RESEARCH ONLINE

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Arts - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

2001

Re-telling 'Us': Researching the Lives of Singaporean Women

Lenore T. Lyons
University of Wollongong, lenorel@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

Lyons, LT, Re-telling 'Us': Researching the Lives of Singaporean Women, in S. Blackburn (ed), Love, sex and power: Women in Southeast Asia, Monash University Press, Clayton, 2001, 115-128.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

RESEARCH ONLINE

Re-telling 'Us':
Researching the lives of Singaporean women

Feminist scholars have long been interested in the politics of speech acts. Early calls for a 'feminist methodology' were premised on a claim that in order to overcome the bias of malestream science, women should write about their own lives and experiences. Feminists asserted that androcentrism had as much to do with who was conducting the research as what was under investigation. Growing criticism that feminists themselves had replicated such practices in their writings about 'other' women signalled a renewed interest in the politics of speech. This interest is based on an acknowledgment that women are "not politically equal, and, given that politics is connected to truth, all are not epistemically equal" (Alcoff, 1991:14-15). Acts of speech are problematic because we are all located within structures of oppression. For this reason there has been a concern to distinguish between two interrelated practices - speaking for others and speaking about others. Speaking about others is an act of representation ('participating in the construction of their subject-positions') and thus a process of interpretation (Alcoff, 1991:9). In contrast, speaking for or on behalf of others is a process of appropriation (taking on aspects of the Other's identity/experience) and thus deception (Gunew, 1993). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) describes the difference between these two forms of representation as that between a portrait and a proxy, and calls on feminists to disavow the latter. While many women may accept the moral and ethical imperative to relinquish claims to 'speak for' other women while continuing to 'speak about' them, others claim that they have a political responsibility as feminists to speak when other women cannot. Two common responses to the claim that it is unethical to speak for/about others that have developed out of this debate. The first is an admonishment to speak only about oneself, the second is to engage in a brief autobiographical sketch that is at once a delineation of identity and an excuse to speak. Both of these 'solutions' are problematic because they rely on understandings of fixed identity that overlook the complexity of our locations within structures of white hegemony. The question is not, as Spivak (1988) points out, whether the subaltern can speak, but who can speak, who will listen, and how?

In this paper I draw on my own fieldwork experiences in Singapore to explore a range of issues to do with 'speaking positions'. In doing so I argue for an alternative to the strategies of silence and/or autobiography employed in much cross-cultural feminist writing. Instead, I argue for the need to

speak the Self in relation to the Other. This is a practice which focuses on the construction of subjectivity rather than on the fixedness of identity. It insists on acknowledging the ways in which the Other is also a part of the Self. As Erica Burman (1996:140) comments:

> If the Others I represent are in some respects also me then *my* representation of *them* should reflect on its process. Rather than the voyeuristic, spec(tac)ular logic of the one-way mirror beloved of psychology, it should present new perspectives on the disciplinary matrix that makes us as well as them.

In exploring the ways in which Self and Other are constructed within the research process, I draw on Liz Stanley's (1990, 1992, 1993a, 1993b) notion of auto/biography. Stanley (1993b:[1]) uses this term in order to dispute "the conventional genre distinction between biography and autobiography, as well as the divisions between self/other, public/private, and immediacy/memory". By highlighting the intertextuality of autobiography and biography, auto/biography involves an active reflection on ourselves - a re-telling of ourselves through the other: "In writing another's life we also write or rewrite our own lives; in writing about ourselves we also construct ourselves as somebody different from the person who routinely and unproblematically inhabits and moves through social space and time" (Morgan, 1998:[5]). Liz Stanley (1990:62) calls on us to make our 'intellectual biographies' explicit in the text; to show "how we come to understand what we do, by locating acts of understanding in an explication of the grounded contexts these are located in and arise from". Such biographies are thus a "set of practices or methodological procedures, rather than a kind of data set" (Stanley, 1993b:[3]).

But, auto/biography is not a 'solution' to the problems posed by the politics of speech. It is both a description of the what feminist research is - a "weaving of the stories of both the researcher and her respondents" (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993:[2]) - as well as a method for bringing such textual strategies to the fore. The same questions remain - how to speak the Other and present the Self without becoming complicit in the violently appropriative colonising practices associated with what Spivak (1988, 1990) labels 'epistemic violence'? What it does provide me with, however, is a methodological framework within which to explicate my own positionality. Rather than a narrative of 'who I am' (and by association, why *I* should/can carry out this research), it is an account of how my researching self stumbled and struggled with the question of positionality.

Snapshots of Self/Other

This discussion centres around the fieldwork I conducted as part of my doctoral research on a Singaporean feminist organisation, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE). Formed in 1985, AWARE is an openly multi-racial organisation with research, service and advocacy arms. There are currently over 600 members, with full membership open to female Singaporean citizens and permanent residents over 21 years of age. Male Singaporeans, as well as foreign men and women without permanent residency may join as associate members or 'Friends of AWARE'. Singaporeans make up approximately 81 per cent of the entire membership. While AWARE does not collect data on the 'race' of its members, women from all major ethnic groups are reflected in the membership - Chinese, Indian, Malay[1], Eurasian, and 'foreigners'. Occupational data from the membership records shows that 65 per cent of members are employed in professional, technical, administrative, executive and managerial positions (middle-class). Another 22 per cent are employed in clerical, sales and service areas (working-class), with 13 per cent not-employed for a wage (including unemployed, retired, home-makers, and students). None of the women are employed in production or labouring positions. Based on predominant identifiers of class labels in Singapore – occupation, income, education, English speaking - these women are firmly located within the middle-class and upper middle-class and the majority of women self-identified as such. The majority of AWARE members are aged below 50 years (88%). This pattern is replicated when age is distributed according to Singaporean nationality and is a reflection of Singapore's generally younger population (see Wong and Leong 1993). Non-Singaporean members tend to be older than the local women, and over half of the membership is married.

I have chosen to describe the organisation according to a series of common 'identity markers', thus replicating the preoccupation within feminist theory with delineating the boundaries between Self and Other. Using a traditional feminist methodology, I could juxtapose this biographical sketch against my own autobiography, highlighting the numerous ways in which AWARE members may be the same as or different to me as 'outside' researcher. This comparison would both authenticate my speech acts, at the same time that it formed a corollary to my conclusions. My interest here, however, is not so much in the points of intersection between our 'identities', but in the interaction between my researching Self and those members of AWARE who informed my study. These moments of interaction provide an opportunity for telling 'our' story. This is a story, however, which is not to be confused with the final research output. The research dissertation, just like this

paper, is ultimately 'my' story. But it is a story which is mediated by a strong concern for researcher reflexivity, and particularly the writing of 'their' stories through my own. This brief snapshot of the association provides a context within which my auto/biography takes place.

July 1994, Identity Paralysis

> Did I, as a white Australian woman, have any place in the analysis of the women's movement in Singapore? ... Did I have a *right*? This question had not been raised by any Singaporean woman, nor by the postgraduate studies board, nor by my supervisor - and yet it persisted, this dull, nagging concern. Where did it come from? Everything would be so much easier if it disappeared; I could get on with the *real* research - the fieldwork (Lyons-Lee, 1995:233).

In a society where 'whiteness' is often only acknowledged via black anger (and thus the reminder of white hegemoony), 'white' as an identity label can become paralysing. The growing sense of frustration witnessed in this paper written at the start of my doctoral candidature grew from a fixation on the identity 'white Australian woman'. I attribute it to an academic reading of ethnocentrism, racism and the post-colonial project, and not from a reflection on my personal experiences as a researcher. I was about to begin the fieldwork for a study of the women's movement in Singapore. The focus of my research was on a feminist organisation, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) of which I had been a member for over 2 years. I migrated to Singapore in 1992 upon my marriage to a Singaporean Chinese, and joined AWARE in an effort to meet local women who 'thought like me' about women's issues. More importantly, AWARE offered me a way of thinking about (and perhaps even 'escaping' from?) the oppressiveness of the Chinese extended family that then shaped my conception of Self/'identity'.

In returning to Australia to begin my doctoral candidature I literally escaped my Chinese family as I re-learnt what it meant to be the eldest daughter in my Anglo-working-class (birth) family. But, by adopting and embracing the fixed identity 'white Australian woman' as I grappled with questions of positionality in my work, I ignored the complexity of my location *between* Singapore and Australia. My unease with speaking the Other contradicted my membership of the category 'AWARE member' at the same time that it hid the day-to-day family obligations that would characterise the 'fieldwork' experience at 'home' in Singapore. I would continue to live as a member of an extended family in the home of my parents-in-law. As the wife of the eldest, only son, I was expected to

perform a range of household duties and defer to the views and wishes of his parents - to become the Singaporean Chinese 'daughter-in-law'.

This contradiction - occupying positions of both Self and Other - acts to undermine the logic of binary and to showcase the contingencies of multiple subjectivity. Thus while I attempted to occupy a position of white, Australian sociologist with respect to my 'subjects', I was continually located as white, Singaporean permanent resident, AWARE member by the friends and acquaintances whom I interviewed. In fact, it was this latter identity that provided me with access to their lives and experiences. The process of asking questions was both a sign of my commitment to AWARE and an opportunity for other AWARE members to think about the significance of their own membership. This is not to suggest, however, that my motivations were unquestioned. I sought permission from the AWARE Executive Committee (many of whom did not know me) and was queried on numerous occasions about issues of confidentiality and the use of data. But, these were questions about the research process itself (my identity as researcher), and not the issue of my whiteness (my identity as white researcher). Some women were interested in my background because it was the reverse of the typical Caucasian-Asian relationship (ie. I was unusual and interesting, and therefore a source of further speculation); or because it made me 'pretty much a Singaporean' who would therefore 'know' and 'understand' what they were saying without further need for elaboration.

At the same time, however, I acknowledge that as signifiers of privilege, the markers anglo/asian do say something important about access to resources, the exercise of power, as well as control over the production of knowledge. However, the markers of domination/subordination are much less apparent, and the discussion of privilege much more fraught, in the analysis of Southeast Asia, than they are in the analysis of black/white relations in settler societies[2]. The history of Australia's relationship with Southeast Asia is characterised by a shared colonial experience, the former as a very white British outpost, the latter as pawns in a European game of power and appropriation. White Australia gained independence from the Mother Country at the turn of the century, and retains the British monarch as head of state. Australia remains, however, on the periphery of the Euro-American core and Australian whiteness is thus marginal in relation to world-hegemonic whiteness (Ang, 1995:69). This has led Meaghan Morris (1992) to describe it as a 'non-metropolitan, postcolonial whiteness' or a 'white settler subjectivity' that moves uneasily between coloniser and colonised identities. At the same time, however, the homogenising act of speaking about 'white'

Australia masks a tension within white Australian femininity – between the construction of native experience (immigrants are non-natives) and colonial history ('we' are white invaders). By glossing over the signifier 'other', white Australians gloss over the complexity of the signifier 'white'. In the process, "the differing relations between indigenous peoples and various groups of settlers remains unaddressed, and … the Anglo centre – *its* problems and concerns pertaining to identity and difference – remains the main focus of attention" (Ang, 1995:71).

The nations of Southeast Asia fought for and variously gained independence as republics in the decades after the Second World War. The privilege of colour meant that Australians accorded themselves a measure of status in their dealings with their nearest neighbours at the same time as they worried about the threat of invasion. This is no more apparent than in the policies surrounding the discriminatory 'White Australia' immigration policy up until the 1970s; policies that existed alongside collective memories of shared battle (the Kakoda Trail, Changi Prison). But the transformation of global capital in the last two decades has seen the Southeast Asian economies outstrip the Australian economy until very recently, at the same time that it has facilitated Asian investment locally. Australian businesses compete internationally for Asian investment dollars, even as sections of the Australian public worry about the transformation (and perhaps asianisation) of their own culture. The meanings associated with being a white Australian in Singapore must also be read against the rhetoric of nation building within the Singapore state, in particular, against the threat of 'westernisation' and the consequent call to strengthen Asian values. The identity 'western feminist' has become an important signifier in this battle to maintain social and economic cohesion within Singapore (Lyons, in press).

I am not suggesting that the research was easier or that questions of positionality were less fraught because I possessed a certain amount of 'insider' knowledge. Positionality is equally problematic for those who occupy spaces 'in-between'. Nor am I suggesting that a 'solution' to the problems of positionality is to be found in itemising similarities and differences and thus showcasing who I can speak about and who I can't. Rather, what I want to argue is that concentrating on a fixed identity, often built around a binary, does little to further a discussion of speaking positions. What we need to do as feminist researchers, is to interrogate those spaces of interaction between our research selves and our researched others. We need to explain what they mean for our research, and not leave them out because they are too messy or because they are easier to deal with in an autobiographical narrative. It was only as I began to reflect on what I shared (and did not share)

with my respondents that I began to give up my investment in the fixed identity 'white, Australian woman'.

November 1997, Transnational Border Crossings

> My engagement with the identity 'feminist' began as a child with the proclamation that not only would I never marry, but I would definitely never have children. My mother encouraged me to 'live and learn' before I made the mistake of marrying young, as she had. Newly married (at the age of 23), living in the claustrophobia of what is the Chinese extended family, and teaching sociology to Singaporean undergraduates, I began a tentative reading of feminist texts. They merely supported what I already *knew*. Seeking the company of women, I joined the slightly radical Association of Women for Action and Research. Later, reading more extensively, I began to realise that my white feminist 'sisters' were saying little about my own experiences of feminist activism. Trinh T. Minh-ha and bell hooks were making much more sense (Fieldnotes, November 1997).

It is difficult for me to identify clearly subordinate or dominant positionalities within the interlocking histories of colonialism, racism, capitalism, and nationalism that define my location between Australia and Singapore. Instead of relying on the static dualisms constantly reinvoked in white feminism's accounts of difference, I find the concept of transnational border crossing useful in exploring what it means to be a white Australian woman studying women in Singapore. In doing so, I draw on the work of Mayfair Young (1994:27) who describes her location as an American-born Chinese doing fieldwork in China in the following way: she sees herself as an immigrant to the West and an exile from China (*huaqiao*) and an exile from the West and an immigrant to China.

> The anthropologist must seek to become not only like the exile who gains a certain perspective on his or her own culture while residing in another culture but also like an immigrant who starts to absorb a new subjectivity, interprets the world from its standpoints, and acts on its historical concerns as if she were a new member of that culture. Understanding and engaging with native self-interpretations of historical context and native self-critiques is a step toward dissolving the monolithic Western subject of knowledge, whether this subject is engaged in self-promotion or self-critique (Young, 1994:28).

Young accepts rather than rejects the process of 'going native' (as opposed to understanding the native's point of view) and believes that in this way she is contributing to the "larger movement of decentring the Western knowing subject" (1994:29). In her writing of the Self/Other, the language of the traveller, the tourist, the immigrant and the exile surface and re-emerge in different configurations of the same narrative. Anne Wollett (1996) also uses the concept of movement to

deconstruct the insider/outsider binary. Whereas Young uses the metaphor of travel, Wollett focuses on temporal change - she examines the way her identity changes over time. Instead of always seeing herself as an 'infertile woman' doing research on other infertile women, as Wollett develops her own non-mothering identities and interests, she begins to see herself as a 'childless woman'. Her previous positionality as an infertile woman, however, provides her with an insider's view into the lives of her subjects, even as she now constructs herself as an outsider (Wollett, 1996:71). In this way, both time and place serve to reinscribe how the researcher sees herself and others. By exploring the interplay between Self and Other, the researcher avoids the tendency to describe identity as fixed or static, while at the same time exploring points of connection between 'us' (see Singh, 1994).

Within the narratives that I construct about myself, several interlinked 'identities' (among a repertoire of many others) emerge as dominant - AWARE member, Singapore permanent resident, Chinese daughter-in-law, Australian sociologist. As signifiers of fixed location, these 'identities' are employed momentarily to form brief auto/biographies, and are held together by a narrative of travel. In speaking (writing), I am not simply arranging prior essential or individual qualities, but rather inscribing those very positionings. The process of relating the various elements of my fragmented subjectivity allows me to explore that part of me which is an immigrant to Singapore and that part of me which returns to Australia (in exile?) from Singapore to write. While I bring something of my western self with me to the field, I am also an immigrant and in accepting and taking on aspects of my Singaporeanness I am able to introduce elements of 'native' subjectivity. Rather than acting as signifiers of 'insider status' these markers of my identity offer me an insight into 'Singaporeanness' that is invaluable in decentring the objectivist stance of the western educated ethnographer and also allows me to reinscribe my analysis with native self-critique. My membership of AWARE is an important part of how I see myself as a feminist, and is an important way of retaining contact with the Singaporean part of me as I live and work in Australia. In writing, the Australian sociologist part of me articulates theoretical and methodological concerns, but when I speak of 'AWARE members' I am often speaking of/for myself. Thus, in theorising my own identity location (subjectivity), I employ a quasi-historical narrative with little recourse to the stagnant categories of race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality. In this way I disrupt the process of Self/Other inscription that reduces my identity to 'white, western, middle-class, heterosexual'. Such a narrative provides me with the freedom to explore both connections and divisions and thus re-affirms a sense of self built across time, space and memory.

If the researcher's 'Self' is constructed of and through the process of interaction with the research subject, what does this tell us about the nature of the research encounter, and in particular, about the 'authenticity' of the narratives that it produces? As I vowed not to 'speak for' the women I interviewed, they reminded me that I too was an 'AWARE member'. But, as I imbued them with authorial presence to speak for AWARE they claimed not to speak for the organisation or for other members, but only for their Selves. Paradoxically, when I pushed (!) them to provide a personal (*self*-reflexive) account of the inner organisational workings of AWARE, they resorted to a publicly acceptable 'party line'; they literally became the official spokeswomen of the association. When I began to critically reflect on internal disputes or NGO-state relations I was quickly reminded that it was my responsibility 'as an AWARE member' to protect the organisation from those who may wish to destroy it:

> When you write this, write it very carefully. [comments deleted]. That is for private consumption because Aware would be finished if this ever got out (Joan Fung)[3].
>
> So that's why we have to be very careful. That's why, even for your article, the comments about political parties [have to be] cut out. For your own sake as well as ours. It wasn't a good idea to publish it (Hannah Kassim).

In speaking 'for' AWARE, I was silenced; in not speaking for AWARE I was implicated in its destruction. In writing about AWARE then I became continuously confronted with the contingency and ambiguities of *our* identities. If my respondents could shift and transform before my eyes, and insisted that I do as well, how was I to write the truth of their stories?

As I began to write and reflect on the research experience, especially the stories that were told or un-told in the interviews, I began to draw my attention away from the search for the 'truth' of an interviewee's life history or AWARE's organisational history, to an understanding of how the research mediates the respondent's construction of her Self. Rather than seeing the interview as a technique which used correctly produces a successful outcome (authentic experience), I see the interview as a *process* such that the result is an 'unnatural conversation'. It is more appropriate to speak of interviews as conjunctural moments in which the interview subjects construct versions of themselves within a triangular relationship (represented by the interviewer, interviewee, and the audience) (Olson and Shopes, 1991). The interviewee constructs a version/s of herself during the interview for public viewing. The interviewer uses her interpretation of a version of the constructed

other to examine the socio-cultural milieu. While it is true that interviewees may construct different images of the Self in consecutive interviews (and this is not always the case), they do so with a continual knowledge of the public nature of their account. For this reason the interview process does not resemble the slow process of peeling back layers of skin to reveal the authentic Self, a self that has been carefully guarded. As Ruth Frankenberg (1993:41) states: "An interview is not, in any simple sense, the telling of a life so much as it is an incomplete story angled toward my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and of how the world works". Claims to positionality must always be challenged on the basis that the relationship is fragile and ever-changing. This was brought home to me by the words of one of my respondents as she reflected on a previous interview and how it had changed for conception of self. Ng Soo Chin says:

> Oh, that was the question you asked, right? And then, I actually wrote a very long paragraph and I actually wrote it in my diary. I don't know if I've got it with me. Wait. Because I thought it was actually quite good, I'm going to write this down and if people ask me later on then I can just read it off you see (Ng Soo Chin).

For Soo Chin, a moment of interview conversation became a narrative of identity to be re-enacted and performed in other contexts – contexts in which I was not involved.

In writing for/about AWARE it has become necessary for me to write about how the interview, the research, the text, and the audience require my respondents and I to position ourselves in certain ways. It is this understanding of both Self/Other and Self/text that has helped me to re-examine my claims to speak about AWARE. In particular, the interview moment provides me with an opportunity to speak (write) about 'us'. This allows me to speak *with* as well as about and for AWARE members. In speaking *with* AWARE members I have located myself within a transnational narrative which at once both challenges and accepts their knowledge of my Self. At the same time, I am wary of inserting myself too vigorously in case I run a steamroller over her expectations (see Lyons and Collins). I acknowledge that their 'stories' (and my own) have been constructed for consumption by myself and Others. By returning the transcripts I allow (encourage?) my respondents to re-write their Selves. By returning my analysis (in the form of papers and reports) I open-up the opportunity for 'our' story to be re-told in other ways. I am concerned, however, that in writing I maintain a 'delusion of alliance' (Stacey, 1988); that the authorial 'I' retains the balance of power. But, it is that discomfort with writing/speaking that

should define the research process; I would be worried if it disappeared. As an AWARE friend and colleague says,

> I feel awkward with it most of the time too. But at another level, you say therefore I should shut up, where is that going to get us? It's quite a serious problem. The strength of it is that the awareness of yourself and what you are doing and your discomfort with it. To be uncomfortable is a value in this case, very strongly (Mehta Vasil).

Conclusion

In this paper I have explored my own place in constructing narratives about the lives of 'other' women. Drawing on an understanding of identity that is both contingent and fluid, I argue against static or fixed conceptions of us/them, white/black, self/other. In doing so, I draw on notions of multiple subjectivity and hybridity. At the same time, however, I warn that simply embracing multiplicity or fluidity as a way of reconciling difference ('we really are the same, really'), overlooks our embeddedness in structures of domination and oppression. The telling of an/other's life history is always a re-telling of our own - whether we acknowledge our identity location or not. In talking about 'her' the researcher inevitably says something about her Self. The danger is that in (re)telling herstory white feminists re-create and re-inscribe structures of subordination/domination. But, breaking down power relations is premised on much more than an assertion of past/present guilt or a statement of fixed location. It involves speaking the Other in relation to the Self.

This process of writing our multiple selves must be contextualised within narratives of the Other. Such a practice requires a fundamental re-examination of our commonly held beliefs about knowledge, narrative, and truth. It is a practice in which the very structuredness of our 'conversations' with 'others' becomes the point for a reflection on 'meaning' and not an assertion of authenticity. By exploring the interplay between Self and Other, I avoid the tendency to describe identity as fixed or static, while at the same time exploring points of connection between 'us'; the process of self-construction takes place in and through the telling of 'our' story. It involves seeing her as an active agent in the construction of narratives about her own life history, even as I re-tell 'her'. It is thus my 'difference' that becomes the focal point for a re-telling of 'us' - the moment of interchange in our life histories becomes a point of fragmentary alliance.

References

Alcoff, Linda (1991) "The Problem of Speaking for Others", *Cultural Critique*, Winter: 5-32.

Alridge, Judith (1993) "The textual disembodiment of knowledge in research account writing", *Sociology*, 27(1): 53(14).

Ang, Ien (1995) "I'm a feminist but . . . 'Other' women and postnational feminism", in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Burman, Erica (1996) "The Spec(tac)ular Economy of Difference", in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London: Sage Publications.

Cotterill, Pamela and Gayle Letherby (1993) "Weaving stories: personal auto/biographies in feminist research", *Sociology*, 27(1): 67(13).

Frankenberg, Ruth (1993) *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gunew, Sneja (1993) "Feminism and the politics of irreducible differences: Multiculturalism/ethnicity/race", in Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (eds), *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

Lyons-Lee, Lenore (1995) "Oh no, not *race* again!", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 20: 231-236.

Lyons, Lenore (1998) *Negotiating Difference: Constructing the Limits of Feminist Political Intervention*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Griffith University, Brisbane.

Lyons, Lenore (in press) "A State of Ambivalence: Feminism in Singaporean Women's Organisation", *Asian Studies Review*.

Lyons, Lenore and Janine Collins (1999) "(De)Constructing the Interview: A Critique of the Participatory Method", unpublished conference paper.

Morgan, David (1998) "Sociological imaginings and imagining sociology: bodies, auto/biographies and other mysteries", *Sociology*, 32(4): 647(11)

Morris, Meaghan (1992) "Afterthoughts on 'Australialism", *Cultural Studies*, 6(3): 468-475.

Olson, Karen, and Linda Shopes (1991) "Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: Doing Oral History among Working-class Women and Men", in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds), *Women's Words: the feminist practice of oral history*. New York: Routledge.

Singh, Parlo (1994) "Generating Literacies of 'Difference' from the 'Belly of the Beast'", *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 17(2): 92-100.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988) "Can the subaltern speak?", in C. Nelsoon and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1990) "Pracital Politics at the Open End", in S. Harasym (ed.), *The Postcolonial Critic*. London: Routledge.

Stacey, J (1988) "Can there be a feminist ethnography?", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11: 21-27.

Stanley, Liz (ed.) (1990) *Feminist praxis: Research, theory and epistemology in feminist sociology*. London: Routledge.

Stanley, Liz (1992) *The auto/biographical I: The theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stanley, Liz (1993a) "The Knowing Because Experiencing Subject: Narratives, Lives, and Autobiography", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 16(3):205-215.

Stanley, Liz (1993b) "On auto/biography in sociology", *Sociology*, 27(1): 41(12).

Stasiulis, Daiva, and Nira Yuval-Davis (1995) (eds), *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*. London: Sage.

Wollett, Anne (1996) "Infertility: From 'Inside/Out' to 'Outside/In'", in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London: Sage Publications.

Wong, Aline and Leong Wai Kum, (1993) (eds.) *A Woman's Place: The Story of Singapore Women*. Singapore: PAP Women's Wing.

Young, Mayfair Mei-hua (1994) *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

---

[1] Observation indicates that Malay women are under-represented in the organisation.

[2] I am using Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis' (1995:3) definition here of "societies in which Europeans have settled, where their descendants have remained politically dominant over indigenous peoples, and where a heterogeneous society has developed in class, ethnic and racial terms".

[3] These quotations are taken from the interview transcripts. All names used are pseudonyms chosen to reflect the use of ethnic language or Christian based names.