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# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

### Editorial

#### **E-Bulletin (International Sociological Association)**

The fourth issue of the ISA E-Bulletin carries an exciting assortment of voices dealing with a range of complex issues. The featured essays section has two papers, by Chua Beng Huat and Michael Roberts – dealing with ‘Communitarian Politics of the East’ and the ‘Tamil Movement for Eelam’ respectively – both pressing issues of our time in the Asia-Pacific region. The ‘In Conversation’ portion presents a conversation between Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas – an eminent and pioneering sociologist based in Malaysia and Patrick Pillai, a researcher at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Kuala Lumpur. It is indeed an honour to carry the text of this conversation in this issue and to bring to ISA members, the views and contributions of one of the sharpest, most critical and insightful minds from Southeast Asia for the last half century. Four practicing sociologists - Yeoh Seng Guan, Daniel Goh, Julia Rozanova and Melinda Mills - share their diverse views and experiences on the question of ‘Publishing and Academia’ in the ‘Reflections’ segment. They offer accounts of the trials and tribulations as well as the politics and tyranny of publishing demands, reflecting real and urgent concerns for all of us located in the academia in the present. I am certain the readers of the E-Bulletin will find this a stimulating issue. As always, I welcome all comments, feedback, suggestions and contributions and I thank ISA members for their support of the ISA E-Bulletin.

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## e-bulletin

### Communitarian Politics of the East<sup>1</sup>

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The 'quest' for community has been a preoccupation of the West since the rapid industrialization of Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Industrialization had given rise to the idea of the 'individual' and 'individualism' because it was a necessary concept that transformed a person into an owner and thus seller of labour power, essential to industrial capitalism. Major European social theorists despaired at the destruction of community by the expansion of both the industrial capitalist economy and its concomitant ideology of individualism. This despair had several expressions: in Durkheimian concepts of anomie, which results from the confusion, even disappearance, of social or community norms, as a cause of social dysfunctions and deviance, including suicide; in the transformation from *gemeinschaft*, which is based on close community ties to *gesellschaft* based on self-interested, rational, monetary calculations as the basis of social transactions and, in the American sociologist, Louis Wirth's conceptualization of 'urbanism as a life', which supposedly drove American urbanites into joining a myriad of voluntary organizations in order to overcome the 'loneliness' and 'alienation' of urban living. The concern with community - the threats of its destruction and the need for its preservation - continues to exercise the minds of Western social theorists. Recent manifestations of this can be seen in the positive re-conceptualization of voluntary organizations as the fundamental building block of 'social capital' and, in the emergence of what may be called 'new communitarianism', particularly in the US since 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the 'liberating' effects of urbanization on individuals have had its own champions as well, as community and its social regulatory norms are unavoidably constraining, even as it enables collective life. Among the theorists that celebrated the liberating, individualizing effects of urban life was Simmel, who emphasised the creativity of freedom for and of oneself in the sea of uncaring strangers. To simplify radically, freedom of the individual from social and institutional constraints may be said to be institutionalized as a

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the International Conference on New Dimensions of Asian Studies: In/between the National and the Transitional, Institute of Korean Culture, Seoul National University, 9-10 June 2006, Seoul, Korea.

core value in liberalism, an ideology which only grants the ‘social’ or the ‘collective’ negative rights which limits the pursuit of self-interest. One’s pursuits should not jeopardize similar pursuits of other’s.

## **Hegemony of Liberalism**

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with global capitalism, liberal individualism has undoubtedly become ideologically hegemonic in the West and is striving to be globally ‘universal’. So much so that it is by now conventional to use the term ‘liberal-capitalist-democracy’ as if it is a matter of course. It is difficult to imagine these days what a ‘conservative’ democracy would look like. Or for that matter, what any non-liberal democracy would look like.

A central tenet of liberalism is that what matters ‘is not so much that people make good choices as they are free to make their own choices’ (Mulhall and Swift 1992:6); that is, choices are to be made without reference to what the community might define as normatively ‘good’ choices. This fundamental conceptualization of an asocial individual, endowed with the freedom to define, at will, what is ‘good’ for oneself, unconstrained by the society and culture within which one exists, immediately opens itself to objections from many angles. Immediately, ontologically, such an individual would be one ‘without history or ethnicity, denuded of the special attachments that in the real human world give us the particular identities we have’ (Gray 1995:5); i.e. such an individual does not exist.

Objections to the asocial conceptualization of individuals constitute the basis for the new communitarianism in the West. The latter argues that individuals are embedded and bound by the cultural practices of the community in which they reside and which constitute them as who they are, realized in and through the reproduction of their everyday life; at its most sociological extreme, the individual may be said to be ‘parasitic on society for the very way she thinks, including the way that she thinks of herself as an individual’ (Mulhall and Swift 1992: 14). Therefore, any conceptualization of a social and political life should begin with the concrete ontology of the community and of the embedded individual – life in and as a community – rather than the eraser of the former and the disembodiment of the latter. Indeed, one could argue that this ontological realism is closer to the way an individual sees oneself in society. This ontological realism is thus a mode of ‘vernacular’ communitarianism, which can be distilled and politically abstracted into a communitarianism-as-party-ideology or even state-ideology and beyond that further abstraction into philosophical communitarianism.

The new communitarians in the US and Western Europe, however, could not deny their own fundamental liberalism and the privileging of individual freedom, making thus for a weak communitarianism. The most explicit example of this is the insistence for an ‘exit’ clause from a group when the cost of membership becomes too exacting for any individual member. That is, membership in a community must be entirely voluntary, based on individual choice and agreement and when the cost of membership outweighs the benefits, then, exit should be permitted. If such an exit clause is in place, it would immediately render the community unstable as the community would not be able to count on the members’ commitment, let alone loyalty.<sup>ii</sup> There is by now extensive literature on the debate between liberalism and communitarianism in the West, so there is no need to further rehearse the discussions here. Suffice it to say that for Western liberals, ‘communitarianism’ is but a reformist stance with which to contest the potential slide of liberalism into libertarianism or at a more mundane level, the everyday use of ‘liberalism’ as an excuse for individual excesses

couched in the language of ‘rights’. What the new communitarian desires is to redress the balance by re-emphasizing the importance and necessary support for community in its own right. Against this weak communitarian sentiment, many political theorists and practicing politicians in Asia have taken a political and social realist position and strongly endorse the ‘community’ as the starting point of political practice and theorising. It is to this that I will focus the essay.

## **Asian Context**

Liberalism has had two hundred years of development and refinement in Western political philosophy but has very shallow roots in Asia. If this was not the case, the triumph and hegemony of liberal democracy would be globally complete after the end of the Cold War in Europe in the late 1980s. As Fukuyama puts it:

The most significant challenge being posed to the liberal universalism of the American and French revolutions today is not coming from the communist world, whose economic failures are for everyone to see, but from those societies in Asia which combine liberal economics with a kind of paternalistic authoritarianism. Asia’s tremendous economic success has led to a growing recognition that the success was due not simply to the successful borrowing of Western practices, but to the fact that Asian societies retain certain traditional features of their own cultures – like strong work ethic – and integrated them into a modern business environment (1992:238).

What Fukuyama has noted is not only Asia’s difference from the West in the history and trajectory of capitalist economic development but also, more implicitly, Asia’s ‘rejection’ of liberal democracy, with each location preferring its own ‘tradition’. Furthermore, it is the presumption of the liberalism that enables him to conceptualize or at least designate the ‘Asian’ traditional practices as ‘paternalistic’ and ‘authoritarian’, precisely because of the absence of liberalism.

As late developers of capitalist economies, the ideological trajectory of liberal individualism in the West appears to be a lesson that emerging capitalist Asia should learn to avoid a similar fate if possible. The imaginable slippage of liberalism into excessive individualism has become something to resist by both leaders and populace in capitalist Asia. Thus, in contrast to the liberal new communitarians who valued individualism in itself and sought only to keep it in check by evoking the ‘social’, East and Southeast Asian people have taken the presence of community in their midst as a given and sought to contain, if not keep out, the ‘community-corrosive’ consequences of the individualising effects of capitalism, which they embrace materially. In Asia, therefore, there is an ideological struggle to de-link capitalist materialism from liberal individualism, a link that is presumed in the discourse of liberal-capitalist-democracy. In Asia, therefore, communitarianism is not a reformist discourse to liberalism but a counter discourse.

There are several reasons which account for the ease with which Asian countries could embrace different local versions of communitarian ideology. First, the most fundamental political transformation, namely the emergence of the modern nation state in Asia, is of relatively recent origin. With the few exceptions of Thailand, China and Japan, the rest of Asia were colonized territories, until the end of the Second World War. The contemporary nations in Asia are therefore newly minted nation-states. Even Japan and China had undergone major political transformations during the same period; Japan on account of

losing the War and China emerged as a communist state after a prolonged civil war between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. Consequently, nationalism continues to be a very fundamental political sentiment in Asia, in spite of the speed with which some of these nations are integrated into global capitalism. Nationalism is central to the identity of new nations which have the tendency to jealously maintain not only their physical geographical boundaries but also tightly embrace its citizens, constantly inscribing upon them and incorporating them within a bounded 'national' identity. In this sense, nationalism is not only an expression of an identity but more fundamentally a 'communitarian' sentiment aimed at building a 'nation' as a community of members that supposedly share the same destiny. It should be noted that within the prevailing communitarian argument in the West, nationalism in its 'diluted' form as republican 'patriotism' is considered a necessary condition for a community of shared destiny (Taylor, 2004).

The nation is one of the abstract entities in the contemporary world that lays claims on its individual members. 'Communities' at lower levels of abstractions can be derived from this fundamental communitarian sentiment. For example, representations at the national level can be organized in terms of groups; racial or ethnic groups, linguistic or religious groups, as in the idea of 'multiculturalism'. Or groups based on geographical regional divisions, as in political regionalism. Lowering the scale further is the neighbourhood as 'community', which in the highly urbanized nations are of decreasing significance, unless there are explicit public policies and institutions that serve as structures for organization and support. Finally, there is the family, an institution that continues to be ideologically emphasised in East and Southeast Asia as a 'fundamental' unit of society, in apparent contradiction with the increasing divorce rates throughout Asia. In general, one can assume that the intensity of identification decreases as an individual moves from the most intimate to the most abstract of communities.

Besides nationalism as a relatively 'modern' sentiment, much of Asia is still embedded in local traditions which are often anti-individualistic. Foremost among these is traditional Confucianism whose major ethical tenets in an ascending scale of social relations are consistent with the scales of community listed above: cultivate the self, manage the family, govern the nation and bring peace to the world. The cultivation of the self is not for selfish purposes but as a preparation to be a better social player. Although the formal teachings of Confucianism as a grand philosophical discourse is now reduced to specialist training, its presence as 'little' tradition of everyday life practices continues in the familial ideology and practices in much of East Asia. In Southeast Asia, the concept of community continues to be evoked in the image of '*kampongs*', a Malay word for 'villages', in both its rural and urban settings, with the supposed ethics of 'mutual' assistance and cooperation among villages in their collective life.<sup>iii</sup>

Significantly, the rapid or compressed industrialization of East Asia, followed by Southeast Asia, took place under these political and cultural conditions. The role of these cultural conditions in the transformation of East Asia into newly industrializing economies, from early 1960s till later the half of the 1990s, has been subsumed under the idea of a 'strong state', which is in turned attributed to authoritarian leadership and regimes. While the prevailing explanation has its grain of truth, it was equally evident that authoritarian leadership was able to appeal to collective sentiments, including nationalism, and drew resonance and support from a large segment of the population. Significantly, in the compressed industrialization process, the organization of enterprises and labour relations had been rationalized in terms of collective-national well being. In so doing, Asian capitalism

showed that capitalist efficiency and profit can be achieved without the Western assumption of the requisite 'individualism'. Rejection of authoritarianism in many locations took place against corruptions at the level of public administration and private enterprise but not necessarily against the 'collectivist-nationalist' ideological underpinning of the system. Nationalism, anti-individualistic 'traditions' and 'values' and the putting into practice of these values in the organization of capitalist industrial production have produced in East and Southeast Asia a counter discourse to the liberal individualism of the West at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Communitarian in Practice**

Examples of communitarian practices in East and Southeast Asia can be drawn from almost every country included in the regions. In Singapore, land is nationalized or collectivized in order to provide efficient infrastructure and, more significantly, affordable high-standard public housing for the entire nation.<sup>iv</sup> Here, the sacrosanct liberal value of private property has been displaced by the national interest. In Japan, the fractional organization of political parties, including the ruling party, creates highly cohesive power blocks that are also often detrimental to necessary economic and political changes. In the case of Korea, the family constitutes the basis of economic and political networks. Familial relations are frequently mobilized to serve the family's economic and political interests, so much so that the family would hold on tightly to its members, preventing the members from joining larger social units, exposing the contradictions and conflicts of interests between different levels of community. In Hong Kong, until changes introduced in early 2000, public healthcare system is made very affordable on the rationale that it is the collective responsibility to provide care for the needy, an idea that can be traced back to Confucian ethics. Finally, in Indonesia, the idea of *panca sila*, a national ideology that emphasized consensus politics was, however, manipulated by the disposed President Suharto to suppress dissent and maintain social order with the direct assistance of the military.<sup>v</sup>

This list of illustrative examples exposes many of the conceptual and substantive political problems that attempt to make communitarianism a central value in political and public governance and economic organization. They make explicit both the positive and negative consequences that communitarian practice entails in public and political governance.

## **Negative Consequences: Corruption and Authoritarianism**

The most obvious negative consequence is the quick and easy slippage of power from communitarian ideology into authoritarianism. This is because the social and political mechanisms for generating what constitute the 'collective' interests are often grossly under developed. This is especially so in developing nations where the underdeveloped media is also heavily restrained by the ruling power of either a military regime or a hegemonic political party, such as the People's Action Party of Singapore. When the ability and facility for expression of public interests are underdeveloped, the ruling regime tends to usurp the 'right' to define what is 'good' for the collective.

Such usurpation does not automatically render the governing power's claim for acting in the collective interests, false; indeed, in the case of Singapore, the hegemonic PAP government being economically incorrupt and efficiently working for the national economic growth have indeed translated into improving material life for the citizens as a whole. In the half a century of absolutist power derived from periodic general elections, with albeit

uneven playing fields of contests, it has transformed the developing economy of Singapore at the end of the 1950s into a First World economy that is well integrated as a major node in global capitalism.

Yet, even in this illustrious economic performance, the PAP government's political practices left much to be desired. It consistently suppresses dissent in various ways, including holding a tight reign on the media with very restrictive licensing regulations. All local media are to be oriented towards supporting government efforts in nation building. All foreign media are not to be involved in 'editorializing' on Singaporean domestic politics or face libel or defamation suits against specific journalists or editors, or has its circulation restricted or outrightly banned. Dissent from Singaporean citizens are often publicly confronted by, what the government calls, 'robust' replies that leave the citizen(s) in question in public distress and even, humiliation. Finally, having governed Singapore successfully in economic terms, the PAP has 'mythologized' its hegemonic position and its mode of governance as the 'only' way to ensure that Singapore and Singaporeans will continue to prosper, hence, it works very hard to keep opposition out of the five-yearly elected parliament. In this context, it is interesting to note that Western political theorists operating from the presumption that democracies must be liberal have argued that while the Singapore system has undoubtedly produce laudable economic development that benefits its people as whole, it should nevertheless be never recognized as a 'democracy'.

If the economically successful and financially incorrupt PAP government in Singapore is already so reluctant to tolerate dissent and political openness, ostensibly for fear that dissent would cause confusion among the increasingly better educated citizenry and erode the global competitiveness of the economy, then, it is only to be expected that corrupt regimes, such as the Suharto years in Indonesia, would use the 'right' to determine and declare the 'collective' interest as a thin veil of its own interests in plundering the national wealth. Indeed, it is these 'rogue' regimes that have given rise to the scepticism and criticism, particularly from the West, of the idea of 'Asian Values' as the values of governance in Asia, seeing them as no more than poor justification for authoritarianism.

### **Positive Consequence: Resurrection of the Social**

As mentioned in the introduction, the obstacle that stood against the 'universalising' ambition of liberalism is the Asian NIEs, especially after the collapse of the 'real' socialism in the Europe. From the point of view of privileging the 'social' over the 'individual', the historical concurrence of the collapse of European socialism and the rise of the Asian NIEs is highly ironic. The collapse of European socialism has left the political Left in the West bereft of any counter-conception of politics to free-market, neo-liberalism. The moral critique of capitalism from the point of view of Marxism and socialism appears to be discredited by the economic failures of real socialist states. Along with it, the question of who should take care of the 'social', and indeed the very conceptualization of the 'social' has been completely subverted by the same collapse. It is within this ideological context that there are good reasons to take the communitarian discourse seriously; indeed, as pointed out above, this is the question that even the liberals are raising in the West.

Significantly, whereas the collapse of European socialism suggests the collapse of an ideology that emphasizes the 'social', as in 'socialism', the rise of Asian NIEs celebrates the emphasis on the social, as 'collective' well being. Conceptually, neither the fall of the real socialism nor the instances of abused communitarianism by some Asian leaders automatically negates the validity of the idea of emphasising the 'social' as the foundation for

the organization of society, polity and economy. There is arguably a discursive and ideological translatability between the two anti-liberal ideologies of socialism and communitarianism, which arguably underpin certain conceptualization of 'social democracy'. To take the argument further, it is necessary to take the relative autonomy of the economy and the polity seriously.

Of the two, the polity can be democratized procedurally in terms of the periodic election of political leaders. However, the underlying values of the society need not as a consequence of this be or become one of individualism. Correspondingly, the elected political leaders need not translate their mandate to lead as simply one of reflecting the narrow interests of those who elected them, instead orient their leadership and mandate towards a macro definition of the collective interest, as one of responsibility to achieve the greatest good for the whole society, which indeed, all premier leaders must ultimately hope to achieve. So, election as the basis of a democratic state is not a hindrance to a society that emphasizes the 'social' over the 'individual'.

The economy has by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century become unavoidably capitalist globally; even the remaining communist states in Asia have to marketize their economies. However, marketization does not automatically imply the 'privatization' of the economies which leads logically into privatization of profits. Instead, as in the case of Singapore, the state could directly participate in industry not on the basis of immediate redistribution of welfare but for profit. The profit of state enterprises are collectivised and may be redistributed if the need arose. This has been happening in Singapore for the past several years; the PAP government has redistributed shares of state enterprise, such as Singapore Telecoms, transferring cash to the individual social security savings of the citizens and more recently, cash distributions to all citizens, with the poor receiving the bulk of the redistribution. In addition, instead of direct welfare handouts, the Singapore government sees state subsidies in housing, education and healthcare, as means to maximize the ability of all citizens to earn a living, thereby improving the national competitiveness in the global market. Housing subsidy helps to maintain the security and stability of households; education is human-capital investment and superior infrastructure supports efficiency and market competitiveness.

The economic policies of Singapore are explicitly articulated against social welfarism of the liberal-capitalist West on the one hand and against the European real socialism on the other. Against the former, no regular cash handouts are distributed in hope of preventing decline of work ethics; instead job retraining programmes are extensively developed. Against the latter, the market is maintained as an instrument of efficiency instead of replacing it with bureaucracy that easily succumbs to corruption. It is a system that accepts the disciplinary effects of the market and uses the subsidies in public goods to improve the competitiveness of the system and its workforce. According to the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and ideologue of his generation of PAP leadership, George Yeo, it is a system that recognizes: "If society preaches only competition and capitalism, where individuals care only for themselves, then society must break up", taking the discourse back to the idea of the 'social' as the basis for both 'collective' and by extension 'individual' well being.

It is this rethreading of the idea of 'community' and 'communitarianism' as a resurrection of 'socialism' that enables us to de-territorialize the former concepts beyond Asia into a social science concept that has greater, if not universal, application. Indeed, there is no reason why the concept should not be endowed with universalizing ambition as in the case of liberalism from the West. It is in the juxtaposition of this same ambition against

Western liberalism that political analysis of Asian nations can contribute to substantive knowledge and theorization of politics.

## Conclusion

Post Cold War in the West has given rise to the trumpeting of capitalism-liberalism-democracy as the 'end of history'. This triumphal call, however, meets its barricade in Asia. Ostensibly, successful capitalist Asian economies and relatively democratic polities in Asia are differently organized at the social level from the West; the East emphasises the 'social', while the West the 'individual'. Of course, these simplified formulations idealized the actual societies to the point of ideological myths. However, it is as myths that they serve their purposes of mobilizing the population and gets internalized by individuals, as 'technologies' of the self, as the 'values' to reproduce one's life-world. In the confrontation of the two 'myths', the tendency is for 'Asian-communitarian' to take the defensive in face of liberal onslaught, in view of the concrete instances of how communitarianism has served as a veil for authoritarianism and corruption,. This is because the hegemonic discourse of liberalism has convinced many, if not most Western-trained Asian social and political theorists, that the teleology of political 'modernity' is towards liberalism, embraced in the idea of 'individual freedoms', as the ultimate end. Significantly, it is precisely at the historical conjuncture when liberalism appears to be achieving its greatest promise that misgivings to its ultimate unfolding, expressed through unlimited selfish desires masquerading as 'rights', raise their head, producing a new liberal-communitarian in the West. Against this background, it would appear that there is discursive space for Asian-communitarianism to assert and insert itself into and contribute to the theoretical discourse of politics at the comparative and global scale.

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### The Tamil Movement for Eelam

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#### **Preamble: Personal & Anecdotal**

When I was teaching in the Department of History at Peradeniya University, a campus university, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was one of the organising hands in an interdisciplinary discussion group called the Ceylon Studies Seminar which probed all manner of issues relating to the island scene. Located strategically within a tri-medium university, we were quickly aware of the seething discontent among the educated Tamils resulting from the gerrymandering of university admissions to the prestigious science courses in the period of 1971 onwards, a programme of allegedly positive discrimination involving standardisation of marks and district quotas.<sup>vii</sup> Again, we were also aware of the dissatisfaction among Sri Lanka Tamils occasioned by the specifics of the new republican Constitution of 1972 and the manner of its passage into the statute books.<sup>viii</sup>

For this reason we organised a half-day seminar debating the merits and demerits of the Constitution in late 1972 or so. But we felt that Peradeniya was an unsuitable site for such concerned reviews. The centre of politics was Colombo, a hegemonic centre dominating the whole island. Some of us therefore decided to mount a whole-day seminar on “The Sinhala–Tamil Problem” at a suitable location in the metropolitan centre, one to which politicians would be invited. Ironically staunch opposition to this proposal emerged within the Arts Faculty from personnel close to the SLFP government: they held that this issue was irrelevant because the chief problems were economic.<sup>ix</sup> But a few of us bided our time and eventually held the seminar in Colombo—at considerable logistical effort—in early October 1973.

Those deliberations deepened my pessimism regarding the likely directions of the Sri Lankan polity in the near future. This reading was informed by the occasional personal experience of hardening attitudes on both sides of the ethnic divide. Since I was neither Sinhalese nor Tamil, I was in the fortunate position (as my wife too was) to pick up prejudiced remarks about the ethnic other when no Sinhalese or Tamil, as the case might be, was part of a circle of conversation. When Sinhala Christian or Tamil Christian friends indulged in such comments, I knew the divide was deep.<sup>x</sup>

The most critical piece of evidence, however, was provided by Jane Russell, a British postgraduate student attached to the Department of History at Peradeniya who was researching the history of the Donoughmore period (1931-48) and had just spent time in the Jaffna Peninsula as part of her investigations.<sup>xi</sup> She told me that she had met a few radical youths who contended that the Tamil leaders of the past as well as present (most of whom were Colombo-based) had let them down. As far as these youth were concerned, all the Tamils in the south could die.

I took this act of witness very, very seriously. I was certain – then -- that it was not empty talk but deeply felt. These young men were deadly serious. They had moved to the pole and thereby possessed the power of polarity. There were no moral constraints on their political action.

It is this pessimistic strain that entered my analysis of the situation in an article that I penned while in Germany in mid-1976, one that eventually saw print in the *Modern Asian Studies* in 1978 (also Roberts 1994a: chap. 10). I concluded that essay by suggesting that it was only a matter of time before Sri Lanka went the way of Lebanon, Cyprus and Northern Ireland.<sup>xii</sup> It should be noted, too, that my interpretations were conditioned in part by the experiences deriving from two career projects: (a) a course called “Nationalism and its Problems” that I had initiated at Peradeniya in 1972, one that was global in its scope; and (b) my researches since 1969 on “Ceylonese nationalism” in the British period, a subject that invariably encompassed Sinhala nationalism as well as the relations between all the communities residing in the island.<sup>xiii</sup>

## **The Movement towards an Eelam Struggle**

The political struggle by Sri Lankan Tamils (SLT) against what was deemed to be impending Sinhala hegemony took an important turn in early 1949 when a breakaway faction formed the Federal Party one year after independence was secured.<sup>xiv</sup> These activists were thoroughly Ceylonese and were arguing within the framework of the state known as “Ceylon.” Their nationalist sentiments were a form of sectional nationalism.<sup>xv</sup> As indicated by their limited success during the 1952 general elections, they did not command majority support among the SLT voters. Thus, the transformation of Tamil nationalism from a sectional nationalism arguing for federalism to a separatist nationalism, as embodied in the new meaning attributed to the term “Eelam” (or rather *Tamililam*)<sup>xvi</sup> as the future state of Sri Lankan Tamils, occurred between 1956 and the early 1970s.

The critical turning point was in 1956 when both the major parties adopted the position of “Sinhala Only” as part of the populist-cum-socialist push to dethrone the power of the English language and the dominance of the Westernised middle class. This programme clearly demeaned the Tamil language and was obviously directed towards disadvantaging Tamil-speakers in the competition for jobs. When the general elections of that year supported the parties -- centred upon the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led by S. W. R. D.

Bandaranaike -- most adamantly attached to its Sinhala nativist and socialist rhetoric, the breach between Tamils and Sinhalese was consolidated.

Numerous academic interpretations have identified and clarified the manner in which the language issue and the ramifying implications of the electoral transformation of 1956 resulted in increasing friction between the Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese activists and eventually led Tamil leaders to advocate separatism or Eelam.<sup>xvii</sup>

Quite recently this summary contention was voiced with a local twist by no less a person than the former EROS-leader-turned-LTTE spokesman, V Balakumaran. Referring to the recent triumph of Mahinda Rajapakse of the SLFP-led coalition at the Presidential elections of 17 November 2005, he said this election brought back memories of the 1956 election victory of Sri Lanka Freedom Party leader S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, which “kick-start[ed] ethnic Sinhalese violence against [the Tamils] that led to eventual war.” Balakumaran then stressed that “it [was] because of 1956 that the seeds of the Tamil freedom struggle were sown.... Banda is the creator of Prabhakaran. Similarly Mahinda's victory is going to pave the way for Prabhakaran's victory. Banda started it. Mahinda is going to end it.”<sup>xviii</sup>

The massive impact of the political transformation in 1956 encouraged the two Old Left parties, the Ceylon Communist Party and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, to jettison (1964) their adherence to a programme of parity for both the vernacular languages while beginning the process whereby Sinhala and Buddhist elements attached to the “ideology of 1956” (to use shorthand) began to capture the majority of jobs in the government sector. Though the Federal Party gained a toehold in government in 1965 when the United National Party returned to power in 1965, that experience of partial clout was dispiriting because of the manner in which even the limited decentralization under a proposed District Councils Bill was abandoned in the late 1960s. That was but one piece of evidence indicating how powerful chauvinist and hegemonic Sinhala thinking coursed through politics. Such sentiments worked in subterranean ways as one factor behind the return of the SLFP to power in mid-1970 in association with the CCP and LSSP under an umbrella association known as the United Left Front (ULF) headed by Sirimavo Bandaranaike.<sup>xix</sup> It was this combination that initiated a new republican constitution in 1972, a set-up that discarded the meagre constitutional safeguards valued by some lawyers.

These developments were a clear indication of debilitating structural features integral to the Sri Lankan polity, namely, the deadly combination of (A) a peculiar demographic composition that was (B) distributed in space in ways which (C) tilted the democratic voting patterns in a particular direction and ensured that governments were made or unmade in the Sinhala-majority districts.<sup>xx</sup>

In other words, the particular species of democracy prevailing in Sri Lanka encouraged and entrenched Sinhala linguistic nationalism in its extreme chauvinistic forms and has continually made compromise difficult. The constitution of 1947 was modelled on that of Westminster and involved a system of parliamentary elections on a first-past-the-post scheme. Given the respective numerical proportions of Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Muslims and their peculiar spatial distribution, this meant that victory at the general elections was decided in the Sinhala-majority areas. Further, a small swing in the percentage of votes generated major swings in parliamentary power. Once, therefore, a wave of Sinhala linguistic nationalism with populist tendencies secured control of the government

in 1956, it was not in the interests of the leading parties to grant concessions to the Tamils (Roberts 1978a).

In summary, then, the chief reasons for this heightening of Tamil grievances and aspirations in the period of 1956-1970s were (1) the ramifying economic and political implications of a programme that made Sinhala the language of administration after the populist victory of the MEP led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party at the 1956 general elections; (2) the structural implications of the island's demographic distribution working in conjunction with (3) the further structural tilt induced by the Westminster model of government; (4) a measure of discrimination inserted into state policies in administrative recruitment and educational criteria as a result of statutory acts and the growing influence of administrators with Sinhala prejudices; (5) the implications attached to the mini-pogrom in Sinhala-majority areas in 1958; (6) the fury aroused among Tamil youth -- in the Jaffna Peninsula in particular -- by the standardization policies for university admissions initiated circa 1970 and the further twist to this programme through a district quota system; and (7) the manner in which a new republican constitution was set up in 1972.

As a result, the Tamil political forces moved to the extremes between 1956 and 1976. In 1972 the FP transformed itself into a broader front called the Tamil United Front (TUF); and then became the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) at the point when it gathered at a mass meeting in May 1976 and adopted the Vaddukodai resolution defining their goal as *Tamililam*. The die had been cast. Even the moderate Tamil politicians of yesteryear had become separatist in sentiment. They had rejected their Sri Lankan-ness. Behind this shift was their awareness of the profound discontent of the Tamil peoples, especially the younger generations. This discontent was strongest in the Jaffna Peninsula. Indeed, by the mid-1970s the centre for Tamil political leadership had shifted to the Jaffna Peninsula and away from the elite Tamil families with residential stakes in the city of Colombo.

This shift and the pulsating undercurrents of youthful militancy were both displayed when one of the early nationalist revolutionaries, Ponnadurai Sivakumaran, sacrificed himself by swallowing cyanide when cornered by policemen on 5 June 1974. A Vellalar lad from a middle class background Sivakumaran was part of a militant cell that had agreed to pinpoint Sivakumaran as their key figure in order to deflect attention from their group: for Sivakumaran would not break under torture -- he had a cyanide vial. Having failed in his effort to assassinate a senior policeman deemed responsible for certain deaths during the International Tamil Conference in Jaffna town in 1974, he was tracked down. It was at this moment that he committed suicide in such dramatic fashion (Narayan Swamy 1994: 25-26, 29; A Sivarajah 1995: 128).

The effects were equally dramatic and serve to underline the arguments essayed in my previous paragraph. He became, in effect and in retrospect, the first martyr for Eelam.<sup>xxi</sup> Thousands of people, mostly Sri Lankan Tamils one presumes, attended Sivakumaran's funeral. Folklore attests that the bicycles in the Jaffna Peninsula ran red (personal communication from VIS Jayapalan). This was not the red of blood, but that of soil. Sivakumaran's village was in the red soil district of the Peninsula. Many mourners travelled there by bicycle. These bicycles carried the message back to other localities.

What is more, by Narayan Swamy's account (1994: 29), all the shops in Jaffna downed their shutters in mourning and hundreds of pamphlets were distributed in the town and its outskirts, eulogising the martyr as Eelam's Bhagat Singh. At the funeral, several TYL [Tamil Youth League] members slashed their fingers and with the blood that dripped placed dots

on their foreheads, pledging collectively to continue the fight for an independent state. Some youths attacked moderate Tamil politicians when they began speaking about Sivakumaran. Tamils later put up a bronze statue outside Jaffna in the (*sic*) memory of the young man -- it showed a defiant youth, his clinched (*sic*) fist outstretched and dangling a broken chain.

We need to dwell on the several moments etched within this description. In the light of subsequent developments, the theatrical action of those youths who planted bloody *pottu* on the foreheads cannot be dismissed as juvenile excess. This practice is suffused with Hindu religious idioms associated with the fierce manifestations of the goddess Sakti (e.g. Kālī, Durga, or alternatively the victorious form of Jayalakshmi). The blood spot is referred to in Tamil as "*irrata(t) tilakam*" and symbolises the gift of one's own blood to a deity as a votive offering that is part of a vow and "contractual transaction" (Schalk 1997b: 64-65).<sup>xxii</sup>

Equally significant for our purposes is the manner in which eminent politicians were berated and humiliated through blows from the ultimate in insults, the polluting slipper (cf. Roberts 1985). It marks the degree to which their leadership was condemned in militant circles; and heralds the subsequent assassination of Amirthalingam and other parliamentarians by the Tigers.<sup>xxiii</sup> As significant, too, was the immortalisation of Sivakumaran in the iconic form of a statue. Statues are symbolic statements to which great value is attached in Sri Lanka and the Indian subcontinent. Some statues, therefore, become the focus of eulogies, assaults and battles. As the conflict between the Eelamist militants and the armed services of the Sri Lankan state hotted up in the years that followed, the statues of Ramanathan as well as Sivakumaran were damaged or smashed by state functionaries.<sup>xxiv</sup> As significantly, Sivakumaran has posthumously entered the pantheon of LTTE heroes: at some point in the 1990s he was decreed to be one of the *māvirar* in the struggle for Eelam. Thus he figures prominently in poster calendars that feature the star *māvirar-cum-tiyaki* within the LTTE hall of fame, namely, Shankar, Miller, Tileepan, Annai Pupati, and Malati.<sup>xxv</sup>

The bullish policies of the two different governmental regimes in the period of 1970 to the 1980s, the mini-pogrom of 1977 and the major pogrom that terrorised Tamils in the southern and central parts of the country in 1983<sup>xxvi</sup> sealed the fate of a united Sri Lanka. Support for Tamil militancy and armed struggle among Tamils everywhere swelled thousandfold. Politicians in Tamilnadu as well as the Indian government stepped into the fray as supporters of the Eelamist forces – in ways that attempted to extend India's regional hegemony.

Several underground revolutionary organisations had taken root among the Sri Lankan Tamils in the Jaffna Peninsula in the 1970s, most "origin[ating] from TU(L)F youth organizations" (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994b: 40). By 1983/84 they numbered over 30, but five (TELO, PLOTE, LTTE, EROS and EPRLF) were of some consequence.<sup>xxvii</sup> It is important to note that in mid-1983 the committed and (partially?) trained fighting cadre of the LTTE numbered only 27 according to one source and no more than fifty according to another.<sup>xxviii</sup>

However, the LTTE and all these other outfits profited enormously from the explosion of Tamil hostility after the pogrom of July 1983 terrorised Tamil people living in the south-central parts of the country and damaged both person and property. Within this context their militancy was sustained by the competition for recruits. As any political scientist could tell you, radical commitments are sharpened by the bidding for support from a radicalised constituency.<sup>xxix</sup> July 1983 radicalised anti-Sinhala sentiments among the Tamil peoples of Sri Lanka like no other event and the organisations were already in place -- in the Jaffna

Peninsula in particular -- to take advantage of this hostility to press forward with what they considered to be a liberation struggle.

It was only the LTTE, however, that insisted that its fighters should take an oath of loyalty. One can safely presume that this oath involved the reiteration of the LTTE's "holy aim" (*putantiram*) and the credo that is widely proclaimed in many of its posters and publications, namely: "The task (thirst) of the Tigers (is to achieve) Motherland Tamililam."<sup>xxx</sup> This initiation was linked to the promise to carry a cyanide vial and to swallow it if captured.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The cyanide vial is called a *kuppi* in Tamil. "The vial is fully and consciously exposed hanging on a chord around the neck in processions and in daily encounters [with] LTTE cadres and civilians ....The vial is dear to the LTTE fighters and there is even an LTTE song praising the taking of cyanide," states Schalk. As significantly, the *kuppi* "is regarded as a friend especially by woman fighters." Its virtues are also promoted by poems and other martyrologies that focus on the agonies of slow death through wounds or torture.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The *kuppi* became a beacon evidencing the commitment of the Tigers as well as the legitimacy and justice of the Tamil cause. The "devotion that the Tigers showed was unmatched" and thereafter the people required no further proof of this dedication, said a Tamil octogenarian when the topic of *arppanippu*, an evocative Tamil word referring to "dedication or gift (of human to god)," entered our conversation.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Tiger personnel were, henceforth, walking witnesses to the idea of *tiyakam*, "abandonment" and sacrifice -- thus potential *tiyaki* and in some ways proximate to "martyrs" in the Western tradition.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The *māvirar* and *tiyaki* were, in the innovative propaganda developed by the LTTE, devoted liberation fighters donating/gifting their selves for the greater good of the Tamil people and their great leader (*talaiivar*).<sup>xxxv</sup> Embodied in these concepts and acts is a re-working of the Tamil Saivite principle of "creative destruction" and "creative sacrifice" (Shulman 1980: 90-91, 108; Roberts 2005: 71-76 and Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2005: *passim*). Needless to say, this practice provided the LTTE with an edge over the other groups in attracting support from the Tamil peoples, though it was their ruthless extermination of the leadership of TELO, EPRLF and PLOT that eventually left them masters of the armed wing of the struggle for Eelam.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In the initial stages during the 1980s, and even into the 1990s, the LTTE was a guerilla force battling what was considered to be an occupying army. They were in a position of military weakness. The power balance was one of marked asymmetry. In this situation the sacrificial suicidal commitment of the LTTE fighters was of special value.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Converted into smart bombs these Tiger personnel became precision tools. These precision bombs were not only used in ambush or battle. They were deployed as weapons of assassination and bomb blast in the heart of enemy territory -- especially the metropolis of Colombo. These means have been used to eliminate the commander of the navy, a president-of-state, potential presidents and a defence minister. By using truck bombs on occasions, massive damage was inflicted in the very heart of a teeming city. The goal here was (is) to evoke anxiety among the people residing in the metropolitan area, while also disrupting the economy. Diffuse terror, reveal inflexible determination, gain Eelam -- method and goal were intimately intertwined. They remain fused and adamantine today.

## Time Chart: LTTE Struggle

1970s	Tiny underground cells emerge amidst parliamentary moves
1976-May	Vaddukoddai Resolution for <i>Thamililam</i> by TULF, the parliamentary party
1977-late July	Mini-pogrom vs Tamils living in southern regions
1983-late July	Major pogrom against Tamils living in southern regions
1983-1987	SKIRMISH WAR between SL state and various armed Eelam groups
April	LTTE wipes out TELO in Jaffna etc
<b>- May 1986</b>	
Dec 1986	LTTE begins decimation of EPRLF
<b>et seq</b>	
May 1987	Vadamaradchchi offensive launched in JP east by SL army
Mid-1987	Indian intervention in support of the Tamils
July 1987	INDO-LANKA ACCORD and arrival of IPKF
Sept 1987	Thileepan's fast-unto-death versus IPKF
Oct 1987	IPKF and LTTE at war
<b>- early 1990</b>	
Early-1990	IPKF leaves after political push by Premadasa govt plus LTTE
Mid-1990	EELAM WAR I
<b>- late 1994</b>	
Jan-April 1995	Peace talks between Kumaratunga govt & LTTE
1995-2000	EELAM WAR II
Early 2000	Ceasefire agreement between new Wickremasinghe govt and LTTE. Peace process commences. Since then an uneasy peace ...

Pictures for *The Tamil Movement for Eelam*







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## e-bulletin

### In Conversation with Syed Hussein Alatas

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#### **Introduction**

Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, the prominent Malaysian academic, has been described as Southeast Asia's foremost sociologist, a compassionate intellectual and a committed activist. An internationally recognized author of fourteen books, he was previously head of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya. He was also a Senator and respected leader of the first major multi-ethnic opposition party in Malaysia.

His writings on ideology, the sociology of religion, corruption, the role of intellectuals, politics, social theory and development have contributed new insights into the understanding of major problems arising from colonialism and modernization.

Some have labeled him a Weberian but he says that he is not a follower of any particular school of thought, but combines the insights of the leading thinkers in the social sciences. 'My approach is more akin to that of Karl Mannheim,' he says.

As an activist, Alatas is more a reformer than a radical. 'In the Philippines, my spiritual affinity is with Jose Rizal (the national hero), in Indonesia it is Hatta and Natsir (rivals of Partai Komunis Indonesia), whom I knew personally.' He also has 'a great deal of sympathy' for non-Communist writers and reformers in the pre-revolutionary Soviet Union, such as Tolstoy and Alexander Herzen, and the nineteenth century Muslim reformer Jamaluddin Al-Afghani.

One of Alatas's first books is *The Democracy of Islam*, (W Van Hoeve, The Hague, 1956). This book discusses the Islamic conception of democracy which is based on moral leadership. It argues that, contrary to Western critics, the Islamic concept of democracy is not restrictive to development.

His second book on Islam, in Malay, is an introduction to Islamic social thought called *Islam dan Masyarakat*, (*Islam and Society*) (Pustaka Antara, Kuala Lumpur, 1959).

Another book on religion, *Reflections on the Theories of Religion*, his doctoral thesis at the University of Amsterdam, was published in the Netherlands in 1963. This book critically evaluates the various theories of religion suggested in the sociology and psychology of religion.

Alatas examines the history of the region in *Thomas Stamford Raffles – Schemer or Reformer?* (Angus and Robertson, Singapore-Sydney, 1971.) Here he argues that Raffles, whom some refer to as a far-sighted planner and the founder of modern Singapore, was in fact a cunning schemer who worked for personal and colonial interests.

*The Sociology of Corruption* (Donald Moore, Singapore, 1968) was described by the late Prof Harold Lasswell as a ‘temperate, scholarly and acute analysis of a complex and pervasive social problem.’ In this book, which has been translated into Japanese, Alatas deflates the many hypotheses explaining the occurrence of corruption, and emphasizes that the problem can only be grasped if the context of its occurrence is analyzed.

Other offerings on the same subject, which consumed much of his thinking, writing and lectures in the following decades include *The Problem of Corruption*, (Times Publishing, 1986), *Corruption: Its Nature, Causes and Functions*, (Gower, London 1990), ‘Corruption,’ *Oxford Companion to World Politics*, (OUP, New York, 1993), and *Corruption and the Destiny of Asia*, (Macmillan, 1999). A separate book, *Korupsi*, first published in Indonesia in 1987, enjoyed wide readership among both the elite and the student population, particularly in the late 1990’s.

A collection of papers dealing with problems crucial to Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Singapore, are brought together in *Modernization and Social Change* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972). Among the subjects tackled in this book is feudalism in Malaysian society, Islam and social change in Malaysia and the impact of the West upon Asia.

In *Siapa Yang Salah? (Who Is To Blame?)* (Pustaka Nasional, Singapore, 1972) Alatas seeks to reply to arguments in two other books. One is *Revolusi Mental* (Mental Revolution) (Utusan Melayu, KL, 1971), edited by the then secretary-general of the main Malay ruling party, who argued that Malay culture and attitudes were responsible for Malay backwardness. The other is Dr Mahathir Mohamad’s *The Malay Dilemma* (Donald Moore, Singapore, 1970). *Siapa Yang Salah* counters Mahathir’s views about the link between genetics and Malay backwardness.

*Biarkan Buta (Leave Them Blind)* (Pustaka Nasional, Singapore, 1974) is a polemic between Alatas and the Singapore Islamic Religious Council on the Islamic view of organ transplants. Two years later, in 1977, Alatas came out with *Islam dan Sosialisma* (Islam and Socialism) (Seruan Masa, Penang).

That same year he attracted a world-wide audience when he published *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* and *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (Frank Cass and Company, London).

The first deals with the emergence, role and function of intellectuals in developing countries. Alatas draws on his experiences in Malaysian politics between 1968 and 1971 to discuss certain issues in this book.

The second book demolishes the theory, propounded first by the colonialists, and perpetuated later by some elites in newly independent countries, that indigenous people are backward because they are lazy. The book was referred to by the renowned Palestinian-born intellectual Edward Said as ‘startlingly original.’

Alatas's next book was *Kita Dengan Islam* (Islam and Us), (Pustaka Nasional, Singapore, 1980) which touches on Islamic thinking, the concept of an Islamic State, and the Islamic concept of tolerance. 'So many frightening aspects of Islam have appeared in the media,' says Alatas, 'but those aspects are not representative of the real Islam.' He says he has tried to correct these misconceptions in the book.

In a fitting tribute to more than half a century of his scholarship, a *Festschrift*, comprising a collection of 17 essays by various scholars, was published in 2005 (*Local and Global: Social Transformation in South-East Asia - Essays in Honor of Syed Hussein Alatas*), (Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, Netherlands, 2005. Edited by Riaz Hassan).

In addition to the breadth and depth of his intellectual interests and capacity, what is most striking is the relevance of his topics, his crisp, clear and concise language, and his use of numerous examples to buttress his arguments.

Alatas's down-to-earth approach is clearly linked to his conviction that knowledge, values and philosophy 'must relate to concrete problems of life.'

'The trend to divorce philosophy from practical life is in the long run detrimental to philosophy itself,' he writes in his *Modernization and Social Change*. 'Its subject matter becomes more and more restricted and its contribution becomes less and less essential from the point of view of significant problems.'

'Those philosophers who refuse to be involved with the day to day life of human beings are like dieticians who tell us that we need so much protein, so much carbohydrates, so much vitamins, but refuse or are unable to concern themselves with concrete foodstuffs such as fish, meat, fruits, etc... Imagine what would happen to a society whose members suffer from undernourishment if its dieticians could not speak the language of concrete experience?'

'By excluding values and metaphysics from our legitimate area of discourse...we slice off a vital portion of human experience, leaving it to the demagogues or fanatical thinkers to do whatever they like with it.'

Note: This introduction contains excerpts from an article by this interviewer published in *Malaysian Business*, May 1, 1988 (Berita Publishing, Malaysia).

## Interview Questions

**Given your 60 years of research, writing and social activism, if you were asked to identify the single biggest impediment to human development in the Third World today, what would it be?**

The nature of the leadership. In the non-Western world, everything hinges on leadership. The ordinary citizen has no significant role in public affairs. In most of the Third World, the biggest group of tyrants and incompetent, destructive leaders rose to power in within 50 years of independence, after the Second World War. During the same period we witnessed the gradual deterioration of these societies in terms of infrastructure, quality of life, and political stability. Malaysia and Singapore were among the few exceptions, followed later by South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. Such a colossal destruction of the quality of life has never happened before in the entire history of mankind.

**Are you exaggerating the point?**

Examine history. Is there any period of human history when almost half the global population experienced such rapid deterioration in living standards?

**Are you implying that living standards have been worse after independence than during colonialism?**

Yes.

**Why?**

The colonialists plundered in restricted areas. The new plunderers were more voracious – they were everywhere. For example, I lived in Indonesia during both periods. Corruption was not as widespread during colonialism compared to the independence period. The cities were better managed. There was law and order, urban services were good - garbage was cleared, trains were seldom derailed. But after independence, services deteriorated. The increase in population and urbanization is no excuse. The ruling elite are to blame.

**The structuralists would argue that this was simply due to the economic system, and systems of dominance by the Western and local elites.....**

They (the structuralists) are producers of puppet shows! They imply that the elites are not independent. This is a fundamental flaw. Structure is the creation of human actors. Structure is created by them (the elites), often for their own interests. The structuralists are incapable of understanding the problem, namely, that structure is also subject to change by human actors and the masses the moment it is no more exertive of influence.

Secondly, taking this argument to extremes amputates us from our capacity to think. It's like a saying a building is bad because it's bad. What kind of thinking is that? A building is bad because the planners, the architects and the contractors fouled it up! The structure of the building is an independent entity.

I recognized (emphasis his) the importance of structure but I did not stop there. I realized that human actors created the structure, and they can change it. Structural analysis

has its limits – it can be used in a limited way but not as a foundation to analyze society as a whole.

**How is your concept of the captive mind – imitative non- creative thinking based on western categories and modes of thought – which you identified in the 1970's, linked to the issues of corruption, the role of intellectuals, the challenge of deconstructing and demystifying myths, and promoting social change – issues you have written so much about?**

Firstly, modernization is closely linked to the introduction of science and technology from the West. The elites must be able to understand, appreciate, promote science and technology, and retain suitable technocrats, without blindly embracing Westernization.

Secondly, effective social change is only possible if there is committed, moral leadership. India, for example, has generated many exemplary pre-independence leaders like Gandhi, Jayaprakash Narayanan and Abul Kalam Azad. But there are very few leaders of such caliber in recent years. The same applies to Pakistan. How many Iqbals and Jinnahs are there today? How many people with the caliber of Hatta do we have in Indonesia today? All these leaders had moral integrity and intellectual depth.

**Is it because the fervor and struggle for independence threw up such leaders?**

Yes

**How do we create such elites? Must we wait for a momentous event or can we create them willfully? One academic told me that ideas do not matter any more; social change in developing counties is driven by events beyond our control. Any comment?**

This is confused thinking! It again demonstrates the dangers of structuralism. Who causes these events? Other than natural disasters, all social events are human events, involving social actors.

**You have been railing on and on about the lack of a socially functioning intellectual community and the problem of corruption in developing countries for decades. Yet for many academics, it is as if you are talking about truisms. When I told a young academic I was going to interview you, he asked: 'Why does he go on about something everyone knows about?'**

That young man has a captive mind! He is incapable of creative thought.

If people find tons of garbage lying all over their cities, are you saying they have to live with it? Are they to say, this is normal, this is a truism, let it be – even if the dirt, disease and toxins from the garbage dumps affect their health? They have to study and act on the problem.

Let me respond with another truism. Some people shake their legs when they sit down. But if everyone in town is shaking their legs, surely we must get down to the root of the problem!

Or, if there is a long-standing infectious disease in the community, and you just brush it off as another 'truism,' then you have a brain smaller than a bird! Because even a bird, when exposed to repetitive behavior, will try to find out the reason.

**Agreed, but as you said, in many countries, things have got worse since independence, despite all the exhortations of people like you. Why is this so?**

Because there is no appropriate ruling elite!

**Why is there no proper ruling elite?**

This is due to negative foreign influences propping up elites of their choice, as well as the internal problem of elite formation. In addition, the public conscience has been weak and citizens did not resist such foreign dominance. One example of a strong leadership which has defended itself against great odds is Cuba. Even though I do not subscribe to Marxist ideology, we must recognize that the Cuban elites do not have captive minds. The leadership and the people have a strong independent spirit.

**Cuba? That sounds like a blast from the past, especially if you are addressing younger scholars.....**

I don't care whether it's from the past, as long as it's a blast. And it's not a false blast, but a true blast!

**What is your advice to scholars, especially the younger ones? Many Third World academics appear demoralized by bureaucratic pressures and the lack of recognition of their wider role of academics in society. You are one of the few who have remained idealistic and productive.**

Firstly, they must have a serious outlook on life. Only then can other things take their place. By all means watch your TV, take your holidays, but you must answer this question: how do you want to leave this world?

This outlook must be based on a firm moral and intellectual foundation. These prerequisites apply to people from all walks of life. Even a street sweeper can be devoted to his duty. In every vocation, including the academic, character is the single most important factor.

**Some academics complain that, unlike in the West, many Third World societies do not have a democratic or intellectual tradition, and there is no space to fight for ideals or to foster intellectual development.**

Nonsense! This applies only to totalitarian societies. Most developing societies are non-totalitarian, and in many areas they are open to research and 'mental exercises,' even if the problem is not solvable.

How is it that revolutionaries in eighteenth century Russia wrote books while banished to Siberia? Condorcet in France and Thomas Paine in the US did the same while awaiting execution. You see, these people were not caged by the 'structure.'

**Are you saying that suffering impelled thinking?**

Condorcet was an aristocrat. He was moved by the injustices around him. The same applied to Alexander Herzen. Oppression stimulated their creativity. Unlike those days, the intellectual infrastructure in Third World societies today is sufficient to impel them to be more creative.

**You have written about the critical need for political leadership in the Third World to have a wide ‘radius of vision’ to identify and solve existing and future problems. How can the intellectuals help if the leaders are honest, but need help to broaden this ‘radius’?**

If the elite has character and humility, it will seek advice. It will not have the arrogance of ‘thought sufficiency.’ If intellectuals cannot change the leadership, they should keep on talking about the ideal leadership. Russia, the most powerful state in modern history, collapsed because of the efforts of intellectuals. It took almost 70 years! People like Solinitziyn, Pasternak and many others worked toward this. Eventually, those in power adopted their thinking.

**You were a minority voice in the 1970’s when you first wrote about the need to carefully distinguish between westernization and modernization. Today, given the speed and scope of globalization, what are your views?**

My earlier calls have become even more relevant. Of course globalization is there, but we must educate the public on the merits and demerits of globalization so that we can protect ourselves and be part of the process.

Globalization has become ‘oceanic,’ by which I mean you cannot immerse yourself down the depth of the ocean. Only a fool will take in everything and drown in it. Being impassive in the face of globalization is like sitting on the beach in the face of an impending tsunami.

**What is your work in progress?**

I plan to put up a proposal to the ISA to introduce new areas of sociology. Secondly, to complete a monograph on Library and Civilization. I am also researching the ‘Silences of Colonialism in the Dutch East Indies,’ including an explanation of the origins of colonialism and imperialism.

Some other articles are in print, while I am trying to arrange for reprints of my books. I also plan to publish my lectures abroad and my writings in Malay dating from the 1960’s into two separate books.

I am currently reflecting on my dictum: ‘Quality without morality is dangerous.’

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### Writing, Politics And Business In The Academe: A View From Afar

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When academics write, they dialogue/debate with their own kind, addressing issues, dilemmas and trends intellectually framed by other scholars past and present from a multitude of provenances. Occasionally, the provocations of academics have wider relevance, and their prose enters the public domain of everyday discourse, animating popular discussion and debate. In general, I think it is still valid to say that academicians continue to enjoy a modicum of public respect and stature everywhere because of their elite credentials of long and sustained learning. But the centuries-old imagery of universities as hermetic ivory towers is an embattled one these days. At one end of the spectrum, their detractors have characterized them more as cloistered places to de-skill young minds and domesticate youthful spirits.

Among others, the theoretical insights of scholars like Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault have also forcefully contributed to their de-romanticisation. Whether as nodal points of the all-pervasive ideological state apparatus (ISA) or as sites of knowledge-production to authorize partial truths, academic labour is not immune from the mundane intrusions of statist politics and capitalist business. On the contrary, the academe and their products (lectures, publications, consultancies, expert opinions, commentaries etc.) are manifestly “political” in the wider sense of feeding towards the manufacture of a culture of consent (or dissent) vis-à-vis the dominant structures and mentalities of the *polis*. To put it differently, whilst not everything is politics, politics is everything.

In countries like Malaysia, university officials in collusion with state authorities have shown an appreciation of this potential by instituting compulsory *Aku Janji* (“I pledge”) legalist exercises for all lecturers and students recently. By framing the need to practice self-imposed discipline through an overt pledge of “loyalty” and “good conduct,” the motive is clearly to arrest, if not retard, “anti-government” activities within the hallowed lecture hall of the university. Punitive measures await individuals who are perceived to be in breach of them. Working in tandem with a host of other repressive laws of the country, many have bemoaned the breeding of a subculture of self-censorship, reticence, acquiescence, and muted resentment within public universities.

I write this piece in the context of my first fieldwork stint away from my home country, Malaysia. Here, in the Philippines, I am affiliated to two prominent universities, and their superficial differences are germane to the topic at hand. University A is a privately run institution, highly reputable for its educational standards and publishing house. In terms of the built environment, the gated campus is impressively discordant with its immediate environs - its well-maintained buildings, manicured lawns, and prominent signposts proclaiming the existence of numerous research centers and institutes project an aura of a sanitized affluent order vis-à-vis “the outside.” The university’s comparatively high tuition fees also narrows its educational and networking opportunities to a small spectrum of Filipino society. Its alumni include several luminaries - indeed, some are household names providing pioneering leadership in the disparate worlds of corporate business, law, politics and the academe.

By contrast, University B’s access to state largesse has traditionally buttressed its reputation as a centre of educational excellence accessible to all who qualify academically. However, budget cuts in recent years have incrementally raised tuition fees and have threatened to undermine this universal franchise of higher education. This trend is indexed materially. Although boasting a sprawling campus ground with wide boulevard roads and majestic trees, many of the buildings look “seasoned” (if not “dilapidated”) and could do with a bit of refurbishment. Upgraded facilities and more access to research funding continue to be wanting. One professor whom I spoke to commented that University B seems to be in a time warp and nothing much has changed since she was an undergraduate student many years ago.

Another striking feature of University B is its apparent porosity between the “inside” and “outside” worlds, epitomized in part by the easy flow of vehicular jeepneys in/out of the campus grounds. More significant to me is that sidewalk vendors exist aplenty inside the campus. Living just outside the university boundaries, they wheel in their wares (like ice-cream, barbeque meat, boiled maize, vegetables, and even fresh prawns) early each morning and leave late in the evenings. At the row of university shops that I frequent, street children co-exist with students as they scavenge for plastic bottles and leftover food. Though this should not be romantically overstated, I do think that their presence provides a potent daily reminder to students and academics alike of the larger context of the country’s inequities and their responsibilities to their less privileged citizens.

During the Marcos regime of the 1970s-80s, University A provided a modest cohort of activists to combat the dictatorship. But their numbers pale in comparison to the hundreds, if not thousands, that rose up in University B. Many were imprisoned, went “missing” or lost their lives for the cause of defending democracy and social justice. The legacy of youthful resistance and academic dissent does not seem to have evaporated. University B is still well-known as a hot-bed for “leftists” and “militants,” a tradition not willfully forgotten by its own administrators as evidenced by the archiving of *The Radical Papers* – intellectual and activist writings of the era – in the university central library. Even today, University B’s academics (and its alumni) provide a constant diet of critical commentary through the mass media on the political and economic woes of the country. When President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo pronounced a *National State of Emergency* earlier this year, defiant students and academics in University B declared the campus to be emergency-free in the spirit of the iconic Paris Commune of the late 1960s.

State attempts to restrict democratic and academic freedoms appear to be more potent and effective in Malaysia. Indeed, one could argue that intellectual activism in Malaysia is

rather tame in comparison to our Filipino colleagues. With some notable exceptions, one would be hard-pressed to name academicians from public universities who are also critically acclaimed public intellectuals providing timely and dialogical commentaries on the machinations of state, culture and society. Instead, the dominant trend is more of segregationist fence-building within the safe compound of the academic's own ethnic and religious ancestry. Given the country's rich multi-ethnic and multi-religious cultural legacies, this is a shame.

Many minority academicians have subsequently opted to migrate to the private sector, to civil society bodies or even overseas in the face of perceived discrimination coupled with the additional burden of adjusting to the demands imposed by the corporatisation of university education since the 1990s. Those who remain face promotional uphill battles in "going against the flow." An outcome of this illiberal and bureaucratic regime has been the creation of the malaise of mediocre and mimetic academic scholarship. The poor performance of Malaysian public universities in recent world academic ranking exercises is some cause for serious concern but perhaps not surprising in the light of the trend set in motion many years earlier.

Outside of public universities, and in the milieu of private universities, other kinds of challenges face the serious (and "politically" engaged) academic apart from having to teach a more economically homogenized cohort of students every year – the pressure to contribute towards boosting profit margins through high teaching workloads and limited access to research funds. Granted that the more prestigious private universities (often foreign-based) might be better endowed in terms of resources, their comparatively precarious legal and economic status vis-à-vis public universities nevertheless do incline their custodians towards the pragmatic wisdom of endorsing self-surveillance and supporting more apolitical-type research projects. It is the street wise and intellectually focused academic who is able to navigate well through the maze of obstacles, real and imagined, on a daily basis.

In the private university that I work back home, I have been relatively fortunate. Although there is an imperfect fit between what I currently teach and research, the programme is a vibrant one, and there is potential to diversify in the near future. My involvement with civil society groups also provides that extra bit of contextual knowledge to animate my concerns and teaching methods. My only misgiving is that a broader spectrum of Malaysians cannot afford to avail themselves to the benefits of a liberal and globally attuned education provided by my university because of the high costs involved. Experiences of teaching part-time in a public university further underscores my perception of the chasm there is at the moment between these two kinds of institutions. The casualty is not only limited to the student but to a range of disjunctions affecting the body politic of the whole nation in terms of job prospects, social integration, and so forth.

Perhaps I am over-estimating the intellectual hold that academics and universities have on society. Perhaps the romantic view of the university as a bastion for reaching the intellectual heavens is just that, an idealist perspective that must necessarily be just out of reach in order to inspire purity and greatness. Even the apparent emasculation of Malaysian public universities is perhaps understandable, if not inevitable, given the wider global economic and political structuring forces currently on the ascendant.

One could contend then that in this milieu, more independent "organic intellectuals" would mushroom outside of the academe, working in a range of media and film companies (mainstream and alternative), NGOs, and even the army of small-scale businesses that

populate the *polis*. Arguably, the dawn of cyberspace has singularly done more than any other academic entity in allowing the proliferation of all kinds of political (and apolitical) writings and partisan debates not quite possible in the recent past. But Malaysian society would be that much intellectually poorer if these concerns were to be reduced to catchy sound bites, visual spectacles, and a range of other advertising tactics to capture the popular imagination. As I would imagine, any prototypical academic would counsel his/her mentee that there is no substitute for sustained and objective study of a phenomenon informed by competing theoretical frameworks. And, all the more better if these concerns eventually reach a wider reading audience inspiring civil debates and meaningful social and political transformation.

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### New Media and Representations of the Intellectual in the Network Society

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At bottom, the intellectual, in my sense of the word, is neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. Not just passively unwillingly, but actively willing to say so in public.

– Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (1994:23).

#### Representations in a Changing Mediascape

The image of the secular intellectual bequeathed to us by the late Said is one of a restless exile and principled amateur willing to speak human truths with the force of conviction. Rather than the righteous prophet or professional expert, the intellectual is an amateur with personal styles of expression and fallibilities of character who seeks to articulate the universal values of freedom and justice to challenge the dogmatic beliefs of the day. Neither is this a picture of the freelancing intellectual, detached from the institutional constraints of society. An established academic himself, the place of the academic in Said's vision is an important one. In the first instance, the academic is a traditional intellectual rooted in the cloistered profession of university teaching and specialist research. But academia is a very different social institution from, say, bureaucracies, corporations and think-tanks, which are dedicated to specific clients and audiences. Because the production of knowledge through a process of free debate, rigorous criticism and peer review defines academia, it encourages and nurtures the formation of independent organic intellectuals who seek to publicly engage and discomfort the dominant understandings of wider society.

It is significant that Said drew this picture in his 1993 BBC Reith Lectures. Part of his argument is that there is no such thing as a private intellectual, that one becomes an intellectual when one ventures from the security of insider professional space into the uncertain hazards of the public sphere. One of these hazards is negotiating the allure of the mass media, which offers a powerful tool for the expression of critical views at the same

time that it tends to domesticate messages to the dictates of consumer fancies and political correctness. The Reith Lectures offer a scarce opportunity for an outstanding intellectual like Said to bring his message across to millions of people in its raw and poignant lecture format. For the rest of us, we have television talk-shows, radio interviews and newspaper opinion pieces, all of which are subject to editorial calculations.

But the mass media is fast-changing in front of our eyes. The World Wide Web has transformed the way we transact, communicate, interact and teach. It has split mass media into old mainstream media and new media. Mainstream media continues to operate in its usual *modus operandi*, using the Internet to broadcast its messages through websites and earning revenues through advertising. Webspace is however quickly changing and new territories and opportunities are opening up. New media, with blogging (weblogging), vlogging (video-logging), podcasting (transmission of audio files) and audience-created content websites such as Wikipedia as its components, is nothing less than revolutionary. As the recent *Economist* survey of new media suggests, it is akin to the Gutenberg printing press transforming the social and cultural landscape of medieval Christian Europe (Andreas Kluth, *The Economist*, 22 Apr. 2006). Not coincidentally, the first blogging tool on the Internet was called Movable Type. How does new media affect the intellectual representations envisioned by Said? Using examples from my native Singapore, I shall focus on blogging because it is most germane to what academic intellectuals are already good at, that is, writing.

Academics are, of course, not unfamiliar with the Internet. Universities have been fast to employ the Internet for marketing, teaching, research and academic exchange. Given professional and institutional restraints, since universities are anxious about their branding and image too, academics do not have the full range of intellectual freedom with their personal homepages on university websites. Blogging offers a natural extension to our enterprise. In essence, a blog is a virtual diary, an online personal journal for logging one's musings about everyday life. The structure of a blog is simple. The front page has one's identity, the most recent entries and a sidebar of links to other pages. Each entry has its own archival page that can be accessed and hyperlinked through its "permalink". Hyperlinks may be created in the text, thus cross-referencing one's writing to other websites. Entries are archived, usually by calendar month. Photographs, documents and audio and video files may be posted in or with each entry. Each entry comes with a postscript space for commenting by readers, which can easily turn into a discussion space centered on the entry. Many free and user-friendly blogging services are available on the Web, most of them only requiring you to log in, choose a template, type and post. As it is obvious, one can easily turn a blog into an academic working paper or research note site complete with facilities for commenting and exchanging ideas. But this will just be an extension of professionalism into new media, hardly the biting intellectual amateurism Said envisions.

## **The Communicative Rationality of Blogging**

In 1971, Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky debated on human nature, justice and power at the Eindhoven University of Technology. This classic debate was broadcasted by Dutch television and recorded on video, its transcript published in books. Now, imagine such debates taking place on a smaller scale on an ongoing daily basis between academics, potentially interminable if sustained, and members of the audience being able to participate in the debate and interact with the debaters and each other, with the debates and comments themselves serving as the immediately-available transcripts of the ongoing proceedings. This is the potential of blogging for intellectual discourse. But the element of sustained

interaction with the audience introduces a major difference. The *Economist* survey notes, “blogging is just another word for having conversations” (Kluth, 2006:5). Like in everyday face-to-face conversations, blogging takes on a raw, amateurish, unpredictable and meandering character. Everyday conversations are, however, limited by space and time. The Web has accelerated what David Harvey (1990) calls the compression of space and time to unprecedented levels in terms of communication. Blogging conversations are no longer limited by space, as they are in principle global in accessibility and universal in inclusion, limited only by the unequal distribution of access to the Internet in the network society. They are no longer limited by time, as each enunciation is instantaneously published and always retrievable, rendering conversations suspended in the virtual materiality of words that are always and immediately available for further engagement.

Indeed, these characteristics of blogging approximate the normative conditions of an ideal public sphere outlined by Jürgen Habermas (1989) in his historical study of the print media-inflected cafes of Western Europe in the age of bourgeois revolutions. This has important implications for the representations of the intellectual. Blogging shifts the haughty representations of revered intellectual giants to modest but more effective exchanges between intellectuals and social actors, transposing pronouncements that may be cast aside as grand philosophical musings to everyday conversations that are hard to brush aside. This is more befitting Said’s Gramscian ideal of academics as organic intellectuals who are embedded in the conditions of social existence while transforming them through critical ideas.

One example of an effort to put into effect the Habermasian ideals of communicative rationality and provide a space for organic conversations between academics, professionals, citizens and other interested individuals is *Singapore Angle* ([www.singaporeangle.com](http://www.singaporeangle.com)). Initiated by an academic philosopher and amateur social critic, it is a group blog bringing together the philosopher himself, a scientist-cum-entrepreneur, a chef, a lawyer, a sociologist, three graduate students (in the fields of sociology, business administration and international relations), an undergraduate and, interestingly, the convener of another group blog. The members post articles and engage each other and readers in the comments. Launching the group blog, Loy Huichieh wrote on “the possibility of reasoned discourse and civil discussion on matters to do with Singapore”,

Even if, at the end of the day, we walk away more convinced of the rightness of our own positions and the wrongness of the opponent view, the hope is that we can now say that we have seen the other side and have, after conscientious consideration, found it wanting of reason, that ours is no longer an opinion held merely for lack of an awareness of alternatives or possible objections, but a conviction that survived an encounter with those who, having given it due consideration, think otherwise. (26 Jun. 2006, “The *New Singapore Angle*”, [www.singaporeangle.com](http://www.singaporeangle.com))

Each member brings to the group the perspectives connected to his or her profession, but the arguments are pitched not at the level of the expert but in a way that any amateur could feel at ease to engage with. Thus far, the first two weeks since the launch have seen more than 350 visitors a day. The topics discussed are wide-ranging from questions of the credibility of anonymous bloggers to public policies such as public transport regulation. In one post, the scientist-cum-entrepreneur argued for greater government support for basic science and social sciences research, eliciting a series of ongoing conversations with skeptical readers who questioned using Japan as an exemplary model for Singapore just because both are ostensibly “Asian”. Criticality is therefore returned and we may speak of a certain

democratization of intellectual representations. In blogging, the transformation of opinions is no longer one way. The singular event of a Foucault, Chomsky or Said convincing the masses of their critical insights has become multiple encounters between reasoning individuals. As in Loy's description of the blogging conversation quoted above, the transformation is mutual even if there is no change in positions, because the encounter of reasoning speakers must surely deepen the conviction with which we bring our position to the next encounter.

## The Enunciative Event of Blogging

The Habermasian model of communicative-rational blogging is not the only possibility for an academic to intellectually engage the new public sphere. If we return to Said's exemplars of abrasive and fiercely independent intellectuals who are more interested in speaking transformative criticisms to question dominant worldviews and challenge the fundamental categories of social existence rather than reasoned discussions, blogging offers a channel that is unrestrained by the political and economic considerations of the publisher and broadcaster. In Singapore, a mysterious blogger who calls himself xenoboy writes poetic and analytical short essays that bring concepts and theories from cultural studies to bear on the one-dimensional worldview internalized by Singaporeans after decades of state-owned mass media and state-run mass education acculturation. In one essay questioning the naturalized imagination of "small Singapore" in public discourse, he writes of the effect of this ingrained imagination on the formation of the Singaporean citizen and the political purpose it serves in sustaining the one-party state,

For the government, the idealised citizen is thus: the citizen performs a mental translation of himself on the map of small Singapore and the citizen has to appreciate the privileged place they are in. And the citizen has to appreciate the founding fathers who placed them into this space known as Singapore despite the limitations imposed by its smallness. This is the "debt" we owe to the ruling party. This is the basis of [Lee Kuan Yew's] admonishment of young Singaporeans again and again for failing to see the Singapore definition, its historical discourse, its historical narrative. (18 May 2006, "Small Singapore", xenoboysg.blogspot.com)

Speculations abound on xenoboy's identity. He is most likely an academic since he has conducted a study on the Rwandan genocide, quoting Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, a theoretical masterpiece on narrative and trauma, in the essay where he mentioned his study. This was an essay written after the People's Action Party, which has ruled Singapore with a "soft" authoritarian hand for almost half a century, was returned to power by two-thirds of the electorate in the recent general elections in May 2006. Xenoboy writes in the piece, "To love Singapore totally is to accept and hear those parts of Singapore which fall out of the scope of the narrative and discourse as dictated by the State authority. And the only way to un-cover, re-cover, to witness these parts of silent Singapore is to approach them without reason, without logic." (8 May 2006, "When Reason Fails", xenoboysg.blogspot.com).

The contrast with the communicative-rational *Singapore Angle* is stark. Xenoboy draws his critical power not from residing in the margins of rational public discourse, in the civil tête-à-tête of citizens daring to push the discursive boundaries set by the one-party state. Instead, he draws his critical power by positioning himself in the gaps of reason, highlighting and deconstructing the social formation of ideas serving pervasive state power in Singapore. If *Singapore Angle* is Habermasian in character, xenoboy is Foucauldian in approach. Each essay of his is an enunciative event analyzing and taking apart events in the real world of

Singapore society. Xenoboy's approach is far more dangerous to the cultural powers of the state than the Habermasian model because the latter engages the rationality of the state with other rationalities but the former questions the very rationality of the state.

Because academia is tightly regulated and remains closely linked to state largesse in Singapore, the anonymity that is available in blogging protects xenoboy and allows him to speak as an intellectual. The anonymous voice of xenoboy also disrupts Said's vision of intellectual representations as the unique inflection of critical power with "the image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance", "the personal mannerisms" of the intellectual (1994:13). Unlike the many exemplary intellectuals Said mentions in his lectures, xenoboy has no public face or life for all to see. His image, signature, intervention and performance are the very words he publishes on his blog. In the Derridean sense, xenoboy is a collection of texts detached and decontextualized from the author and his signature performance as a social actor. It is writing as an enunciative event submitted to the vicissitudes of the event of reading (Derrida, 1982). In the context of Singapore, this authorial decontextualization gives his voice a powerful critical edge. State control of media institutions and defamation suits against political opponents by the country's leaders have created a narrow and unforgiving definition of credibility as linked to one's institutional location, occupational achievement and purity of character measured by past actions. By remaining anonymous, xenoboy renders the question of credibility irrelevant. His essays are therefore judged by the power of his critical insights alone.

### **Blogging Truth to Power**

More than offering the potentials of actualizing communicative rationality and performing enunciative events, blogging is about "speaking truth to power" (Said, 1994:85) in the network society. As Manuel Castells argues, a network society is organized around networks of interconnected nodes where informational flows are exchanged and managed. These networks permeate and transform the social structure. In a network society, "the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power", in which "switches connecting the networks" are the "privileged instruments of power" guiding and translating multiple informational codes (Castells, 1996:469, 471). How do we locate blogs in the network society? It is incorrect to locate blogs as a discrete network by itself. Blogs do not make up closed and secure circuits, such as financial networks, which are accessible only to social actors who buy into the network with their monetary resources. They do not make up closed, public circuits, such as mainstream media networks, where select professionals broadcast public messages to a mass audience. They are not like bulletin boards or online forums, which are circuits open to discretionary membership that are either public or secure depending on the decision of the circuit's owner.

Blogs constitute an interconnected layer of the public sphere superimposed on the circuits of the network society. They are dispersed nodal points of concentrated information emergent from the different circuits. They connect to each other, exchanging and translating information from the different circuits with each other. For example, in my own participation as a blogger in *Singapore Angle*, I posted an essay presenting a class analysis of political change in Singapore, thereby translating for non-specialists and non-academics the political economy approach to understand democratization or the lack of it (2 Jul. 2006, "The Flowing River of History", [www.singaporeangle.com](http://www.singaporeangle.com)). Some blogs emerge as powerful switches in this respect. *Singapore Angle* is one model, where actors from different networks gather to translate their specialist knowledge into amateur language in a debating roundtable

open to public view and participation. *Singabloodypore* (singabloodypore.blogspot.com) represents another model, where bloggers with diverse interests and styles come together to maintain a news commentary journal with biting original articles, recycled mainstream media articles and otherwise-unpublished or republished pieces on Singapore from dissident sources and independent media, and from activist and political networks around the world.

It is difficult to measure the power that blogs have in a network society. This issue should be properly considered and methodologically tested in a sociological study. I can only give some anecdotal evidence here of the potential of blogs to bring truth to bear on social and cultural representations and political power. Before the recent General Elections in May, the People's Action Party government recognized this potential and banned political podcasts and videocasts on the Internet and issued a warning that bloggers who "persistently propagate, promote or circulate political issues relating to Singapore" would be regulated during the hustling (*The Straits Times*, 4 Apr. 2006). In a society where the political culture of fear has been ingrained for generations, the warning had surprisingly little effect. The blogging community was "abuzz" with analysis, opinions, criticisms and referrals to key blogs (*The Straits Times*, 9 May 2006). In one instance, a corporate executive-turned-citizen journalist published photo essays of election rallies held by the various political parties in his blog (www.yawningbread.org). A photograph showing a bird's eye view of a massive opposition Workers' Party rally involving tens of thousands of citizens circulated among blogs, online forums, emails and became an instant hit. Using posted and circulated photographs, bloggers discerned the meaning of the attendance of tens of thousands of citizens at opposition party rallies, which contrasted starkly with the hundreds of mainly party members attending the ruling party rallies. In what would otherwise be a news item in the mainstream media of democratic countries, Singapore's mainstream media studiously avoided giving attention to the massive opposition party rallies, focusing instead on the spurt of public speeches made by the ruling party leaders and their attacks on the character of opposition figures. In a society where 66 per cent of households have home access to the Internet (IDA, 2006), Singapore's new media, made up of multiple, interconnected blogs, became an alternative media that referred citizens to the oppositional political voices and positions ignored by the pro-regime mainstream media.

The dispersion of blogs across different networks and their switch-like interconnectedness mitigate the state's power to control criticisms and suppress dissent. There is no newspaper or television station to shut down, only individuals conversing with each other in public view, leaving archived records of the conversation for all to read and add to. New media has created a public sphere that is a conundrum for state control. This has brought on two tactics to manage political blogging. The first involves the co-optation of celebrity bloggers by mainstream media in its engagement with new media, so as to draw the cyberspace public's attention to these managed blogging. In the aftermath of the May elections in Singapore, the returning incumbent government announced that it was reviewing its Internet regulation policy and proposed to adopt a "lighter touch approach" to "engage new media" (*The Straits Times*, 1 Jun. 2006). Two weeks later, the flagship newspaper of state-owned mainstream media, *The Straits Times*, launched an online interactive portal to engage new media, offering discussion forums, expert answers to any questions, and blogging and vlogging by a group of invited "star" bloggers (www.stomp.com.sg).

Another fortnight later, Mr. Brown, a popular blogger co-opted by mainstream media, whose podcasts of political satires during the elections were widely circulated (www.mrbrown.com), wrote a satirical column in *Today*, a free newspaper published by

another state-owned media company, on the rising cost of living and government policies. The government responded with a scathing letter published a few days later in *Today*, chiding Mr. Brown for his “diatribe” and promotion of “cynicism”. The letter led to his sacking from the paper. The government ruled that it was “not the role of journalists or newspapers in Singapore to champion issues” and that “a columnist” should not exploit “access to the mass media to undermine the government’s standing with the electorate” or he/she would be considered “partisan player in politics”. The second tactic therefore appears to revolve around the placement of markers and rules to keep out the infusion of the independent criticality and argumentative vigor of new media into mainstream media.

It is a matter of time an academic-intellectual blogger would be co-opted into the policed mainstream media in Singapore. The power of mass media broadcast is hard to reject. But even more so in the network society, where a media revolution is underway, intensifying the clash of powerful ideas and the deepening of the security state, Said’s vision of the independent, unaccommodating and critical intellectual must not be compromised. At the same time, the media democratization brought on by new media means that the academic-intellectual can no longer afford to merely pronounce criticisms, but must also engage fellow citizens in conversations. The representations of the intellectual in the network society reside in the space between critique and conviction.

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# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

Survivor Academia – your next challenge is publishing!

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Last month I received a hot-off-the-press issue of an academic journal where my article was published. It drew on the data I collected overseas and challenged some media theories. This article originated from a conversation with a senior colleague with whom I shared some insights from my study. My colleague was interested and suggested I write it up as a paper and send it to a journal. So I wrote that paper and submitted it to a journal two years ago. It was exciting to write this article. And then I got the reviewers' responses. Two reviewers gave me excellent feedback on how to improve my paper and how to present my study better and more clearly to the reader. But the third reviewer fundamentally disagreed with my theoretical departure point, and wanted me to take my study into a different direction.

And I fought this reviewer very hard. I addressed their every concern but stood firmly on my theoretical grounds. I revised my paper three times. Every time I spent hundreds of hours gnawing my fists and crashing my head on the keyboard in desperation, and resisting the growing feeling of angst and frustration. I was fighting to win the theoretical argument with someone who fundamentally disagreed with my conceptual perspective, and it was an unequal power play. But I did not give up. I felt that what I was saying in that paper was important enough to fight for, because I wanted the reading public to have an opportunity to hear my point of view. And at the end, the article was published and the editor of the journal sent me a letter complimenting the way I handled the conflicting and contradictory responses from the reviewer throughout the process.

It is a good article. And I am glad it got published. I will be glad that someone will read it and start thinking about the problems that intrigued me when I wrote it. And I will be glad if they disagree with me, because they may then understand things that I have not understood yet, and see the issues that I have not seen, and perhaps they will write another article. And if I read it, I may learn something new from it.

But I also feel very sad that I had to put so much effort into fighting so that my article may see the light of day. Was the price I paid for the success of that one paper too high? Who had the moral right to set this price? How many other interesting papers could I have written had I not fought for so long? What other studies could I have done? Or even how

much time could I have spent with my family, enjoying my yard, training my dog, taking care of my aging relatives? How many hours could I have spent working out, cooking meals, cleaning my house, having babies, sun-tanning, shopping, flirting, traveling, and having experiences that are worth to write about and interesting to read about, instead of turning into half woman, half desk?

I am curious whether Max Weber, had he still been alive today, might have had the nerve to submit his work for peer review, and what response he would have then received. "Thank you for your piece entitled 'Protestant Ethics...'. The ideas expressed are quite interesting, but the reasons for the author's choice of Protestantism for analysis are insufficiently clearly articulated, and a comparison with Islam would be highly desirable...Last but not least, a final proof-read of the text by a native English speaker will be required. There are flaws in the grammar and spelling which make the manuscript hard to follow". And is the old saying about talent always finding its way still true, or would Weber get so bogged down in responding to feedback that he'd never get the energy to accomplish his life's work that would put him into the sociological hall of fame?

One professor I know once told me that in the Soviet Union there used to be a special Department in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, to professionally deal with schizophrenic authors who claimed they have figured out how to achieve communism, why the Cold War needs to be ended, and so on. According to this professor, the Communist Party invented an ingenious way of handling these authors without distressing them and saving money on community care and mental health hospitals. This Department, it appears, had representatives in every scientific and literary journal because apparently schizophrenic authors were likely to send their manuscripts anywhere. So once a manuscript landed on the editor's desk, the Department's representative arranged a meeting with the author, and told her in the sincerest, politest and most respectful tones that their ideas were very interesting, and very fresh, but needed elaboration / precision / further work. Why don't they go back and work more on this manuscript / shorten it/ lengthen it? Apparently, the professor claimed, this system worked quite well and the poor deranged souls would disappear and work for about a year, to resurface again with a bigger / slenderer version of their manuscript. At which point the Department's representative would encourage them to go back home and do yet some further work on revising their manuscripts.

Because of the shortage of mental health hospital beds, the government in the Soviet Union decided to occupy the non-violent patients with a task that would keep them busy and out of trouble for a long time. Every time the task is finished it would be extended so that the patient has to start over again, and keep herself busy practically forever, under the misapprehension that she is doing a meaningful thing towards an end goal. Doesn't this story sound disturbingly similar to the endless peer-review process in academic journals of the developed Western world? As academic jobs are scarce, published papers become one of the key and most sought-after resources in climbing a career ladder, and scarce space for publishing in prestigious journals makes authors go through the vicious circles of revisions, rejections, further revisions, more revisions... Is the recommended revision a sincere collegial advice that may improve their paper and help the reader understand the study better? Or are they laboring under a misapprehension having been purposefully duped by those who want to put them out of circulation for another year? Who is getting insane – me, revising the same paper for the 57<sup>th</sup> time, or the reviewers, who recommend making the 58<sup>th</sup> revision? Is perseverance the true answer to academic success, or should someone get

enough guts and common sense to resist and say very loudly, so that all the academia may hear: “Enough is enough. We are getting things way out of perspective here”.

Publishing is incidentally in the title of this piece. Come to think of it, publishing has become so important, so central to the life and destiny of academics, that it has overshadowed such concepts as discovery and writing. Instead of being seen in its proper light – as just the end routine stage of research when the text that describes it is put on paper by a journal – publishing patronizes scholars and becomes an end goal in itself. Endless revisions, the politics of the process, oozes out all creativity, stifles the quest for discovery, eradicates the free flight of fantasy, and all that remains is publishing for the sake of publishing, publishing for the sake of landing a tenure-track job, publishing for the sake of producing grant deliverables, publishing for the sake of winning the Survivor-Academia Grand Finale.

I have talent and a drive for achievement, and I know the rules of this game very well. I am aware of journal prestige rankings, and am skilled in dealing with reviewers’ feedback. I can write efficient cover letters to the editors detailing my revisions, and am a good team worker in collaborating on articles and book chapters. And I make sure my papers eventually get published. I am winning awards and getting funding, and I am getting ready for the cut-throat competition to get one of the scarce academic jobs. But I promise myself to always remember that this is but a game that I have to play well and must win, and take the rules with a grain of salt. And if I win the Grand Finale of Survivor-Academia, I will use the power of my words to challenge the hegemony of too many words of power like ‘publishing’ that dominate and patronize academia.

However, it is not on the note of resistance that I would like to end this piece. What matters is what side of the ledger you live by, the losses or the gains. I am deeply grateful to all the anonymous reviewers who have taken the time to read the papers that I have ever submitted to journals. All of them have taught me important lessons. In one way or another they have helped me excel in my field, learn to think sharper, and to write better. And my special thanks go to those of them who have taught me the art of being patient. So stay tuned everyone. I will be sending more papers for review!

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### The Journal Impact Factor and Citation Rankings in Sociology: Nonsense or Necessity?

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#### Introduction

In the current academic climate, the quality and sustainability of individuals, departments and universities is largely based on publications in international refereed journals. Sociologists require publications to survive, often encapsulated in the mantra 'publish or perish'. Publication prowess is furthermore often tied to funding opportunities and resource allocation in addition to providing substantial returns in terms of career mobility and recognition. In the increasingly competitive academic system, citations and journal impact factors have emerged as a defining ranking device of individuals and institutions.<sup>2</sup> When individual researchers or institutions are evaluated, it is often done so via publication counts, number of citations and the prestige of the journals where they publish. Quantitative and seemingly more 'objective' indicators in the form of journal impact factors and citation indices were therefore developed as a practical and cost-effect tool to serve these evaluation goals.

But what exactly are these impact factors and citation indices? How do they operate in sociology in comparison to other disciplines? Do they accurately reflect the quality of publications? What are the positive and negative aspects of using these indices to rank and gauge academic ability and success within the discipline of sociology? After defining these ranking instruments, this article explores how they operate within sociology and places the ranking system within a larger scientific context. The discussion concludes with some cautionary reflections on the blind reliance of these 'quality' indicators for the international sociological community.

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<sup>2</sup> There is also documentation that it has been used as evidence in alleged discriminatory hiring and used to determine whether salaries are distributed in an equitable manner (Cronin, Snyder and Atkins, 1997).

## The Anatomy of 'Quality' Publications: Defining the Journal Impact Factor and Citation Index

The evaluation of academic 'quality' is a commonplace and yet highly difficult and contentious task. Quality is initially guarded and gauged via the peer review process and often numerous revisions, which culminate into the published articles that we read. An article must first pass through the reviewers and editors before it is permitted to join the ranks of the 'cited' or have any impact on the scientific community. There are mixed reactions to this peer review process that is intrinsic to publication. Some have argued that peer review is more reminiscent of a lottery than a rational process (Seglen, 1997) while others contend that authors must 'prostitute' themselves and 'sell their soul' in order to publish (Frey, 2003). While some urge authors to 'reap the rewards' of the reviewers (Agarwal et al, 2006) or call reviewers an 'author's best friend' (Seibert, 2006). Regardless, once these manuscripts successfully pass through the editorial process, the articles, their authors and the journals where they are published are then examined in order to rank and evaluate the quality of publications.

Initiated by Garfield (1955), the journal impact factor and citation indices have emerged as the central evaluation device in many academic institutions across most disciplines. The journal impact factor is a quantitative measure of journal quality in the form of an index that charts the frequency with which journal articles are cited in scientific publications. Its strikingly simple calculation is rather out of proportion with the weight often attached to its value. The impact factor covers a three-year period that calculates the average number of times published papers are cited for up to two years after publication. For example, the impact factor for a journal in 2005 is calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} A &= \text{total citations of articles during 2005 of articles published from 2003-4} \\ B &= \text{total number of articles, reviewers, proceedings or notes published in} \\ &\text{2003-4} \end{aligned} \text{ Therefore the 2005 Impact Factor} = A/B.$$

In a similar manner, the impact of individual researchers is also assessed via a citation index. The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) in the United States produces citation information by recording the number of times each publication has been cited within an allotted period and by whom. This is published in the form of the *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI). The value of research is then calculated on the basis of citations, which is discussed in more detail shortly.

Table 1 provides a ranking of the top journals in sociology over the 24-year period from 1981 to 2004. In an expanded calculation based on similar premises to the one described above, the impact factor in this table is calculated as the total citations to a journal's published papers as divided by the total number of papers that the journal published, which produces a citations-per-paper impact over this period.

These top journals in sociology have a relatively stable position over time and represent the journals that publish a broader range of subject matter or contain the largest number of review articles. It is a well-established fact that review articles are heavily cited and thereby inflate the impact factor of journals, which is largely the case for the *American Sociological Review* (e.g., Seglen, 1997). The broader journals do comparatively better than specialized ones do to the fact that the impact factor of a journal is proportional to the database coverage of its research field. Small or specialized fields will therefore always receive low impact factors. Yet, a central reason for the dominance of American scientists and journals

appears to be a cultural one. Americans are more prone to citing each other and self-citation, which means that they comprise of over half of the actual citations, raising both the citation rate of their own journals and the subsequent impact of American science (Møller, 1990). In fact, one of the most cited articles at this moment in sociology according to the ISI web of Knowledge, Essential Science Indicators is Henshaw's (1998) article 'Unintended pregnancy in the United States', which clearly reflects a topic generally relevant to the American context (with 391 citations).

Table 1. Journals Ranked by Impact Factor in Sociology, 1981-2004

Rank	Impact period 1981-2004	Impact factor
1	American Sociological Review	39.97
2	American Journal of Sociology	33.47
3	Annual Review of Sociology	27.94
4	Journal of Marriage and the Family	20.91
5	Ethology and Sociobiology	18.63
6	Sociology of Education	17.05
7	Social Forces	14.47
8	Social Problems	13.89
9	Population and Development Review	13.39
10	Sociological Methodology	12.92

Source: Journal Performance Indicators.

### Are these indicators a measure of quality? A critical assessment

Numerous articles across multiple disciplines have criticized whether these indicators are a valid measure of scientific quality. Several points are directly pertinent to the discipline of sociology. A leading argument is that the impact factor *measures the quantity rather than the quality* of publications. A related point is that the focus on quantity reflects the absolute number of publications in that area of research, which is not always associated with quality.

The *limitations of the three-year temporal window* have also been a topic of contention. A three-year window for citation is very short and negates the significance of classic studies that are cornerstones of many articles. In addition, if a journal has a long time between submission and publications, it is difficult to cite articles within the 3-year window.

Another problem is the fact that journal impact factors *do not properly statistically represent individual journal articles* and correlate poorly with actual citations of individual articles. The impact factor should fundamentally refer to the average number of citations per paper, which should show a Gaussian distribution around the mean value. Yet as an Editorial in the journal *Nature* (Vol. 435: 1003-4, 23 June 2005) notes: "...we have analysed the citations of individual papers in *Nature* and found that 89% of last year's figure was generated by just

25% of our papers.” In fact, the distribution of article citation rates across all disciplines is very skewed, which illustrates that only a few key articles are repeatedly cited (Cronin, Snyder and Atkins, 1997).

A fundamental criticism is the *limitation of the database* and subsequent bias that is created due to the way that the citations and impact factors are calculated. The first critique is that the index has a high english-language bias, which largely favours American publications. For example, in the Social Science Citation Index, only two German social science journals are included, whereas the actual number of journals is over 500 (Artus, 1996). Another clear difference is the cultural differences in citation behaviour, discussed previously. The central critique of the limitations of this database is the fact that the database only includes academic journals and not books, which is a substantial amount of scientific output in sociology. An additional criticism is that beyond normal articles, notes and reviews, incorrect citations are also included such as editorials, letters, meeting abstracts and even translations. The database is also unable to correct for self-citation, which is a further compounding problem.

Cronin, Snyder and Atkins (1997) engaged in an empirical analysis to examine whether the citation rankings in sociology produced a skewed picture of scholarly impact. They asked whether the citation counts based solely on journal articles and omission of books failed to identify key authors and/or incorrectly impact their impact. Table 2 shows a comparison of the citation rankings of major sociological authors based on books and articles for the period from 1985 to 1993. They found that six sociologists (Durkheim, Janowitz, Weber, Freud, Portes and Parsons) were cited fifty times or more. An interesting deviation is that only nine of the ‘top authors’ in the book sample were represented in the ‘top author’ list for journals. However, when the list of top authors for book and journal articles was compared, the relative rankings of the authors did not appear to differ in a statistically significant way between the two forms of literature. Yet, since there was only a minimal overlap between these two publication mediums, the authors conclude that there are two populations of highly cited authors, one that is highly cited in books and the other in journals. This provides evidence that the omission of books means that a significant area of scientific impact is omitted in the discipline of sociology.

A further criticism levelled at these quality indicators is the notion of *differences in ‘doing science’* which is reflected in the disparity between the impact factor scores per discipline. Figure 1 shows the 2005 impact factors for selected disciplines, including sociology. Here we see that certain disciplines such as the medical sciences or physics score remarkably better than disciplines such as sociology. But why is this the case? First, the absolute number of researchers within certain disciplines inevitably impacts this number. A second related point is the absolute number of journals. A smaller number of journals where authors can publish their work mean a higher number of citations in the journals that are available. Third, the average number of authors varies significantly per discipline. Within the medical sciences, papers are often authored by a large number of multiple authors. An inescapable fourth difference is the variation in citation habits between disciplines. Next, the length of the articles plays a role. Since the citation rate is roughly proportional to the length of the article, journals with longer articles also do relatively better. Finally, the nature of results and culture of publication and citation behaviour is a further consideration. Research areas where results are rapidly obsolete and use many references per article, such as the medical sciences or physics are favoured over disciplines such as mathematics.

Table 2. Comparative Citation Rankings Based on Monographs (books) and Journal Articles, 1985-1993

Name	Monograph (book) rank	Journal rank	Name	Monograph (book) rank	Journal rank
Durkheim, E.	1	3	Foucault, M.	13.5	12
Janowitz, M.	2.5	21	Wallerstein, I.	13.5	15
Weber, M.	2.5	1	Lenin, V.I.	16	22
Freud, S.	4	16	Giddens, A.	18.5	4
Portes, A.	5	11	Park, R.E.	18.5	18.5
Parsons, T.	6	2	Shils, E.	18.5	20
Marx, K.	7	7	Tilly, C.	18.5	8
Lipset, S.	8	9	Hechter, M.	21	17
Goffman, E.	9.5	5	Bradbury, T.N.	22.5	26
Habermas, J.	9.5	13	Merton, R.K.	22.5	6
Berger, P.	11	10	Bell, D.	25	14
Burgoyne, J.	13.5	25	Glazer, N.	25	18.5
Fincham, F.D.	13.5	23	Rose, R.	25	24

*Notes: Spearman's rho = .4402 (N=26)m Sig. .024 (2 tail test)*

*Source: Cronin, Snyder and Atkins (1997: 269, Table 7).*

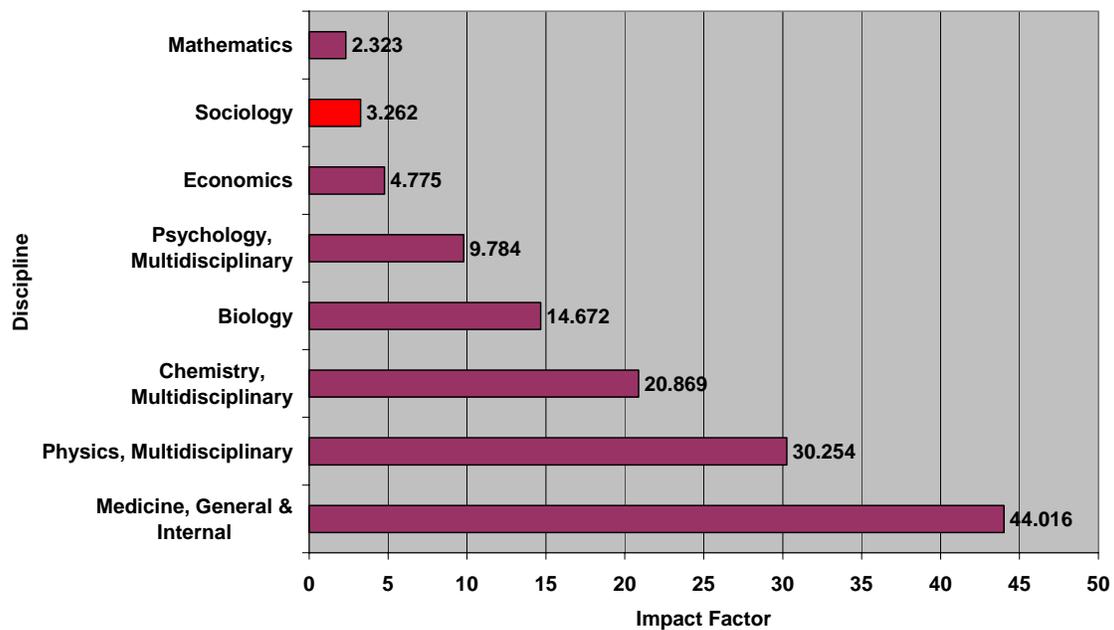
### **Discussion: The Consequence of these Indicators for the Discipline of Sociology**

The underlying premise of the quality indicators of journal impact and citation frequency is that it measures the overall quality of scientific publications. These quality indicators are easily attainable and a seemingly objective and quantitative measure of scientific achievement. For this reason, they are increasingly used in many countries to evaluate individual researchers, institutions and universities.

This article explored the calculation of these indicators and key criticisms. When using these indexes as a gauge of quality it is important to be aware that particular journals fare better such as those with a broader focus, with more review articles, are written in the English-language and are American-based. It is questionable whether the impact factor measures merely the quantity or actually the quality of publications. It also has further limitations such as the three-year window when calculating journal impact factors and the fact that only a few key articles are repeatedly cited, meaning that journal impact factors do not adequately statistically represent individual journal articles. Key critiques include the

limitation of the database and bias to the english language, reliance on only journal articles at the expense of books and the inclusion of incorrect and self-citations. There also appears to be a great deviation in the way that scientists in different cultures and disciplines ‘do science’. Americans appear to be more prone to self-citation and citing one another, which increases their presence in these indicators and the dominance of American journals. Other factors to consider are the absolute number of researchers and journals within certain disciplines, the number of authors, citation habits, article length and speed at which results become obsolete.

Figure 1. Comparison of Journal Impact Factor by Selected Disciplines, 2005



Source: *Journal Citation Reports* (graph produced by author).

In spite of the many criticisms and flaws, these impact factors appear to be only growing in their influence. The reliance on these indicators has several consequences. Libraries may use it to select relevant journals for their collections, thereby reinforcing the importance and use of prominent journals. More importantly, it inevitably impacts the publication behaviour of sociologists. Under these conditions, the natural tendency is to attempt to publish in journals that have the maximum impact when more specialist journals may actually be more efficient and are better vehicles for the dissemination of ideas and results. The consequence is that specialized fields or unpopular topics will become even more marginalized. This system also influences the type and potentially even the subject matter of research that is published, due to the fact that articles need to be written for a broader, largely American-based audience and appeal and be relevant to this readership. The question of local relevance, particularly for non-english language scientists becomes a very real one. A positive impact of this system is the fact that sociologists are forced to place local arguments, behaviour and context into a broader international perspective. This can be useful not only for their own research, but also for practitioners and policy-makers who are

suddenly forced to ‘think outside of the box’ and seek different solutions to cope with local social problems. There is also a dark side as authors from smaller countries have difficulty ‘selling’ the relevance of their particular social situation or context to a broader international audience. This article demonstrates that it is vital to be cautious of how these quality indicators are calculated and draws attention to their potential limitations.

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<sup>i</sup> An essential text for this new communitarianism is Amitai Etzioni (ed. 1998), *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (Boulder: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers).

<sup>ii</sup> Within the liberal tradition, the most explicit articulation of the idea of an ‘exit’ clause is in conjunction with multiculturalism, see Kymlicka (1995). For different ‘Asian’ positions against liberal multiculturalism see Kymlicka and He (2005).

<sup>iii</sup> For a discussion on the idea of ‘kampong’ see Chua (1995), and for ‘mutual assistance’ see Bowen (1986).

<sup>iv</sup> Furthermore, Singapore has sought to inscribe the ‘communitarian’ ideology as the national ideology in the guise of ‘Shared Values’ among the citizens, and in terms of ‘Asian Values’ in the presentation of its values to the outside world. On communitarian, Asian and Shared Values in the political rhetoric of the single-party dominant state of Singapore, see Chua (1995a).

<sup>v</sup> All the examples listed here have been analysed in detail as country case studies by different local authors in the book edited by Chua (2004).

<sup>vi</sup> This summary account is intended for those unfamiliar with Sri Lanka’s recent political history and should be read in conjunction with the Time Chart appended at the end. It does not purport to be an objective account insofar as my personal subjectivity is implicated in

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the review – as indicated by my opening paragraphs and Roberts 1994b. Constraints of space restrict the comprehensiveness of the coverage.

<sup>vii</sup> See CR de Silva 1974 & 1979; and Sabaratanam 2001: 199-207.

<sup>viii</sup> Sabaratnam 2001: 198-99 and personal knowledge.

<sup>ix</sup> One adamant voice from within the fringe of Ceylon Studies Seminar was WI Siriweera of the History Dept. Significantly he was then seen as a rising star within SLFP circles, while his siblings were all secondary school teachers; and his lineage was from Matara in the southern low country, but his father was involved in tobacco cultivation in the up country dry zone (his father's death revealing all these details to me).

<sup>x</sup> In my impressionistic assessment and in relative terms, cross-ethnic friendships, and occasionally even marriages, were best developed in Protestant and Catholic circles as well as the lowest order of slums and shanty towns in urban areas (and also in some mid-country and low country plantation districts between “Indian Tamils” and Sinhalese).

<sup>xi</sup> See Russell's eventual book (1982).

<sup>xii</sup> I was partially correct insofar as I was pointing in the right direction; but also wrong insofar as the displacements and deaths in Sri Lanka have been far greater.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Roberts 1977 as well as my articles in the edited collection 1979. Sinhala sentiments, sometimes nestling within Ceylonese nationalism and at other times running alongside, were more significant than Tamil sentiments in the challenges to the British Raj. While Tamil communitarian feelings existed, the Tamil spokesmen rarely referred to themselves as a “nation” in English-speak (see Roberts 1999). On this issue I am restricted by my inability to read/speak Tamil and the fact that secondary historical work into Tamil vernacular expressions in the first three quarters of the twentieth century is conspicuous by its absence.

<sup>xiv</sup> See Roberts 1999 and 2002 as well as Wilson 1994.

<sup>xv</sup> See some of my chapters within the edited volume (Roberts 1979).

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ilam* or *Eelam* was originally the Tamil word for the whole island.

<sup>xvii</sup> Kearney, 1967, K. M. de Silva 1986, C. R. de Silva 1987, Jeyaraj 1993, and Sabaratanam 2001.

<sup>xviii</sup> Reuters report under heading, “Sri Lanka rebel compares new president to old enemy,” 19 November 2005, accessed via [www.LankaAcademic.org](http://www.LankaAcademic.org).

<sup>xix</sup> See Wilson 1975 and Roberts 1978: 94-95. The influence of communal arguments at the general elections of 1970 has been underestimated. Note, too, the effect during the elections of subterranean activity by some JVP elements in favour of the United Left Front. The JVP was a “New Left” force that reared its head in revolt against the United Front government one year later. One can say that in all its manifestations THEN it was a child of the “Old Left” on the one hand and the 1956 populist resurgence of Sinhala linguistic nationalism on the other. This combination has been quite deadly and wholly inimical since then to the interests of the Sri Lanka Tamils.

<sup>xx</sup> This argument is spelt out in Roberts 1978a, but also see Wilson 1975 and Sabaratnam 2001: 197 or any general work on Sri Lanka's history.

<sup>xxi</sup> Schalk pours scorn on my previous (1996: 252-54) depiction of Sivakumaran as a martyr on the ground that such a term was never deployed then in 1974 (I did not say this). “Civakumaran was never a member of the TNT-LTTE. It is therefore a mistake to inflate

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the importance of Civakumaran for the study of Ilavar [SLT] ideology.” He insists that Celvam Pakin was the first LTTE martyr by cyanide suicide on 18 May 1984 (Schalk 1997b: 60-61). But, as I indicate later in my article, Sivakumaran was soon incorporated into the LTTE’s pantheon of martyrs (*māvīrar*).

<sup>xxiii</sup> I was initially led to the implications of this act and the meaning of the term *irrata(t) tilakam* in the unpublished work by Ramanathapillai (1991: 46), but Schalk provides the correct transliteration and correct meaning. Note that in 1977 when the Tamil poet and TULF youth leader, Kāsi Anandan, emerged as a hero after two years in jail and campaigned for the TULF at the general election, he was received warmly "at every public appearance" where youthful admirers "cut their hands with blades and put an *irrata(t) tilakam* on [Anandan’s forehead]"-- on such a scale that his shirt was bloodied (Ramanathapillai 1991). Anandan now works for and within the LTTE enterprise and is one of their poets laureate. In Chennai he has been “feted with the title that loosely translates a 'emotional poet', a honour earlier bestowed on one of our greatest poets Bharatidasan” (email note from Maya Ranganathan, 27 Nov 2005).

<sup>xxiiii</sup> Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran were assassinated in Colombo in July 1989. Note that already in the 1970s the TULF had become “the object of satire and caricature among the more radical organizations” and was sometimes derided as the “Tamil United Lawyers’ Front” (Sabaratnam 2001: 213, 000).

<sup>xxiv</sup> *National Geographic*, January 1979, p.138 and Narayan Swamy 1994: 46n.4 and grapevine gossip which I picked up in the early 1980’s when I was working on the Asokan Persona and running an argument about the personification of symbolic figures through statues. Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851-1930) was a lawyer from a distinguished Tamil family who was elected as a representative for the Educated Ceylonese seat in the Legislative Council in 1912 and 1916. Subsequently, he expressed concerns regarding the position of the Tamils in the future as devolution gathered pace in the 1920s, spoke of potential Sinhalese domination and opposed the extension of universal suffrage in 1931. Though an arch conservative who was viewed as a reactionary by the Jaffna Youth League of the 1930s, today he has been ‘resurrected’ as a visionary by some Tamils. It may be significant that in November 2004 the *māvīrar mandapam* (great hero shed) at the Jaffna University campus at Tirunelvely was located beside the statue of Ramanathan (see Figure 2 in Roberts 2005: 78).

<sup>xxv</sup> I have one such in my possession.

<sup>xxvi</sup> On this event see Kanapathypillai 1990 and Roberts 1994b.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994a: 169 & *passim* and Narayan Swamy 1994: 72ff, 115-53.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Personal communications from S. Sivadasan (a senior administrator) and Prof K. Sivathamby (August 2005) respectively.

<sup>xxix</sup> Thus I agree with Mia Bloom (2005: 45, 58-59) on this point rather than the pathetic effort made to dismiss its significance on the basis of poor empirical knowledge by Robert Pape (2005: 139-40).

<sup>xxx</sup> Schalk 1997a: 64 and Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994a: 177.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Narayan Swamy 2003: 201-02, 109. Narayan Swamy says this policy was adopted in 1984. I have no means of verifying all the information in his book (though I am sure that a proportion of his facts would be wrong—that being the nature of the historical beast).

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Schalk 1997a: 74. “We are married to our cyanide,” said one LTTE publication in Tamil (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994b: 67). Also see Schalk 1997b: 62-63. Schalk notes that the cyanide vials are manufactured in Germany.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Interview with S. Rajanayagam (b. 1908) in Adelaide, 7 January 2004. On *arppanippu* (also *arppanam* and *arppani*), see Schalk 1997a: 66 and Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2005: 123ff

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Schalk 1997a: 67. The Tamil word *tiyaki* (also written as *tiyahi*) is one of the terms used by the LTTE to convey the idea of martyr though other words are also used according to Schalk. Schalk stresses that this concept “does not exactly correspond to what in Judeo-Christian tradition is meant by ‘martyr and ‘martyrdom’.” (1997: 67). The term *tiyaki* is related to the Sanskrit word *tyagi*. Both were deployed in colonial India to describe the Indian freedom fighters of the anti-British struggle. It is probably from this intellectual thread and the representations surrounding the life and times of Subhas Chandra Bose that Prabhakaran and his associates adopted this term for their personnel. Christian missionaries and Christian Tamils used the terms *cāti* (pronounced *sātsi*) or *ratacāti* as the term for “martyr” (Schalk 1997a: 66, 80 & 1997b as well as my Tamil and Christian informants). Hellmann-Rajanayagam elaborates on the diversity of Tamil concepts used to express the notion of heroic action and martyrdom, including *ikam*, *vittutal*, *arppanam* (2005: 115, 123ff).

<sup>xxxv</sup> For e.g., see Chandrakanthan 2002: 164, Roberts 2005: 13 & fn.41 and Luthra 2006.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Narayan Swamy 1994: chs. 7 & 8 and 2003: 132-49. Also Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1994b: 42-48, 138.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The LTTE leadership was also convinced that the *kuppi* gave them a motivational edge in battle: “As long as we have this cyanide around our neck, we have no need to fear any force on earth! ... In reality this gives our fighters an extra measure of belief in the cause, a special edge; it has instilled in us a determination to sacrifice our lives ... for the cause” said Kittu during his interview with Peter Schalk (1997a: 76). This comment points to the indoctrination of recruits, while revealing how the commanders are themselves true believers who had internalised these attitudes. On this important issue, also see Trawick 1997: 169-70 and Sabaratnam 2001: 207.