



ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL
SCIENCES IN AUSTRALIA

**What's Your Story? Surveys, Social Science Expertise and the State in the Twentieth
Century ASSA Workshop
Monash University, 13-14 July 2016**

Conveners: Warwick Anderson (University of Sydney), Clare Corbould (Monash University),
Charlotte Greenhalgh (Monash University), Catherine Waldby (Australian National University)

Report authors: Charlotte Greenhalgh and Clare Corbould

We expect social surveys and other forms of social science research to inform, shape, and critique government and other public policies, but this was not always the case. This workshop brought together scholars from around the world to examine how, when, and why the techniques of social science surveying took on such public prominence, and to consider the effects and legacies of that process.

THEMES AND PARTICIPANTS

The Race and Gender Politics of Surveying:	Paul R.D. Lawrie (University of Winnipeg) Clare Corbould (Monash University) Georgina Arnott (Monash University)
The Spread of the Survey:	Laura King (University of Leeds) Michelle Arrow (Macquarie University) Zora Simic (UNSW)
Surveys and Subjectivity:	Charlotte Greenhalgh (Monash University) Mike Savage (LSE)
Disciplines, Methods, and Origin Stories:	Tony Bennett (Western Sydney University) Jane Carey (University of Wollongong) Murray Goot (Macquarie University)
The State and Productive Citizens:	Michael Hau (Monash University) Kate Darian-Smith (Melbourne)
Social Class, Capitalism, and the Cold War:	Alice O'Connor (UC Santa Barbara) Jon Lawrence (University of Cambridge) Agnieszka Sobocinska (Monash)

Survey or Surveillance?:

Julia Martínez (University of Wollongong)
David Goodman (Melbourne)
Jordy Silverstein (Melbourne)
Katherine Ellinghaus (Monash University)

WORKSHOP REPORT**Background**

This two-day workshop was co-convened by Warwick Anderson (University of Sydney), Clare Corbould (Monash University), Charlotte Greenhalgh (Monash University), and Catherine Waldby (Australian National University) in order to examine the history, evolution, and impact of social surveying. The workshop included 24 scholars and 19 papers. Collectively we used the history of the social survey as a starting point or case study, and aimed to:

1. explore the joint creation of social scientific knowledge by researchers and their subjects;
2. uncover the use of such survey data and its effects on the development of government and institutional social policymaking;
3. establish the relationship between universities, non-academic centres of social research, governments, and international organisations;
4. uncover the impact of twentieth-century social science on non-professionals and especially ideas of the self;
5. test the limits of social science research in the twentieth century, including by asking which groups were the subjects of social surveys, which were the subjects of anthropological study, and how that distinction contributed to national, racial, and imperial policies and practices;
6. map the national, transnational, and international networks of which Australian research was an integral part.

We invited participants, from doctoral and ECR researchers to professors, with a range of expertise in the area and on the specific topic. Some are experts in the history of social science. Others had previously used data generated by social surveys in their research, and responded to our request that they focus in a more substantial way on the social science method. It is now commonly accepted that states and other policy-making bodies use surveys to register and analyse populations and to formulate and reshape policy settings. But how did this practice emerge? Participants discussed the development of the modern social survey and how it was constituted over time.

Discussion

Social surveys were distinguished by their first-person interviews and evidence-based recommendations, and they initially offered citizens a new form of knowledge about themselves. Far from being a simple discovery of fact, these acts of social inquiry also conveyed new ideas

about the place of research participants within social hierarchies, and about their relationship to the state and its institutions. So while such research reflected the rise of the social scientific “expert,” especially in the mid-twentieth century, social research also conferred new status on the opinions and experiences of so-called ordinary people. Researchers then presented that data as scientific evidence, which in turn justified policy recommendations and the changing role of the state in people’s lives.

Collectively participants were interested in not only what social survey research made possible in terms of policy-making and the changing role of the state, but also in its limits. Who was deemed an acceptable survey respondent? Who was excluded? What were the races, genders, ages, locations of individuals, groups, or communities who were considered surveyable or, importantly, not surveyable? And how did the rise of the social survey affect individual and groups’ sense of themselves?

In order to answer these questions, participants disaggregated social survey research in order to trace its development with respect to place, people, groups, and techniques. Each of the participants considered an example or examples of twentieth-century social surveys. Some of these come from national contexts, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Others took regions, such as the work of the League of Nations on human trafficking in the East. None of these studies existed in a vacuum, of course, and the workshop interrogated connections between instances of social surveys. These connections were sometimes across national boundaries, between imperial centres and colonies, and between empires themselves.

The workshop took international and comparative perspectives on the development and legacies of social surveying. Participants generated six broad questions for future research and discussion:

1. *How did social survey methods travel between disciplines, nations and institutions?*

What would we learn by working across the histories of individual disciplines, institutions, and researchers? Speakers argued that doing so might cast in new light the contributions of germinal social scientists and social research projects. Participants in the discussion took a broad view of the history of social science, either by considering the shifting lines of academic disciplines or by drawing our attention to the similarities of apparently competing forms of expertise. **Tony Bennett**, for example, examined early forms of ‘cultural arithmetic’ that were developed in voluntary, scientific, and cultural organisations operating either outside the state or in varied ‘twilight zones’ between state and civil society. **Jane Carey** encouraged us to interrogate the evolving relationship between sociology and anthropology, fields which were initially very closely linked and only diverged later. **Murray Goot** then took a comparative perspective on the famed research methods of Mass Observation and the Gallup Poll.

2. *How did the social survey spread? What was its social and political influence?*

Social researchers met with concerted resistance as they conducted research in the early years of the twentieth century. Just a few decades later they worked in a very different environment. By 1970 social scientific facts and theories were common currency in public life. How did the social scientific sea change come about? Participants examined some of the genres that popularised survey methods and findings during the twentieth century. **Laura King** discussed the publication of social survey findings in the British press, and in the second half of the twentieth century their use of social science methods, in order to engage readers and to increase circulation. **Michelle Arrow** explored the use of survey techniques such as personal testimony by marginalized groups—women who had suffered domestic violence, and gay men and lesbians—and showed

that it completely altered the course of the Royal Commission on Human Relationships in 1970s Australia. **Zora Simic** demonstrated that the onset of the HIV-AIDS crisis transformed sex research in Australia. **Agnieszka Sobocinska** examined the relationship between public opinion polling and foreign affairs by analysing polls of Australian attitudes towards Indonesia from the 1940s to the 1980s.

3. *What were the race, gender and class politics of social surveying in the twentieth century?*

The twentieth-century social survey aimed to describe and categorize social conditions. On the page, its orderly classifications might appear to be objective. But what social tensions shaped the collection of this information? After all, surveying occurred face-to-face, and often in the households of survey subjects. Participants considered the race and gender politics that played out among survey researchers and subjects during the twentieth century. **Paul Lawrie**, for example, examined the relationship between race, industry, labor, urbanization and the exercise of expertise in the United States in the early twentieth century. **Clare Corbould** discussed the work of now-forgotten, low-ranking research assistants and college students who conducted surveys for the Negro Youth Survey in the American South in the 1930s, and their relationships with the prominent Chicago School sociologists at its helm. **Georgina Arnott** uncovered the professional biographies of three women who worked on Wilfred Prest's survey in 1940s Melbourne and who acted as intermediaries between famous social scientists and their subjects. **Jon Lawrence** focused on questions of intersubjectivity in the social-science interview, during the golden age of the community study in the United Kingdom from the late 1940s to the early 1980s. Lawrence asked how the performance of class and gender within the interview shaped not just testimony about community and class identity, but also how social scientists understood that testimony and incorporated it into their research findings.

4. *What has been the role of the state in social research?*

It is now commonly accepted that states and other policy-making bodies use surveys to register and analyse populations and to formulate and reshape policy settings. But how did this practice emerge? Participants considered the use of surveys by twentieth-century states, especially in the interests of improving national productivity. **Michael Hau** examined the German application of the idea of a 'human economy', which aimed to develop the performance capacity of each citizen to the fullest, over the first half of the twentieth century. **Kate Darian-Smith** explored the legacy for rural communities of Australian surveys of the productive capacities of rural industries, and the living conditions and amenities in wheat-growing and irrigation districts, which were carried out during the 1940s. **Alice O'Connor** pointed to a shared blind spot of researchers and states by showing that wealth distribution was all but missing from the social problem survey during the post war decades in the United States and remained so long after the resurgence of interest in poverty in the 1960s, with important consequences for redistributive policies.

5. *How have social surveys affected subjectivity?*

The development of reflexive selfhood is usually explained with reference to literary or commercial autobiographical practices. Yet the social survey, too, asked its subjects for life narratives—even if they took a different form. Over time, researchers became interested in recording people's opinions as well as the material conditions of their lives. By mid-century many favoured methods of interviewing that were based on psychotherapy and were believed to deliver therapeutic benefits to participants. To what extent did people identify with these

developments? Did their participation in social surveys alter their expectations about life, or their sense of self? In order to explore these questions, **Charlotte Greenhalgh** revisited raw data that was collected during large-scale surveys of Melbourne and rural Victoria during the middle decades of the twentieth century. **Mike Savage** took this discussion to the twenty-first century in analysis of 230 qualitative interviews with the 1958 cohort of the British panel survey that he helped to complete in 2008-2009. Savage reflected on how the cohort members understood the significance of their participation in that project when they reflected on their own lives. He then raised questions about how changing ideas about privacy and duty might affect participation in social surveys in the future.

6. *Surveys or surveillance?*

Participants asked which groups of people researchers, and those who paid them, deemed to be acceptable survey respondents, and when, where, and how such ideas changed. In many cases, certain groups were excluded from surveys on the grounds of their race, especially, as well as gender, class, sexuality, age, region, and nation. Even if groups were not subjects in social surveys, though, they were not exempt from the surveying, or surveilling, eye of governments, the state, and its institutions. **Julia Martínez** highlighted the use of second-hand surveys by the League of Nations commission on trafficking of women in Asia in the early 1930s. Unlike in similar studies in Europe, the commission did not interview women in prostitution, relying on the knowledge of officials including police, emigration, justice, health and education officials as well as social workers. **David Goodman** critically analysed the different treatment of African American and white soldiers in large-scale survey research on the US Army during the Second World War. **Katherine Ellinghaus** and **Jordana Silverstein** uncovered the classification by state bodies of social groups that were not considered to be full citizens and the results of that classification for the state surveillance of indigenous people and child refugees in Australia during the second half of the twentieth century.

OUTCOMES

The convenors have prepared a proposal to publish this scholarship. Together, the essays examine the development of survey techniques, recovers experiences of participation in social surveys, traces the consequences of social research for policy worldwide, and establishes Australia's role in the global development of social science.

Contributors have engaged the public in discussion of the history of social surveys and surveillance in the forms of online publication (Jordy Silverstein and Katherine Ellinghaus, 'The racialised amnesia of #CensusFail', *Overland*, 5 August 2016) and a radio interview (Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'Social surveys: a history of resistance, scandal & negotiation', Radio New Zealand, 23 September 2016).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the Academy for its generous support of the workshop, and Monash University and the University of Sydney for their ongoing support of the project.