

International Sociological Association  
e-bulletin



Number 5, November 2006

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# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

### Editorial

The ISA E-Bulletin is now in its second year and fifth issue. I am pleased to say that this publication has been well-received by sociologists all over and I have had little difficulty securing contributions. I have also made an effort to be as inclusive as possible and to reach out to the diverse community of sociologists. This issue reflects such diversity. The featured essays carried in this issue are penned by two prominent sociologists, Prof. Susan McDaniel (Canada) and Prof. Sujata Patel (India). The conversation segment focuses on Ms. Ela Gandhi, a social worker, peace activist and a former Member of Parliament in the ANC-led South African government, whose fascinating and moving life experiences are inspirational for us all. The reflections section carries three pieces by young, upcoming social scientists – Avipal Kotter (Israel), Satoshi Ota (Japan/Taiwan) and Pattana Kittiarasa (Thailand/Singapore) and their experiences of fieldwork and ethnography in diverse substantive and regional fields. I would also like to thank Mr. Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir for his copyediting skills in the preparation of this issue of the E-Bulletin. I remain open to all feedback, comments, suggestions and contributions to this publication and thank you all for your support of the ISA E-Bulletin.

Vineeta Sinha

*Editor, ISA E-Bulletin. E-mail: [ebulletineditor@yahoo.com](mailto:ebulletineditor@yahoo.com)*

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### Escalating Accountability in the “Impossible Science”: Perils and Pitfalls

**Susan McDaniel**

Sociology, University of Windsor  
Canada

E-mail: [mcdaniel@uwindsor.ca](mailto:mcdaniel@uwindsor.ca)



*Susan McDaniel is Professor of Sociology, University of Windsor, and was for 15 years, Professor of Sociology, University of Alberta where she was awarded the honorific title, University Professor. She was Vice-President Publications of the ISA 2002-2006 and served as President of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and serves on the Scientific Advisory Board of the Council of Canadian Academies. She is widely published and has evaluated almost every sociology department in Canada and many elsewhere.*

Accountability of sociologists and sociology departments, when examined through sociological lens, unfolds in layers. There are ongoing, intensifying evaluations of individual sociologists for tenure, promotion, awards and of course, research grants and contracts. Evaluations of programs and departments of sociology in many parts of the world are now becoming routine administrative practice, often coordinated by government bodies, as they are in many countries of the economic north. Much of the ostensible objective of the growing insistence on evaluation is accountability, to the public, particularly the public purse, but also accountability in escalating ways, to students, their parents, corporations who rely on academic research, and to central university administrations who increasingly oversee, if not coordinate, what we do in sociology and how. Rankings and ratings of universities and programs are undertaken for various agendas and purposes, some public, others linked directly to funding allocations. And there is the usual ‘strife among faculties,’ disciplines and universities, for priority, special acknowledgement for their particular research specializations, and, of course, for funding. This creates a series of, for better or worse, self-evaluation processes, a.k.a. discipline/department specific self-promotion and self-rating schemes. However created, these self-evaluation exercises often engage, even if only with sideways glances, externally determined accountability paradigms or typologies, the criteria of which are developed and used by central university administrations and/or governments in setting strategic priorities and in allocating funds.

Sociology as a field of knowledge, as a way (or more appropriately, ways) of seeing society, and as a site of learning and producing new knowledge in the academy, is being

shaped and transformed by shifting institutional and governance contexts of accountability. This reflection focuses on the intellectual and real challenges of escalating accountability for sociology, with reference to historic evolution and moment. It is a sociological look at escalating accountability for sociology as a discipline and as a practice in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Canadian and Quebecois sociologies are drawn upon as illustrative of wider global tendencies. The term, “impossible science,” borrowed from Turner and Turner’s 1990 book, *The Impossible Science: An Institutional Analysis of American Sociology*, is used here to encapsulate the multiple pushes and pulls evident in and on sociology as it evolves, changes and repositioned in academe and society. The concept, “impossible science,” recognizes the profound reorganization of disciplines and the perpetual recreation of knowledge as voices, gazes and stances within and without sociology shift with new ideation and ideology as well as with shifting power relations.

In Canadian and Quebecois sociologies, the pushes and pulls include the historic (and contemporary) solitudes of Anglo-Canadian and Quebec sociologies, the project of Canadianizing Anglo-Canadian sociology (largely differentiating its focus and approach from American, and to some extent British, sociologies), opening the discourse by new “made in Canada” intellectual currents such as the “standpoint feminism” and institutional ethnography of Dorothy Smith, social network theory developed by Barry Wellman, various political economy and historically cross-disciplinary analytical stances such as those of Harold Innis, and of course, the equally cross-disciplinary work of Marshall McLuhan, a student of Innis’, whose ideas spawned communication/media studies and contributed to the birth of cultural studies. In Quebec, new sociological ground has also been broken with the contributions of Guy Rocher and Jacques Godbout, as but two of many exemplars. These intellectual tensions, among others such as the pursuit of interdisciplinarity and the recent push for applicability or useful sociological knowledge, have posed challenges to the evaluation of sociology, as well as of contributions and the esteem in which sociology is held. Challenges are also posed by and to accountability frames – to individuals in hiring and promotion decisions, to assessment of the relative merits of various methodologies and topics as well as of journals, to where the boundaries should be drawn for the discipline of sociology, and to the merits accorded to cross or interdisciplinary sociology or policy relevant research. These have been the subject of active debate, discussion and ‘crisis talk’, sometimes heated, in Canada and Quebec (see Baer, 2005; Fournier, 2002; Curtis and Weir, 2005; McLaughlin, 2004; 2005; Simpson, 2005 among others) and elsewhere around the world.

A second focus of this reflection, which intersects with the tensions and contradictions noted in the first, is on governance and evaluative institutions, processes and procedures, with Canada again drawn upon for illustration. The mantra of accountability and a managerial ethos link to changes to the modern research university (and most universities are expected, and expect themselves, to be research universities at least to some degree). Clark (2006) shows how the contemporary research university is inextricably connected with what he terms “the modern order” in which “... the visible and the rational triumphed over the oral and the traditional” (Clark, 2006: 3). The rational is manifested in bureaucratic structures, procedures and processes whereby academics are ‘managed’ in the interests of markets and/or states.

## A brief history of academic accountability

Early modern academic faculties and colleges had a family-like structure with collegial practices including favours, nepotism, seniority, gifts and the like taking precedence over rational bureaucratic procedures. Indeed, vestiges of the “family” remain in the cultural practices of many traditional colleges with dining halls and special occasions presided over by a patriarchal don or professor, typically male.

Bureaucratic and entrepreneurial interests overthrew, to some extent, the traditional authority of faculties in favour of oversight by central authorities, whether kings or ministers of state. Academics and the academic enterprise became incorporated into the larger agendas of state apparatuses and “managed” in a politico-economic system. Ministers of state, policy masters and minders, came to see themselves as “stamping out pedantry” (Clark, 2006: 13), and instead encouraging the production of both students and knowledge as useful to the state and, most importantly, to markets. That attitude is very much part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century *zeitgeist* with politicians routinely ridiculing research they see as “pedantic,” or put in contemporary parlance, “a waste of taxpayers’ money.” It is also a constitutive part of the accountability paradigm which holds that the more useful the knowledge produced in any unit, the more employable and in demand the students are from that unit or program, the more valuable the unit or program is seen and the more resources are bestowed upon it.

There is a further re-characterization of the contemporary scientist (hard scientist, not social scientist!) as a kind of wizard who possesses extraordinary abilities and powers. This is, in a sense, akin to Weber’s sense of charisma, with the wonder and magic of science supplanting the warrior, the king or the religious charismatic. The modern academic scientist could possibly save us from death thereby providing eternal life (something religion only could promise in earlier eras), save society from all its problems, produce technologies to reinvigorate sagging economies, and generally perform feats of wizardry (modern-day science as magic) through activation of markets with ideas and inventions. Of course, the wizards, it is thought, must be managed very carefully and steered by ministers of state and their servants, university administrators, who are thought to be wiser, and certainly more prudent and rational, than unruly scientists and researchers. (Anyone familiar with Harry Potter and his wizardly friends would understand the unruly potential of wizards!) These managers certainly see themselves as blessed by the light of accountability, holding the reins on the unruly. “The strength of the modern research university consists in its ability to rationalize and routinize prophecy and revolution, to make equilibrium dynamic” (Clark, 2006: 18).

Often seen as part and parcel of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century academic life, accountability paradigms go far back in history. Remarkably, this minding relationship of ministers of state with respect to academics, or in the image of academics as disorderly, can be found as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Johann von Justi had this to say in 1755:

Ministers and state officials usually have a very bad opinion of academics...

And the greater and more famous the academic is, the less they believe they can employ him in a true sense and service for the state. From this arises the reproach of pedantry, which most state officials in their hearts give all academics.

*(von Justi, 1755, translated from the original German)*

Indeed what were called ‘visitations’ by ministerial representatives to universities originated in medieval ecclesiasticism. Early modern visitations were typically church clerics dropping by centres of learning to verify the orthodoxy of teachings and to be assured that professors were not engaging in immoral conduct. The visitors were not always fully welcomed, however, as might be expected. Clark (2005: 341) notes that some professors and even some monks regarded the visitations as surveillance, which indeed they likely were!

The impetus for medieval universities such as Oxford and Cambridge to seek some degree of autonomy in their governance was to avoid the persistence of visitations by church clergy. Instead, what happened was that the visitors changed from churchly to stately in stance. Accountability of academics actually intensified, with protocols for the visitations formalized both in content (sometimes with predetermined questions) and format. With respect to the latter, visitation instructions drawn up by the bishop and duke in the “German lands” in 1597 noted that the visitation group was to arrive on a specific evening and time, and that the next day all professors were to assemble and answer the 124 questions put to them by the civil authorities (Clark, 2005: 345).

In responding to the preset questions, allegations emerged about standards in hiring, about colleagues, and about pedagogical practices, good or bad – all duly recorded by the visitors. Here is a sample from those records with the identities of those discussed protected:

He was against hiring X... and was for Y in Wittenberg. A may improve but did not lecture in the eleventh month...B had many failings, [and] his [Nr. 2’s] face was nice but behind his back tried to push things his way in the [academic] senate. He [B] once had a servant who had a whore for a wife. Because of him, there were fewer theology students than at other places. C was tight and liked to leech off others, so he could drink for free...

*(Clark, 2005: 349, taken from original visitation documents at University of Wittenberg)*

Any 21<sup>st</sup> century academic who has ever served as a member of an evaluation committee, the modern-day visitation committee, will immediately recognize similarities in statements shared with committee members. “Ministerial machinations work on academic noise or babble by transforming it into something professionally relevant...” (Clark, 2005:352). Innuendo becomes a form of professional truth-telling about standards. With escalating accountability, narratives become power and indicative of weakness or strength of a discipline or unit. In normal parlance, these narratives would likely be termed gossip or back-biting.

The minders and masters of the accounts and of the unruly scholars and scientists in academia in late modernity, perhaps the most unruly of which (in their eyes) would be sociologists, are the holders of accountability. They discipline and cajole, calling these tactics incentives and strategic opportunities. They, like kings and lords of yesteryear, have an arsenal of tools by which to adjudicate worthiness of disciplines, academic units and individual professors of sociology. Marketability of both students as products and products of research, would be an increasingly central measure.

Research productivity is also a basis, typically captured by a set of metrics including numbers of publications, quality of publications measured by various schemes, and increasingly, impact of publications captured by impact factor ratings coveted by journals, and by complex systems of bibliometrics aimed at assessing networks and collaborations across units, disciplines, research groups or countries.

Accountability schemes are complex in operationalization in any system of governance. In a federal system such as Canada's where education, including postsecondary education, falls under provincial jurisdiction, accountability of academic units and/or disciplines becomes even more dispersed and knotty. Federal funds are contributed to universities for teaching and infrastructure through omnibus transfers to the provinces, to the universities directly from competitive funding for research infrastructure (Canadian Foundation for Innovation primarily, and also in research overhead transfers and by various other means). Built into the structure of funding, the teaching and research functions of Canadian and Quebecois universities are disconnected, leading to severe difficulties in integration of the two mandates. If funding is allocated on the basis of strong specialty research groups, as tends to be the case in the United Kingdom, then the canon of sociology becomes a challenge to cover in courses offered at either the undergraduate or graduate levels. Faculty is hired because of their research areas, so teaching areas and coverage can be neglected. The opposite can be true for universities not attracting large funds for research or research groups where the focus then becomes on filling course needs with new hires. In both situations, the beneficial and frontier pushing associated with bringing new knowledge into classrooms and taking classroom experience into research, are lost or, in the best case, diminished. Universities are structurally challenged in integrating teaching and research by escalating accountability tied to funding formulae.

Some Canadian provinces have developed their own systems and structures for evaluating programs and departments, including sociology, often with a particular focus on graduate programs where there is concern about the production of what bureaucrats call "highly qualified personnel or HQP" to drive the economy. The Ontario Council of Graduate Studies has a long-standing routinized system for rotating evaluation of graduate sociology programs, on which both accreditation and funding depends. Adjudication of research projects, funded largely but not exclusively by federal research agencies, are undertaken separately, often on the basis of individual applications, but increasingly with attention to shifting strategic priorities set by governments for research clusters, centres and networks. An additional pressure is toward commercialization, not only of research, but increasingly of teaching materials and intellectual property related to pedagogy.

## **Framework**

The celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the meetings of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association in 1990 provided an occasion for critical reflection as well as contemplation of where Canadian sociology might head in the future. An edited book, *Fragile Truths: 25 Years of Sociology and Anthropology in Canada* (1992) came from those reflections. The title is an apt one, as Canadian sociology reflected with the acuity of hindsight on the fragility of social truths and the multiplicity of social realities. It is fully recognized by the authors in this volume that truths become reconstructed by the march of history and by human agency. "Knowledge of the social is dynamic and the social itself is changed by the ways we go about knowing it," say Bruce Curtis and Lorna Weir in 2005 (Curtis and Weir, 2005: 505). The editors and authors in the 1992 volume sensed and anticipated the fragility of sociological knowledge, which in the intervening years has accelerated its 'best before date.' Both knowledge of the social and the ways of knowing, have become highly dynamic, ever more fragile and contested in Canada and throughout the world as the twentieth century closed and the twenty first opened. And the accountability paradigm has stepped up its pace and

broadened its offensive to encompass teaching, now thought of not in terms of intellectual development and critical thinking, but in terms of countable 'learning outcomes.'

Motivated by the dual concepts of fragile truths and multiple social realities, the guiding framework for this reflection is that of Bourdieu (2005) where reflexivity means working to use concepts and simultaneously to interrogate the conceptual apparatus being used. The sociologist's personal social location matters in this framework, as do the 'regulatory norms' of the discipline itself, and the institutions in which we work that enable and constrain our apprehending of the social, whether or not it is called sociology. The question then becomes not whether various sociologies can produce certain knowledge or truths that are uncontested with the capacity to alter the world we know, but rather to assess the means by which we can make sense of what is scholarly excellence and what is useful knowledge in sociology given the fragile and shifting terrain of the discipline, the multiple and complex places from which the social is observed, and the immensely elastic ways in which whatever is thought or seen is reported. A reflexive sociology of accountability requires thinking sociologically about the sociology of accountability through evaluations.

### **Currents and Tensions in Evaluations of Sociology**

In addition to the currents and tensions noted above, there are more recent emergent issues related to the commodification of teaching and courses as intellectual property (Turk, 2000). This trend, it is argued, has turned university teaching of sociology, as well as of other disciplines, into a commodity to be bought and sold by students but also by the universities themselves which often own the intellectual property rights to courses taught on the internet or by other ICT means. This is a world where ratings and performance count more than learning, more than pushing students to understand afresh what they think they know, a hallmark of sociological pedagogy. Professors who teach are increasingly held accountable to their students, whose ratings of their professors in individual courses are taken highly seriously in promotion, tenure and merit pay increases. Whether this accountability framework results in better teaching or better learning, whether captured by learning outcomes or by other means, is hotly contested. Funding, both internally in universities and by external funding agencies, is increasingly pegged in some jurisdictions to student ratings. Programs, or even courses, that attract students are seen as desirable and worthy of resources by the accountability bean counters.

As accountability becomes more central in the granting of government transfers to universities, the vast majority of which in Canada and Quebec are public, teaching evaluations come to matter more and more. Students evaluate not only individual course instructors but also the entirety of their university experience (The National Survey of Student Engagement). These evaluations are now being published in Canada's popular weekly news magazine, *Maclean's* (2006 or see [www.macleans.ca](http://www.macleans.ca)). Comparisons amongst Canadian universities on students' perceptions are now possible and increasingly comprise an integral part of the accountability framework with the full endorsement of university administrations, boards of governance, and with governments who provide funding to universities. This will no doubt have implications for evaluation of sociologists and of sociology across universities in Canada as sociology is prodded to move more and more into popular areas such as media studies, criminology, etc. and away from the canon of the discipline including theory and methods.

## **Evaluation and accountability of academic units of sociology and of the discipline**

Bourdieu (1975) tells us that every science is organized around an interest of disinterest where disinterest is an orientation to the more or less firmly established collective norms that regulate a science's truth claims. Interest encompasses the striving of those in that field for distinction for themselves, their research area(s), or of their academic unit in relation to the field overall. Coherence of the nexus of disinterest and interest is a key tenet of any accountability framework, most often implicitly. It is an abstract normative conceptualization of what this particular group of practitioners of 'the social,' in the case of sociology, ought to be doing in pedagogy and research, and whether or not they cover all that that field is conceptualized as containing. Our research is expected to defend, to a large extent, the integrity of sociological knowledge as it is understood.

At least two significant challenges are posed by this dimension of the accountability framework when applied to sociological evaluations. First, with escalating accountability, accompanied by parallel changes in what comprises 'the social,' and who are the sociologists, there is a distancing of evaluators from sociology as practiced, on the ground, by particular units. Unfairly harsh or lenient evaluations can be the outcome. Second, there is a contradictory component of disciplinary cohesion in a world when real-world questions are interdisciplinary and necessitate nimbleness. This is perhaps best evidenced by the example of demography:

There are striking cases in which the construction of a strong disciplinary core, the promotion of a professional hierarchy and the erections of barriers to interdisciplinary influences have led to the decline of disciplines. In both Canada (outside Quebec) and the United States, demography, which was a leading sociological specialty in the 1960s and 1970s, has been recuperated in large part by the discipline of economics and emptied of much of its critical potential, or paired with a new theoretical problematic and taken up by history. As Susan Greenhalgh argues, it was precisely the professional strength of demographers, their claims to scientificity, and their insulation from new currents of social theory that caused their specialty to decline (Greenhalgh, 1996).

*(Curtis and Weir, 2005:508)*

## **Evaluation and accountability of individual sociologists**

At least three kinds of work engage sociologists: 1) the production of new knowledge whether through empirical research or theorization; 2) knowledge diffusion which includes publication and teaching, and 3) the work of professional administration including thesis supervision, service in reviewing papers, participation in professional activities and associations and public outreach. These activities flow differently at life course stages, as we know. A particular dimension of the Canadian and Quebec university systems, not unique but not globally characteristic, is "institutional flatness." Although defined variously, we take "institutional flatness" here to mean that all (or at least all but the very rare few) academic sociologists are expected throughout their careers, to engage fully in all three kinds of work outlined above. There are no breaks for the most brilliant researchers or for the most brilliant of public intellectuals. Nor is there much of a hierarchy amongst institutions in terms of distribution of expectations along these three kinds of work, although workload

varies. Evaluation then of individual sociologists is, for the most part, predicated on the operation of some sets of accountability standards, however loosely defined, in all three of these areas.

Few systematic studies exist on the evaluation processes by which universities accord tenure and promotion in Canada or anywhere else. Even fewer exist for sociology specifically. What do exist are personal stories, for example, Pierce's (2003) U.S. experience of the shifting standards for hiring, promotion and tenure. There are systemic comparative studies in some countries, for example Platt's study of male and female experiences, navigating the stages of academic sociology in Britain (2004). She finds large fluxes and flows in the hiring of women in sociology departments in Britain, which of course differentially affect the opportunities for women sociologists over time.

And there are studies of specific sociological foci such as African studies in Canada (Dei, 1995) which argue for more inclusive criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure that give credence to a widening definition of sociological contribution. One enticing systematically controlled study (Dennis, 2000) examines the degree to which applicants doing explicitly gay or lesbian research are hired in the U.S. in sociology departments compared to a control group of applicants doing other kinds of sociological research. It is found that those doing gay and lesbian sociological research are more likely to be hired.

One exceptional study that focuses on sociologists and anthropologists in Canada (Nakhaie, 2001) finds that there have been distinct changes in the composition of academic sociologists in the 25 year period studied (1971-1996). Most notable was an increase in the number of women, mostly of British and French ethnicities. These women were more represented over the study period both at entry level and in the upper ranks. Women of "other" ethnic origins were less represented in sociology departments but once there, more likely to move into the ranks of Associate and full Professor.

A doctoral student in Sociology at Universite de Montreal did his dissertation research comparing how tenure is gained (or not) in the sociology and economics departments at Universite de Montreal and Universite de Quebec a Montreal for two cohorts, one whose tenure process took place before 1985 and one after<sup>1</sup>. Qualitative interviews were done, the results of which might be summarized in the following way: in economics, there is precision and agreement about what publications are needed for tenure and promotion, while in sociology, it is more, in the best cases, "live and let live", based on a loose reputational process (Albert et Bernard, 2000a; 2000b).

In spite of what appears to be something of a *laissez faire* system of evaluation of individual sociologists in Canada and Quebec, several patterns seem apparent. First, with institutional flatness as a structural norm in Canada, evaluations tend to be tripartite with contributions in all three areas given approximately equal weight. Those then who may be contributing strongly to new sociological knowledge but perhaps less keenly to knowledge diffusion, or service, may not be rewarded highly. On similar grounds, diffusers of sociological knowledge may be rewarded equally to the creators of new knowledge. The result is a possible conservatively biased reward structure that fails to provide incentives to top knowledge-producing sociologists. To add more weight to this evaluation bias, some universities in Canada only engage in evaluation of individual sociologists when promotion or tenure is at stake. In other words, there are universities with no merit system at all, meaning that the incentives to excel in research, teaching or service are not present. This is a potential negative for the probabilities that Canadian or Quebecois sociologists will achieve

prominence on the world stage, although of course, despite the disincentives structures, many have.

Secondly, this flatness is exacerbated by the dominance of sociology, indeed of all social sciences, in Canadian universities by other disciplines thought by administrators and governments that fund universities, to be more important. Thus sociology becomes a “dominated” discipline in Bourdieu’s terminology, open to large service teaching demands from non-sociology majors, and to being badgered into participating in applied areas such as health studies, criminology or gerontology, often as ‘add-on’s” rather than as the intellectual or project leaders. Worthy as some of these large interdisciplinary research projects may be, the overall effect is to dilute the capacities of many Canadian sociologists to make original and sustained contributions to the field of sociology.

Third, adding further complexity to evaluation at the individual level is internal heterogeneity in Canada and Quebec on what constitutes sociology or excellence in scholarly sociological work. Sociology in Quebec emerged from an indigenous Quebecois combination of the historical influence of Catholicism with its Jesuit tradition of scholarship, and a cultural-linguistic orientation toward France. These influences remain evident today. Francophones publishing in journals in Quebec, Platt (2006) finds, lead Anglophones publishing in journals in Canada in reliance on historical methods. But both Francophone and Anglophone sociologists publishing in journals in Canada and Quebec have moved increasingly to interviews over time as a preferred research method.

In the “Rest of Canada” (outside Quebec), the sociological traditions come largely from Britain and the United States (McLaughlin, 2004; 2005). Even this dual parentage leads to contradictory impulses. American sociology has privileged survey research and statistical analyses, what Alford (1998) calls “multivariate theorizing.” British sociology, on the other hand is more multi-method oriented with a stronger qualitative strain and a deeper theoretical tradition than in the U.S.

## **Governance and Evaluative Institutions**

These multiple tensions and contradictory proclivities have led to a hodgepodge of Ph.D. programs in Sociology across Canada and Quebec. Many have slowly removed quantitative methods and statistics from their program requirements and/or entrance prerequisites for graduate students, while they have come to emphasize contemporary theory courses (Baer, 2005:499). Others have become hotbeds of interdisciplinarity focusing on cultural or media studies. Still others rely on a specific problematique such as gender and race inequalities and hire only new faculty in that area. The result is that the breadth of what is sociology, or rather what sociology could be, is shrunk, distorted or simply incorporated elsewhere in other units or disciplines.

## **Conclusion**

It should be clear from this reflection that escalating accountabilities at various levels and for various purposes holds perils and pitfalls for both the sociological construction of new knowledge and for the practice of sociology. Now it is also true that other disciplines are not unaffected by rampant accountability frames. However, it has been argued that the consequences for sociology may be deeper and more significant because of the perceived need of the minders and managers in the accountability business, to see sociologists as particularly unruly and in need of their careful management.

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- Based on a paper prepared for the plenary session, "Evaluations of Sociology and the Sociology of Evaluations," World Congress of Sociology, Durban, South Africa, July 2006*

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## e-bulletin

### Colonial Modernity, the Sociological Study of Religion, and Nineteenth Century Majoritarianism<sup>1</sup>

**Sujata Patel**

Sociology, University of Pune  
India

E-mail: [spatel@unipune.ernet.in](mailto:spatel@unipune.ernet.in)



*Sujata Patel is a professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Pune, India. She is a historical sociologist working in the area of sociology of domination. Her work has focused on the way premodern hierarchies such as caste, ethnicity and gender have interwoven with class to define socialities in contemporary India. She is interested in examining the local contexts that structured hierarchies as well as evaluating the discourses that represent them. Currently, she is working on two research projects: one explores the way global processes have impacted on the city of Bombay, transforming popular culture and politics. Another examines the sociology of intellectual ideas in postcolonial India, with specific reference to the discipline of sociology and its institutional expression. She is author of *The Making of Social Relations: Ahmedabad Textile Industry* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), and coeditor of *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1995), *Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1995), *Thinking Social Science in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002), *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Urban Studies, A Reader* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006).*

The focus of this paper is on the sociological discourse on religion as it applies to the South Asian region. I am devoting the paper on this theme because many of us here are concerned with the way the interface between religious identities, the state and political processes are creating communal, ethnic and sectarian conflicts in South Asia. Historians and political scientists have been writing on this issue for some time and explicating the complexity that structures this theme in the South Asian context. Religion, as we know, has been traditionally the domain of research and study of anthropologists and sociologists. How have sociologists understood religion and its contemporary manifestations in South Asia? Do they possess the language and the vocabulary to assess the contemporary processes that impacts religion and the way religion structures them?

There is a tendency in India by sociologists of religion to propose that they should use Emile Durkheim's perspective to assess religious experiences. Thus T.N. Madan, one of

India's foremost sociologists of religion quotes Durkheim to assert that '...religion was historically and everywhere the source of morality, law, science and much else. And, as he (Durkheim) put it, 'if religion gave birth to all that is essential in society, that is so because the idea of society is the soul of religion'...' (Madan, 2006: 6). On the basis of this position he argues that religion in India organises all aspects of social life and that the contemporary Indian secular state infused with the enthusiasm of western modern concepts has refused to appreciate this aspect of religion. No wonder he applauds the fact that there is 'the return of religion to the public arena' the world over (Madan, 2006:14).

In this presentation, I argue that the sociological discourse on religion in India has not been able to grasp the complexities of the religious dimensions in ex-colonial countries as it interfaces with modernity. This is because this discourse incorporates seminal assumptions relating to colonial modernity and its knowledge, earlier embodied in the discipline of anthropology, as contemporary sociology was then identified, and then incorporated in the sociology of religion. These assumptions relate to the matrix of binaries such as the west and the east, modernity and tradition, materiality and religiosity, majority and minority that represents the project of modernity. This episteme structures the construction of academic knowledge regarding societies in the west and the east and the division of this knowledge into two disciplines, that of sociology and anthropology. It also informs perspectives and practices of these disciplines together with the placement of scholars in distinct academic traditions with its own sets of research questions, methods and methodologies. These binaries are part of the colonial project of domination and rule that uses and continues to use classification of groups as a means to structure power and to highlight differences between the Orient and Occident (Patel, 2006:382).

More particularly, the sociology of religion of India draws its frame from two assumptions governing the discipline of anthropology/sociology. I have argued earlier (Patel, 2006:383-4), that these two assumptions were organised in the late nineteenth century when they fashioned a continuum of binaries. The first assumption was geographical and distinguished between groups living in the subcontinent from the spatial-cultural structures of the West. Later those living in the subcontinent were further classified in geographically in spatial-cultural zones. The second assumption related to the internal division and relationship between these groups. All groups living in the subcontinent were defined by its relationship with Hinduism. Those that were directly related to Hinduism, such as castes and tribes were termed the 'majority', while those, that were, not, were conceived as 'minorities', these being mainly groups who practiced Islam and Christianity<sup>2</sup> (Patel, 2006).

In this presentation, I argue that anthropologists/sociologists researching on South Asian religions have oftentimes uncritically accepted this logic, and thereby become trapped in this discourse. The geographically vast subcontinent of South Asia with it thousands of communities having distinct cultural practices and ideas have lived and experienced existence in various forms of unequal and subordinate relationships with each other. Nineteenth century anthropological/sociological knowledge dissolved these distinctions and re-categorised them into four or five major religious traditions thereby constructing a master narrative of the majority and minority. This logic homogenised distinctions between groups but it also naturalised one form of unequal distribution of power and resources. India and Hinduism collapsed into each other. Also, both these concepts were loaded with additional meanings. Hinduism as a majority religion was redefined to include all kinds of ideas and cultural practices, as it became a Great Tradition, and anchored into a timeless civilization.

This project found expression (ironically and paradoxically) in the work of indigenous intellectuals in the subcontinent searching to find an identity against colonialism. They categorised and classified Hindu traditions while systemizing and ordering its internal hierarchy as they adopted the language of the binaries and thus of colonial modernity. They constructed discourses of immanent Hindu tradition and reformulated its concepts and theories. In their search for the 'roots' of this Great Tradition, they codified and standardised in the mirror of *savarna* (upper caste) perceptions, the discrete cultural practices of groups in India. This became a political project in two senses, in reaffirming tradition to interrogate the 'modern' and in fashioning a tradition in the image of the *savarna* perception. Religion as tradition naturalised the relationship of domination-subordination, together with processes and forms of inequalities, exclusions and violence prevalent in the subcontinent. The discourse of colonial modernity became a tool of creating a new knowledge of power and domination to classify, categorise, order and thus divide in a new representation the disadvantaged and underprivileged groups.

This presentation weaves together the nineteenth century representation of Hindu majoritarianism with an examination of the sociological discussion on religion and religious traditions in India. In the first section, I evaluate the work of T. N. Madan, a sociologist of religion, who has in contemporary times written the most on India's religions and is recognised for his contribution in this area. I assess his position on India's religions, his discussion on the nature of Hinduism, modernity, secularism and pluralism and show how this position remains embedded in the binaries formulated during colonial modernity.

I conclude this presentation by arguing that the sociological discourse on religion in ex-colonial countries needs to assess, understand and interrogate the discourse that has constructed the binaries of majority-minority. These binaries and the processes that it generates structure modes of domination against extreme exclusions governing the subcontinent, restructuring dissent in terms of religious expression. Religious identities of majority-minority govern the fault lines of conflicts in South Asia. Social science language should recognise this role and not become part of this language of domination and power.

### **Madan's Theory on Religions in India**

I have taken the work of T.N. Madan for discussion because his perspective draws from that of French theorist Louis Dumont and resonates among some scholars working on South Asian studies in Europe. Dumont's oeuvre, I argue is steeped in the binaries of colonial modernity. Dumont constructs a separate sociology for the west based on the concept of equality in juxtaposition to the sociology of the east that is based on hierarchy. Though Madan wishes to interrogate western modernity, because his conceptual language is based on Dumont binaries of the west and east he cannot interrogate western modernity. I argue that when Madan affirms a need for an indigenous and a pluralist perspective, he extends uncritically a Hindu majoritarian perspective that is based on the binaries created by colonial modernity, that of west and the east, of materiality and religiosity and of majority and minority. I suggest that this position cannot recognise the differences of cultural and religious practices among *jatis* and ethnic groups as these are constructed in differential forms of domination and subordination within the subcontinent because it collapses these differences into a *savarna* position on Hinduism.

In the course of the last two decades, T. N. Madan has written extensively on the sociology of religion and has edited two books on religions in India. His paper titled *Secularism in Place* has evoked sharp criticisms not only from radical social scientists (Baber,

2006) but also from sociologists such as Andre Beteille (1994). While agreeing generally with these criticisms I want to expand this appraisal to include a criticism of his use of methods, methodologies and perspectives. How one presents a problem has a bearing on how one thinks out the problem. This in turn is related to the assumptions and the discourse that guides one's thought.

In the introduction to his edited book *India's Religions* (2004), Madan starts the discussion on religions in India by using the census. Thus he suggests that the Hindus constitute India's largest community followed by the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and lastly the Jains.

There are two issues that need to be considered here. The first is the use of numbers to understand the proportionate strength of religious communities and related to it, is the use of census to identify religious groups in India. To what extent can and does the census represent the complexities of religious beliefs and identities? It is important to note that the census uses self-definition to enumerate religious affiliation, that is, it uses self-identity of individuals. Earlier G. S. Ghurye and M.N.Srinivas have commented on the way the census enumeration of communities became in colonial and later independent India, an instrument for the mobilisation of groups to define identities.

B. S. Cohn (1987) has put forward a new dimension in this argument. He suggests that the census does not only portray the way groups identify themselves but also is a response to the project of objectification of identities that the colonial government initiated. British officials and later trained anthropologists initiated the study of India as the premodern civilisation and society. Their initial tasks were to categorise and classify the groups and communities so that rule can be facilitated. Cohn has argued that

.....(i)t was felt by many British officials in the middle of the nineteenth century that caste and religion were the sociological keys to understand the Indian people. If they were to be governed well then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about caste and religion.....The impetus to collect information ... went way beyond the 'intellectual curiosity of a few officials and was based on widespread beliefs about Indians by the British.(Cohn ,1987:243)

Nandini Sundar extends this idea when she argues that the census 'was significant as numbers were fetishized and became objects of government action in themselves.' She continues, 'statistics on identities became important as communities demanded entitlements on the basis of numbers, in a politics which conflated representation (standing on behalf of) with representativeness (coming from a particular community)' (Sundar, 2000:113)

Dirks (1997:121) has made a more general argument when he suggests that the invention of new 'social technologies, printing and the standardisation of languages, self regulating and autonomous legal systems, official histories of the state and people and the production of celebration of national shrines, symbols and pilgrim centres' were part of the larger political project of the nation state now imposed on by the colonial elite in India. He argues that the colonial conquest was sustained not only by superior arms and military organization, nor by political power and economic wealth but also through cultural technology of rule. Colonial conquest and knowledge both enabled ways to rule and to construct what colonialism was all about – its own self knowledge (Dirks, 2001:13).

How did the census realise this goal? Historians and anthropologists have shown that it was extremely difficult to implement this project. Some of the groups could be classified as

being part of two or three religions. At another level, two or more castes would have identical names but have different customs and mores and could be classified in different religions. Alternately, castes having different names would have similar customs. No wonder the effort to document social behaviour, customs and mores of individual communities became a major project for the colonial state which used not only enumeration, but scriptural and indological methods to categorise and classify groups.

The second issue relates to the concept of 'tradition'. Since the mid nineteenth century there had been attempts to codify 'tradition'. Indological texts came to be used in devising theories regarding Hinduism and the caste system. Indologists built an extensive repertoire of knowledge on Vedic and post Vedic scriptures and translated ancient Indian texts from Sanskrit to European languages. Also British officials relied on 'native informants' (generally Brahmins) to obtain information regarding placements of castes within the hierarchy. Earlier the Brahmins had elaborated the theory of the four-fold *varna* classification. Later they reinterpreted it in order to legitimise it, when they became the informants in helping the British to codify practices and classify castes.

As a result, in the census, caste classification through *varna* categories came to be used and became part of the state project. And as the *varna* categories were related to Hinduism, religion became a key reference in the first identification of groups and thus the constitution of the majority and minority. Thus Cohn shows that in the first census, in 1871-2, the classification of castes was based on the initial classification of all groups into religious communities. After this, officials tried to place *jatis* in the four *varnas* or in 'categories of outcastes and aborigines'. Cohn adds that these officials recognised the difficulties and the 'absence of a uniform system of classification' However, '(f)rom the beginning of the census operations, it was widely assumed that an all-India system of classification of castes could be developed' (1987:243). As this system took the point of view of the Brahmins and other *savarnas*, we see a codification of the privileged and *savarna* point of view.

Madan's position as those of many other contemporary sociologists, I would argue has continuity with this perspective and remains etched in this discourse. He considers 'four out of five Indians', Hindus reiterating the use of numbers to define the majority (Madan, 2004:1). Like the earlier indologists he looks at the scriptures and especially the *Manusmriti* for guidance in assessing the constituents of religion. Later his argument collapses all Indians (including the one out of five) into being Hindus when he states that though Islam and later Christianity 'broke the bond between India and her indigenous traditions' and,

....from a cultural perspective, anthropologists and sociologists have provided details of the many components of culture and aspects of social structure of the non-Hindu communities that have either been borrowed from the Hindus or are survivals from their pre-conversion Hindu past with or without significant alterations (Madan, 2004: 1)

In a profound sense Madan was influenced by Louis Dumont who reconstructed the binaries into an elaborate theory of the sociology of hierarchy for the East and contrasting it with the sociology of equality in the West. While sociologists like Srinivas had used the empirical method to demystify some of the received indological assumptions and had distinguished between *varna* and *jati*, (Srinivas, 2002), Dumont made a critique of this empirical position, by insisting that not only does 'a sociology of India lie at a point of confluence of sociology and indology' (Dumont, 1957:7), he also argued that Vedic Hinduism is the most ancient religion and defines the organic character of India. "... The

very existence and influence of the traditional higher Sanskrit civilisation demonstrates without question the unity of India... ..it does not demonstrate but actually constitutes it' (Dumont, 1957:10).

Madan continues this assessment when he asserts that religion has '...immense importance .....in the lives of the people of South Asia' (Madan, 1994:395). He goes on to state that,

South Asia's major religious traditions-Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism are totalising in character, claiming all of a follower's life so that religion is constitutive of society (Madan, 1994:399)

No wonder he argues that,

.....religion in India is not discrete element of everyday life that stands wholly apart from the economic and political concerns of the world....the religious domain is not distinguished from the secular, but rather the secular is regarded as being encompassed (Madan, 2004:2).

What is this critical holistic notion that unifies all religious activity in India? For Madan, this is Dharma. Dharma connotes for Madan, the maintenance and sustenance of moral virtue. This broad strand of a self-sustaining cosmo-moral order runs through all the religions in India, especially Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism which incorporated Hindu principles with subtle difference of nuances. He thus asserts a continuous and a long tradition of Hinduism. This tradition he argues was never a source of conflict, for 'the scope of interreligious understanding is.....immense and it is no way contradicted by the holism of the religious traditions of mankind' (Madan, 2004:385). The differences that are there within Hinduism are part of this long history.

No wonder in the introduction to his latest edited volume, titled *India's Religions. Perspectives from Sociology and History*, Madan characterises Hinduism as inherently plural and uses the concept of 'pluralism' to depict its traditions and values. The argument of pluralism obviously draws from the American tradition. In the USA, religious pluralism is a loosely defined term concerning peaceful relations between different religions. Pluralism acknowledges the diversity of interests and considers it imperative that members of society accommodate their differences by engaging in good-faith negotiation. It is connected with the hope that this process of dialogue will lead to a re-definition of conflict in terms of a realization of a common good that is best for all members of society. This implies that in a pluralistic framework, the common good is not given a priori. Rather it is needs to be constructed through a process of negotiation (a posteriori). Consequently, the common good does not, according to pluralists, coincide with the principles one religion. Rather it evolves as negotiations happen between religions.

By suggesting that Hinduism is an immanent tradition, Madan accepts the construct of colonial modernity that indigenous 'Hindu traditions' determine its essence. In this paper, I am not debating whether Hinduism is essentially plural in nature. Rather, I am questioning the epistemic moorings of Madan's understanding of Hinduism. These moorings are located in nineteenth century principles of colonial modernity, which defined every aspect of social life to be circumscribed by Hindu traditions. Can this form Hinduism be plural in nature? For, as mentioned above pluralism is interconnected to the creation of common good. And it can evolve only if there is equality among individuals and groups of different religious affiliations. But in this case this is not so. Thus, how can common good be negotiated between groups who are defined as a majority and a minority? Also, Madan recognises that

caste hierarchy gets legitimacy through Hinduism. How can common good be negotiated between groups in an internal hierarchy with each other? How can common good be negotiated between two divided groups, one of who, a very small section, believe that it is innately superior to the larger section?

Madan together with many of his contemporaries who argue the indigenous position and uphold 'traditions', seem not to recognise that 'traditions' are a construct of modernity. In this logic, India particularly and South Asia more generally, lives in a world which is steeped in tradition and which has the 'native' resources to mitigate religious conflicts. For he states, '...for in truth, it is the marginalisation of religious faith, which is what secularisation is, that permits the perversion of religion' (Madan, 1991:396). This perversion has its roots in western modernity and in the ideology of secularism. Secularism is 'a social myth ...of th(e) minority to separate politics from religion in the society in which members live' (Madan, 1991:395).<sup>3</sup>

But is secularism and modernity the source of religious conflicts? Or is the source of conflicts the knowledge process by which religion and religious affiliations has become part and parcel of the politics of identity construction? If it is the processes, how and in what contexts have these processes developed? In being critical of secularism and secularists, and particularly the imposition of European notions of secularism, Madan elides the questioning of colonial modernity and the way its knowledge is intrinsic to the politics of religious conflicts in South Asia. Surely we should have the sociological language to assess the way these processes have taken place and to explicate the manner in which knowledge construction, including our own, helped to construct and build these identities that have been articulated through these processes? Andre Beteille (1994) has critically appraised Madan's use of the concept secularisation as a process related to secularism and indicated the need to dissociate these two terms. And commenting on Madan's use of scriptures to evolve a position on India's religions, Beteille has reminded us that theological analysis need not be the sole criterion for making a sociological assessment of religion.

Till now I have made a critique of Madan's ideas on India's religions to demonstrate how colonial binaries imposed itself on the language of the sociologist who naturalised not only the concepts of majority and minority but also incorporated various theories that homogenised and hegemonised this position. Knowledge alone cannot play the role in hegemonisation. It also takes place through social movements and involves intellectuals who mobilise the populace through a set of ideas. In the next section I once again revert back to the nineteenth century to explain how the Hindu majority was constituted. I discuss Vivekananda's idea of *seva*, the *guru* tradition and the organisational structure of *sangathana*, all three that became models to incorporate non *savarna* groups into a majority Hindu community.

### **Vivekanda, *Seva* and the making of a Majority**

In this section, I discuss how the binary of majority and minority is not merely a discourse. Since the late nineteenth century in India, there have been attempts to organise and mobilise the Hindu majority as a nation under the hegemony of a *savarna* male authoritarian leadership. Emerging in late nineteenth century this project continues to define the social and political processes within India and South Asia, now in the context of global processes of change. I discuss the political fallouts of Vivekananda's project to built *sangathanas* (organisations) through the use of an overarching concept of *seva* (service). The *sangathanas* and its movements lent legitimacy not only to the colonial modernity's project but also

codified and systematised Hinduism in terms of a *savarna* reading of tradition. It also provided a model of maintaining *savarna* and patriarchal domination. After independence and particularly since the seventies, this model has been reformulated by the RSS and its *parivaar* (family). Sociologists need to recognize how institutions, processes and structures of colonial modernity have been carried forward after independence and come to be reflected in the way binaries of majority-minority continues to be reconstituted.

Historians such as Romila Thapar (1996:3-4) have argued that Hinduism was ‘a juxtaposition of flexible religious sects’ before colonialism attempted to homogenise these diverse traditions. Hinduism did not affirm a single God, prophet, founder, church, holy book, religious symbol or one centre. Hindu religion had diverse dimensions, like “a) revelation; b) religious experience; c) reference to the transcendent, d) religious beliefs of creeds; e) rituals; f) ethical norms and ideals; g) world-view h) social or communal solidarity; i) socio-moral law; and j) clerical organization” (Jhingran, 1996). Additionally, Hinduism cannot be considered a faith because of its inherent diverse character in terms of its beliefs, deities, schools of thought, practices, and rituals as also its organic link with diverse cultural practices. It has no less than six different schools of philosophies (Samkhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Yoga, Purva Mimansa, Uttara Mimansa). Its idea of God ranges from monism to dualism to polytheism. Its rituals range from the individual Dhyana (meditation) to the large scale social ‘yagna’ (a spectacular ritual). At different times attempts have been made to codify and organize Hinduism around a specific deity or philosophy in terms of denominations like Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism, but it remained diverse.

These diversities were reorganised in the colonial period when for the first time, new religious groups were formed and came to be organised as *sangathanas*, (religious organisations) and around the figures of *gurus*, who framed its objective in terms of the narrative of the nation. The goal of these organisations or the *sangathanas*, was to constitute a new community of believers of Hinduism, the majority, through the mobilisation of these believers against the colonial state on one hand and its dominant religion, Christianity on the other. This phase saw a movement akin to proselytization within Hinduism through the elaboration of the concept of *seva*, the creation of a set of practices together with allegiance to *Gurus* who led these *sangathanas*, or organizations and/or movements

Scholars have argued that though these three had some historical reference in pre-colonial periods the way these were organised as ideas and institutions were radically different. *Sangathana*, which literally means ‘organization’ or ‘association’, emerged out of the religious reform movements in colonial India and has had its origin in organisational formations around sects and the temple towns in India. In its new form, in late nineteenth century, it attempted to replicate and reflect structures of organizations established by the colonial state and carried the hallmark of the organizational culture present in Western traditions (Copley 2000, 2003, Damle and Anderson 1987, Hansen 1999).

*Sangathanas* emulated the Christian traditions of building a congregation around the church. No wonder some *sangathanas* were named missions, such as one of the first such *sangathana*, the Ramakrishna Mission. These *sangathans* were built around another idea, that of the *gurus*, who were now considered the authentic interpreters of Hindu religion. In its initial phase, these organizations were revivalist in nature, seeking to defend one particular Hindu tradition or denounce parts of it completely; in order posit a less recondite, but a socially oriented religion. These missions/*sangathanas* were organised around various activities, called *seva*. These included discourses by the *gurus* (*pranachanas*) and/or prayers (*satsangs*) and organising the *sevaks* (volunteers) around other activities work such as teaching in schools

and helping in disaster relief. Some *sangathanas* also started medical help centres and in recent times hospitals, colleges and even Universities (Hansen 1999, Watt 2005).

The *guru* has been defined as a spiritual teacher and the 'one who brings light out of darkness' (Copley, 2000:5). *Gurus* are and have been of various kinds and the history of Hinduism, before and during colonial times and later have attested to their sublime power together with their unworthiness and dubious reputation. The *gurus* that emerged during the colonial period and whose missions and *sangathanas* stood the test of time were distinctive. Not only were they educated (most had English education), but also, they came from the *savarna* upper caste groups, and had been at some time teachers and educators. Their work and writings were mainly in English, oriented to the emerging upper and middle classes in India. Copley also argues that dominance rather than friendship and equality defined the relationship between the *guru* and the disciples. No wonder *gurus* encouraged obedience and loyalty and have been considered elitist and authoritarian (Copley 2000: 6).

While the tradition of '*seva*' is as old as Hinduism itself, it acquired new dimensions when the earlier individual based notion of *seva* (as doing service to oneself, the family and God in the four stages of life) was enlarged during the colonial period to incorporate socio-political dimensions.<sup>4</sup> In form and essence the earlier texts defined *seva* in terms of the personal aspects of life and gave it religious overtones. It belonged to the private sphere, within the figurative walls of *karmic* isolation. In the late nineteenth century, *seva* was reframed to mean the acquisition and pride of the individual *sevak*, for a new religio-political identity, that of an imagined Hindu nation, as defined by the *gurus* of the *sangathanas*.

It is in this context one has to examine the late nineteenth century developments within Hindu religion and the redefinition of the concept of *seva*. Hinduism felt threatened on one hand by Christian missionaries who were educating and later converting lower castes into Christianity and on the other, by the introduction of a range of new Western scientific ideas by the colonial state, in the public domain. In the late nineteenth century Hinduism confronted these processes head on and developed a new identity for itself in the public domain, by mobilizing the populace as a Hindu nation.

In the following paragraphs, I assess Vivekananda's ideas and show how he standardised Hindu principles by excavating 'traditions' and explicating a *savarna* and a gendered reading of Hinduism. These ideas had become the fountainhead of all majoritarian Hindu positions as these evolved in India from late nineteenth century onwards.

Swami Vivekananda was the first to use the concept of *seva* when he gave it a new meaning and declared it as 'organised service to humankind' (Beckerlegge, 2000:60). This reformulation was related to Vivekananda's quest to understand the reasons for India's subjugation to colonial masters. Unlike Ramkrishna, his *guru*, who attempted to synthesize and universalise the many popular traditions within Hinduism (see Sarkar, 1997), Vivekananda's project was unique in that it remained a social and political project- a social project to reform Hinduism and a political project to displace colonial suppression by mobilizing new groups into an institutionalised structure of Hinduism. In order to create this constituency, he reconstructed the principles defining Hinduism by creating a blend of two distinct traditions, the orthodox principles of Hinduism, incorporated in the earliest Hindu religious texts called the Vedas, and the contemporary socially sensitive and reformist aspects within Hinduism. He merged these two with the principles of charity and service as embodied in Christianity. In his prolific speeches, talks and writings Vivekananda did not wander away from the realms of Vedantic metaphysics. Of the four *yogas* he gave more

emphasis on Karma yoga, which he now redefined, to substitute 'traditional caste based rituals and obligations with humanitarian service. The *jnana* of Vedantic monism was sought to be transformed... into a message of strength and strenuous help to others' (Sarkar, 1997:347). This fusion created a new set of ideas and structured Hinduism and influenced a generation of religious and political thinkers and continues to have salience even now within Hindu *sangathanas*. Drawing on the traditional Hindu concepts of *seva* as selfless service and *sadhana* as spiritual penance, he applied these to the problem of resolving the manifold dimensions of what he identified as spiritual and material poverty of the religion and its *sevaks*.<sup>5</sup>

The dominating note of Ram Krishna Mission that Vivekananda founded was humanitarianism ('those who are kind to all creatures, are sincere to God'), and physical morality. In the mission, *seva* represented humane and ethical religiosity. *Seva*, it was argued would forge a new Hindu community integrated around a common principle, that of selfless social duty. The strength of this community would lie in its spiritual strength and physical fitness and its objective was to ameliorate the lot of the downtrodden within this community by improvement of their material condition and social position and spread social awareness and spiritual enlightenment among the economically stronger section by letting them connect to the lesser fortunate.

There have been many treatises on Vivekananda. Most scholars have seen his ideas as radical and revolutionary. They have argued that by emphasising on the masses, the deprived, under-privileged, weak, exploited, and diseased people of the country, Vivekananda not only modernized a very old religion steeped in fatalist traditions but also equipped the Hindu society to be confident, self-sufficient, strong and fair in its affairs both in the public and private domains. His efforts to focus on the joy and sufferings, achievements and failures of the human beings within a society has been interpreted to mean that he made Hinduism 'human-centric'. Vivekananda's criticism of mindless ritualism in *sanatana dharma*, (orthodox Hinduism) and his dislike of many elements of contemporary Hindu revivalism, has led some scholars to consider him a reformist. Because Vivekananda argued that in his opinion Hinduism is what India, and indeed the whole of the world needs in order to solve their social, economic and spiritual crises, his ideas have been lauded and considered to be universal in nature.

Many commentators have argued that this orientation, that this sensitivity to the 'masses', his attempts to include 'untouchables' into the mission's activities, and his criticism of mindless ritualism makes Vivekananda a radical and a democratic social thinker (Raju, 2006). It is however important to delve a bit on the way Vivekananda connected *seva* and the *sevak* (disciple). Vivekananda advocated that his disciples, the *sevaks*, need to train themselves to be pure, noble and discerning souls who could rise above superstitions and appreciate the true character of Hinduism, no matter how dogmatic it may have become in recent times. He also put emphasis on developing physical strength and capacities. For, he suggested, when one builds the body, the individual *sevak* becomes a fit person, and then he can withstand any challenge. A nation cannot be made up of weak people. If there were weak people, then its boundaries, both spiritual and physical would be infiltrated and controlled by outsiders. Vivekananda argued that *seva* was *sadhana* should become the key concepts that the *sevaks* can use in their efforts to spread education, and overcome ignorance that has brought poverty and subjugation to the Hindus in India (Sarkar 1967).

The *seva* that Vivekananda discusses is the *seva* to be performed by the *sevaks*. It is the *sevak* who is to understand what Hinduism represents and cleanse it of its ritualism. It is the

Vedas that the *sevak* has to appreciate in order to know what Hindu principles are. It is the *sevaks* whose salvation Vivekananda is interested in and not that of the masses. His ideas I would contend are not in continuum with those that we today consider radical social and political ideas. Rather I would argue that Vivekananda reiterates the early meaning of *seva* as the set of practices to be performed by the householder/individual.

I would thus go with Sarkar (1997) when he argues that Vivekananda's reconstitution of Hinduism distilled not only the many diverse traditions of Hinduism, including some associated with non-Brahminic sects that Ramkrishna had attempted to synthesize in his writings, but it also diluted in many ways the appeal that his persona had for various underprivileged groups in contemporary society. By asserting the *vedic* orientation of Hinduism and addressing himself mainly to a literate English educated upper caste and class audience, Vivekananda asserted distinctions between the *savarnas* and the rest of Hindu society, as also between males and females in new and subtle ways and yet preached for their reform.<sup>6</sup> No wonder communal organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) trace their ideologies to Vivekananda's notion of *seva* and to his dream of making Hinduism a world religion (Beckerlegge, 2003, 2004, Copley 2000, 2003 Sarkar 1997 and Sharma 2003).

Thus Sumit Sarkar states:

More relevant today, ominously so, is the image of the Swami as one of the founders of twentieth century 'Hindutva', of a unified and chauvinistic Hinduism (Sarkar, 1997:291).

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*

I have tried to show in the above how Hindu majoritarianism as a process was constituted in late nineteenth century. Like the colonial officials, Vivekananda used indological sources to reconstruct and present a codified Hindu set of principles. He also operated in the principles of the caste hierarchy and presented a brahminical upper caste male view of Hinduism. Ramkrishna as Sarkar has shown tried to integrate the popular and *tantric* versions of Hinduism. This was not so for Vivekananda. Additionally Ramkrishna did not create an organisation to propagate Hinduism. Vivekananda did so. The mission/sangathanas was also organised through the principles of hierarchy and not only made the *guru* the main interpreter of Hinduism, but it also demanded complete loyalty from the congregation. His mission became a model for other *gurus* to emulate.

As can be seen from the above, I do not see the above as a process of revivalism or of reform in Hinduism. The codification of Hinduism, the establishment of missions/sangathanas and the elaboration of the concept of *seva* was an intervention by the upper castes in various regions of India to construct a religion-based community, a Hindu nation. It was a political process and reflected many of the assumptions of 'Hindu traditions' that colonial modernity had articulated.

Today the same process is using the model perfected in late nineteenth century. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) established in 1925 as 'an organization of the self-motivated' and its *parivar* (family) are leading this process. Dr Keshav Hedgewar the founder of the RSS shared with Vivekananda the ideas that it is necessary to use education, discipline, organisation, and the strategy of instilling pride in Hinduism to create a band of (celibate) male *sevaks*. Vivekananda had argued for a need to create a 'pure and fit self' and the need for the *sevaks* to relate to the 'served' (the oppressed groups) through humanitarian *seva*. The RSS has used this political philosophy to expand its sphere of influence. In 1940, the RSS

had five hundred *shakhas* (branches) organising *sevak*s performing various *seva* activities. In 1997, RSS increased its shakhas doing seva to 2866 units. (Beckerlegge, 2004:116). The commissions of inquiry established by the Government of India to investigate communal riots attest to the role played by these units in exacerbating religious and communal conflicts that have taken place in post independent India.

It is imperative that any assessment of India's religions takes into account these processes as these have evolved since the late nineteenth century together with the way colonial state used the binaries to create a language of domination. As can be noted, I see an organic link between the discourse of colonial modernity and the creation of Hindu majoritarian movement, a key role in which has been played by Vivekananda. Both colonial modernity and Vivekananda's project to codify Hinduism elided all referents to differences that were part of cultural practices of *jatis* and ethnic groups and collapsed these into a savarna position on Hinduism. Additionally, this movement also consolidated *brahminical* and *savarna* male interests and legitimised their authority. Majoritarianism is thus not only a movement that fuels an aggressive integration of Hindu identity but also legitimises everyday caste and gender violence.

## Conclusion

Like many of us here, I am concerned with the way religiosity; ethnicity and communalism are defining everyday practices and lives of the people of South Asia and dividing them among groups. This paper was written with two goals in mind. First to understand what are the processes that generate these trends and second what is the discourse of sociology available to us to examine and evaluate this process. We have extensive documentation on communal violence and state pogroms against minority communities. While communal violence is an overt manifestation of this phenomenon, covert communalism has played a major role in creating religious conflicts. It does so through the conversion of everyday practices into majoritarian projects.

In one of numerous papers written on the sociology of religion, Madan had deplored the lack of research and scholarship on the theme of religion in India. I agree that it is imperative that students of sociology focus on the way religion and religious expression is stamping cultural practices with new meanings. However this process is occurring not because religion was '...historically and everywhere the source of morality, law, science and much else...' but it became a process of knowledge and meaning construction (Madan, 2006:6). We, who study religions and religiosity in ex-colonial countries need to theoretically define our perspectives, clarify our theoretical lineages before attempting to initiate research in this theme. Drawing our inspiration from western classical theorists of sociology may not yield results. Rather using a historical sociological perspective may help us better. I argue that we need to develop an alternate sociological language and free ourselves from the language of colonial modernity in order to accomplish this daunting but very necessary task.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly revised version of the keynote speech given at the 19<sup>th</sup> European South Asian Studies Conference at Leiden on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have thus found it difficult to fit Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism into this broad classification.

<sup>3</sup> Most would agree that secularism is not atheism nor is it scientism. But that seems to be the basis of Madan's assessment of secularism.

<sup>4</sup> *Seva*, first finds mention in Hindu texts such as Bhagwat Gita, Vedas and Dharmasutras. In the third verse of the third chapter of Bhagwat Gita, Krishna says: "In this world I have stated a twofold path of spiritual discipline in the past. The path of Self-knowledge for the contemplative ones, and the path of unselfish work (*Seva*, Karma-yoga) for all others." These "others" really are the householders, almost everyone who hasn't renounced society to enter a life of *sanyas* or monk-hood. This perception of *seva* fits in with the institutional structure of *sanatana dharma* or traditional Hindu religion. Similar to Weber's 'Irrational action', *seva* is closely related to the duties associated to the four stages of a man's life as specified by the dharma shastras, duties toward the Teacher (*Guru*), the family, the needy, the departed ancestors and also plants and animals. Performance of such duties calls for various forms of *seva* and offerings. More stress is put on 'offerings' in the form of *dana* (charity) and *yagna* (sacrificial fire ritual). *Seva* is also understood as a spiritual practice that allows one to progress on the path of "*moksha*", to acquire knowledge, truth and realization as the above-mentioned verse from the Bhagwat Gita suggests.

<sup>5</sup> The historian Romila Thapar has argued that in pre-modern period Hindu religious sects were divided in terms of elite religion, that of Brahmins and popular religions such as Shramanism. The former adhered to Vedic beliefs and rituals and was confined to *savarnas* (upper castes) while the latter aligned themselves to Buddhist and Jain and other teachings and were open to all castes. (Thapar, 1999:10-11)

<sup>6</sup> While on one hand Vivekananda preached for the amelioration of caste and gender distinctions, his speeches show ambiguity regarding these issues. Sarkar (1997) calls these 'tensions' and argues that he resolved it by promoting the cult of 'Divine Mother' wherein he exalted one kind of womanhood that of the traditional discourse that projected women as widows, desexualized individuals and oriented to service activities.

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### Global Aspects of Professionalism : from defining traits to discourse of organizational control

Julia Evetts

University of Nottingham

*Julia.Evetts@nottingham.ac.uk*

*Julia Evetts is Professor of Sociology at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. She has been researching and writing books and papers on professional occupations and work for several years. She has studied careers (including gender differences in careers) in teaching, in engineering and science in industrial organizations, and in banking in commercial organizations. She is currently engaged in research on the internationalisation of professional regulation, on the work of the UK Engineering and Scientific Institutes and on the military. She has written four books and edited two (one jointly), and has published widely in academic journals. She is the Editor of Sage Studies in International Sociology (SSIS). This is a monograph series of the International Sociological Association (ISA) and involves membership of ISA Publications Committee. Julia is also joint Editor of the journal Knowledge, Work and Society, which is published in France.*

There is now extensive use of the concept of professionalism in a wide range of occupations and work places. The concept of professionalism is increasingly used in a diverse variety of work, occupational, organizational and institutional contexts. It is used as a marketing slogan in advertising to appeal to customers (Fournier, 1999) and in campaigns to attract prospective recruits. It is used in company mission statements and organizational aims and objectives to motivate employees and in policy procedures and manuals. It is an appealing prospect for an occupation to be identified as a profession and for occupational workers and employees to be labelled as professionals. The concept of professionalism has entered the managerial literature and been embodied in training manuals and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) procedures. The concept of professionalism is increasingly used (or misused?) in organizational, commercial, service, financial and security work places and locations. The discourse of professionalism is also claimed by both sides in disputes and political and policy arguments and disagreements between professional workers and governments – particularly in respect of proposed changes in funding, organizational and administrative arrangements in health and in education (Crompton, 1990). ‘The professionalization of everyone?’ (Wilensky, 1964) was a question much debated and discussed in the 1960s but it seems important to return to this question now in view of the extended use of the concept in different kinds of work and employment relations.

It is important also to recognise that there have been considerable advances in the analysis of professionalism as an explanatory concept particularly since the 1990s. This discussion paper begins with a brief history of theoretical interpretations of professionalism

over the last half century starting with the early concerns over definition where professions were analysed as particular types of occupation with special and distinctive characteristics. This section ends with the more recent analysis of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and social control. The second section of the paper goes on to suggest that in contemporary western societies we are experiencing the co-existence of two different and contrasting forms of professionalism in knowledge-based service sector work : occupational and organizational professionalism. It is then suggested that these contrasting types might have wider global relevance. The two types co-exist in western societies but other societies, including post-communist states in Eastern Europe, might only refer to and construct organizational forms since these social systems lack historical experience of the occupational type.

### **From Defining ‘Traits’ to Discourse of Control**

The earliest analyses and interpretations of professions focused on the concept of professionalism as a normative value and its significance and functions for the stability and civility of social systems (Durkheim, see 1992; Tawney, 1921; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Marshall, 1950; Parsons, 1951).

#### Defining professions

This was following by a period in the 1950s and 1960s, when researchers shifted the focus to the concept of profession as a particular kind of occupation, or an institution with special and distinctive characteristics. The difficulties of defining these special characteristics, and clarifying the differences between professions and occupations, have long troubled analysts and researchers. For a period the ‘trait’ approach occupied sociologists who struggled to define the special characteristics of professional (compared with other occupational) work. For example, Greenwood (1957) and Wilensky (1964) argued that professional work had a number of characteristics or ‘traits’: it required a long and expensive education and training in order to acquire the necessary knowledge and skill; professionals were autonomous, exercised discretion and performed a public service; they were guided in their decision-making by a professional ethic or code of conduct; they were in special relations of trust with clients; and they were altruistic and motivated by universalistic values. In the absence of such characteristics, the label ‘occupation’ was deemed to be more appropriate, and for occupations having some but not all of the characteristics the term ‘semi-profession’ was suggested (Etzioni, 1969).

The ‘trait’ approach is now largely assessed as leading nowhere, in that it did nothing to assist our understanding of the power of particular occupations (such as law and medicine, historically) or of the appeal of ‘being a professional’ in all occupational groups. It no longer seems important to draw a hard and fast line between professions and occupations but, instead, to regard both as similar social forms which share many common characteristics (e.g. as originally argued by Hughes, 1958).

Researchers now handle the definitional problem in different ways. Some avoid giving a definition of profession and instead offer a list of relevant occupational groups (e.g. Hanlon, 1998, claimed to be following Abbott, 1988). Others have used the disagreements and continuing uncertainties about precisely what a profession *is*, to dismiss the separateness of professions as a field, although not necessarily to dispute the relevance of current analytical debates. Crompton (1990), for example, considered how paradoxes and contradictions within the sociological debates about professions actually reflected wider and more general tensions in the sociologies of work, occupations and employment. These definitional

critiques reappear from time to time (see Sciulli, 2005, and the response by Evetts, 2006a) but, for the most part researchers have accepted definitional uncertainty and moved on.

Hence, professions can be analyzed as a generic group of occupations based on knowledge and expertise, both technical and tacit. Professions are essentially the knowledge-based, service sector, category of occupations which usually follow a period of tertiary education and vocational training and experience. Another way of differentiating these occupations is to see professions as the structural, occupational and institutional arrangements for dealing with work associated with the uncertainties of modern lives in risk societies. Professionals are extensively engaged in dealing with risk, with risk assessment and, through the use of expert knowledge, enabling customers and clients to deal with uncertainty. To paraphrase and adapt a list in Olgati et al. (1998), professions are involved in birth, survival, physical and emotional health, dispute resolution and law-based social order, finance and credit information, educational attainment and socialization, physical constructs and the built environment, military engagement, peace-keeping and security, entertainment and leisure, religion and our negotiations with the next world.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a period of critique of professions and professional projects followed, in which the analytical focus was the process of professionalization, professionalism as ideology, market closure and occupational dominance and competition (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Freidson, 1982; Abbott, 1988). This period of critique, which is sometimes characterized as neo-Weberian (Saks, 2003), continues in some analyses particularly in health and medicine. For other service-sector occupations, professional projects and professional dominance were never seen to be relevant to and for their concerns about changes to working practices and employment relations. Subsequently the critique was followed in the 1990s by a period of re-evaluation of the importance of professionalism which was led by Freidson (1994, 2001) whose earlier work had been critical of social closure in the medical profession.

In the reappraisal the claim is now made that professionalism is a unique form of occupational control of work which has distinct advantages over market, organizational and bureaucratic forms of control. Certainly occupational control of the work and the work practices and procedures is essential because only experienced practitioners can know what is necessary for professional practice. Control by 'managers' is particularly resisted because organizational forms of control of work are perceived to be at odds with the service ethic and discretionary decision-making of professional work. In assessing the political, economic and ideological forces that are exerting enormous pressure on the professions today, Freidson (1994) has defended professionalism as a desirable way of providing complex, discretionary services to the public. He argues that market-based or organizational and bureaucratic methods impoverish and standardize the quality of service to customers and demotivates practitioners, and he goes on to suggest how the virtues of professionalism can be reinforced. In his last book Freidson's (2001) analysis reflects many of the features of professions and the normative social order identified by Parsons (1951). Thus, professions might need to close markets in order to be able to endorse and guarantee the education, training, experience and tacit knowledge of licensed practitioners, but once achieved professions might then be able to concentrate more fully on developing the service-orientated and performance-related aspects of their work (Halliday, 1987; Evetts, 1998). The process of occupational closure will result in the monopoly supply of the expertise and the service, and probably also to privileged access to salary and status as well as to definitional and control rewards for practitioners. In respect of these privileges, it is necessary to

remember the dual character of professions which includes both the provision of a service (and the development of an autonomous form of governance) as well as the use of knowledge and power for economic gain and monopoly control (which poses a threat to civility).

#### Professionalism as discourse

In addition to the re-appraisal, a different interpretation of the concept of professionalism is also developing and this involves examination of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control. This interpretation would seem to have much more contemporary relevance in the analysis of occupational groups where the discourse is increasingly applied and utilized. In trying to account for the appeal and attraction of the discourse of professionalism in a wide variety of occupational groups with very different working conditions and employment relations, it is suggested that professionalism is being used as a discourse to promote and facilitate particular occupational changes in service work organizations. The interpretation includes the analysis of how the discourse operates at both occupational/organizational (macro), and individual worker (micro) levels.

The occupational, organizational and worker changes required have been summarized by Hanlon (1999:121) who stated that 'in short the state is engaged in trying to redefine professionalism so that it becomes more commercially aware, budget-focused, managerial, entrepreneurial and so forth'. Hanlon's emphasis on the state is because he was discussing the legal profession. When this analysis is applied to the use of the discourse of professionalism in other occupational groups then the state might be less directly involved and the service company, firm and organization (via its managers and supervisors) would probably be the constructors, promoters and users of the discourse.

In general, then, as organizational budgets become leaner and customers/clients become more demanding, as service work becomes more closely regulated and achievement targets are specified, measured and assessed, so the changes are often characterised as the need to 'professionalize' the service and knowledge workers concerned. The adoption of New Public Management theory and policy in the operation of service institutions (such as in health and education) clearly illustrates this changed usage of the concept of professionalism. This professionalization will be achieved through increased occupational training and the certification of the workers/employees – a process labelled as credentialism by Collins (1979, 1981). These occupational changes are often perceived by the workers concerned as more paper work and additional responsibilities but with no corresponding increase in either collective or individual status or salary – the rewards usually perceived to accrue from professionalization (Larson 1977). Often such occupational changes are interpreted by workers as increased bureaucratization (i.e. more form-filling) but, as a consequence, the quality of the service to the client, including time spent with the client, is perceived by the workers to decline. One result is a form of occupational identity crisis which can be expressed as forms of discontent perceived particularly by (older? and) more experienced groups of workers. Why, then, and how in the face of such experiential contradictions does the discourse of professionalism continue to be such an effective instrument of occupational change and social control?

It is necessary to clarify and operationalize the concept of discourse. In this paper discourse refers to the ways in which occupational and professional workers themselves are accepting, incorporating and accommodating to the idea of 'profession' and particularly 'professionalism' in their work. It is also apparent that in the case of many, if not most,

occupational groups the discourse of professionalism is in fact being constructed and used by the managers, supervisors and employers of workers, and it is being utilized in order to bring about occupational change and rationalization as well as to (self-) discipline workers in the conduct of their work. This use of the discourse is very different from the earlier (historical) constructions and uses of 'professionalism' by the practitioners and professional associations in medicine and law – from where the discourse originated. This analysis of the use of the discourse of professionalism in work and organizations is based on Foucauldian concepts of legitimacy (Foucault, 1979), normalization and the control of autonomous subjects exercising appropriate conduct (Foucault, 1973; 1980). Using these ideas in her interpretation of professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism, Fournier (1999), following Miller and Rose (1990), has explored professionalism as the control of professional practice 'at a distance'. This means that close supervision and control is not required because 'professional' workers are inner-directed and self-motivated to do their best for clients (patients, students, customers, clients etc.).

These interpretations can also assist in understanding the appeal of professionalism as a mechanism of occupational change in the modern world. Fournier (1999) has considered the appeal to 'professionalism' as a disciplinary mechanism in new occupational contexts. She suggests how the use of the discourse in a large privatised service company of managerial labour serves to inculcate 'appropriate' work identities, conducts and practices. She considers this as 'a disciplinary logic which inscribes "autonomous" professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance' (1999:280).

At the level of occupations the appeal to professionalism can also be seen as a mechanism for promoting social change. In these cases, however, the appeal is to a myth or an ideology of professionalism which includes aspects such as exclusive ownership of an area of expertise, autonomy and discretion in work practices and occupational control of the work. In fact the reality of the professionalism that is actually envisaged is very different. The appeal to professionalism most often includes the substitution of organizational for professional values; bureaucratic, hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; budgetary restrictions and rationalizations; performance targets, accountability and sometimes increased political control. In this sense, then, it can be argued that the appeal to professionalism is an 'effective' mechanism of social control at micro and macro levels.

## **2. Organizational and Occupational Professionalism**

One consequence of these new directions in the research field is that in contemporary, advanced western societies we seem to be witnessing the development of two different and contrasting forms of professionalism in knowledge-based, service sector work: organizational and occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2004; 2005). As ideal types, the contrast between the two forms is summarized in model 1.

**Organizational professionalism** is a discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations. It incorporates rational-legal forms of decision-making, hierarchical structures of authority, the standardization of work practices, accountability, target-setting and performance review and is based on occupational training and certification. In contrast, and again as an ideal-type, **occupational professionalism** is the more traditional, historical form. This involves a discourse constructed within professional groups themselves which involves discretionary decision-making in complex cases, collegial authority, the occupational control of the work and is based on trust in the practitioner by

both clients and employers. It is operationalized and controlled by practitioners themselves and is based on shared education and training, a strong socialization process, work culture and occupational identity, and codes of ethics which are monitored and operationalized by professional institutes and associations. These two contrasting forms of professionalism would seem to be in competition in western post-industrial societies where systems of new public management, particularly in health and in education, are becoming common (Evetts, 2006b).

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1 I thank Paul Bernard for calling my attention to this research.

# MODEL 1

## Two different forms of professionalism in knowledge-based work.

### Organizational professionalism

- discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations
- rational-legal forms of authority
- standardized procedures
- hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making
- managerialism
- accountability and externalized forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review

- 
- linked to Weberian models of organization

### Occupational professionalism

- discourse constructed within professional groups
- collegial authority
- discretion and occupational control of the work
- practitioner trust by both clients and employers
- controls operationalized by practitioners
- professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations

- 
- located in Durkheim's model of occupations as moral communities

Important questions are indicated by this analysis. One would seem to be whether or not occupational professionalism is currently under threat in western post-industrial societies where it originated and developed as an alternative logic (compared to the market and the organization) to control work and workers. Other questions concern the predominance and use of organizational forms of professionalism, as a discourse of occupational control, in societies with no historical experience of occupational professionalism. In considering these questions, this discussion becomes much more speculative and I look forward to (critical) comment from colleagues researching in related and in different sociological areas and fields.

In the advanced post-industrial societies of North American and Western Europe, occupational professionalism is currently being challenged by or in competition with organizational forms as well as by economic, political and social changes. Several states are using various types of New Public Management (NPM) as a response to the political and financial problems posed by the high fiscal costs of public services and the difficulties of controlling and managing sometimes powerful professional groups. NPM can be interpreted as a tool of government intended to promote commercialized professionalism (Hanlon, 1998) and/or organizational professionalism. When service sector professionals have proved enduringly difficult to manage and resistant to change, then an important part of the strategy became to recreate professionals as managers and to manage by normative techniques. This is developed further and discussed in Evetts (2006b). The control of professionals in public services is to be achieved by means of normative values and self-regulated motivation. The discourse of enterprise is fitted alongside the language of quality

and customer care and the ideologies of empowerment, innovation, autonomy and discretion. In addition, this is also a discourse of individualization and competition where individual performance (e.g. of teachers, doctors) is linked to the success or failure of the organization (e.g. schools, hospitals). This constitutes a powerful mechanism of worker/employee control in which the occupational values of professionalism are used to promote the efficient management of the organization.

In general then it can be argued, and it is frequently claimed, that professions, as a special (privileged) category of service-sector occupations, are in decline in Anglo-Saxon and Western European societies. Occupational forms of professionalism are being challenged by organizational forms as well as by economic and political changes (e.g. Greenwood and Lachman, 1996; Reed, 1996). The autonomy, discretion and dominance that have been parts of professionalism are being reduced (Freidson, 1988; Mechanic, 1991; Allsop and Mulcahy, 1996; Harrison, 1999; Harrison and Ahmad, 2000). The relations between professionals and clients, professionals and their managers, are being changed. There has been a decline in professionals' abilities to exercise the occupational control of the work (Freidson, 1994); and a weakening of professions abilities to act as self-regulating occupational groups (MacDonald, 1995) entering into 'regulative bargains' (Cooper et al., 1988) with states. Some researchers have welcomed such changes and continue to celebrate the reductions in power of these previously privileged occupational groups. It is necessary to add, however, that once occupational forms of professionalism are lost then the logics of the market and the organization will become the only means of controlling work and workers in post-industrial societies.

This leads to the second, and related, question of the forms of professionalism currently being developed in global markets and societies with no historical experience of occupational professionalism. It has been persuasively argued that knowledge-based occupations are the expanding employment categories and the growth sectors of labour markets in developed (Lyotard, 1984; Perkin, 1988; Reed, 1996; Frenkel et al., 1995), transitional (Buchner-Jeziorska, 2001; Buchner-Jeziorska and Evetts, 1997) and developing societies (Hiremath and Gudagunti, 1988; Sautu, 1998). This argument has focused on the expansion of occupations based on knowledge (Murphy, 1988), whether or not the concept of profession is used, and the growing capacity of higher education systems in most societies to produce workers who are educated and trained. It is also related to the substantial growth in outsourcing as (particularly commercial) organizations in western economies increasingly utilize the substantially cheaper educated labour in developing societies in order to deal with the electronic and telephonic advice-giving and service assistance which can be standardized.

The expansion of the service sectors and knowledge work in developed, developing and transitional societies indicates the appeal of the concept of professionalism as a discourse of organizational control and occupational change. It is in fact a discourse of control and motivation constructed and used increasingly by managers in work organizations. It incorporates rational-legal forms of authority and hierarchical structures of responsibility and decision-making. It involves the increased standardization of work procedures and practices, including the use of software programmes, and managerialist controls. It relies on externalized forms of regulation and accountability measures such as target-setting and performance review. Managerial controls can be control 'from a distance' as the professional is assumed to be inner-directed and self-motivating in the interests of both individual career development and the success of the organization. The occupational control of the work and

work culture is never envisaged and instead the 'ideology of professionalism' becomes a motivational instrument of occupational change and rationalization.

The competition between occupational and organizational forms of professionalism might best be interpreted as the operation of two simultaneous processes. In western societies and economies, some particularly powerful professional occupations (e.g. law and accountancy) continue to exercise occupational control of the work and their practitioners. For other knowledge-based occupational groups, however, particularly those working in service organizations, and in societies in the global market with no historical experience of occupational professionalism, then organizational professionalism is becoming the dominant form. In general there are continuous changes and alterations in the balances of occupational and organizational professionalism at local, national and international levels. The consequences and effects are different for different occupational groups in different societies and parts of the world. In the contest between organizational and occupational forms of professionalism, it becomes important to be able to demonstrate the distinct advantages of the logic of occupational professionalism both for customers and clients as well as for practitioners. Organizational professionalism has already demonstrated and continues to demonstrate its effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and stability.

## Note

This paper uses some material already published in other journals. Julia Evetts welcomes discussion of the issues raised in this paper, particularly in future editions of the e-Bulletin.

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# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### In Conversation with Ms. Ela Gandhi

Interviewed by Vineeta Sinha  
*Sociology, National University of Singapore*

#### **Transcript of Vineeta Sinha's interview with Ela Gandhi at Hilton Hotel in Durban, South Africa on July 26, 2006 from 12 to 1pm.**

*Ms. Ela Gandhi, the grand-daughter of Mahatma Gandhi, was born on 1 July 1940 at the Phoenix Settlement in Durban. She obtained her BA degree from Natal University and an Honours degree in Social Science from UNISA and by profession is a social worker. Politically active from a young age, Ms. Gandhi helped to revive the Natal Indian Congress in 1971. In 1975 she was placed under house arrest for a period of eight and a half years. After the end of apartheid, she served as a member of South Africa's parliament representing the African National Congress from 1994 to 2002. She is the recipient of the 2002 International Peace Award for her non-violent resistance to apartheid in South Africa. Now retired, she remains steadfastly committed to Gandhian principles of non-violence resistance to oppression and continues Mahatma Gandhi's legacy in her activism and community work. She is currently the Chairperson of the Satyagraha Management Committee.*



*Her e-mail is [egandhi@anc.org.za](mailto:egandhi@anc.org.za)*

Vineeta Sinha (VS): I would like the readers to know about your life story. You carry the legacy of Gandhiji and that's a very fascinating connection to the past that we value so much, so perhaps you could start by telling us your life story.

Ela Gandhi (EG): I was born in South Africa. My father was the second son of Gandhiji and he was very involved in the work that Gandhiji started. 2 things in particular, the newspaper that he started... my father was the editor of the newspaper, and then the Phoenix settlement that my grandfather started, my father continued with running the Settlement, and continued the political work in South Africa. I was born at the Phoenix settlement and lived there until 1979, when I was

under house arrest, and so I had to move away because my children didn't have the facilities to go to school at the Phoenix settlement at that time, so we went to Verulam, a small town near Phoenix Settlement and lived there until 1989. The Phoenix Settlement was burnt down in 1985.

VS Sorry, where did you move to?

EG To Verulam, which is a little town close to the Phoenix Settlement. I have been involved in politics since my childhood, initially going with my father to marches and protest meetings and later fully participating at all levels. I grew up to respect all the races as we had people of all races living with us and visiting us. We used to say our prayers which incorporated prayers from all the religions, Hindu, Christianity, Islam and Parsi and so we respected all religions. For us the human family was one big family with no differences on the basis of race or religion or class or caste. We interacted with everyone coming in and out of our home. So I came to see the world as one big human family. It was another dimension in a racist society. However in terms of the government rules, I had to attend a segregated school in Inanda and then to the Indian girls high school to do my secondary school education. I attended the University of Natal Non European Section where there was again segregation...we couldn't go to the same university as the white people...we went to a completely separate structure which was an old warehouse converted into classrooms. So you can imagine the conditions under which we studied. And also, most of our classes were in the evenings, because our lecturers would lecture to the white students in the day and come lecture to us in the evenings. We began to experience segregation, and the rampant discrimination against black people from an early age.

My first demonstration was with the university students against segregated graduation. Graduation was also segregated in terms of race and the one way in which we could show our objection was to boycott this segregated graduation ceremony.

VS: How old were you at that time?

EG: I was about 18 years old when we stood with placards urging students not to attend the segregated graduation ceremony.

VS: Was it successful?

EG: It was. A majority of the students did not attend the graduation ceremony. Some of the students did, some of the students were forced to do so because...to get the certificate in absentia meant that we had to pay to receive it. Because of financial constraints they

were forced to attend the ceremony where they could get the certificates without paying. There were of course some who attended the ceremony because they felt what we were doing was a waste of time. But the majority, a large majority refused to go and somehow we did make a dent in the system as slowly but surely the University changed its policy.

We also grew up on a farm where we saw the disparity amongst the poor and the rich. We lived a very simple life, we didn't have running water, we didn't have electricity, and no sewerage. We were taught from an early age that we had to do our own cleaning. We had a toilet that was based on the bucket system. We maintained the toilet ourselves by keeping it neat and clean at all times. We had to clean the buckets each day into a pit and wash the buckets. We were taught that there was no work that was not important and that what other people can do, we can also do. Respect for all work was the philosophy in our home. We grew up respecting all work and doing it all ourselves.

I think these are important values; and I really appreciate it today when I see the world around me, and when I see people who don't really want to do so-called "menial work" which they expect other people to do. They also do not take on the responsibility to make sure that they observe a general standard of cleanliness and neatness so that whoever is charged to do the work does not have a heavy burden of cleaning the mess made by other people.

I continued my university education to take on an honours in Social Science and became a social worker.

VS: So you did graduate? Did you go to the graduation ceremony, no?

EG: Yes, I did attend the graduation ceremony at the Natal University because by the time I graduated, it was a completely desegregated graduation ceremony. I had gone for a year to India, in 1960 to visit my brother and my extended family so my studies were on hold for a year. Our demand from the University was for complete desegregation of graduation ceremony. The University initially acceded to our demand to the extent that they had the graduation on the same day and at the same venue but all the white students first and then the black students, we continued to boycott and then they agreed to a graduation all together in terms of alphabetical order but the seating in the hall for the parents was segregated, we continued with the boycott until there was a completely integrated graduation ceremony with no discrimination which eventually happened in 1962 and then I and my colleagues called off the boycott and attended the graduation ceremony.

During the time of my work with the Child Welfare Society, I realized that there was a need for us to work together with the other organizations so we formed a cluster of organizations working together on a nonracial basis to provide services to all in the area of operation of our agency. This took me into the African Townships and other poverty stricken homes and areas. We worked as a team and formed people's grassroots organizations to deal with the issues confronting them.

I joined the Natal Indian Congress branch in Greyville Durban. But after a few months became ill with jaundice and had to move to the Phoenix Settlement with my mother. Many of my colleagues, who remained in the branch, engaged in underground activities and were arrested and were sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island. I escaped arrest because just before the clamp down on the activists I had moved away from the area. This was in 1961, before the political organizations got banned and *umkonto we sizwe*, the liberation army of the African National Congress was established. I moved to live with my mother at the Phoenix Settlement, my birth place.

VS: Were you ever arrested? Did you ever spend time in jail?

EG: I spent just a day in jail. There were 3 times when I got arrested and on these occasions had to travel in the back of the police van. This was my worst experience. Getting into the van was not bad but I am claustrophobic and asthmatic, and sitting in the dark and completely enclosed back of the van, with many of us cramped together was quite an experience. For once, usually I am very shy and won't sing, but in the back of the van, I started singing "we shall overcome" and other freedom songs that came into my mind, and that helped me to overcome my phobia. It shows the power of freedom songs as an important part of struggle in South Africa. Singing freedom songs is something that people are doing all the time in this country.

We however continued to work undeterred by police intimidation. My ex-husband was also a political activist. As a social worker, I continued to work in the community, building up civic structures and so on, and linking them up with other similar structures through out the region and the country. I participated in many of the civic activities. For 8 and a half years, I was house arrested and banned.

VS: What was the charge?

EG: They told me that I was a threat to the security of the state – that was a general thing that they told everyone. They don't give you a specific reason for the house arrest, banning orders or detentions without trial. In a way, when they don't give you a specific reason, then people are afraid of doing anything remotely political for fear of

being banned or house arrested or detained. So it served as a deterrent for other people.

VS: What was living under house arrest like?

EG: It was quite difficult, because I had growing children and house arrest meant you were confined to an area and confined to the house over the holidays, the weekends. So for us as a family it was very difficult because it prevented us from doing the normal things of going out to the beach or on picnics or even socializing with others.

VS Did this apply to the children as well?

EG They were free to go anywhere, but at age 3-13 children usually depend on their parents to take them out. They had to grow with us in confinement for almost 8 and a half important years of their lives.

I am also a woman activist and was one of the founder members of the woman's organization in Durban, the Natal Organisation of Women. We joined the United Democratic Front and played a major role in this organization.

We took up women's issues and we took up civic issues. The 2 important things we achieved were, firstly we as woman got together and decided we needed to act when the Congress for a democratic South Africa (CODESA) was formed. We found there were very few women in this forum. When we all came together and protested that changes cannot happen in our country when 52% of the population were not involved, we were able to ensure that women were given an opportunity to participate in large numbers in these discussions. One thing we discovered is that just our participation in politics during the freedom struggle did not mean that we would be automatically accepted by the organization as equals. The struggle for equal status of women continues.

The ANC Women's League was instrumental in starting the women's convention. Although I personally wasn't very active in the convention, I know that they went from home to home to collect the demands of women and drew up a women's charter, which was given to the Constitutional Assembly to be incorporated into the Constitution of South Africa. This was one achievement because it resulted in many of our demands being incorporated into the Constitution. We had a lot of discussions on what kind of structure would best meet our needs and what we want in the Constitution.

There were a number of issues. We discussed the possibility of a separate women's structure resulting in the marginalizing of women's issues. We discussed the various possibilities and decided that we

should not ask for a separate woman's ministry as this would result in us moving women's issues from the mainstream to a separate Ministry. We opted for empowering structures and bodies that will oversee the status of women. We thus were able to have provisions in the Constitution ensuring the equal status of women; we have desks on the status of women in the President's Office and at every level of Government. We also have a commission on gender equality.

In terms of religion as well, we in 1989, already started getting people together, the religious communities and asking them what are the rights and responsibilities of the religious communities, what are the minimum demands that we want to see, and we drew up a declaration that was given to the Constitutional Assembly. So there are these 2 declarations, The Women's charter and the Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Religious Communities, and these are important documents as they can be referred to as the base documents in any litigation. Today in the Constitution, we have a number of clauses that also ensure that all religions would be recognized, protected, and given equal rights. They in turn would be responsible to maintain good relationship among the religious communities to ensure that all religions exist side by side and are not dominated by any one. A Commission to oversee this is also established in terms of our constitution.

So I think these 2 were important for me, because women's issues and religious issues did dominate my life. If for instance you look at the number of wars that are going on, ostensibly on the basis of religion, then you realize that the understanding and respect across religious lines is a very fundamental thing in life today.

So I have been working on these issues, I have been in parliament for about 8 years, for the first 5 year term, and then for about 3 years in the second term, until I resigned. For one thing, I was about 63 years old when I resigned, and I felt at that age, I didn't want to sit in parliament because parliament can get very boring, I felt if I want to do community work properly, I need to have more time. My energy was depleting and I didn't feel happy about sitting in parliament for any further period.

VS: Were there any ideological differences in the ANC?

EG: Basically the differences were with the nature of delivery, the way the delivery was taking place. I didn't like the fast tracking of privatization for instance. I don't think privatization is a good thing, that's my belief, and I wasn't happy about that and I raised it at our meetings and wherever I could, we(myself and others who agreed with me) tried to stop it to some extent, but there were places where we couldn't stop it. But apart from that difference in ideology, I felt

that we needed to mobilize the community to play a more active part in influencing government policies.

VS: What did you do?

EG: I started a newspaper, Satyagraha. In fact, I started the newspaper when I was still in parliament. I am editor of the newspaper.

VS: What is the name of the newspaper?

EG: Satyagraha-In Pursuit of Truth.

It is an alternative newspaper to the normal...but I guess it shouldn't be called a newspaper because it is not about news; we get enough news in the dailies. It's about views, about philosophies, about how communities live and so on. We have a focus on youth, on information about how communities overseas and in our country are making a difference through creative means. We present our articles in a way that will influence our people to do something about changing their situation both in terms of the development of race relations and in terms of economic development.

VS: Would you tell me what it felt like to live through the end of apartheid when it came?

EG: Well, it was really beautiful, I remember the day, my really most memorable moment, when I was in the UDF delegation, the last delegation that met with Nelson Mandela in Prison. We went there and visited him, and the very next day, in fact, as we were traveling out, the Ministers were coming in to tell him that he was now a free man. So that was really beautiful – the joy of seeing the change in our country in our life time. But then after that, between the time of his release and the negotiations and ultimate change of political power, was a period of a lot of anxiety. There was a lot of violence and many people were killed. Clearly one little thing can go wrong and could have lead to major problems or even war. That was really a worrying time.

VS: What was the source of this violence and anxiety?

EG: Well, a number of sources. There were a number of people who didn't agree with the idea of freedom for all in South Africa. There was the right wing.

VS: Would they have been White South Africans basically?

EG: Many of them. The heads of those organizations who were part of the old regime and these included the homeland governments and other structures that the government had set up during the days of

apartheid. These groups felt that they may lose their power once we have a new democratic government, so they were trying to rally more support for themselves. One way in which they thought they could do this was by killing our people or the opposition. So lots of people were killed during the time between 1990-1994, and one of the casualties was my son. He was just 29 years old in 1993, at the time of his assassination. I guess that is the price one pays for participating in politics. It is painful, of course...losing your child is like losing part of yourself and the pain remains.

VS: And the legal part now, living in a country defined by a lack of institutionalized racism now, do you think it has all been worth it?

EG: I don't want to talk of it, as being worth it. My only wish is that the kind of freedom and joy I feel could be shared by many other people who continue to live in the slum settlements and rural areas and still do not have access to education, healthcare, housing and other basic needs, I wish we could change that.

VS: Yes, as a first time visitor to South Africa, this is my first time in Africa. SA is not a poor country in terms of its GDP, growth or any of the measures you might choose, so what is the reason for the existence of this kind of poverty among large sectors of the population?

EG: Well, in my opinion, there are a couple of factors. The one big one is that while we have got political freedom, we don't have economic freedom because the economy was in the hands of the white people, it wasn't in our hands. We've got now black empowerment policies, but it doesn't work for the benefit of the people. It has created a number of black millionaires, but by creating millionaires, you also create poverty, because in my simple economics, money is like a cake that has to be shared. It depends on how you divide it – if some people have more and bigger portions then others will have smaller and some none at all. That to me is one of the reasons contributing to the increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

The other thing is that there is also a big gap in salaries. We have a skills shortage, because most of the black people didn't have access to good education, and so there is the shortage of skills. What is happening now can be understood if we look at the past when the White people in this country occupied the senior positions in a business enterprise and in government and received a very high salary compared to the black people who occupied the much lower and menial positions. Now you have some black people occupying those senior positions with high salaries while the lower level salaries still remain low. The gap therefore is not between black and white

salary levels but rather between the higher and lower positions, a gap which was there and created by the apartheid government.

VS: That is a very paradoxical situation.

EG: It is, because how can the new government reduce the salaries, without appearing racist because it would appear that the salary scales are being reduced because now there are black people occupying these positions. The salary remains high and is in fact increased at the top level while the lower level salaries receive only a minimum increase. In this way the gap increases. Also the number of workers is reduced so that it becomes easier to pay fewer people a better salary than to pay many people, and so there are retrenchments. It is a very paradoxical situation, and if you look at, for instance, revenue collection, you see the largest number of and the biggest tax payers are the middle level earners and not the very rich. The situation is that the average persons who constitute the majority are in large numbers and they pay taxes through VAT and income tax and are able to pay a lot more because of the larger numbers than the few millionaires who continue to get the benefit of a good tax regime. In the same way it is easier to give one or two top executives a very high salary and keep them happy than to pay higher salaries to a large number of the juniors and below. So their salaries remain low and in order to ensure maximum profits their numbers also remain low. The situation can only be corrected if there is a better distribution of wealth and employment and income generation activities.

VS: So it's a vicious cycle.

EG: It's a vicious cycle, but that is what is affecting us now because there is so much unemployment now and business and industry are cutting their staff to down size. And we have the managers sitting with high salaries while everybody is complaining about these very high levels of salaries. But that is not the only problem. The problem is also the fact that big business still wants to make the same levels of profit like they always had, instead of saying okay, let's put some amount of our profit back into our workforce and take in lesser profits. This kind of altruistic people are very much in the small minority. To achieve equity we have to change the mindsets of these big businesses to think that "for us to survive in this world, we have to change". We have to remember that if we kill the world we too will die!

VS: What's your assessment of the level of racial integration in South Africa after the end of apartheid? Do you feel there's more racial integration now?

EG: Definitely there's a lot of integration and some of the schools at the primary level have more success in integration than universities and

higher level schools. Here you will see a group of Blacks, a group of Whites, and a group of Indians, all in their separate groups there are very few people who will cross the line and say we don't want to meet as racial groups. We want to remain in our separate groups where we feel more comfortable, clinging to the past and refusing to change to meet the new challenges. So at that level, integration is slow. Change is also not easy as there is also class distinction which has now replaced race distinction.

Another drawback is the large townships, which were created on the basis of race. These can't just disappear. We still have areas where you have all African people living together and the schools are all African schools with no other race groups attending these schools. In Chatsworth and Phoenix for instance the population is predominantly Indian but there are some African people who are now moving into these areas and the schools in these areas are now integrated with large numbers of African pupils coming to these schools from neighbouring townships. Here, you won't find a single school that is totally Indian, there's at least 40% African in all the schools, in Chatsworth and Phoenix. Because there was differentiation between resources allocated to Indians and Coloureds and those to the African people, the schools in these areas are better equipped and the educators have a better educational background. But where there is an all-African settlement it continues to remain all African and no other race groups are in these schools or live in these areas. People haven't gone into these townships because of fear and because of a number of other issues relating to the townships. As long as this racial segregation of living and schooling continues the integration process will be slow. For a country to develop, and to develop a common image, you need to have integration. Integration is the key to that kind of development, so somehow I think we need to make that shift. We need to shift from focus only on elections, to look at better integration mechanisms.

VS: This is a personal question, with your permission – do you see yourself as an Indian or a South African or a black South African? Because I know there was a great solidarity between the black South Africans and the South Africans of Indian descent, do you think after the end of the apartheid, those divisions have become more intensified.

EG: Well, to an extent, I know a lot of people who now continue to think of themselves as Indians. But I think by far the majority of the people, and I myself think of myself as South African of Indian origin. We are of Indian origins, but that's where it stops. We are proud South Africans, and I am happy to say that a large majority of Indians now are thinking of themselves as South Africans. And it is important to remember that there are many South Africans of Indian

origin who have never been to India, especially those living in Durban.

VS: Have you been back yourself, since the early days?

EG: I have, I have a large family there and we have maintained close contact all the time, so once in four or five years, but recently it's been closer, like 3 years or so I travel out there.

VS: But you still consider yourself South African first?

EG: Yes.

VS: This is also a personal question, with your permission; I just was wondering whether you could reflect on your experiences with Gandhiji. As a young child, what do you remember of your life and experiences with him?

EG: When I was 7 years old, my family and I spent some months with him in his Ashram. This was one of those fortunate things in my life that my family decided to go to India in '46 / '47 and we lived there for almost a year. So for about three/four months, I had the privilege of spending time with him daily.

VS: This was in Gujerat?

EG: This was in Sevagram Ashram and in Pune. For 3/4 months, my mom, myself, my brother and sometimes my dad were with him daily. Those moments were beautiful. I remember him, particularly when I think back. Lots of people have criticized him for not being a family person, not giving his children quality time. But I feel that's very unfair because today as a busy person myself, I think of how much of quality time am I able to give to my children and grandchildren. He gave us undivided attention on a daily basis, we had an hour, every single day with him and that was our time.

And I know that during that time all the other important people such as Jawaharlal Nehru and others took second place during the time we had with him.

VS: So what did you do in that one hour?

EG: We used to chat with him, lots of childish discussions. 2 things that I remember I asked him – if everyone called you Bapuji even when you were a child? And he said to me, “no! They all used to call me Mohanio”...so I said, “I am going to call you Mohanio”...and we used to go on teasing him with that name.

The other incident was when we lived in Sevagram Ashram. After a couple of days we found out that we had to eat pumpkin for lunch and supper everyday. And so, after a couple of days, I asked Gandhiji, “Why do you call this place Sevagram?” He explained to me “Seva means service and gram means a place so this is a place of service and we call it Sevagram.” I listened to him and responded, “I think we should change the name to Kohlagrama” which means the place of pumpkin. He asked me why, and that shows how undivided his attention was, and so I said to him, “we eat pumpkin everyday and there’s so much of pumpkins here, more pumpkins than Seva” He listened carefully to me.

That evening at the usual prayer services he mentioned this story. He said “a little child drew my attention to the fact that we cook pumpkins daily in our kitchen. I want you to know when I talk about simplicity; I don’t mean that you have to eat pumpkin everyday. You can eat other vegetables” He spent his entire discourse, at the prayer, on this story, and then after that, everybody came to me and scolded me for carrying tales. But he didn’t scold me, he took me seriously. When we think of ourselves, how many of us give this kind of attention to our children and take the little things that they say so seriously.

- VS: Did he also have a good sense of humour? Did he laugh as well?
- EG: Very much so. We had very good times together. I cannot remember all the stories. But he used to tell us a lot of stories. The ones he enjoyed, like his favourite stories were of Harishchandra the king who was devoted to truth and Shravana the lad who carried his elderly blind parents on his shoulders on pilgrimage.
- VS: And did you communicate in English?
- EG: Mostly Gujarati.
- VS: So you were exposed to Gujarati and you learnt it? Did you speak Hindi as well?
- EG: Yes. I also know Hindi but very little.
- VS: So the work you do in South Africa, do you see it as an attempt to carry on the legacy of Bapuji?
- EG: Absolutely. I have and continue to study his philosophies. I feel some of the things he has said have absolute relevance for human kind today and for the survival of the world in the next millennium.
- VS: That his philosophies have a timeless quality?

- EG: Like today, there was somebody who talked about development and development can take hours, but Gandhiji's whole idea of technological development, when you think of it, of what is happening today, the cars the culture and we have an article in our paper...on a speech that a young person made and he's a White person, and he wrote about Gandhiji's ideas and also Castro's ideas and what is happening today between the West and Africa. When we develop Africa, is every family, every person going to have a car? And if we do, how much more emissions will there be? Is that progress? Is that development? We need to think about that. And he spoke very beautifully about that.
- VS: You have adult children, you have three children?
- EG: I have 3 daughters and a son...
- VS: Do you see any of your children continuing the work that you began?
- EG: Most of them are doing in my opinion very good work. My one daughter runs a human rights organization. She's a lawyer; she's doing development in human rights law. My other daughter runs an NGO; she's also doing participatory development work, helping people to be empowered to participate in development issues. My third daughter is doing small business development and empowerment of the community through small business enterprise. I think in a way, in different ways, they are taking this forward. My son, he's a technological wizard. He works in IT, computers and so on, but he was working for United Nations Commission for Refugees. He worked with them for a number of years, but now he's working with a computer company. His idea is to take computer literacy to all areas.
- VS: Do South Africans today remember Gandhiji and his work he did in South Africa?
- EG: I think this year has been tremendous because our President mentioned Satyagraha, as a presidential project for this year which has given it completely new status and more people are now talking about it.
- VS: So what plans does the President have?
- EG: I think firstly, there is going to be a big function with the PM of India coming down, and they are going to have a celebration in South Africa when they are going to talk about collaboration and celebrate our combined legacy of Satyagraha. But we also have programmes, which are supported by the government. We have an annual salt march; we have an annual awards day which coincides with an

international conference here. Our minister of economic affairs addressed a meeting. Many other Government officials supported the various events in South Africa.

I just have a final question. I know you have to run. What do you think of the political aspirations of young people in South Africa today? Do they think they are a population who has their consciousness raised about political issues or do you sense there is some apathy on their part, as far as politics is concerned?

EG: I think there're 3 things. There are those people who have political aspirations in order to gain access to money and power— and that is sad.

And then there are those who have political aspirations in order to do something good, and those are really good people who really want to make a difference and they want to bring about changes. Hopefully they will also someday be able to lead this country as well.

And then there is this third group who has political aspirations, but is not clear in their mind about why, because they are very disillusioned with the poverty that continues and so on. They belong to movements that are outspoken, popular movements but not very disciplined and so whether they will ever have political power is questionable.

I think that an important thing about being a political activist is to learn discipline, is to be able to learn to analyse, is to be able to say why is this the way it is, and how can we change it; can we change it by replacing the person who is leading now, do we replace him with another person or do we have to do certain other things. And there're lots of other things that people can do as political activists.

VS: So are you optimistic about the future of South Africa?

EG: At this stage I am. There is a lot of understanding and there's a lot of debate going on and I hope populism is not going to be the way South Africa goes. I hope reasoning, understanding and discipline are the route that we will take.

VS: Thank you. It has been a pleasure and an honour.

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## e-bulletin

### Pitfalls Constructing a 'Normal Identity Space' While Doing Field Work with the Bnei Sakhnin Soccer Team

**Avipal Kotter**

University of Haifa

E-mail: [akotter@univ.haifa.ac.il](mailto:akotter@univ.haifa.ac.il)



*Avipal Kotter completed his first degree in physical education, sociology and anthropology at the Zinman College of Physical Education at Wingate, Tel Aviv University before embarking on his second degree in physical education at the University of Haifa. He is currently doing a PhD at the University of Haifa.*

About two years ago, while in my first year of graduate studies, I looked for a suitable topic for my thesis. In my BA studies I combined two domains of interest – physical education and sociology, and since I had always aspired to continue and specialize in subjects that are related to the sociology of sport and the effects of sport on society and on the individuals living in it, I searched for a topic that would enable me to realize this aspiration. The soccer team Ihud Bnei Sakhnin provided me with the opportunity to realize my aspiration. The team, representing the town of Sakhnin, an Arab urban settlement of 25,000 citizens in the north of Israel, stirred great interest when, in the year 2004, it ascended to the major league in Israel. Thus the Bnei Sakhnin team became the second Arab team in history to play in the major league in Israel. The former one, Hapoel Taibe, played in this league one season only before it slid back all the way to the fourth league, where it has played ever since. On May 18, 2005, towards the end of its first season in the major league, Ihud Bnei Sakhnin wrote to its credit an unprecedented achievement and became the first Arab team to win a championship in Israel – Sakhnin won the National Cup Final and became the first Arab Israeli team to hold the cup. By the end of that season the team registered another achievement when it became the first Arab team to play in the major league for three consecutive seasons. Throughout that period, the team impassioned the entire Arab population of Israel. From a team representing a town, Sakhnin turned into a team representing a sector. Bnei Sakhnin became a symbol for many women, men and children who considered the team's success an opportunity and a proof of their integration into Israeli society.

As a sworn soccer fan, I was fascinated by the team's unusual background. My curiosity was aroused and a number of questions about this success presented themselves. The first question was: why Sakhnin of all teams? What is there in Sakhnin, both the team and the

town, which succeeded in sweeping so many fans to follow it and turn a soccer team into a symbol also for people who are not typical soccer fans? Above all, why do these people need that symbol, what does the team represent for them and how does a soccer team's success affect its fans, their world-view and the way these fans perceive their identity?

To understand why these questions are significant, one must first recognize the wide cultural and historical relation of the town of Sakhnin in particular, and Jewish-Arab relations in the State of Israel in particular. The history of the town under the Israeli regime is a record of frustration and protest. The event that marked Sakhnin in public awareness as the focus of national Arab protest in the State of Israel occurred in February, 1976. The State of Israel announced its intention to confiscate some of Sakhnin's land. As a result violent clashes erupted between demonstrators and border guard police. In these clashes, six demonstrators were killed and approximately seventy were wounded. The date of the event, March 30, was declared as 'Land Day' and has become an annual day of memorial and protest for the entire Arab minority in Israel. In October 2000, Ariel Sharon, an opposition member at the time, visited the Temple Mount, and incited the flare-up of an 'Intifada', an uprising. As a token of identification with the 'El Aksa Intifada' which erupted in the territories as a protest against this event, Israeli Arabs initiated disorderly demonstrations throughout the country. One center of the demonstrations, which lasted three days, was the town of Sakhnin. The tumultuous demonstrations were accompanied by stone throwing and blocking main roads. In clashes with the police and the border guards, thirteen Arab citizens were killed. These events caused a tremendous shock to Jews and Arabs alike and severely damaged the delicate relationship of Jews and Arabs in Israel.

This article will describe my personal experience while observing and collecting data for writing my thesis, and I will try to shed light on dilemmas a student encounters while performing a qualitative research, and coping in the research field with such dilemmas.

Right from the start, while carrying out my first observation, I discovered that not always can one carry out what had previously been planned. I arrived at my first Bnei Sakhnin game about an hour before the opening of the game, equipped with a detailed observation journal which I had prepared in advance. This observation journal was actually a small notebook with tables of game categories, an observation schedule and criteria I had defined beforehand according to the goals of my research. Nevertheless, even before the referee whistled for the game to start, I realized that if I wanted to integrate into the crowd of fans without raising suspicion and without standing out, I would not be able to use the observation notebook and write notes in the presence of the audience while the game was being played. Taking out the notebook and writing in it caused an obvious dissatisfaction among the fans around me, and when I tried to ask one of the fans a question, his first response was: 'what newspaper are you from?' Therefore I had no choice but to write down my notes during intermission, or immediately after the game was over, as I understood that even taking out my notebook and writing in it during the game emphasized the fact that I was a stranger in the team's stand. It isolated me and drove the rest of the fans away from me, thus decreasing my chances of winning their trust and enabling me to be part of them at least for the ninety-minute duration of the game.

I carried out participant observations at the Sakhnin team soccer games. Just sitting in a stand, crowded with soccer fans, was participation and a declaration that we all had something in common, namely, support for a particular soccer team. One could argue that a fans' stand in a soccer field should constitute a convenient research field for me as a researcher and should allow me to do participant observation under ideal conditions. From

my point of view, the stand made it possible to find the golden mean between being close and observing the researched crowd in its natural environment, and keeping a distance and anonymity while separating myself from the researched phenomenon. In this case, however, merely sitting in the stand, among Sakhnin fans, did not enable me to be assimilated in the crowd and keep the desired anonymity for performing the observation. The reason is embedded in the fact that as Sakhnin is a team representing an Arab Israeli town, its fans consist primarily of people from the sector itself and the presence of strangers in their midst is highly noticeable and raises a plentitude of questions. A glance at the stand was enough to grasp that I did not belong; my long hair and the pair of earrings in my ears made conspicuous the fact that I was not a local. The extent of my standing out in the teams' stands is evident in the following example: in one of the first home games I watched, after half an hour of playing, one of the fans, sitting next to me, turned to me and said 'No. 7 ruins the game for you.' The fan treated me according to my appearance and since it was clear to all that I was not a local, he naturally concluded that I was a Jew. As such, to his mind, it was clear that I was a fan of the rival team. Nevertheless, as time passed, close relations and trust did develop between me and the regulars in the stands. By showing up frequently, taking part in shouts following a goal, and in expressions of disappointment after a loss, helped me be accepted as a regular fan and as 'one of them.' This did not solve all my problems.

In the framework of my courses in the methodology of qualitative research, numerous dilemmas the researcher has to cope with while conducting the research were indicated. One of the first dilemmas the researcher copes with is the extent of involvement in the research. The more games I watched, the more interested I became in the team and its games and at the same time my emotional involvement and the wish to see the team succeed and win, increased. At first I related my growing interest to the importance I placed on the team's success for my thesis, and that it was purely a professional matter. I understood the real extent of my emotional involvement and how attached I became to the Sakhnin team when I watched Sakhnin play against my favorite team. When the team with which I had played in my youth and the love for which I share to this day with my whole family scored a goal, I was not at all glad, and all of a sudden I was not sure in whose favor I was and which of the two teams I supported. At the end of the game, which Sakhnin lost 4:0, I was confused as I walked toward the parking lot and met groups of rejoicing fans. Not long ago I had been one of them, and now .... Through the experience, I fully understood the methodological lesson.

A strategic decision I made while designing the research, which was supposed to enhance neutrality and anonymity, was to become part of the audience in the team's stands and not to accept invitation tickets from any people close to the team or from functionaries in its management, and, furthermore, to delay contact with the team's management as long as possible. The reason for this decision was to keep a distance between myself and those key figures thus trying not to create any expectancy system or dependence that could possibly interfere with my wish to make objective observations. In other words, I tried to keep observations 'clean' and avoid outside interference. In practice, I discovered that implementing this decision, which seemed simple at first, was not simple at all. I often had to refuse offers and invitations politely, and risk hurting the person who extended the invitation; occasionally I had to give in and accept the invitation so as not to hurt the other party's feelings. One of the episodes when I agreed to accept an invitation to a game demonstrates the fact that even the most carefully planned research design may encounter

difficulties and change unexpectedly. In one of the Sakhnin games away from home, a game against Beitar-Jerusalem (a team known for its hatred of Arabs in general, and of Sakhnin in particular), an acquaintance associated with the team begged me to accept an invitation. In the end, I did agree because of the great importance that was attributed to that game. The games between the two teams were always very tense due to the rivalry between the fans of the two teams; these games were usually accompanied by many events of research significance for me and thus I decided to break my habit and accept the generous invitation. Being such a sensitive game, it took place in a neutral stadium that enabled a complete separation of the two camps of fans. When I arrived at the box-office before the beginning of the game to collect the ticket that had been left for me, I was surprised to discover that the ticket was for the stand of the Beitar Jerusalem fans, the adversary, and not for the stand of Sakhnin's fans where I planned to carry out the observations. As a result I was forced to sit and watch the game surrounded by the Jerusalemite team, unable to conduct the pre-planned observation. Later I found out that due to the immense tension between the two fan groups, and in fear for my well-being, and since I would be the only Jewish fan sitting in the midst of Arab fans in such a sensitive and tense game, my acquaintance decided for my own sake that I was better off in that stand and not among the Arab fans.

Conducting ethnographic observations of this kind is supposed to be a means for a researcher to gain an understanding of a relatively unfamiliar world. To that end, the researcher must know and understand the language the subjects use and be able to identify meanings and non-verbal messages the people use. This methodological point was divided into two in my Sakhnin research. On the one hand, the fact that the research subject was a soccer team and I am familiar with 'soccer language' helped me to find a common tongue with the team's fans. The fact that I demonstrated expertise in whatever happened on the field helped me relieve their initial suspicion when I introduced myself as the team's fan. By being able to conduct an everyday conversation about what was going on the field and in the team, I could easily be accepted as a regular fan. This fact helped me to understand the fans' behavior, and to interpret non-verbal messages and communication with regard to various events on the field and outside it. On the other hand, the fact that unlike most fans in the stands, I did not speak Arabic, occasionally created a problem of understanding things in depth and prevented me from fully interpreting and understanding episodes and events I witnessed. To receive maximum information, I was thus forced to ask one of the fans sitting next to me to translate for me; when I sat in the game with a local Arabic-speaking acquaintance, I had to ask him to translate for me the spirit of things. How inadequate I was, a stranger, to understand the root of things, may be seen in the following example: In one of the crucial games of the season, after Sakhnin scored a goal, the large crowd started to sing in Arabic. When I asked the meaning of the song, my neighbor in the stand explained that it was a traditional song usually sung in honor of a bride on her wedding day and the words meant that as we had honored the bride so far, and we would continue to honor her in the future. The connection to soccer was that we expected more goals coming in the game. I received a detailed explanation including a translation of the song's words and what the crowd had in mind. Yet, it was obvious that I, as a stranger who had never attended a traditional Arab wedding and had not been educated in this tradition, could not really understand the crux of the matter. I needed to get the interpretation from a secondary source knowing there is no way I could reach a higher level of making sense of the data.

One of the main issues that qualitative researchers are engaged in is the need to understand the subjects' world with regard to their cultural world. A qualitative researcher

must get as close as possible to the researched culture. In my case, I certainly tried my best to learn about and get to know the researched culture. However, it was quite clear from the beginning that my ability to utilize the familiarization process to the fullest was limited. An outstanding phenomenon in the Sakhnin games was the presence of women among the crowd of fans. In many stadiums all over the world this is a trivial matter and many women are there as an integral part of the fan audience of many teams. Yet from my knowledge of Arab culture, on the one hand, and from my acquaintance with findings of previous research in the domain on the other, I realized that this was especially significant here. It was important to try and understand its meaning in its cultural context. Despite my curiosity as a researcher and the wish to collect data that would serve the research, familiarity with the traditional nature of the Arab society prevented me from initiating any contact with the women in the stands. The conservative nature of the Arab society which was the subject of my research precluded the possibility of making eye contact with one of these women. Even a long look would be considered an offense to their honor and could lead to furious reactions on the part of the fans around me. Therefore, in spite of my great intellectual curiosity, I had to be satisfied with receiving the information from other sources; yet clearly this limitation, not to be enabled to receive the information first hand, was a disadvantage and possibly, the data received from the different sources were incomplete, while data that could possibly be valuable or significant was lost.

Conducting the observations was, for me, a rich source that provided me with much significant information for my research. Yet no less important to me was the methodological experience, a first fascinating experience of the dilemmas of participant observation, a method that qualitative researchers regularly use in their work. I am convinced that other students and researchers who are engaged in qualitative studies share similar experiences and struggles, and I hope that in describing my personal experience I have succeeded in transferring some of the feelings, the internal conflicts, and the dilemmas I encountered – problems with which researchers have to cope with when conducting field work in surroundings that are at once highly familiar and completely foreign.

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### Sex in the Field: Anthropologists' Sexual Involvement with the People in the Field

**Satoshi Ota**

School of African and Oriental Studies  
University of London

E-mail: [satoshi69@yahoo.com](mailto:satoshi69@yahoo.com)



*Satoshi Ota obtained his PhD from the School of African and Oriental Studies at the University of London in March 2006 and got his MA from the Oxford Brookes University. His research interests include Identity construction; Nationalism; Youth Culture; Consumption; Media; Post-modern Theories; Post-colonialism; Cultural Studies; Anthropology of Literature; Anthropological Theories; Social Theories; Methodologies; Japan; Taiwan; and China.*

I stayed in Taipei for about two years from the year 2000 to 2002 for fieldwork. My research was about Taiwanese young people's consumption of Japanese popular culture, so I spent as much time as I could with Taiwanese young people. I mingled with different groups of young Taiwanese, and some of them liked to go to places like bars, nightclubs, and KTV (karaoke parlours). Because I also like to go to these places, I could get along with these people easily. The following is an excerpt from my thesis (Ota 2006) which describes one of the situations I encountered in the field.

About a week after the night we met at a bar, Suying called me and asked me if I could come out that night. She told me it was her birthday, and she wanted to celebrate with some of her friends. She said she had to work until 9 o'clock, and suggested that we meet near her office and she would take me to the place. We made an appointment to meet at the crossing of Xincheng North (新生北路) road and Minsheng East road (民生東路). The place is a big intersection of two major roads in Taipei, but it is slightly inconvenient to get to, as it is a bit far from the underground station. I could have taken a bus from the station but I decided to walk there. It was raining a bit, but in Taipei many buildings protrude over the pavement so people can walk under the buildings without getting wet in the rain.

As soon as I started walking, the rain became heavier, and I regretted that I had decided to walk. Even though the pavement was relatively well covered, there were still some places which were not covered by the buildings. It took me about ten minutes to get to the place from the station. It was already 10 past 9. I called Suying to tell her that I had arrived. She turned up a few minutes later.

'I still have some work that I have to do. Can you come to my office with me and wait there for a few minutes?' Suying asked.

Her office was just two blocks off Minsheng East road, on the ground floor in a small building. There were two sofas at the reception, and boxes of badges for the group tourists. Papers on which were written itineraries and remarks were piled up messily in many places in the office. The desks were located behind the sofas. There were still a few people working when we arrived.

I was sitting on the sofa for a while, then Suying's two male colleagues called me. They seemed to have finished their work so they were going to drink beer at the office before they went out to celebrate Friday night. They asked me to join them. Suying was still working. There was some food which somebody had bought from a food vendor. The men already knew that I was from Japan, so one asked me which part of Japan I came from. I said that I was from Tokyo, and one of the men said that he had been there a few times. Suying finally finished her job and joined us. After sharing a quick drink she told them that she should go because she had to meet with her friends. The two men were already slightly drunk.

We took a taxi and headed towards a KTV in Dong-qu (東區). Her friends were already there and singing. Suying introduced me to everyone. There were six people besides Suying and I, but two or three of them seemed to be her friend's friends whom she had met only once or twice. She was asking the names of two or three girls. They all told her their English names. There were five girls and one man. Two girls looked similar, they were tall, slim, and had long black hair; one girl was wearing a black dress and was called Serena; the other wearing a white dress was called Tracy. Those two did not look acquainted with Suying. Another girl was slightly overweight, with short hair and naturally dark skin. She called herself Debora. Debora said she was a master's student at the national university in Taipei. She studied education. Another girl was called Vivian. She did not know Suying directly; she was a friend of some of the other girls. Vivian was slim and short with long black hair. She wore fashionable clothes but did not wear sexy clothes like the two girls in black and white. She looked slightly conservative but seemed a bit curious. The other girl was called Angela. She was mid-height, slim, and had long black hair. She wore tight low hip jeans which emphasised her body line, and a blue tube top. Angela seemed to be Suying's best friend; they appeared to be very close to each other. When we came into the Karaoke room, Angela looked at me and smiled. They seemed to normally use Chinese names with each other, since when Angela introduced herself to me, Suying said to her that she did not know that she was called Angela in English. Lastly there was a man called Tom. He was a man of medium height and build, but not a macho type, and slightly chubby. He was wearing black jeans and a black tight T-shirt. Suying told me that she had known him for a long time, and they were good friends. He also worked in a travel agency.

As mentioned, when we arrived at the place, they had already started. The two girls were singing a Mandarin song and there was food and drinks on the table. They sometimes sang slow ballads or love songs and sometimes upbeat pop songs. Suying and I sat next to each other, picked up the song 'menu' and browsed through songs to sing. In Taiwan, I witnessed many times that regular KTV goers memorised the order numbers of their favourite songs, so once they arrive in the karaoke room they use a key pad connected to the computer instead of a remote control, because the key pad is faster to input, so they can input the songs they like immediately. They must have already ordered many songs, because it took a while before our choices came up.

Suying started talking about her friend.

'You know Tom is gay, Debora is lesbian, no...she also likes man, so bisexual? And Angela is dating three guys at the moment.'

She said both Tom and Debora had come out, so people knew their sexual orientation. While we were talking there was a phone call. Vivian picked up her mobile. She talked for a minute and hung up the phone with an unpleasant look. The girls next to her asked what happened and they started talking for a few minutes. I was sitting quite far from Vivian and they were playing the music loudly, so I could not hear very well. After they finished talking, Suying explained to me that Vivian's boyfriend was very possessive and every time she went out, her boyfriend asked where she was now, with whom, and when she would come home, and so on. Vivian had become a bit tired of his attitude, Suying told me.

After singing for a while at the KTV, Suying picked up her mobile and started calling someone. After she hung up the phone, she called Angela over and talked for a second.

'We are going out to pick up some stuff,' Suying smiled at me. 'We'll be back in a few minutes.' They left the room.

They came back after half an hour. They came into the room then immediately went into the toilet. In a KTV in Taiwan, most of the rooms come with a toilet. They were stuck in there for five minutes, then came out at last.

The night became late and people got drunk. The more people got drunk, the more they became 'high'. They started to order up-beat Hong Kong pop songs. The girl in black, Serena, loved to sing Hong Kong pop. Because people drank a lot of alcohol, they also started dancing. Meanwhile a girl came into our room. Judging from everybody's welcome for the girl, she must have been a friend of theirs. She sat next to Tracy, and joined in singing a few songs with us. Then she called Serena and Tracy. They started packing their belongings and told Suying that they were leaving. I went to KTVs with Taiwanese people many times during my fieldwork, and on many occasions, friends' friends joined in the middle, sometimes they stayed and sometimes they left after a few songs. On weekends people call each other on their mobiles, and find out where their friends are and what they are doing. When they find that their friends are near them or doing interesting things, they go and join the group. Some people party hop two or three times in one night.

Vivian's phone rang again. She answered, a minute later she covered the handset by the right hand and said 'My boyfriend said he wanted to come over and pick me up.'

'No way! Tell him not to come,' everybody said.

Vivian looked annoyed with her boyfriend when she hung up the phone.

'Why don't you switch off the mobile?' Angela said.

'Yeah, why not,' Suying instigated.

'But, I will be told off if I do this,' Vivian said a bit anxiously.

'You can say that the signal got weak so you couldn't answer, or set the mobile on silent mode and left it; then you say that you were in a loud place couldn't hear the phone was ringing, or whatever. If your boyfriend still nags, you can get angry and say "you don't believe me?" or something,' Debora told her.

Urged by everybody, Vivian switched off her mobile.

The above was not an uncommon conversation I have heard in the field. Taiwanese young people I met talked about their love life frankly, and sometimes they discussed sex.

The issue of sex in anthropology is not a recent topic. It can be dated back to Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929). Nowadays, quite a few anthropologists study this subject, but most of them study 'their' sexuality. The sexual relationship between anthropologists and informants has not been discussed until recently. Anthropologists do almost everything with their informants: share their lives, eat with them, attend their rituals, become part of their families and even close friends. It seems hardly thinkable that all anthropologists remain celibate in the field. But in graduate school, students may not receive information about this from their supervisors. Some students raise the question of whether anthropologists remain abstinent or whether this aspect of their experience simply does not appear in the academic text.

Kulick has referred to Anthropologists as 'Merchants of astonishment' (Kulick 1995:3), who peddle all over the world polyandry, puberty hoses, subincision, ghost marriage, ritual defloration, chiefly incest, and homo-sexual insemination for example. In contrast to their interest in the sex life of others, anthropologists have kept quiet about their own sexuality. One reason for his silence is that anthropology was considered as a science based on the objective recording and analysis of the habits and customs of other people. Therefore, as Kulick (1995) has pointed out, the biography and position of the researcher did not matter, and textually, ethnographers achieved this pose of not mattering by making themselves invisible. Clifford (1986) also argues that researchers established their authority at the beginning of their accounts with a difficult arrival scene and/or a claim to fluency in a local language, and then they proceeded to vanish from their texts.

Malinowski (1958) claimed that social anthropology was a social science. To be scientific, as Kulick (1995) argues, there was a disciplinary disdain for personal narratives. To put it another way, as Pratt (1986) suggests, personal narratives are often deemed self-indulgent, trivial, or heretical, even without discussions of the anthropologist's own sexuality. Scientists are supposed to use the passive voice and the third person - for example, to quote Ruby's word (1980: 159), "Bows and arrows are made by the Bushman", and not say 'I saw some Bushman make bows and arrows.'

However, Ruby (1980) points out that an examination of ethnographic literature for the past 75 years reveals a fairly consistent lack of systematic and rigorous methodological statements and discussions of the relationship between the researched and the researcher. There seems to be a strong belief among Western scientists to regard scientific experience as the sole source of knowledge, and the methods of empirical science are the only means by which the world can be understood. That philosophies of science causes social scientists to try to be detached, neutral, unbiased, and objective toward the object of his/her study; to withhold value judgements; and to reject political, economic, and even moral positions - in other words, to attempt to negate or lose all traces of his/her culture so that he/she can study someone else's culture. The field worker tends to become a self-effacing creature without any reactions other than those of a recording machine.

The problem is that the neutrality of the observer evolved in a science of subject/object relations, and not an anthropological science of subject/subject relations. To put it another way, one cannot make another human being into an object of study in the same way that one can control animals or inanimate objects. The method for writing ethnography is involved, non-standardized, and involves a personal version of methods: that is, participant observation. Anthropologists who see the science from an empiricist point of view and practise participant observation in the fieldwork find themselves in a double bind. As Ruby (1980) puts it, the more the ethnographer attempts to fulfil his/her scientific obligation to

articulate his/her methods, the more he/she must acknowledge that his/her own behaviour and persona in the field are data. His/her methodological statements then begin to appear to be more and more personal, subjective, biased, involved, and culture bound - in other words, the more scientific anthropologists try to reveal their methods, the less scientific they appear to be.

This contradiction was pointed out by anthropologists, and Clifford and Marcus's (1986) *Writing Culture* questioned the notion of objectivity in anthropology, as well as discuss the issue of writing 'truth'. Writing styles in anthropology were influenced by these debates, and reflexivity became a style of writing. The presence of ethnographers has become commonplace in anthropological texts. Anthropologists' self has been revealed in anthropological texts, but writing about their sexual life is still rare. Dubisch (1995) argues that there was no advice about sex, not even for those who were going alone into the field and would presumably be facing a long period of sexual abstinence. Despite the lack of explicit instruction of advice on the matter, a large number of anthropologists absorbed the idea that sexual relations with members of the community in which they were working would be neither appropriate nor wise. In some societies, of course, in which female sexuality is restricted, a male anthropologist's sexual affair with a local woman may create an unpleasant result, and even terminate his fieldwork or, in other cases, a lone female anthropologist might feel that it was necessary to remain not only celibate but circumspect in her dealings with men in order to retain her standing and respect in the community.

If fieldwork is conducted in a small village or town where the members of the community know each other, fieldworkers' behaviours may affect the life of the community members, however in a big city like Taipei, it is not always the case. Even in a big city, when anthropologists mingle into networks of different communities, such as families, office workers, friends, and so on, the behaviour of anthropologists may affect the dynamics of the human relationships they got involved in. There is a principle in fieldwork that the researcher becomes a fly on the wall and observes the society he/she studies. In some cases, this method may be more appropriate than the researcher becoming actively involved in the society. However, in my case, Taiwanese young people's reactions to Japanese youth culture, including their interactions with Japanese people became valuable references for my analysis of Taiwanese youth culture. For the young people in Taiwan I met, regardless of their sexual orientations, having sex with more than one partner in their life is not uncommon.

There are some issues involved when anthropologists have sexual relations with the people they study, such as power relations between researchers and researched, including the cultural dominance of researchers over the culture of the researched. In my case, interaction with Taiwanese people is not free from the issue of Taiwan's colonial past. In academia, power relations are sensitive issues. So, it is one view that a male anthropologist from the country of the ex-coloniser becomes aware of his position, and is not involved in sexual relationship with people in the field and in some cases this attitude is appropriate from an ethical point of view. However, there is another view that if anthropologists consciously avoid having intimate relationships with people they study because of power relations, it might create rather unnatural situations. If the principle of anthropological fieldwork is that researchers blend into the society they study, and live life in the field as local people do, then how should they negotiate the issue of their own sexuality? In my case, I did not resist becoming intimate with Taiwanese women, because this is part of a certain group of young Taiwanese people's life. In addition, after becoming intimate, it happened that people spoke more frankly about what they had in mind, or sometimes became emotional which led to

quarrels. Some information came from unexpected intensive conversations, and these became useful for understanding certain groups of Taiwanese young people of certain circumstances.

Back in Malinowski's era, when anthropological research was expected to be 'scientific', and moral issues were stricter in Western society than they are today, having sexual relations with the people anthropologists study was not considered to be appropriate. However, since the 1980s, influenced by post-structurism, 'objectivity' has been questioned in anthropology, influencing anthropological writing styles as well as research methods in the field. When I conducted fieldwork in Taipei, I mingled with groups of young Taiwanese people, and took a 'let it go' attitude to people I met in the field. In my case, becoming intimate did not become hazardous to conducting my fieldwork. Having sexual relations with people in the field may cause trouble depending on the situation. However, if the aim of fieldwork is to live as people in the field do, it would not be unnatural for anthropologists to get involved in sexual relations with people in the field.

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## e-bulletin

### Headnotes, Heartnotes and Persuasive Ethnography of Thai Migrant Workers in Singapore

**Pattana Kitiarsa**

Asia Research Institute  
National University of Singapore  
E-mail: aripk@nus.edu.sg

*Pattana Kitiarsa holds a doctoral degree in sociocultural anthropology from the Department of Anthropology, University of Washington in Seattle, USA. He has published in the fields of Thai popular Buddhism, popular culture, and transnational labor migration. Currently, he is a research fellow in the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He will join the NUS Southeast Asian Studies Programme in January 2007.*

Ottenberg (1990) argues that 'headnotes' are fundamental for an ethnographer both during the course of and post fieldwork. By headnotes, he simply refers to the notes which are in the head. He maintains that "I remember many things, and some I include when I write even though I cannot find them in my fieldnotes, for I am certain that they are correct and not fantasy" (Ottenberg 1990:144). Headnotes are the businesses of mental note-taking which include some audio, visual and graphic traces containing in the memories of the field experience. They are the products of memo-faculties which can be recalled, retrieved, or reproduced in service of complementing the fieldworker's first-hand accounts of 'being-there-in-the-field.' The headnotes are specifically useful in some sensitive field situations, where the fieldworkers cannot make use of pens, pad-notes, or cameras. Throughout the course of my fieldworks among Thai migrant workers in urban Singapore settings, I have no doubt that 'trained and experienced' headnotes emerged as one of many key conceptual tools to gather information, which are substantial compared to my "construction of fieldnotes" (Atkinson 1990:57). However, the ethnographic fieldwork as an academic and a human-relation enterprise cannot be solely relied on the 'head' and what it has contained. In this essay, I argue that the combination between the 'head' and the 'heart' are ethically and professionally important. The fieldworker should be able to perform his/her multiple "field roles" (Gold 2005:100) with strong senses of ethical and moral commitment and responsibility to the people and communities understudied. I coin the term 'heartnotes' to connote some moral and practical roles in which the fieldworker takes part in order to earn him/herself 'rights' and 'authority' to write about or comment on the complex life situations in question. One of my priorities in doing fieldwork among the Thai workmen in Singapore

through the intensive engagements of headnotes and heartnotes is to produce a persuasive ethnography of migrant livelihood and subjectivity.

The headnotes and heartnotes are particularly needed when one carries out fieldwork among migrant people and their community. They are the products of intensive “body work” and “emotion work” (Sanders 2006:215), in which the fieldworkers “place their own body alongside that of their respondents as both parties engage in an exchange of watching, analyzing and managing their physical presence and emotional consequences” (Ibid.). Since late January 2004, I have carried out my ethnographic fieldwork among Thai migrant expatriates making their transient livelihood in Singapore. The majority of my informants comprises of male construction workers, cross-border tradeswomen, sex workers, domestic workers, and housewives. These people make up a great portion of an approximate 43,800 Thai expatriate population working and living in this tropical global city (Thailand Ministry of Labour Affairs 2006:141). I came to Singapore to serve my academic appointments in the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore after spending more than fifteen years doing ethnographic researches on aspects of culture and society of Thai-Lao people in my native region of Northeastern Thailand (thereafter, Isan). More than 85% of Thai migrant workers in Singapore hailed from this region. My informants and I are incorporated into the larger regional labor migratory patterns, which always loom large in the globalizing world. We represent rural peasants as well as professionals who are forced to leave homes for urban and overseas employments. Beginning in the late 1970s, male and female workers from Thailand have joined the generations of multi-national workforces (e.g., Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines) in their contracted journeys for migrant employments in Singapore (Pattana Kitiarsa 2005a; Saranya Bunnak and Saowapha Chaimusik 1985; Wong 2000). ‘My people’ from Isan and I have found ourselves constituting diasporic “moving targets” (Appadurai 1999) through the complex labor divisional networks of transnational migration.

I characterize my fieldwork experience in Singapore as a committed process of ethnographic common sense with an aim to dig deep into the textures of Thai workmen’s everyday life on their cross-border contracted employment missions. Cultural sensitivity and courtesy are among key ingredients for a successful fieldwork. They permitted me to “adjust [my own] role-repertoires to research objectives” (Gold 2005:100). I stepped into the world of migrant workers from Thailand in Singapore with a sense of curiosity. It is my ethnographic urge that I felt most strongly when I walked around the weekend outing spaces in the Golden Mile Complex (Little Thailand) and the Kallang Riverside Park on Beach Road, where male workers (*khon ngan/raeng ngan*), tradeswomen (*maekha*), and some sex workers (*phuying ha kin*) gathered on Sundays. Doing fieldwork requires common sense as much as scientific endeavors in order to make an entry into the social field and establish rapports with the people one wants to study. I found myself talking to men sitting on the floor with used newspapers as their mattresses and having fun with beer or rice whisky and snacks inside the Golden Mile shopping mall, under the residential flats, or in the Park. Cross-border tradeswomen from Hat Yai came to sell the workmen some snacks and occasional sexual services on the weekend via the air-con bus routes between Hat Yai, Malaysia and Singapore.

Most of my informants are men and women speaking a distinctive Thai-Lao dialect. I usually began my chat with them by asking how long they have been working in Singapore, which part of Northeastern Thailand they came from, and what job they are on at the moment. Besides our shared linguistic dialect, we had developed our rapports by locating our

places of origin. I came from a rural village in Nong Khai province. My informants either came from different districts in the same province or neighboring provinces, such as Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Udon Thani, and Khon Kaen. My informants were more comfortable once they learned that I am an *achan* (teacher/instructor) working in an established university in Singapore and wished to study about the livelihoods of Thai workers in Singapore. They identify me as a Thai *achan*, who came from their home region of Isan and speak their dialect. Between me and my informants, we are *thai ban deaow kan* (the people of the same origin). From my side, I regarded their status and identity based on the Thai cultural convention of seniority and fictive kinship. Therefore, I addressed my older tradeswoman informants as 'pa' or 'na' (aunt) and older workmen as 'phi' or 'a' (older brother) and 'nong' (younger brother).

My fieldwork roles were indeed dictated by the inner voice from the heart (*hua chai* or *chai*). I always wish to carry out my fieldwork endeavors with heart and I had gradually learned how to take the heartnotes through time and close social relationships which I had cultivated with groups of Thai workmen and officials in charge of Thai Labour Affairs in Singapore. A few months after I had committed myself to the project, I discovered the Friends of Thai Workers Association (FTWA), located on the third level of the Golden Mile Complex. The FTWA is sponsored by the Office of Thai Labour Affairs and the Royal Thai Embassy to run educational and cultural activities for benefits of Thai migrant workers. It looked for a volunteer teacher for their English classes and I decided immediately to play my part. Most Thai workmen with only a four or six-year compulsory education attainment have encountered some daunting tasks to overcome language barriers in their workplaces. They speak neither English nor Hokkien or Mandarin. It is difficult for them to communicate with their employers and co-workers from countries like Bangladesh, China, India, and Malaysia. My Basic English courses for Thai construction workers on Sunday evenings have opened to more than a hundred workmen/students in the past three years (2004 to present). Later, there are good numbers of Thai women who are married to Singaporean men and who came to work as domestic workers, clerks, or sex workers joining my expanding language classes. From my side, I have learned not only my proper field roles, but also my true identity of what has made up my selfhood through my teaching volunteer works. I always feel at home to teach and do research as a middle class ethnographer with strong Thai-Lao cultural sensitivity from Isan. In other words, I see my ethnographic fieldwork project as a deep moral mission to serve the community of Thai migrants in Singapore, especially those sharing my ethnocultural backgrounds. I truly identify myself with my own displaced people despite our temporary existence away from home.

My head and my heart usually go hand in hand. My heartnotes particularly through the roles of volunteer teacher and fieldworker usually led me to some further intriguing and exciting headnotes as well as constant fieldnotes, which is illustrated by the convention that "the ethnographer is engaged in 'writing down' what goes on" (Atkinson 1990:61). With an extended period of classroom contacts and through joining other Thai migrant activities i.e., May Day celebrations, Thai labor football tournaments, and events to celebrate Thailand's National Day/His Majesty the King's Birthday on December 5<sup>th</sup>, I have gradually built up rapports with a group of male informants, who allowed me to visit their dormitories and observe their off-duty leisure night life. I was welcomed to join their leisure activities as *achan* (teacher), who is '*khon ban bao*' (a person coming from our villages in Isan with the same ethnocultural identities). They invited me to hang out with them on numerous occasions in the Kallang Riverside Park, at the beer bars and pubs in the Geylang areas, the Golden Mile

Complex and the Orchard Tower, and at their living quarters. I received some helpful cooperation throughout my semi-structured interview and participant observation despite the fact that I made series of sensitive enquiries and intrusions into their private life.

The fieldwork is “the basic arts,” argued Wolcott (2005), but the arts of studying the social life of a people must be firmly embedded in the human relations. The social life of the migrants is largely governed by forms of transient cultures, which see how men and women have struggled mightily to survive with their low-skilled labor capitals in a given limited space and time in Singapore. Suspicion and skepticism over my roles as an ethnographer appeared in an unusually high-risk degree from my informants’ perspective. Ket, a veteran cross-border tradeswoman, saw me as a secret anti-narcotic police from Bangkok. She had rough experiences from being searched and interrogated by both Singapore’s immigration officials and the Thai police in the past few years. She once told me that the officials treated her as if she were a criminal suspect, instead of a small trader who tried to earn a living to support her family. Her suspicion was proven valid considering the fact that no Thai or foreign strangers hang out with them in the Kallang Riverside Park on Sunday afternoon. When I requested Ket to join her overnight trip by air-con bus to Hat Yai in Southern Thailand through Malaysia, she took a sarcastic shot at me and told me to prepare rolls of films and a good camera to take pictures of herself and her friends. I had to shrug off her remarks and happened to realize one of the ethnographic fieldwork truths that the observers are constantly observed by their informants in the fields (Stocking 1983). The natives or informants too are keen observers. However, my straight-forward approach was well accepted by most male workers, whom I can comfortably engage into conversation. They knew me as a teacher/researcher and gave me full cooperation. I also developed some good relationship and trust with many of them, who revealed their private life and took me along when they visited brothels in Geylang. Some even introduced me to their secret forest brothels and make-shift gambling dens hidden away from spotlights behind the hostels for foreign workers or in the corners of Singapore’s tropical forest.

Both headnotes and heartnotes have guided me into the conscious process of “constructing the field” (Amit 2000) in Singapore. My fieldwork among Thai migrant workmen forced me to define and redefine Singapore as a fieldwork site. Despite its small and compact geographical setting, Singapore cannot be my field site per se. I have evaded Singapore as an ethnographic field beyond its cosmopolitan, global images.<sup>2</sup> My close relations with Thai workmen have led me into social spaces, which are usually either hidden away or suppressed in Singapore’s official and academic discourses. I was particularly excited by my two field trips into two forested areas in Lim Chu Kang and Choa Chu Kang. The first one was to join a team of local journalists to inspect the forest brothel near a hostel for foreign workers, which served as a camp-work station for Thai sex workers. I was stunned to witness how sex and gambling play their roles for the foreign workmen during their leisure time at night. The second trip was to accompany a group of Thai Isan workmen to go foraging and fishing in some abandoned fruit orchards and fish ponds. The workmen took refuge in the forest to collect edible forest food (e.g., wild vegetable, fruit, and root) as well as to go fishing with poles and nets they bought from stores in the Golden Mile Complex. They can save some money on meals and enjoy their favorite wild food. They can also entertain themselves with some freedom ungazed and unregulated by their employers and authorities. My perception of Singapore has forever changed with these trips to marginalized places, which are reconstructed and redefined by its migrant workers population.

My initial goals in cultivating headnotes and heartnotes as the flagships of my ethnographic investigation are two folds. First, they guided me to focus my attention on gathering situated lived stories concerning the workers' migrant livelihood and subjectivity away from home. Beio (2005:317) argues that 'story telling is a reflexive representational strategy.' In addition, they are 'lived narratives' which 'offer insights into the social fields people transverse in situations of mobility' (Sorensen and Stepputat 2001:314). Second, ethnographic stories I have gathered and reconstructed helped in forming the "factual accounts" of Thai workmen, which feature them as key actors of labor transnationalism on the ground. Stories from the field vividly show how men and women have struggled and survived their socially marginalized migrant lives in a strictly-monitored and controlled geopolitical space like Singapore. In other words, my informants allowed me to feature their lived memories and experiences in my ethnographic writings as "persuasive fictions" (Atkinson 1990:26). I take stories which I retrieved and reconstructed from my headnotes, heartnotes, and other field information gathering tools to convince as well as "...persuade the reader of the facts [they] supports to describe and comment on" (Ibid.:36).

Many migrant stories I have gathered reflexively showed the masculine cultural discourses among displaced Thai migrants in Singapore. The workmen are strongly committed to their families. They eagerly remitted their wages home (*song ngoen klap ban*) on regular basis. Sending money home to their loved ones are among the proudest moments in these men's lives, who have worked very hard as breadwinners for their families. Besides their breadwinning ideal, Thai workmen also demonstrated their masculine passion in sports, e.g., boxing, football (soccer), and sepak takraw. The young workmen from different companies and construction sites enthusiastically participated in the annual football tournament organized by the Office of Thai Labour Affairs. Football became the masculine language and mode of social interaction among men, who enjoyed showing their sporty skills and heroic working class pride in their attempts to win some male honors for their teams and for themselves. A more touching story involving how the Thai workmen maintain their cultural bonds with their original villages in Thailand is the Buddhist merit-making project commonly known as '*pha pa*.' Traditionally, *pha pa* is the ceremony of giving away the yellow robe and other necessities as a form of merit-making to the monks and the Sangha. The transnational *pha pa* projects usually intend to raise funds for the village development projects like the construction of temple halls, school libraries, village roads, and other infrastructure development projects. The *pha pa* is jointly organized by the home-village committee and the migrant representatives in Singapore. The envelopes containing the ceremony's details are distributed among workers, who wish to make some cash donations (e.g., 2SGD or more). The donations are collected by the organizing committee and remitted back to the home-village counterpart as a form of Buddhist merit-making token from overseas workers. My informants estimated that there are more than 300 *pha pa* projects all year round which raised up to 300,000 SGD each year to help support community development projects in the Thai countryside. Accounts from the abovementioned headnotes and heartnotes have articulated deeply how the Thai workmen are engaged in their masculine discourses both within their fragmented community in the host country and across international borders back to their home villages. They are highly conscious of their own presence and absence as 'labor-selling' men (*khon khai raeng*), who are always committed to invest economically and socially to their home villages for now and for their post-migrant future (see Pattana Kitiarsa 2005b).

Fieldnotes make ethnography. However, it requires efforts other than the habitual jotting down of one's pad-notes and rewriting them into fieldwork accounts in order to produce ethnographies as "persuasive fictions" (Atkinson 1990:26). Lessons from my fieldwork among Thai migrant workers in Singapore suggest the vital roles of headnotes and heartnotes as ethical and professional field role scripts for engaged ethnographers. Writing on the subjects of migrant livelihood and subjectivity cannot be accomplished without a series of committed observation, which cut deep into the textures of everyday life beyond the workmen's stereotypical life in the public sphere. I have employed both headnotes and heartnotes to ensure myself that I have earned my academic rights to represent them in the world of ethnographic literature.

## Figures



**Figure 1:** The author takes note during one of *pha pa* merit-making gathering at the Kallang Riverside Park, Singapore (February 9, 2005; photo by Phutthathat Phakul)



**Figure 2:** Thai Isan workmen gathers to collect *pha pa* donations at a space near Food Center on Beach Road (June 17, 2006; photo by the author)



**Figure 3:** Thai workmen displays their passion in the annual Thai Labour Cup at Nanyang Junior College Stadium, Singapore (February 27, 2005; photo by the author)



**Figure 4:** An abandoned forest brothel camp near a hostel for foreign construction workers in Lim Chu Kang area (May 17, 2005; photo by the author)

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2 I owe Vineeta Sinha (Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore) for pointing out this point to me in our personal communication. She writes that "I do feel quite strongly that there has been an 'over-reading' and 'over-analysis' of Singapore as a highly urban space, where the world of official bureaucratic rationality, discipline and over-regulation are dominant frames. If one looks at the city outside these frames, a different world appears--and one which is more meaningful, either in enabling or obscuring the business of day-to-day living" (Personal Communication, October 15, 2005).

