992). Sewel's data from the 1970s suggested that masculine identity was very much associated with coal mining in Blaengwyn, and stimulated my interest in seeing how the demise of the industry would affect masculine and feminine identities and gender relations in the village.

When theoretical views are considered, one can identify the need to use both a macro and micro approach because of the sociological problem I am investigating. Feminist theories posited by Moore (1988 & 1994) and Walby (1990) were considered to be complementary, with the structural analysis of patriarchy expounded by Walby enhanced by Moore's acknowledgement that interactions at the micro level are also vital to our understanding of how gender is constructed and lived.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus was considered to be useful in analysing why things may not have changed as much as would be expected following extensive economic shifts (Bourdieu, 1977). By analysing *practice*, the day to day ways in which people behave, constituting, affirming or rejecting the dominant discourse, an understanding of the two-way process of culture, which people make and are made by, can be gained.

Related to the notion of habitus is identity, and the conceptual

frameworks of Mead, Goffman and Cohen were introduced as a useful way of seeing the interaction of structure and agency in identity formation (Goffman, 1963, Mead, 1934, Cohen, 1982, 1985, 1986 & 1994). Both consider how a group's values are internalised by an individual, while Goffman adds the notion of identity being affected by biographical details such as class and gender positions within society. Goffman also suggests that discrepancies between the ideal and the actual self lead to stigma. These theories of identity were considered to be useful in analysing gender identities in Blaengwyn following pit closure, when idealised or "hegemonic" identities (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985), such as a version of masculinity which decrees that a "man should be the breadwinner", or a complementary version of femininity which decrees that a "women's job is at home", would not be able to be maintained because of lack of employment opportunities for men and increasing employment prospects for women.

Cohen's work extends Mead's and Goffman's concepts of identity to consider not only the self, but the relationship between individual and community identity. His earlier work (1982, 1984 & 1985) suggests that communities can be analysed in terms of how people see themselves belonging to them, and in his later work (1994) he reminds us that we should not generalise too much when looking at communities, since differently situated people within the community will have different experiences of belonging in different contexts.

The specificity of context, also stressed by Goffman (1976) is something which has influenced my choice of research method. Participant observation can give access to many different social contexts, and this was my main research method, and I lived in the community for a year. This method gives rise to awareness of my own identity as an insider or outsider in the

community, possible ethical problems arising from these identities and the epistemological problem of how one knows something (Cerroni-Long, 1995, Asad, 1979, Huizer & Mannheim, 1979). Doing anthropology at home does not necessarily make one an insider. This also relates to representation, and how one formulates ideas about one's research. My argument is that as social science researchers we should take seriously what people say to us, as feminists have advocated we should do when researching women's lives (Smith, 1987, Roseneil, 1996). As I am studying *gender* and not just women, I am taking what men say seriously too, and found the people of Blaengwyn were analysing their situation constantly and considering how their own lives were affected by structural changes beyond their control. My ethnography is mostly comprised of a discussion of data compiled through participant observation, and when one presents such data one inevitably recounts experiences through one's own eyes. Instead of presenting the data as "facts", the value of a subjective and reflective approach has been recognised by some anthropologists (Okely and Callaway, 1992), but could be argued to be emphasising too strongly the researcher's gloss on events. Interview data is also presented as part of my ethnography, and perhaps puts forward the voices of the people of Blaengwyn in a less diluted way than the participant observation data.

Both these research methods needed to be complemented by data which could give a larger picture, however, again reflecting the necessity of considering the micro and the macro. To these ends statistical information from Census data and official statistics and responses to a survey questionnaire have also been included. Despite my allegiance to qualitative methods, I am conscious of the need to look at the macro level too, especially if one's research is focussed around structural changes!

The statistical data confirms that major structural changes have occurred, and that the area in which my fieldwork was conducted was an economically deprived area, in contrast to the earlier half of this century, when the community was thriving and there were nine pits in operation (Thomas, 1982, Blackaby, Murphy & Thomas, 1994, West Glamorgan County Council, 1991). Having established that such changes have taken place, my research project was to find out how these changes affected everyday life in Blaengwyn. I now turn to the main themes which feature in my ethnography to draw some conclusions from my findings.

### **Gender Divisions**

During my participant observation I found that there was a sharp division of the genders in terms of socialising and paid and unpaid work. The data obtained by observing social interaction was thus able to amplify the statistical data, showing the impact at an individual level of these structural changes, and highlighting that it was the right decision to combine a macro and micro approach. My first few days at the bakery were instructive as to what was considered men's and women's work: men could be bakers but it was a woman's job to cook Welsh cakes, make tea and serve in the shop. Men and women could be van drivers, although there was only one man employed as such when I did my fieldwork. Bread delivery was a part-time job, and therefore attracted more women in the same way that the Lucas jobs did in Ystradgynlais: there was nothing to stop men applying for such work, but the relatively low wages meant that these jobs were considered to be better suited to women. Blackaby Murphy and Thomas (1994) describe how the number of women in part time jobs in Wales and West Glamorgan in particular is rising,



a situation borne out by Blaengwyn. As Derek said: "the woman will accept a lesser wage than a man".

Although mining was no longer a possible means of employment for men in the valley, my questionnaire responses confirmed that most households had included men employed in mining prior to pit closure. Many of the men I met in Blaengwyn were unemployed, though a few had found work in lower paid jobs than they had had when they were miners, such as working part time on a barge in the Neath valley during the summer season, or being steward of the rugby club.

Men and women were segregated in paid work, but also with regard to work at home. It was apparent that women still did most of the housework and child care, even when the husband was not working. Unemployed Danny made an effort to do some household tasks, but his wife Phoebe had to do it again "properly" at the week-end, still taking responsibility for the domestic duties even though she was working in a paid job too. Another ex-miner, Anthony told me that "a woman's job is in the home", and Mary did all the housework despite having two paid jobs.

Rose (van) did all the housework in her house, and when she was told to rest after a major operation her son complained about having to do the domestic tasks like washing up and gardening. In fact, when Rose was in hospital, it was her son's girl-friends and her sister who cleaned her house, not her sons. They were so undomesticated that they "needed a map to find the coal-shed" as the other Rose (shop) said.

The genders were also sharply segregated in leisure activities, and tended to socialise on a same gender basis. For example, it was unusual for women to go inside the rugby club, and when I joined friends for a drink there, we sat outside. When it was Gillian's birthday, and she wanted to

celebrate by going out for a meal, it was an all women event, as was Joanne's party at the pub. Aerobics was an all-women leisure activity, and bingo tended to be attended by more women than men, though some men did go. What was interesting was that even when men and women attended the bingo sessions, women were grouped with other women and men mainly sat with other men.

Men also tended to socialise with other men. They went out rugby training together, and socialised together afterwards in men only groups. The male-voice choir was another example of a segregated group, and an extreme example was the biannual rugby trip to Scotland for which the choir was formed.

### **Sexual joking**

The sexual joking between men and women was at once a way of highlighting the difference between men and women, and a way of each gender antagonising the other: Mark and the other bakers joked with me sometimes to make me feel a part of the group, sometimes to remind me that my behaviour should not overstep the gender divide. Billy, the Scottish man who lived in a village further down the valley had not quite got the hang of the joking: he asked me 'Do you want to have an affair?' but without the subtle innuendo that usually disguised such jesting. The remark did not hit the right humorous note, and though he may have been attempting to "include" me in the bake-house camaraderie, it just emphasised to me that he himself was an "outsider" who had missed the point. The joking remarks to Ruth after the aerobics class were an example of a flirtatious joking which included her in the other women's group, even though she could be considered as an outsider

because of her sexuality. In another context, Meryl described how jokes were made by men about lesbians at the DOVE Centre, suggesting that the women involved were deviant because they were doing something without men's involvement, and therefore had gone beyond what was considered acceptable for women in the village. Sometimes women's jokes were used as a way of embarrassing men through crudity whilst celebrating the women's sexuality, as Gail's remark about the walking stick demonstrates. Thus as Douglas (1978) notes, joking means different things in different contexts and is important in the Blaengwyn examples as a means of women challenging men's dominance, men maintaining domination over women, and establishing a sense of community or belonging.

### **Social Networks**

Bott's notion of networks (1971) is still very much pertinent to the situation in Blaengwyn, with women family members and friends helping out with child care, and men's and women's networks going out socialising together. Bott's theory that where couples have highly interconnected social networks of kin and friends, they are more likely to have sharply segregated gender roles certainly applied to Blaengwyn. Indeed it was through the respective networks of Gillian and Jack that I was able to meet as many people as I did in the village, since they introduced me to other members of their same gender networks. The sharp segregation was highlighted by my own difficulties in meeting men: with women, once I had been introduced to a number of women at work in the bake-house, or to friends of Gillian, they involved me in their activities, such as Gail arranging for me to go to bingo, Rose's (van) invitations to her house for chats and tea, and Joanne's invitation to her party.

This did not happen when I met men, and to compensate for this I arranged to interview more men than women. But it was through Jack's contacts that many of these interviews were arranged, as with the Chairs of the male-voice choir, the Welfare Hall and the President of the rugby team. My own ability to carry out my duties as a researcher was affected by the networks, and although Jack facilitated contact with men, I was never able to join the men's networks as I was a woman. My gender precluded entry into a group in Blaengwyn, and thus highlights the problems of my wishing to conduct "insider" anthropology. I could never get "inside" the men's networks, though Jack stressed my Welshness ("she's from Haverfordwest") to find some common ground with my prospective interviewees. Even with the women's networks, the difficulties experienced between Gillian and me emphasised that I was not really an "insider", not really someone who could be her daughter: the demands of my research meant that it was impossible to do everything that Gillian wanted me to. If I had, I would not have been able to gather my data. Although I was asked to go along to activities in the village, my lack of knowledge of the area meant that I did not get the joke about Nant at the rugby celebration concert, however, unlike Billy, I was able to participate in the sexual joking banter because of my own working-class background. So yet again one can see the importance of context: I was an insider on some occasions, but definitely an outsider on others. If I had been a true "insider", I would not have had to construct a new identity for myself when I arrived at the bakehouse. Debbie's resistance to my questions highlighted my role as a researcher rather than a friend. Although I had set out to do "anthropology at home", Blaengwyn was only my home for a year, and it was not really "home" because I had another "real home" in Swansea where my husband was still living. Emotional demands meant that I wanted to spend time there as well as

in Blaengwyn, and I was also keen to visit my other family members in Haverfordwest. Whereas I often felt an “outsider” in academic contexts because of my working-class background, my “cultural capital”, in the terms described by Bourdieu and discussed by Eder (1993 p. 68), gained through several years’ in higher education, was a barrier to really “belonging” in Blaengwyn. These observations have implications for native anthropology, since they raise the question: when is “home” really “home”? Diana Wolf is right to warn that we should “take care not to make automatic assumptions about solidarity, empathy, and understanding” (Wolf, 1996, p. 18).

### **Gender Identity**

If we accept that gender segregation developed with industrialisation, how can we account for the fact that despite de-industrialisation in the area, and major changes with regard to men’s and women’s employment, such segregation still occurs? I have argued that as well as material factors, gender ideology is relevant, particularly as expressed through gender identity. By looking at how gender identities are created and reinforced in Blaengwyn through the practices of everyday life, one can gain a better understanding of the social processes at work in gender relations.

Sewel (1970) associated men’s identity with mining in the valley, but in practical terms this could no longer be the case during my fieldwork, as there were no miners living in Blaengwyn as all the pits had closed down. Sewel also argued, as had Dennis *et al* for the Yorkshire mining town they studied (1969), that women’s identity was associated with the home. I would argue that in the case of Blaengwyn, these two identifications were still apparent, even though the pits had gone and more and more women were going out to work.

Phoebe said that if her husband ever learnt to iron, she might as well go home to her mother, and Rose (van) loved doing as much as possible for her sons around the house. These women took pride in their domestic skills, even if Rose (shop) recognised that her friend was being exploited by her “waster” sons. Kim gave up her involvement with the DOVE Centre, even though she was one of its main instigators, because of her child care responsibilities. Her identity was clearly centred on her maternal role rather than any other, even though during the 1984 - 85 miners’ strike this had been usurped.

Several ex-miners talked about mining in the present tense: for example, Peter, Evan and Anthony, and Mary’s husband, Sam. They, as Mary said of Sam and his friends “still think of themselves as being underground”.

## **Community**

The identification of men with mining was extended to the identity of the community. The rugby trip to Cardiff was used as a metaphor to analyse gender and community identity in Blaengwyn. I argued that rugby has taken on some of the characteristics that mining formerly did, as a means of providing a unifying element in the village. The trip also symbolised the way in which gender relations are constructed, internalised and reproduced in Blaengwyn.

Although the rugby team was a masculine domain, women’s contributions were vital to the success of the team, and this was acknowledged by the men team and committee members, including Jeff in his speech at the club. I believe that a shift has taken place in the village. In a similar way to that described by Frankenberg for the similarly de-industrialised north Walian village of Pentrediwaith, a sporting game has been adopted as a symbol of village unity in Blaengwyn, although the game here is rugby whereas it was football in the

Pentrediwaith case (Frankenberg, 1990, p. 100). Whereas the village was once associated with mining, it now associates itself with the rugby team, another male activity, although the helmets worn at the match by women acknowledge the contribution they make to the community through their support, not only of the team, but also of the close-knittedness of the village through their networks of family and friends. Funds obtained from British Coal Open Cast went to provide an astro-turf playing field for the team, which could be argued to benefit the men more than the women in Blaengwyn as it provides them with another recreational facility not used by the women. The open cast workings were a source of conflict in the village, highlighting that, as Cohen says (1994), differently positioned people within a community will have different ways of expressing a sense of belonging. The Old Street Action Group, as represented by its activist Joanne, was opposed to the open cast workings behind the street, whereas other villagers, such as those in the Blaengwyn and Cwm Support Group like Pam and Gillian recognised the financial benefits and facilities it brought to the community, and others still like Ruth and Gail appreciated the few job opportunities it afforded. The conflicting views on the open cast site were unusual and represented division between the two villages of Cwm and Blaengwyn, which were more often identified as the “same place really”.

However, there was still a strong sense of communality, expressed most notably during my time in the village through rugby. In a sense the shift of focus from pits to rugby concurs with Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, as this masculine activity identifies the different sectors of the village in a way that a women-only activity such as the DOVE Centre does not. People often suggested to me that Blaengwyn was best known nowadays for its rugby team; the DOVE was never mentioned as something which made the village unique, although clearly it is unusual in having such a facility, together with the Community University of

the Valleys situated in the same site. A masculine activity is seen by most villagers to mark their identity following pit closure, but it was the women supporters who wore the mining helmets and were thanked for their efforts at the victory celebrations. It was the "Blaengwyn girls are on the piss again" signs in the coach windows which announced the arrival of the team's supporters in Cardiff, and although women were still doing the domestic and child care work in Blaengwyn, this contribution to life in the village was recognised implicitly by people's comments that the village was still a "mining" community. In fact the close-knittedness of the village was maintained through the women's networks, and these were the defining factors which made it still a mining community.

### **Ethnicity**

The fact that this study was conducted in Wales is a vital element which should be taken into consideration. The sense of "Welshness" in the village was apparent during my fieldwork in a number of ways. For example, it was expressed through the frequent use of the Welsh language, and by the sometimes unintentional or unconscious bilingualism as demonstrated by Jack, by an opposition to Englishness, as stressed by Gail, by the identification of the valleys as being a significant element of Welsh identity in Wales and elsewhere, and that the valley mining communities were something special, as they held together during the 1984 - 85 strike, as indicated by Kim, and by a real passion for the national sport, rugby, as played in the village and on a national level.

Much literature on south Wales mining communities has focussed on class dimensions at the expense of proper consideration of ethnic identity, and the inter-relationship between the two, as Brian Roberts has pointed out (Roberts, 1994). He suggests that the ethnic aspects are an integral part of social



identity and may be becoming more significant in the era of de-industrialisation (Roberts, 1994, p. 92 - 93).

However, Hywel Francis demonstrates that “Welshness” has always been an important aspect of the community identity in the upper Dulais valley and was still apparent in 1994, as shown in the financial support given for the National Eisteddfod when it was held in the neighbouring Neath valley (Francis, 1994). He notes that the non-conformist chapel was a pivotal focus for the community in the first half of this century, and nurtured “learning, communal values and social justice”, albeit in increasing competition with the labour movement (Francis, 1994, p.91). However, union involvement did not mean that chapel influence was negated: indeed, Francis says that “the Bible could still sit comfortably alongside the crimson rows of the Left Book Club” (Francis, 1994, p.91). He suggests that the Welfare Hall eventually took over from the chapel as the centre of community life, but states that its community focus and puritanism echoed the chapel in its “Welshness”, thus hinting at his own definition of “Welshness” (Francis, 1994, p. 93). Francis mentions the commemorative plate made to raise funds for the National Eisteddfod, noting the irony in the fact that many of the images printed on it are of scenes now gone: the colliery, school, chapel and even the main streets at Coedwig (Francis, 1994, p.85.) I see the plate also as a telling symbol of the inter-relationship between ethnic and occupational identity in the village: the plate was commissioned to raise funds for the National Eisteddfod, the major Welsh cultural event, and depicts on it views of a mining, and therefore working-class, village. It reminds me forcefully of why it is impossible to ignore either the occupational or ethnic aspect of the community’s identity, and how the two are inextricably linked.

## Concluding remarks

What then can one conclude from my research? I would argue that my belief that people in Blaengwyn understood and analysed their situation has been borne out by the data presented in this ethnography, and comes across in the quotations and description of activities in the village. Whether it was the feelings of hatred expressed by Whizzo towards Margaret Thatcher, at a time, it should be remembered when she was not even Prime Minister any more, and recognition that her government's decision to close the last of the local pits had led to the deprivation experienced subsequently, or the same man's analysis of the contradictions of being Welsh but not being able to speak Welsh, or Gillian's remark that all the women in the village hated their husbands but were too cowardly to do anything about it: these were reflections of the situation and an incisive understanding of social relations was demonstrated. Jeff's recommendation to me that if I wanted to find out about the village I should go to the rugby match is particularly relevant to my argument, since the trip acted as a catalyst for me in my own analysis of social relations in the village as presented here. I have been able to build on the villagers' observations and understanding gained through experience, to present my ethnography. This thesis, as an academic enterprise in the form of a social scientific study, is then able to analyse social life in Blaengwyn in terms of concepts like structure and identity, adding an academic coating to the type of reflections which Giddens suggest characterise our era (Giddens, 1979).

By relating structural events to an interactive level and complementing statistical data with interviews and participant observation, it has been possible to heed Bourdieu's advice: I have examined the everyday practices through which people in the village reconstitute Blaengwyn as a mining community,

five years after the last pit closed in the valley.

Walby's work on patriarchy has shown the necessity to consider the structures which inform and influence gender relations, and the structural changes which have been shown to have taken place in the community were my starting point. Moore's contribution has been to show that a real understanding can only be gained by a consideration of social action at the interactional level as well as the structural. At the micro level specific contexts and relationships can be examined, in order to explore how gender ideology, including identity, feeds into a culture. The everyday practices of gender segregation at work and home, the joking relationships, the operation of networks whereby women in particular are able to help each other out, the segregated leisure activities, of which rugby is the paradigm: all these practices, the "habitus" as Bourdieu calls them, reconstituted the sense of gender and community identity, of what it was to be a man or woman in Blaengwyn, but in some cases, such as the shift of emphasis to rugby, were also adapting as people reinvented identities as a response to structural change.

Despite the major structural change, there has been resistance to change in everyday life and a maintenance of the traditional way of doing things in order to preserve gender and community identity. The structures of patriarchy were still being reproduced in gender identities through the various practices. There have been some shifts in gender relations, particularly in terms of morality and the entry of women into institutions like clubs and pubs, but these seem to have changed most dramatically in the 1960s, as Peter and the Welfare Rule Books suggest, rather than as a result of recent pit closure. But, as Jonathan explained, women were still excluded from being committee members in the Welfare Hall at the time of my interview.

Although the DOVE was the impetus for my research, it did not feature

prominently in my ethnography as few villagers who I met were involved with it. Steve expressed his reservations about the DOVE, implying that the Blaengwyn Community Centre would be better used as a meeting-place for the whole community and not just for “the ladies to have a second chance”. The stories circulating regarding the DOVE which Meryl mentioned, that “women getting together, and just women, and not including men, are lesbians” also indicates the views held by some members of the community regarding the DOVE, and that it was an activity which threatened the basis of the community whereby women supported their husbands largely through their family and friendship networks. Set up as it was during the 1984 -85 miners’ strike, the DOVE provided a real possibility of change in women’s life through access to better paid and possibly full time jobs in the future.

The work of Rosser and Harris (1965) and Young and Wilmott (1957) emphasises that women’s networks hold communities together. If more women did get better paid, full time jobs through their involvement with the DOVE, it would be difficult for them to maintain the support networks which I encountered, as they would have even less time to do so than they do now. They also may assert themselves more and demand better treatment from the husbands they “all hate”. If, as Rosaldo (1974) suggests, women gain greater equality as they move from the private to the public sphere, especially as they gain autonomy, this may happen as a consequence of the DOVE, where, in Meryl’s words “it’s women who are running it, are organising it”. Perhaps this is why it is not accepted in the community: the villagers realise that if women do take up full time work as a result of educational and training opportunities provided at the Centre, the village will finally cease to be a “mining community”.

Although there was little enthusiasm for the DOVE amongst the people I

met in Blaengwyn, support was often expressed for the idea of attracting tourism into the area. Indeed it was suggested as the only possible economic strategy for the valley. The village would attract tourists to Blaengwyn because of its mining heritage, and in this way the identity of Blaengwyn as a mining community could be preserved as a simulacrum.

The major economic changes at the structural level were predicted by the villagers, and they tried to prevent it through industrial action which affected the whole community. Kim and Pam's discussions of their involvement in fund-raising activities, which are presented in Chapter 7, and the radio programme recorded during the strike,<sup>1</sup> highlight the many fund-raising activities which were an attempt to ensure that the strike would go on long enough to prevent pit closure. Again, the villagers' understanding of their situation is evident in this quote from the radio programme. The interviewee was Joanne. She said about the strike:

It's not only a fight for jobs, it's a fight for our whole communities as well. I mean, if the pits in the valley close, we've just had it.

The people of Blaengwyn attempted to change the situation at the structural level, but failed. They had no control at this level. What they have been able to control, however is their identities. In this way they were able to maintain an element of control in a fundamentally uncontrollable situation, to reconstruct through social practices which, in a dialectical process, community identity is reconstructed through gender identity.

The ethnography also has some bearing on the nature of social change, particularly with regard to how structural change is translated into cultural change. In the Blaengwyn case, this has been very slow. There is a lag between

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2.

the two. The strike and pit closure have brought about change, but not enough to transform the "traditional" way of doing things in a mining community. In fact the traditional way preserves and is preserved by the community's identity and by its inter linking with gender identities.

## Appendix One

### Questionnaire

N.B.The names of the villages have been changed in an attempt to maintain confidentiality.

#### *Questionnaire : Social changes in the Upper Dulais Valley since pit closure*

I am a post graduate student based at Swansea University, carrying out research in Blaengwyn, Cwm Glan and Coedwig. I am looking at social changes in the area following pit closure, and would be very grateful if you could spare a little time to complete the short questionnaire below. Please note that all the information given will be kept completely **confidential**. *I will call to collect the completed questionnaire within the next couple of weeks, or it can be returned to me via the Cwm Bakery. Please feel free to omit any question you do not wish to answer, and if there is not enough space on the form, please continue overleaf specifying numbers answered. If you have any queries I will be pleased to answer them when I call back to collect the form.*

Many thanks for your assistance

Stephanie Jones

### HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

- 1) How many people live in your household (including you)? .....
- 2) How many of them are under 16 years of age? .....

### WORK DETAILS

- 1) Did any members of your household have a job connected to the mining industry prior to local pit closures? YES/NO

If NO, please go on to question 2.

- If YES a)How many members of your household had mining related jobs? .....

b)How many of these were full time jobs? .....

2) Do any members of your household have a job connected to the mining industry now? YES/NO

If NO, please go on to question 3.

If YES a)How many members of your household have mining related jobs? .....

b)How many of these are full time jobs? .....

3) Do any members of your household have a job now which is not connected to mining? YES/NO

If NO, please go on to next question.

If YES a)How many members of your household have jobs unrelated to mining?

.....

b)How many of these are full time jobs? .....

**BACKGROUND**

1) How many years have you lived in the Upper Dulais Valley? .....

2) How old are you? .....

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Thank you for completing this form.

Would you be agreeable to my contacting you again for further help with my research? YES/NO

If YES, please give your name and address and contact telephone number if possible.

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## Appendix Two

### Transcript of Marling's Pike BBC 4 Radio Programme, 12 July 1984

N.B. The names of the villages and interviewees featured in my ethnography have been changed in an attempt to maintain confidentiality. Words in italics are those spoken by the radio presenters.

*Now, as you may have heard earlier, we're paying three visits this morning to a small mining village in South Wales, Cwm Glan, where work and money are alike in short supply as a result of the miners' strike. Now this is in no way with the intention of commenting on the dispute itself, but to get the feel of what life is like in such a community at present, and how people are coping with an experience that has brought some people close to poverty. Susan Marling's in the village this morning and reports first from the High Street.*

*The High Street is perhaps a bit of a misnomer really because although some 700 or so people live in this village, the place is deserted, it's bleak and desolate this morning particularly because it's pouring with rain and the sky is a gun metal grey. There are only a couple of shops left open and there's no noise now from the shunting train because it's eighteen weeks since the men here went on strike. But this empty street is perhaps deceptive because behind me is the ex-servicemen's club and that's the busy headquarters of a group of miners' wives and widows who've been fund raising, holding meetings, arranging food parcels, public speaking. They have found a new energy in a revived community spirit, certainly women like Kim Pritchard and Joanne Williams who are with me this morning, are very much in on the fight.*

Why?

Because I am determined to get jobs for people. It's ridiculous the way these people are on the dole, there's over four and a half million out because of the Conservative Party. That's what they want to happen to the miners again. It makes me sick and there's no way we're going to let them do it this time.

*Is that the general feeling?*

Oh, 100%. It's not only a fight for jobs, it's a fight for our whole communities as well. I mean, if the pits in the valley close, we've just had it. I mean, the shops will close, the houses will go, we'll never be able to sell these houses, never. We are going to win this fight definitely, yes, the men and the women are 100% behind that.

*Right, now judging from the activity that's in here, you've managed to organise everybody to be behind you in those thoughts. Are you a natural born organiser, Kim?*

No, this is the first effort I've ever had to make at this. You find when a fight is as strong as this and the feeling is so strong that quite honestly you do things that you never ever thought you would ever do before.

*Now, the food parcels are one of the most important parts of your work, and 96 families will be having parcels here from this hall this morning. Where does all this stuff come from?*

Wonderful sources actually, some of the unions in London, some of the Press unions as well have collected money in big meetings and they turn that money into food and send it down to us. We've even had money actually coming from America and Canada.

*Food parcel sounds like you're under siege, like it's a war. Is it really necessary?*

Very much so, yes, definitely. I mean I don't think people realise that we still have to pay for electricity, and you know, rates and things like this, that are really essential. If you don't pay your electricity bills they come and cut you off. A food parcel does bridge that gap, it enables you to save a little towards these bills. There are people being cut off being cut off with electricity, there are people have had letters, you know, demands, they have to get out, bailiffs are there because they have not been able to pay their rates.

If we didn't have these parcels I think a lot of people would be starving. I mean the money we have, I say, they take the £15 out of any money they give us first, saying that the unions are giving us £15 - they're not. Well, I can't see how anyone can live on £16 with two children, I mean, it's impossible. So, I mean, in a way, perhaps we are under siege, but we're winning.

*Fighting words, perhaps we'd better pack up a parcel, right. Here you are, get hold of the polythene bag. Now, quite a lot of tinned food, that's useful obviously because that will go right through the week. What have we got here? Processed peas, we'll have a tin of those. Some carrots in a tin, right, butter, what's this?*

## Meat paste

*Meat paste. And cucumbers - half, oh sorry, not a whole one, half a one, and two or three tomatoes. Well, we've got our parcel and we've come to the end of the line here where there are some more helpers sitting. Now you are keeping a book. What's this for, is this to see who's already received the parcels and who hasn't?*

Yes, marking down everyone who receives a parcel, naming them and their pay numbers and what colliery they work in.

*There's no kind of means test at all about who's to have and who isn't?*

No

*Somebody comes in and if they say I need a parcel and they get one?*

Oh, yes. It takes courage for a man to walk in and even ask for a parcel any way. He wouldn't come in for a parcel if he wasn't in need of it.

*Well, we've got two men here. Hello, how do you do? Hywel's just been saying there's a bit of shyness perhaps about taking a parcel. Is that your view?*

It used to be but I'm an old soldier who's been around a little so I'm picking mine up, you know. That's what people have donated, so I think we're entitled to come and get it, if it wasn't for the women it wouldn't be

happening now. They are doing it all up here. If it wasn't for them, without their help it wouldn't be possible.

*Kim, now, there is no end to the inventiveness of the village because isn't it this morning that you have a new venture which is starting up?*

That's right, we've got a new second hand shop really, only we call it next to new, it sounds a bit nicer if you say next to new, and that's opening now this morning

*And what's the idea of it, just to provide people with the things that they need or to provide funds?*

Both. Actually it's to help the mining families really, more than anything, but it's also to raise money so it will go towards the fund and buy food for the people then.

Hello

*You're the major shop assistant here*

Yes, well, not really me, there's a few of us here, but uh

*What kind of things have you got on sale here?*

Well, we've got blouses, trousers, skirts, all children's clothes

*Which are the customers now?*

Silvey by here

*Hello*

Joanne

*Hello. Now what are you after?*

Well, things for my children mainly, I can't afford to go buying them in the shops, and the clothes here are so good quality, that I'm coming to see if there's anything to fit them.

*It's not the case that this shop is taking custom from a shoe shop or a drapers or something else in the village?*

It's not taking nothing because the shops are closing up here, the same as the collieries.

This has brought everybody much closer together, everybody is together. This strike is making everybody stronger, yes, and we will fight it, we're going to win this battle, there's no doubt about it.

*Do you feel bitter about the fact that you are now in here looking for second hand clothes for your children?*

Yes, I suppose, in one way, yes. When there's others can go out shopping, got plenty of money to buy things and we are - look at us.

Well, I remember there was a shop down the road here which sold everything - David Crynant's, didn't it, everything there. Across the road from here there's four shops, there's three shops that have closed, there's only the bake-house left. Every year you see something else closing down. They could build a wall round here and drop supplies in, because that's what they think of the top end of this valley.

*Look, you've got a customer here. Come in sir, this is the nearly new shop and I've got a jacket that will fit you exactly. Come in, here you are. What's your name, incidentally?*

Stewart

*Stewart, what do you think of that for a fit? Ladies any comments?*

No way, the colour's all wrong

I think the cut is wrong as well.

*I tell you what, 15p, how about it?*

Well, not really, look at the colour it doesn't suit my eyes, no way, thank you very much all the same.

*If you don't want a jacket, then what have you come for?*

Well, I've come to deliver the Valley Star, it's a bulletin of information of what has transpired during the previous week and a programme, a diary really of functions coming the following week.

*What's your involvement, you're not a miner yourself?*

Oh, good heavens no. I was lucky to get out of the mines and find a job. I mean five pits closed under me before I found a job. These people will not get jobs.

*But you've still got a miner's sympathy?*

It's in the blood. If your father died on a bottle of oxygen, your sympathies, you have sympathies with miners for ever, don't you? It's really an easy job to be a supporter of this group, you know, when people walk up to you and push £100 in your hand every Thursday and say "Give this to the miners", it's not a difficult job.

*It's hardship all round really in this village and that includes the tradesmen, the ones that are left. People like Mr Jeffries the butcher, and I'm just going up the High Street to have a word with him, I'll see you later there Richard.*

*Right Susan, we look forward to that, just before 11 O'clock, that will be. Well, what it's like keeping family life going in a Welsh mining village during the present crisis.*



*Let's now go back for our final visit to the South Wales mining village of "Cwm Glan" in the company of Susan Marling. She's joined the fund raising coffee morning which is being supported by the local area choir.*

Choir sings (last line "Let's stick together, man to man")

Clapping

I'd like to say thank you very much to the choir for singing that small rendering and we'll be hearing a little more of them later on. I'd like to welcome you all here this morning and hope you all enjoy yourselves, and thank you all for supporting us. We raffle of ham a few weeks ago and I'd like to tell you all it raised £260. It was donated by the King Of Hay, which was a very good donation. We've a barbecue tomorrow evening and also on Saturday, that's of course if the rain stops and we don't have to float down there. But we've had some letters also, some very touching letters, and perhaps Joanne would like to read them out?

Well, we've had a letter here from a lady of Grimsby, who didn't quite know our address, but she hoped we would get it. She says "I don't have much money as I am self supporting, but I have sold something and that released £40 which I am sending on to you for food parcels." And she says after "All of you have a lot of courage". We've also had an offer of a holiday for children, France and Switzerland, so I hope somebody will be able to go.

*Oh, I should think, any offers here to go to Switzerland? Yes? This has really become your kind of headquarters, hasn't it, this particular room. I mean, this is the hub, almost the entire village seems to be here this morning.*

Yes, that's right.

*Have you had lots of letters that like?*

Well, marvellous response from all over the country, Scotland, London, North Wales, everywhere.

*That keeps your spirits going really, doesn't it?*

I think so, yes

*Of course nobody in the village gets left out at all. Judging from the Welsh oatcakes that I can see here, somebody's been doing some baking. That's you, isn't it? What's your name?*

Mrs Tongue

*And how old are you?*

Nearly 70

*Well, we'll keep that a secret*

I hope so, any way

*Well, how many millions of these cakes have you made?*

Well, I've no idea but since the first week of the strike I started baking Welsh cakes

*Who's enjoyed them? Can I have one, incidentally?*

Yes. Oh, everybody that's on strike has had my cakes. They've gone to Glyneath, they've gone to "Blaengwyn", they've gone to "Cwm", Coelbren, Ynyswen, they've gone everywhere.

*Your kitchen must look like a factory*

It is, I'm up every morning

*Do you have to get up early every morning?*

Yes, to make them

*Ok, well, well done, keep up the good work, that was, I must say, very good indeed. Now, it doesn't matter if you're very old or if you're very young, you can all help. What's your name?*

Nicola James

*And how old are you Nicola?*

I'm ten

*Now, you've got in your hand, I can get rid of this Welsh cake, a poem that you've written. Did you write it at school or at home?*

At home

*Right. Would you like to read it to us?*

"The Strike -

My father is a miner

Ian MacGregor's making the industry go finer

Scargill will not give in

Not unless the miners win

Mum is collecting for food

She is in a rather good mood

Women go collecting from door to door

Asking for money and food and more

The strike has been going on for weeks

Welsh men have to do without leeks

The money is becoming less and less

The miners feel in a queer mess

The miners' union has got to win

Or all the unions will end up in the bin."

Clapping and cheering

*Not bad, eh? Is that how you really feel about things?*

Yes

*And that's a sort of true reflection of what you think?*

Yes

*Has your parents and the village and so on being on strike made any difference to you? Have you seen anything different in the village as a result of what's happened here?*

Yes

*Can you give me an example? Perhaps your Mum can give me an example?*

Well, she had to give up her holiday in Llangranog, which I thought she was very brave to do. She went up the school and told her headmaster herself that she couldn't go because of the strike, and she said she didn't mind at all, so I think she's really rather brave.

*Mm, there you go, good girl.*

Clapping

*Now, we mustn't let you get away with the idea 'cause I was here earlier this morning, I've seen all the fun games and jollity that go into making all these sandwiches and great piles of them under cling film here. We've got some splendid sandwich ladies. Come over here, come over here. What's your name?*

Pam

*And you must have butterer's elbow by now mustn't you with all this?*

I'm the filler inner

*Now, you all work as a good team, don't you, there isn't anybody here who's slacking*

No, there isn't anybody, we all help each other, anything we can do to help each other, that's the way it is in the village.

*How much are you charging, incidentally for these, I think corned beef and tomato are your speciality, aren't they?*

Yes, and also salad. 20p for the whole lot.

*Right, now you've called it a coffee morning, I haven't seen anybody, is anybody actually drinking coffee here? One hand goes up. It's a tea morning. Why don't you come clean about it?*

I don't like coffee so I have tea instead.

*All right. Now you do actually have fun though don't you? I know it's a serious cause, but you're a jolly crew really*

Oh, yes we have a bit of fun. Last Wednesday for instance we had a jumble sale here and one person donated a beautiful fur coat. So of course Jean Pant o Wal which is the clown with us, she puts the fur coat on, a pair of man's waders, one of Benny of Crossroads hats and parades up and down as if she was in Ascot. We do have a good laugh.

*All right. But things have changed, Kim haven't they?*

Oh yes.

*I mean, the village is not the same.*

Oh, no, the community spirit we find is far far stronger now than it ever was. We found that before people tended to be in smaller communities, you know perhaps a street of people, where now I find the whole village is prepared to fight for this, it's so serious, as I did say a little earlier on.

*Is your life going to slip back into normality after this?*

Definitely not. I think we've got the fighting spirit now and there's no way we're going to let this fighting spirit go. We'll find some way or another to harbour it anyway.

*Right, have you got any immediate plans for the future?*

Yes, I hope to open a co-operative, actually, I'm not really sure doing what, but we hope to open one.

*Ok, now we've got the concert secretary for this magnificent choir, James Burton , you've had some good responses haven't you from people outside the valleys when you've been on fund raising tours to sing?*

Actually, we are not on fund raising, we have been asked by particular groups whether we'll go and sing and we have decided, yes, we will. We've been down to Southampton and I had a letter back last week where there was a small nucleus down there, they rose £300 and they have said that since that small nucleus, since the concert they have doubled and they are collecting much more like, you know.

*So, you get money and then you also expand the amount of support outside the immediate area?*

Yes, that's right, and they also want us to go back there some other time under different circumstances.

*Also, it must be said, you make a fabulous noise doing it, don't you?*

Well



*He said modestly, well, well. Don't you all agree? They're fairly wonderful aren't they?*

Clapping

*Well. We're only a quarter this morning, there's only twelve of us, you know, in the choir this morning.*

*But, big powerful Welsh men, I mean you're not puny. Any way, I know that you've got a song with which you're going to sing us out, so let's hear it.*

Choir sings

*Well, there you are, a community that's making the most of adversity, there's an enormous amount of courage and pride here, I don't think anyone can deny that. And a spirit that frankly makes me feel enormous respect. From the Welsh valleys it's back to you Richard.*

*The prayer of the Reverend Eli Jenkins that is as I recognise it, from 'Under Milk Wood' by Dylan Thomas, a very suitable finale to that programme.*

*Susan Marling experiencing the solidarity of a South Wales mining community this Thursday morning.*

## Appendix 3

### Summary of social networks in Blaengwyn.

#### Women's networks:

##### The Bake-House

My initial contact with **Gillian**, who ran the bakery with her husband, and was aged approximately 50, enabled me to partake in the social networks associated with the bake-house. The key informants, including men, that I met through my association with the bakery, and who featured in the ethnography are, in roughly the order that I met them:

**Meryl**, aged approximately 48. (Part-time DOVE worker who introduced me to Gillian)

**Ruby**, aged approximately 75 (Gillian's mother, former train guard and housewife, who came to do the housework at the bakery)

**Babs**, aged approximately 50 (Gillian's friend and part-time cleaner at the school)

**Gail**, aged approximately 38 (Part-time bread-van driver and friend of Mary and Debbie)

**Mary**, aged approximately 38 (Part-time bread-delivery person and cleaner at the DOVE centre, and wife of Sam, steward of the rugby club)

**Kim**, aged approximately 42 (Part-time bread-van driver, formerly involved with DOVE workshops and wife of Peter, former NUM chair)

**Rose - (shop)**, aged approximately 47 (Full-time sales assistant and friend of Rose - van, commuted from Neath every day to work in shop)

**Rose - (van)**, aged approximately 47 (Part-time bread-van driver, mother of four

sons, one of whom was living with Rhian and Rhian's daughter Mandy, also friend of Rose - shop)

**Joanne**, aged approximately 40 (Part-time newsagent's assistant, wife of Raymond and sister-in-law of Debbie, member of Old Street Action Group)

**Margaret**, aged approximately 43 (Customer and friend of Debbie)

**Rhian**, aged approximately 25 (Customer, part-time worker at Lucas factory, mother of Mandy, girlfriend of Rose van's son)

As well as the women's network centred around the bake-house, I am including Jack here as he was a family member, and introduced me to men in his network of contacts.

**Jack**, aged approximately 70 (Mark's uncle, former miner and retired open cast worker)

#### **The Rugby Club - bingo**

**Debbie** (see above)

**Margaret** (see above)

**Nancy**, aged approximately 40 (Part-time Lucas factory worker)

**Karen**, aged approximately 45 (Part-time Lucas factory worker)

#### **Welfare Hall - aerobics**

**May**, aged approximately 45 (Part-time home-help, also customer in bakery)

**Ruth**, aged approximately 50 (Part-time steward, partner of Dot)

**Dot**, aged approximately 42 (Part-time steward, partner of Ruth)

**Felicity**, aged approximately 37 (Full time fitness instructor)

## **Men's Networks**

All of the key informants listed below were introduced to me by Jack:

**Jonathan**, aged approximately 73 (Chair of the Coedwig Welfare Male Voice Choir and retired miner)

**Elwyn**, aged approximately 52 (County Councillor and unemployed ex-miner)

**Geraint**, aged approximately 55 (Chair of the Coedwig Welfare Hall Committee, unemployed ex-miner)

**Derek**, aged approximately 55, (President of the Rugby Club, comedian, and former miner)

## **The bake-house**

The following men's network worked at a more informal level than the one cited above.

**Jack**, see above

**Mark**, aged approximately 50 (Gillian's husband, full-time baker)

**Hywel**, aged approximately 24 (Full-time baker, son of van driver Robert)

**Andy**, aged approximately 30 (Full-time baker, friend of Arthur)

**Pierre**, aged approximately 82 (Customer, former miner and retired school caretaker)

**Arthur**, aged approximately 45 (Customer, friend of Andy, former miner, member of rugby club committee who asked me to go to Cardiff with him)

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