

Auto-Interviewing, Auto-Ethnography and Critical Incident Methodology for Eliciting a Self-Conceptualised Worldview

Béatrice Boufof-Bastick

Key words: auto-interviewing, auto-ethnography, critical incident methodology, worldview

Abstract: Knowing oneself has been an age-old humanistic concern for many western and oriental philosophers. The same concern is now shared by modern psychologists and anthropologists who seek to understand the "self" and others by elucidating their worldviews. This paper presents an auto-anthropological methodology which can effectively elucidate one's worldview. This introspective qualitative methodology uses integratively three methodological processes, namely auto-interviewing, auto-ethnography and critical incident technique to elicit baseline cultural data.

The paper reports on how this methodology was used to elicit my current worldview. It first explains how emic data were elicited and rendered in emotionally enhanced narratives, which were then deconstructed to elicit the major recurring themes in the etic interpretive content analysis. To illustrate this auto-anthropological methodology, two cultural life events have been used: a critical incident in Singapore and a consciousness raising process in Fiji. The first event revealed my own education ideology while the second made me realise my mitigated support for cultural diversity.

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1. Introduction

*Connaître les autres, c'est sagesse. Se
connaître soi-même, c'est sagesse
supérieure.
[Knowing others, it is wisdom. Knowing
oneself, it is superior wisdom].
Lao-Tze*

This paper has been motivated by the humanistic importance of knowing oneself. It introduces a qualitative methodology using auto-interviewing, auto-ethnography and critical incident methodology for eliciting self-conceptualised worldview. The paper follows a two-part reporting structure. The first part presents the anthropological methodological approach used. It provides a justification for using a critical auto-interviewing process methodology in Section 2.1. Then it gives an overview of the three-stage baseline cultural data collection and analysis for this autobiographical introspective study, that is emic reporting in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 and etic narrative analysis in Section 2.4. The second part of the paper uses auto-ethnography and reports two critical cultural incidents, then it explains how their cultural meanings were derived and incorporated into an evolving synergetic worldview. These interpretations were brought together to present my worldview model explaining my support for cultural diversity, linguistic plurality and inter-cultural tolerance. [1]

2. Describing the Process Method for Worldview Conceptualisation

This part of the paper describes three aspects of the methodology. First, it seeks to highlight the appropriateness and cultural sensitivity of auto-interview methodology for worldview conceptualisation in Section 2.1. Then, it expounds the two-step methodological process of emic auto-ethnography in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 addresses the subjectivity inherent to emic reporting. Finally, Section 2.4 provides a brief explanation of the etic exploratory analysis of biographical narratives. It introduces the etic critical incident biographical modality used to elicit worldview self-conceptualisation. [2]

2.1 Using a culturally responsive auto-interview methodology

The first duty of man, according to Socrates, is to know oneself (470-399 BC). Yet self-knowledge is not just a philosophical luxury, it is a modern necessity for rational action (COHEN 1992; 1994; DRETSKE 1999; GALLAGHER 2000; SHOEMAKER 1963; FOGELSON 1982; VERENE 1997). Introspection and reflection have come to be the time-honoured process by which we come to know ourselves (GARANDERIE 1989; HIXON & SWANN 1993; MONTEBELLO 1994; VARELA & SHEAR 1999; VERMERSCH 1999). However, without guidance, experience and patience this process can, for many, result in nothing more than nothing more than pointless self-absorbing introspective "navel gazing" excessive subjectivity and self-delusion. This paper brings together some more modern tools of qualitative enquiry to suggest a more rigorous process for uncovering the

royal road to self-knowledge—to shed light on ethical and ideological principles which have forged from lived experiences. [3]

The methodology used to uncover these principles and their ontogeny is critical auto-interviewing. Critical auto-interviewing is a process method which presupposes spontaneous reflexivity and critical awareness. This methodology recognises, from an anthropological perspective, that: "All knowledge ultimately reflects a set of norms and values about what is worth examining ..." (THOMAS 1993, p.21) and the values which direct our affective and cognitive responses (as illustrated in the Singaporean experience later described in Section 3.1). In other words, I was aware that what caught my attention, what stirred my emotion, and what I chose to report, were an expression of my own cultural code. So, from a socio-psychological perspective, by being the object of study I did not only learn about myself but also about my own society (STRATHERN 1987, p.17) and about its value system in which I had been enculturated. [4]

Another significant aspect of auto-interviewing is that it originated in historical research through oral history. As a process method, it was then used for the construction of individual history. This autobiographical paper followed that methodology and used the author's reconstructed life history exploratively to facilitate an insight into her evolving worldview. The value of this approach is that it helps to discover the "basic set of assumptions that gives meaning to one's thoughts ... the way things are, about what things are, about why things are" (BUSH 1991, p.16). I should also mention at this point that it is for this same purpose that I used a totalist view of culture to select critical cultural events which shaped my worldview. In other words, I referred to culture as the totality of a people's "way of life" including knowledge, beliefs and all forms of cultural expression, such as language, kinship structures, customs and cultural rituals, dress, art and music etc. (COHEN 1974; LEVINE 1975, p.213; TYLOR¹1958, p.1; VIVELO 1978, p.16). In this way, I could use my observations of cultural expressions as a departure point to ask myself the significance of these cultural phenomena which I observed. These observations served as baseline cultural phenomenological data. These observed phenomena were then analysed from a mentalist view of culture, described by VIVELO as "an ideational or conceptual system, i.e. as a shared system of knowledge and beliefs, by which people order their perceptions and experiences and make decisions, and in terms of how they act" (1978, p.17). This analysis was emically guided with the intent to penetrate the cultural milieu and unravel the symbolic significance of these observed phenomena for its members. The next section briefly outlines the two-step emic process for critical auto-interviewing in auto-ethnography. [5]

1 TYLOR's definition of culture (1958, p.1) has served many anthropologists' conceptualisation of culture. He describes culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

2.2 Auto-ethnographical process of emic reporting

The introspective ethnographic study was a two-step emic process of first memory recollection for gathering baseline data for subsequent transcription. Memory recollection used a visual mode of response to past lived experiences which prompted an immediate sensory response in the form of a wordless succession of colourful vivid images from the different cultures with which I interacted. A chain of visual flashes came to fill my mind with faces, objects, places, ritualistic behaviours like photographed images from many different places in Europe, Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean. These were the raw data used for transcription of self-generated emic data. [6]

The second emic step was to crystallise these fleeting visual memories by transcribing them into words to describe memorable events and create a vicarious experience² using GEERTZ's (1973)'s "thick description". The purpose was to create meaningful contextualised narratives for analysis³. As LAPLANTINE (1996, p.37) explicated this written descriptive rendering of the event is "une activité de construction et de traduction" [activity of construction and translation]. The experiential transcription into text formed the "narrative space" (DRESSEL & LANGREITER 2003) for the emic affectively guided identification of critical incidents recognising, on one hand, that "the past is a selective reconstruction" (RIESSMAN 1993, p.64) and, on the other hand, that narrativisation is inherently subjective. [7]

2.3 Subjectivity in emic reporting

Emic reporting was to make note of these recollected experiences hence to retrospectively draw up a log of major memorable events "to shift ... stance from the ethnographic emic gaze of the participant observer to an etic gaze of our own subjectivity" (SIEGISMUND 1999). To this effect, I described each event whilst being aware that the subjective recollection of the event enhanced the event itself. This enhancement helped in translating the events meaningfully into consistent spoken/written narratives (PESHKIN 1988; 1991). The narratives were used both as descriptive and interpretive methodological tools for constructing my personal history, thus (re)creating reality. These narratives formed transformative experiences which could be comprehended in their totality. I was aware, nevertheless, that by using a narrative methodology I would use rhetorical devices to present the self-image I intended to project, be it consciously or unconsciously, to the reader and myself. This implicit need for "impression management" (GOFFMAN 1974) in narrativising was dictated by the social

2 The specific characteristics of ethnographic description of ethnographic observations were expounded by LAPLANTINE (1996, p.27): "Si l'observation ethnographique est un rapport entre les objets, les êtres humains, les situations et les sensations provoquées chez le chercheur, la description ethnographique est donc l'élaboration linguistique de cette expérience" [if ethnographic observation is a relation between objects, human beings, situations and sensations provoked in the researcher, ethnographic description is thus the linguistic elaboration of this experience].

3 SARBIN (1986, p.19) advocated "contextualism" as an alternate worldview and claimed that narrative was useful for examining and interpreting human action.

expectations of my own culture (ALSOP 2002). I became the protagonist, the hero of an unavoidably subjective re-constructed multi-event life story (YOUNG 1987, pp.186-187). [8]

Subjectivity is inherent to emic narrative reporting. Emic reporting rests upon an enrichment of recollected past events of which the recollection is characteristically stronger, more intense than the past lived instances⁴. This is because the past is reconstructed according to the present (GRESLE et al. 1994, p.167) and the values embedded in my current ordered sense of reality. I was aware that I was reporting an emicly biased recollection of an event⁵, because on one hand, I interacted with the recall of that event, and on the other, my current worldview was permeating my telling of the event⁶. These emic perspectives, however, are central to self-reflective research (MRUCK & BREUER 2003). They have enabled me to effectively spawn my enhanced worldview through etic exploration. [9]

2.4 Etic exploratory analysis of biographical narratives

Emic biographical narratives were then analysed etically by restricting the focus on analytical content and excluding their wider integrating emotional connotations. The etic modality consisted in identifying meaningful critical incidents for eliciting my worldview self-conceptualisation. As an unbiased researcher I sought for critical cultural incidents in the narratives which seemingly had highlighted or affected my worldview. The purpose was to investigate the major ideological principles underlying my worldview⁷ (STITT-GOHDDES, LAMBRECHT & REDMANN 2000). [10]

The etic investigation followed WILLIS' (1977) organisational technique (as reported in GLESNE 1999, p.166) of separating narration from analysis. This was achieved by deliberately separating the affectively loaded descriptive reporting from the parallel interpretive analytical reporting. In this way, I gave an etic rationalisation of my emic experiences. For example, the recollection of a conversational exchange with a traditional Hindu Vice-principal (VP) on Vanua Levu island in Fiji instantly brought back the recollection of my inner emotive response to the telling of his daily domestic ritual. Although my emotion was

4 The intensity of the past lived experience results from the fact that one focuses on a specific event in an attempt to recreate in its totality, that is to see people and places, to hear people's voices, to feel the heat/cold, in an attempt to heuristically re-create and re-live a past experience. MOUSTAKAS (1990, p.39) explained that "The focus in heuristic quest is on recreation of the lived experience, full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person".

5 The lack of objectivity in life history telling due to the researcher's involvement with the research context is a major limitation. This was one of the criticisms of ethnographic research made by LEIRIS (1983, pp.85-86).

6 My worldview was itself permeating my narration of the event, it was my personal interpretation (AGAR & HOBBS 1982, p.1). In the narrative, I selectively described past events which were meaningful to me. The cultural meaning I attached to these selected events underpinned some of my major world view principles. As CORTAZZI (1993, p.42) remarked the narrator gives a "performance".

7 The analysis of the auto-biographical narratives was aimed to reveal the "(etic) social construction of the (emic) social constructions found and explicated in the data" (CHARMAZ 1990, p.1165).

contained and concealed at the time, the emic re-creation of the exchange magnified the emotive feeling. This expressed feeling was holistically interpreted from an etic perspective due to my culturally determined disapproval of starkly asymmetric gender relationships. The VP valued humility and respect from the married woman towards her husband. These values were illustrated in his description of the daily ritual performed by his wife—her kneeling by their conjugal bed before he arose in the morning, bowing respectfully to him and kissing his feet with reverence—and his subsequent acknowledgement—his obligingly resting his hand onto her head and munificently giving her his blessing. The recollected narrative was charged with overtly expressed emotive feeling and this emotion tainted my coding with subjectivity. Value judgements were then reflected in the open codings for the event: "gender inequality", "differential gender status", "male dominance", "woman submission", "cultural slavery". My interpretation of the narrative used my current values rooted in my native culture, that is I used value-loaded codes such as "cultural slavery" and "male dominance" to express my disapproval of women's culturally ascribed lower status. This interpretive stance was itself indicative of my social education and it was part of "the clusters of common concepts, emotions and practices" (BRUMANN 1995, p.1, cited in KOROTAYEV & DE MUNCK 2003, p.355) of my culture which shaped my worldview. [11]

In short, the interpretive analytical technique provided an etic rationalisation for emic experiences. This technique has, however, two methodological flaws. First, recollected emic reporting is subjective and this subjectivity was rendered in the open coding process. Secondly, there is a lack of triangulation reliability; the reason being I was the only source of data and of its interpretation. [12]

I was aware of these two flaws and, by being simultaneously both the researcher and the object of my research. I had to reconcile the emic/etic duality and give validity to my emerging worldview model. This antithetic dichotomous relationship had been addressed by Claude LEVI-STRAUSS (1958, pp.307-308) who claimed that: "il n'y a pas contradiction, mais intime corrélation, entre le souci du détail concret propre à la description ethnographique, et la validité et la généralité que nous revendiquons pour le modèle construit d'après celle-ci" [there is no contradiction, but an intimate correlation, between concern for the concrete detail specific to ethnographic description, and the validity and generalisability claimed for the model built out of it]. [13]

The third methodological step aimed to obliterate subjectivity by deconstructing the narratives. Narrative deconstruction (BRUNI 2002, p.25)⁸ consisted in seeking key components in selected auto-interview narratives, looking for, and picking out key phrases, such as metaphors, or key events, and then coding them so as to construct my worldview. The narratives were coded using broad key concepts, such as equity and gender role differentiation (in cultural phenomenon related in Section 3.1) or achieved status vs. ascribed status, individual vs. group, social

8 BRUNI (2002, p.25) stressed the need to deconstruct auto-biographical research and used the term "auto-ethnographer to capture this imperative; that is the need to explore the discursive contexts which shape the person ...".

interaction, kinship relationships, language and culture, linguistic capital (in cultural phenomenon related in Section 3.2). Critical incident methodology was used in this case to highlight these cultural phenomena which were indicative of my own deeply entrenched values. These critical cultural phenomena, of which two are described in Section 3, for example revealed my mitigated support for diversity and tolerance as these were found to conflict with more dominant humanistic values indicative of an overriding support for meritocracy and equality of opportunities [14]

Reflecting on these cultural phenomena, I was aware of the differential degree of influence on shaping different aspects of my worldview. However, my purpose here is to identify and analyse the critical experiences responsible for my initial unreserved support of linguistic and cultural diversity and intercultural tolerance, and to that effect, I selectively report two specific cultural phenomena which demonstrated this. The first cultural phenomenon was a discrete critical incident which shed light on a culturally different view of education and equity. The second phenomenon is a holistic process leading to my developing an understanding of culturally-determined social relationships. The first phenomenon occurred in Singapore (Asia) whilst the second in Fiji (Oceania). These two phenomena were selected because they did not readily fit in with my native sociocultural value system⁹ and exemplified a worldview different from mine at the time. [15]

3. Worldview Construction: Eliciting Major Culturally Learnt Principles

This second part of the paper seeks to recall and record imprinted cultural experiences or events and identify those most germane to this study. It is structured into two sections. The first section reports on the emic recollection of memorable cultural experiences or events. The second section identifies two past cultural experiences, describes them and gives an etic culturally specific interpretive analysis in terms of worldview construction. [16]

Emic recollection of past cultural experiences:

The auto interview stimulated emotional responses translated into spurred blurred mingled images sounds and smells that were created by my mind. The first response was to recreate the eeriness and magic unreality of these past lived experiences. The question I asked myself was "What critical incidents influenced my worldview?" So, in search of critical cultural incidents, I tried to capture these images and release them by describing them verbally. This conscious act of describing these images crystallised them in my mind. Why did these images, rather than others, flow into my mind? A probable explanation was that they

9 The very selection of these two cultural phenomena highlighted two significant aspects of my own cultural value system. The Singaporean incident made apparent my belief in educational equity and meritocracy whereas the immersion in Fijian society showed the importance I placed on family and social relationships. They explained my own values, that is "idea, creencia, costumbre u objeto—que para alguna razón es importante ..." [idea, belief, custom o object—which for any reason is important] (BROWN, 1968, p.125).

carried strong cultural meanings, and so, eliciting these meanings would be likely to shed light on my evolving worldview. [17]

In reconstructing these culturally loaded images I became a seer (LAPLANTINE 1996, p.15)¹⁰. As a seer I penetrated these images and relived them with fervid intensity. In an attempt to give some order to these chaotic tumbling images I decided to use chronological recollection, returning to the fundamental enculturating experiences of my childhood. [18]

Images from my childhood home and their emotional culturally related meanings sprang to my mind: the glamour of my native Paris, the creepiness of the dark green thick forests with oak trees bordering the Loire, the smell of the golden brown resin seeping out the open trunk of the pine trees, excitement of climbing down the hay-coloured sand dune "La Dune du Pyla" in the Landes, south-western part of France. [19]

Passing fleeting images of Europe, each image indicating my puzzlement on meeting people who looked, behaved and interacted in a socially unexpected manner, spoke different languages and lived in houses of myriad design, such as the architecturally eclectic London blocks of flats, the austere Dutch housing, the ornate Italian buildings, the whitewashed Spanish villas. These images highlighted the significance that this European social, linguistic and architectural rich diversity had for me early in my life. I had been enculturated into valuing European multi-faceted cultures although I was also aware of having been enculturated to think in the more restrictive terms of the supremacy of French "high" culture. [20]

The second milestone in this emic memory journey of exploration into my worldview construction was to leave Europe for Asia. At that stage, emotionally loaded events erupted into my mind. The emotional load was associated with fervidly experiencing different aspects of starkly different cultural settings and ways of life. [21]

Vivid images, starkly contrasted, pushed each other out of my mind: images of ... a youngish tall skinny man kneeling down and licking melted ice cream off a pavement in Hanoi, Vietnam, of busy Chinese men and women burning paper money in Singapore Chinese temples, of attractive young Thai girls dancing lasciviously around poles under the staring eyes of blasé European men in Pattaya, of silent women wrapped up from head to toe in long lacklustre black attire, of Iban natives sitting together in the evening in their longhouse in Sarawak, Borneo, of the strange melody of gamelan music and the unreality of a shadow puppet theatre in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, of the emptiness and disquieting silence of Ventiane streets, Laos, of the swarm of hectic Chinese riding their bicycles through the crowded streets of Guangzhou, China ... These fleeting

10 LAPLANTINE (1996, p.15) advocated an emic approach to reveal the invisible: "Le voyant est celui qui voit ce qui n'est pas 'devant', mais 'dedans', c'est-à-dire ce qu'à première vue les autres ne voient pas ou ce qui n'est pas immédiatement visible pour tous: l'invisible". [The seer is the one who sees what is not "in front", but "inside", that is to say, at first sight the others cannot see what is not immediately visible for all: the invisible].

emotional Asian-defined images were followed by pictures from culturally dissimilar peoples from various parts of the world, such as Quechuan women ambling along the shores of Lake Atitlan Guatemala whose babies' heads were protectively hidden under hoods so strangers could not look into their babies' eyes, from an Australian gold digger fervently panning with his family, from Fijian men dressed in sulus and fulfilling their communal social duties, their "vanua", while drinking narcotic yagona (kava), from New Caledonia Kanaki doing "la coutume" (the custom) by officially presenting me with gifts of Gauloises cigarettes, matches and brightly coloured fabric ... And finally of Jamaican men in the street calling me "whitie". [22]

Recollecting these memories was an elating experience. I re-lived vicariously discrete cultural experiences with an intense eagerness and fervour; I recaptured my initial amazement at discovering unfamiliar (non-European) cultures and their differing societal representations and codes. This elation made me realised my determination to support the world's rich cultural diversity, disavow an eurocentric worldview and reject the contaminating standardising global materialistic American value system. [23]

Etic identification and reporting of two culturally significant life experiences:

Two cultural life experiences were carefully selected to underscore two major inter-related principles underlying my worldview: supporting cultural and linguistic diversity and its associated inter-cultural tolerance. [24]

3.1 A critical incident example: education selection in Singapore

The first selected life event highlighted my humanistic conceptualisation of formal education. It emerged by being exposed to a culturally dissimilar education ideology in Singapore. Singaporean education was primarily geared to national development, and from this utilitarian perspective Singapore placed high value on investing educational training in the individual, essentially for the economic benefit of the nation. This contrasted with my ideological humanistic principles, which held education both as an inherent right for all individuals—open access to educational opportunities irrespectively of ethnicity or gender—and as a self-developmental tool for cognitive, affective and spiritual growth—enabling individuals to identify and develop their inner abilities, talents and gifts. My liberal conceptualisation of education was partly shaped by my former enculturation into the 'French republican educational ideology' premised on equality of opportunities, social equity and meritocracy. My liberal view of education became apparent when teaching French for the Singapore Ministry of Education. It was defined in contrast to the Singaporean view. [25]

The Singaporean educational ideology was influenced by a culturally specific Confucian worldview concerned with the practical aspect of man's actions, namely by prioritising the needs of the state over those of the individual. This was reflected in maintaining socially gender-determined and ethnically-defined statuses within a tri-ethnic Singaporean society. A brief reflective contextual

description of Singaporean multi-ethnic social fabric and its associated bilingual policies are first outlined to understand Singaporean cosmology. Then, within this context, a critical cultural incident is described as a vignette illustrating my educational principles. [26]

Singapore is made up of three ethnic groups, a larger Chinese majority, some Malays and a few South Indians. The lingua franca, and main official language, is English¹¹. A major consideration in adopting a dominant western colonial international language as the country's national language was its economic, and to a lesser extent, social benefits (BOUFOY-BASTICK 1997 p.61; KACHRU 1983, pp.40-42; LIM 1991a, p.57; 1991b, p.83; PENNYCOOK 1992, p.280). This means, in anthropological terms, that English was considered a linguistic capital which could be converted into symbolic economic and social capital (BOURDIEU 1986). From a symbolic interpretive perspective, selecting English was based on the Taoist principle that this language policy was the "right conduct" to adopt for rapid economic expansion in a small island state and for creating a common civic identity between culturally dissimilar ethnic communities. However, this functionalist linguistic homogenisation did not signal the demise of ethnic languages and Asian values. To this effect, moral values, that is the attitudes or rules that governed relationships with other fellow beings, were taught through the approved ethnic languages. So all Chinese had to study Mandarin, Malays Malay and Indians Tamil, whether or not these languages happened to be the mother-tongue. The inflexibility which typified Singapore homogenising language policies seemed to me, at first, fairly repressive as they prohibited finer ethnic linguistic identities: many Chinese spoke Hokkien or Hakka, some Indians spoke other Hindi-related vernaculars and they were compelled to adopt a "foreign" ethnic language. From a eurocentric humanitarian perspective, such language policies were anti-democratic and coercive. They denied an individual access to his or her true mother-tongue and regional sub-culture, and constrained him or her to adopt a broader all encompassing culturally pluralistic ethnic language. Nevertheless, I could rationalise these policies on culturally materialistic terms, that is because of the necessity to survive as Asian ethnic groups in an increasingly globalised market-driven economy. My indulgence in absolving these linguistic policies should not be perceived as endorsement but merely as a cultural relativist attempt to find their cultural meanings and understand the Singaporean culture based on its own worldview. That is, I acknowledged the two cultural purposes of Singapore's language policies—their utilitarian purpose of enculturating students into economically driven western values embedded in the English language and their symbolic purpose of fostering selected core Asian values—which promoted Singapore's East-West biculturalism, that is its cultural compartmentalisation. [27]

11 Singapore recognises four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Malay, which is the language of origin, remains the national language although it is used mainly for ceremonial purposes (e.g. the national anthem "Majulah Singapura" is in Malay. However, English is the language of prestige, "la langue suprême" (DABENE 1994, p.47; T'SOU 1980), the acrolect used for global communication. By contrast, Singapore's three ethnic languages are the languages conveying Asian cultural values; they are mesolects used for cultural identity. As to the non-official Asian dialects they are considered as basilects used for everyday informal communication; they are the languages of street vendors, those of Singapore hawker centres.

The incident related below, within this context, made me aware of my humanistic educational ideological principles. I was then teaching French at the Ministry of Education (MOE). Foreign language programmes in French, Japanese and German are offered to students who rank in the top 10% in the end of Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). On receiving the PSLE results, two MOE officials meet with French, Japanese and German teachers' representatives so as to agree which students should be selected for these programmes. For French, the foreign language with the higher student intake, the first top three hundred students were to be selected. This selection was said to be based on academic results (Grade Point Average) and on a distinction in the English and mother tongue components of the PSLE. Looking at the long list of applicants, the MOE officials pointed out there were just 153 male students and a larger number of female students. However, there was a starkly marked difference in GPAs between males and females with females clearly outstripping males, to the extent that the female ranked at number 150 in the list of females had results comparable to the male ranked at number 3 in the list of males. This meant that 148 lower achieving males had been selected in preference to 148 higher achieving females. [28]

Irrespective of the divergence, the MOE officials declared that all 153 male applicants should be selected and the additional 150 places be allocated to the top female students. On hearing this seemingly outrageous statement, I reacted spontaneously declaring that it was "unfair" and did not support the meritocratic intent of Singapore education, which was to select the most deserving students. But I had yet to realise that the Singaporean meritocratic intent was mediated by culturally rooted expectations of socially gendered roles¹². It became obvious to me when an MOE official hastily retorted: "Mrs. Lee Kwan Yew may be brighter than her husband but she will never become the Prime Minister!" (BOUFOY-BASTICK 1997). From a utilitarian perspective, this meant that males are born to hold leading positions in politics, diplomacy, finance and trade while females are expected to assume subservient roles. From a symbolic interpretive perspective, this meant that Singaporean society is modelled on traditional Chinese patriarchal gender differentiation which places males as heads of families and as country leaders and such social order is inalienable. The emic interpretation of what I perceived as gender discrimination was abidance to social order. My etic interpretation of what was constructed as social order was inequity. The different interpretations of gender-bias selection underscored the educational value I placed on meritocratic achievement (for achieved status); this was inimical to Singapore's prescriptive gendered social organisation. [29]

12 Taoist dualistic doctrine of Yin and Yang seems to have influenced Singaporean "gender-stereotyping". Yang are the positive elements, among them masculinity and strength, while Yin represents the opposite one such as femininity and weakness.

3.2 Contrasting two culturally opposed worldviews: reflecting on the Fiji example

The second life story sequence illustrates my support for maintaining cultural diversity to the extent that a group's marginalisation from reduced global economic returns can be avoided. The following account shows culturally dissimilar societal characterisations of Fiji's two main ethnic groups, the indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians, and how these characterisations lead to differential levels of educational and economic development. This account is auto ethnographic and emerged from my sharing the daily lives of both Fijian and Indian communities for four years. This social experience was culturally enlightening; it revealed to me how culturally extreme two worldviews could be. As contextual cues, I shall briefly describe two of the most evident social characteristics which markedly differentiated these two ethnic groups: family structure and planning for the future¹³. [30]

The Fijian social structure is clan-based. It is organised into several chiefdoms. Chiefly titles have been hereditary since early colonial times and, as a result, the Fijian society has been hierarchically structured into chiefly families and commoners. An interesting characteristic of Fijian society is the significance of kinship relationships and its associated communal land ownership. Fijian family structure is extremely intricate and family membership centres on the "*mataqali*", that is the extended family led by the "*turaga ni mataqali*", that is the "Chief" of the mataqali. Mataqali membership ensures moral and social obligations, that is "*vanua*", and native land ownership. These two inter-related societal features, mataqali and communal land tenure, instigated by the British around 1876, have given Fijians a large degree of social security and resulted in a typically nonchalant "*vaka viti*", that is "Fijian way" or lifestyle. Vaka viti in rural island villages is characterised by a present comfortable seemingly care-free communal life. It is ritualised by workaday activities aimed at preparing for village and mataqali social functions. Life flows like a long tranquil river in which the present moment has primacy over the uncertainties of the future. The emphasis on the "here and now" (BOUFOY-BASTICK 2003) was also reflected in, and conveyed by, the Fijian (Bauan) language: "*Kana ni kua. Raica mataka*" [eat today and let tomorrow take care of itself]. This evasiveness of the future is also expressed in the way it is referenced in the Fijian language, as it is represented semantically as being behind one's back, implying that the future does not exist as it can never be seen. This contrasted with my western semantically-constructed conceptualisation of the future as being in front of me. Fijians rationalised their cognitive schema by explaining that future does not exist, one cannot "see" it, but the past and the present do. Their attachment to the present and the past and its correlate denial of the future also meant that planning for the future was irrelevant. Both the lack of planning for the future and the dependence on the mataqali had removed the need for competitive production and prevented rural

13 Planning for the future was a cultural behaviour which I observed starkly differentiated the Fijians from the Indians. The Indians were found to plan for a long-term future, even after death, whereas the Fijians were mostly concerned with the present time. To characterise their different behaviours I developed a heuristic tool, "Event Horizon", to assess how events in the future concern a person at the present time (BOUFOY-BASTICK 2003, p.142).

Fijians from progressing economically. By contrast, the Indo-Fijians were culturally-oriented towards self-reliance and self and nuclear achievement. This was heightened by limiting the size of the family unit by marrying off their daughters to other family units—resulting in typically a family consisting of an elder son, his wife and children and parents. It resulted in many family units competing against each other for the greatest share of the society's resources to enhance their family's prosperity. The materialistic competition was confounded by laws which precluded Indo-Fijians from land ownership and hence being condemned to the insecurity of leasing land from the Fijian land owners. This insecurity also prompted Indo-Fijians to study hard so that they could leave the land and competitively gain white collar jobs. As a result the Indo-Fijians (freed from India's caste system) notably improved their economic positions and social statuses and the socio-economic gap between Fijians and Indians widened alarmingly, which, in turn, led to mounting ethnic enmity and inter-cultural intolerance. [31]

There I found myself confronted with two polarised socio-cultural value systems: the Fijian value system based on social relationships and congenial communal living and its intrinsic values of sharing and collaboration, contrasting with the Indian value system supporting self-denial, commitment to achievement and wealth accretion. The Fijian value system was aimed at cultural maintenance while the Indian value system was aimed at social change. [32]

I realised that unconditionally protecting the Fijian indigenous culture would pre-empt any economic advancement and condemn Fijians to lag behind. I was faced with a humanitarian dilemma which shook my firm belief in maintaining cultural diversity. I felt then that I could no longer support a culturally sensitive economically detrimental option because of the momentous socio-economic cost it would have on the Fijian society. I had to adopt a utilitarian perspective and accept that cultures needed to adapt to new contextual conditions for their survival. I recognised that cultures could not be static but, deplorably, had to incorporate selected values of the dominant socio-economic groups: cultural survival is conditional upon acculturation. This cultural borrowing has the added advantage of promoting inter-cultural tolerance and exchange but inevitably reduces the range of cultural diversity. [33]

4. Conclusion

This paper has integrated qualitative methodologies and concepts available to modern researchers in order to guide the elucidation of one's worldview and more rigorously resolve the age-old human need to "know oneself". The methodology showed the ontology of three aspects of my worldview, support for cultural diversity, linguistic plurality and inter-cultural tolerance. It has used two examples, one critical incident in Singapore and one consciousness raising process in Fiji. The Singapore example revealed my own education ideology by being confronted with a philosophically divergent Asian conceptualisation of education. The Fiji example forced me to mediate my previous unconditional support for cultural diversity into a more culturally responsive utilitarian approach. Both examples

underscored my fervid interest in other cultures and, also in learning and interacting in their vernacular languages, as vehicles of their culture. I realise, through this paper, that my worldview is in constant flux and changes in it reflect an emergent composite trans-cultural identity that seeks to resolve the conflicts among my "valued" principles. [34]

Although I value cultural diversity, I realise through my culturally diverse experiences that the economic pressure of globalisation has the effect of reducing the cultural diversity of economically insecure peoples. Whereas economically secure peoples, for example those in the oil rich Arab States or the phosphate rich people of Nauru, can afford to maintain their cultural diversity. However, where there is economic need for survival then the choice is between people suffering or cultural diversity suffering. Currently, I support trade agreements and preferential international funding to lessen economic threats to cultural diversity, but I recognise this only buys time by softening the economic threat to the cultural diversity that I value. Until I and other like-minded world citizens can solve this problem, I regretfully find the reduction of cultural diversity to be the lesser evil I am forced to accept and a current threat to my worldview. [35]

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Author

Béatrice BOUFOY-BASTICK is a linguist who holds a Master's Degree from the Sorbonne in France, a postgraduate from the University of London and a doctorate from the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

Her main research interests are in the interaction of culture and language education, in second language teaching methodology and in anthropological research methods. She has a wide cross-cultural experience in teaching and researching in Europe, Australia, Asia, the South Pacific and the Caribbean. She currently lectures at the University of Guyana.

Contact:

Dr. Béatrice Boufoy-Bastick

Department of Languages and Culture
University of Guyana

E-mail: bboufoybastick@yahoo.com,
Beatrice@bbgy.com

Citation

Boufoy-Bastick Béatrice (2004). Auto-Interviewing, Auto-Ethnography and Critical Incident Methodology for Eliciting a Self-Conceptualised Worldview [35 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(1), Art. 37, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0401371>.

Revised 9/2006