

Reading Harriet Martineau in the Context of Social Thought and Social Theory

VINEETA SINHA

ABSTRACT

The recorded historiography of the social sciences is steeped in androcentrism. It exclusively remembers, canonizes and lists contributions by male scholars. This mode of recalling, by and large renders invisible contributions by women thinkers in the history of ideas. In this paper I document the experience of introducing the works and contributions of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), known to very few as the 'first woman sociologist', alongside the writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, to a class of undergraduates. I see this introduction as a powerful strategy for the recovery, and rightful location of women thinkers and analysts in narrating any history of the social sciences. Through the themes of androcentrism, 'female invisibility', multiplicity and difference, I also address the discourse on indigenisation in the social sciences. The latter, although it has rightly highlighted the biases and distortions in the practice of mainstream social science, has yet to place the issue of androcentrism on its agenda, a stance that makes it more similar to, rather than different from, mainstream social science theorising.

Key words: Harriet Martineau, women thinkers, androcentric social science, female invisibility, indigenisation

ABSTRAK

Rekod historiografi sains sosial penuh dengan androsentrisme. Rekod ini secara eksklusif mengingati, mengkeramatkan dan menyenaraikan sumbangan sarjana lelaki. Kaedah mengingati semula ini secara umumnya menyebabkan sumbangan pemikir wanita tidak kelihatan dalam sejarah idea. Dalam makalah ini, penulis mendokumenkan pengalaman sendiri dalam usaha memperkenalkan kepada para pelajar karya dan sumbangan Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), yang dikenali di kalangan segolongan kecil sebagai 'ahli sosiologi wanita yang pertama' setanding dengan Marx, Weber dan Durkheim. Penulis melihat pengalaman ini sebagai satu strategi yang sangat berkesan untuk mendapatkan semula dan menempatkan pemikir dan penganalisis wanita dalam pengkisahan sejarah sains sosial. Menerusi tema adrosentrisme, ketidakhadiran pemikir wanita, kepelbagaian dan perbezaan, penulis juga telah membicarakan tentang wacana pemperibumian dalam sains sosial.

Sungguhpun wacana ini telah berjaya mendedahkan kewujudan bias dan putar belit dalam amalan sains sosial arus perdana, namun ia masih perlu memasukkan isu androsentrisme dalam agendanya. Hal ini merupakan satu pendirian yang menyebabkan ia menjadi semakin serupa, bukannya berbeza daripada usaha membina teori yang terdapat dalam sains sosial arus perdana.

Kata kunci: Harriet Martineau, pemikir wanita, androsentrisme dalam sains sosial, ketidakterlihatan wanita, pemeribumian

SETTING THE FIELD

In the course of teaching a compulsory undergraduate theory module with a colleague and fellow sociologist at the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore (NUS), we had introduced 'Eurocentrism' as an appropriate context for making sense of the emergence of classical sociological thought in European history. Additionally, we presented Eurocentrism as a particular kind of bias in classical scholarship and explored practical ways of dealing with this limitation. As we continue to teach this module, we have had the opportunity to re-think its teaching in varied ways. It was through these sustained (and still on-going) periods of pondering and reflections that I literally stumbled upon the name of Harriet Martineau. Through Martineau's writings, we have recently addressed the androcentric bias as a problematic in mainstream social sciences, and one that we attend to through the teaching of social thought and social theory in a novel mode.

This is what I try to do in this paper. First, I articulate the logic that led to the inclusion of Harriet Martineau in the course syllabus of the module I was co-teaching at NUS. Second, I detail various aspects of Martineau's writings and ideas included in the teaching and present student responses both to the persona of Harriet Martineau and the theme of androcentrism in the teaching of social thought and theory. Finally, I discuss how a conscious focus on Martineau has allowed me to note parallels between counter-Eurocentric and counter-androcentric discourses, and reflect on the consequences of such notice.

HOW ARE THE SOCIAL SCIENCES ANDROCENTRIC?

Thematically and theoretically, I deem the androcentric critique of the social sciences to be of central and paramount concern in the teaching of classical sociological thought. Yet, it is significant that formally, I was only able to allocate two and a half out of 24 lectures and one tutorial discussion topic (out of nine) to the theme of androcentrism in terms of real time. Although my colleague and I were in full agreement about the need to address and include this element

in our teaching of social thought and theory, we were ourselves operating under certain constraints. For example, the expectation to continue teaching Marx, Weber and Durkheim as part of the classical tradition (albeit critically) and also our own interest in developing the Eurocentric critique of the classical sociological canon, via the teaching of the founding fathers.¹ The limited space given to the androcentric critique in the actual course outline was an issue subsequently, and produced some lively exchanges with students, a response I fully anticipated, and something I will elaborate upon later.

Given space constraints, I devoted only half a lecture to a general, theoretical discussion of the theme of 'androcentrism', noting first of all that the field of classical sociological theory is steeped in this bias. I added that this notice should be so obvious in 1998 (the first time I included this theme) that it seemed even pointless to state it. But then of course it was not so apparent, least of all in practice, for example, in the area of undergraduate teaching. So, I consciously and deliberately introduced androcentrism as an example of a particular kind of bias within the history and practice of the social sciences, and argued that this slant shapes how we recognise and remember pioneering contributions and contributors to various social science disciplines. Although 'androcentrism' translates to 'male centeredness', my interest in this term lies well beyond its literal meaning. Clearly the social sciences are by no means distinct or unique in displaying this bias. The same argument has rightly also been made for the humanities (Herman & Abigail 1994) and the natural sciences (Haraway 1994, 1995, 1996).

If one looks at the historiography of the social sciences, the signs of androcentric scholarship are abundant, as pointed out by others (McDonald 1994, 1996; Seidman 1994) in the field. The written, recorded history of social science disciplines remembers, canonizes and lists contributions almost exclusively by male scholars. To facilitate a focused discussion in this paper, I draw my examples from the field of classical sociological theorizing, although the discipline of sociology is also not unique in its androcentrism.

As is well known to any student of sociology, the founders of the discipline are presented in the canons variously as 'the great men of ideas', 'the great masters' and 'the founding fathers' – clearly a gendered, and more specifically, a maled account of sociology's history and establishment. I used Artemis March's groundbreaking piece of 1982, as a way of entering this discussion. Following March, I suggested to my students that it was possible to talk about androcentrism in the field of classical sociological thought by focusing on these two themes: its defined object of inquiry as well as the identity of its practitioners. In the former, we have clear evidence of neglect of women as 'subjects' i.e., as 'objects of study' with or without agency, and in the latter we witness non-recognition of women as pioneering thinkers and analysts of society. I then dealt with each of these themes briefly.

NEGLECT OF WOMEN AS 'OBJECTS' OF STUDY

How has the domain of investigation been constructed in classical sociological theory? Here, I referred to the ways in which the 'great masters' had argued as to what constitutes the subject matter and the object of inquiry for sociology. The latter we know is defined as the condition of modernity and its effects on individuals and society. This domain of investigation is largely defined by 'public,' formalised and institutionalised spaces and theorists draw exclusively from the experiences of the male ego, and hence male perspective/vantage point in order to produce appropriate concepts and categories of analysis. (Sydie 1987, 1994; Bologh 1994). Here, with March (1982) I raised the question of the extent to which the subject matter of sociology was truly representative of both male and female interests, or even truly reflective of diverse male experiences. For example, it is not difficult to see that the central concepts and categories of sociological analyses (such as reason/rationality, freedom, anomie, class, alienation etc.) were shaped both by the defined object of study (condition of modernity) and the male vantage point from which such theorising emerged.

Instead of speaking in generalities, I found it instructive to focus on specific writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim to illustrate the different strands of androcentrism within their theorising, thus making the point that there are different ways of being androcentric. I suggested that a focus on the kind of problematics the classical sociologists were interested in reveals that they were theorizing predominantly the abstracted experience of the male ego, engaged in the public, official, formal realms. Hence, terms and concepts that deal with the domestic, private domain are seriously lacking in classical sociological theory. Scholars, in particular feminists, have highlighted that in this body of literature there has been little or no attention to the realm of male-female relations, familial relations, issues relating to women's status and location in society – vis-à-vis marital issues, working conditions and child care etc. Consequently, women, even as 'subjects' are largely missing in the discourse of classical sociological theory. This omission to me is a crucial element of male-centeredness in such writings. Classical theorists did not deal with women's experiences partly because they did not have access to this realm but their position was justified by a more crucial and powerful 'rationale': given the dominant cultural and ideological context of the times, it was possible to define the subject matter of sociology without paying attention to women's experiences, and for this to be seen as 'legitimate'. The easy move from exclusively male concerns, experiences and perspectives to a more universal, generalised 'societal' position (thus, by-passing women) was not deemed by founding theorists and their descendants (for quite a long time) to be problematic.

Although the invisibility of women as objects of study is commonplace in classical sociological theory literature, their mere *empirical presence* in some of the accounts does not provide an immediate corrective. Emile Durkheim is a

good example of this. He, for example, had devoted quite a few pages of his text, *Suicide: A Sociological Study* (1897), to women, men and the sociological phenomenon of suicide. These sections of his writings are I would say, *sex-specific* but the assumptions he made about men and women were clearly problematic in being essentialist, reductionist and biologically deterministic (refer Shope 1994). So the pertinent issue is not the mere absence/presence or exclusion/inclusion of women as objects of study, with or without an agency, but *how gender as a sociological category is theorised, if at all.*

NEGLECT OF WOMEN AS THEORISTS

I then moved to a discussion of women as pioneering social theorists, making the following argument. It is by now quite common for social scientists to at least notice that women theorists are largely missing in the history of the social sciences. Beyond this lip service, and taking this notice seriously means that other more important questions must surface. If women are non-visible and deemed to be non-existent in such a history, is it because there were no significant theoretical contributions by women, or might there be other ways of making sense of this gap? The mode in which the history of sociology was conventionally presented might suggest that there were indeed no notable women thinkers or founders of social theorising. I suggested to my students that the existing story of sociology's founding is one that documents theoretical contributions exclusively by male scholars and is indeed a 'distortion'. This claim is sustained by different kinds of historical evidence that attests to the presence of women who *have* contributed to theorizing, but for various reasons their contributions have not been archived. A rendering of a history of sociological thought that focuses exclusively on contributions of male founders, and denies that women (as theorists and analysts) were important players in theorising modernity, smacks of androcentrism. Related to the male-focus is the idea of 'female invisibility' (March 1982).²

In my own experience, which would gel with that of others who teach the classics, it is not uncommon to hear statements such as these from fellow practitioners: 'I would very much like to introduce pioneering women theorists, but there weren't any' or 'Yes, there were these women theorists but are they as good as Marx, Weber and Durkheim'? At a sociological conference recently, I presented a paper on Harriet Martineau in which I argued that there is evidence to consider her a pioneer social thinker, and that it would be instructive to teach her alongside Marx, Weber and Durkheim. The varied responses to this suggestion were quite telling. Although there were some who said that they were glad to have 'made acquaintance' with the name of Harriet Martineau, there was some degree of resistance and hostility to my suggestion. These latter responses questioned the wisdom of including Martineau and pointed out the inappropriateness of placing her in the same category as the esteemed founding fathers.

What I found interesting was that these individuals, who knew little about Martineau, could confidently dismiss her and in so doing, unwittingly served as 'gatekeepers' of a territory, entry into which is clearly rigorously policed. Quite apart from granting entry to the likes of Martineau, what is fascinating is that even serious consideration is denied her. Such pre-judging is rampant, and although hard to justify, accounts for some of the invisibility of women in this domain. I shared these responses to Martineau with my students, who were surprised at how 'closed' minded academics could be. On the other hand, some felt that the need for 'rigorous' and 'stringent' criteria is more than justified.

I continued the discussion with the observation that the evidence of androcentrism in the social sciences is overwhelming. By now it is certainly noted (often fashionably), but I contend remained to be acted upon in practice. I argued that seeking ways to counter androcentrism signals a real concern to translate one's awareness of androcentrism through channels that could make a difference to one's rendering of the discipline's history. One way to take students through such a discussion is to scrutinize classical and contemporary literature in the various disciplines for evidence of different kinds of androcentric biases. This was indeed important, but I argued further that one needed to move beyond this first necessary step, and to additionally contemplate other more effective and radical strategies for responding to the noted androcentrism.

RESPONDING TO ANDROCENTRISM

How does one respond to androcentrism as students of classical social thought and social theory? What could be the various strategies for response? No doubt, many responses are possible, depending on one's agenda. My own response is not about replacing a male-centred focus in the noted domain with a female-centred core; my concern is not to re-write the history of sociological theorising, by denying male contributions, or by including only contributions by women - both of which are limiting and limited positions. In my lectures then, I suggested the possibility of several responses to androcentrism and invited students (in the tutorial discussions) to identify relative merits and demerits of each. Here are two responses I suggested:

1. One, is to subject classical sociological works themselves to scrutiny and critique in order to demonstrate how women and men are conceptualised, and to ask if whether gender is theorised and if so how. This amounts to identifying androcentrism in the writing and theorising of the founding fathers. Ironically, this again ends up legitimating their works in a different way as these are continuously read and re-read, and thus still remain central to the discipline. Despite this, the awareness that their theorising is androcentric at least leads to a search for alternative ways of re-reading the

classics, with attention to their various limitations, and thus of raising critical questions about teaching the classics in the present.

2. Another strategy is the recovery of women pioneers of sociological theorising and placing them alongside the known/famous works of male founders. This exercise is rooted in the assumption that there were women thinkers, intellectuals and activists, who although were not necessarily associated with formal social science disciplines (for various structural reasons), but who nonetheless contributed to theorising modernity. These women commented on the state of their societies and tried to make sense of issues that were relevant to them – such as family, marriage, political freedom, and rights of women, access to education, women's working conditions and employment opportunities. Women by no means wrote only about so-called 'women's issues', but to the end that they focussed on women's experiences, their approach served as a necessary and important balance to the lack of attention to these issues in the male accounts.

Students agreed with me that the strategy of recovering women as 'subjects' (as objects of study) was an important one, and has been a central concern and contribution of feminist positions and perspectives. The latter have highlighted the neglect of women and of the category 'gender' in mainstream social science theorising. While the task is far from accomplished, significant progress has been made in this direction. As such, one can no longer ignore gender as an important category in sociological analysis.

Nevertheless, I pointed out that the second named tactic – process of recovery of women as theorists/analysts of society, has been a much slower one (McDonald 1994). If one picks up any standard text on sociological theory (something as recent as the mid-1990s), and turns to a discussion of the discipline's history, chances are that there will be little or no mention of women's contributions to pioneering sociological work. An exception is Irving Zeitlin's text, *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* (1997), which by now includes several chapters on women thinkers and theorists. Interestingly, Osborne and Van Loon's *Sociology for Beginners*, a 1996 text notes Martineau's contributions in the history of methodological research in sociology.

However, I cautioned that accounts that simply include women's contributions (by way of expressing political correctness or by playing the numbers and representational game) raise a different sort of problem. That is, the mode in which women's contributions are acknowledged is itself a problematic. Scholars have noted how the mode of remembering women's contributions has tended to present them as helpers, collaborators, translators (McDonald 1995, March 1982) and not as women with independent ideas, intellectual capacity and creative thinking. Another mode of remembering is when some particular feature of a woman's contribution is selectively emphasized to the exclusion of others. Two good examples I highlight are Florence Nightingale and Zora Neale Hurston.³

The point to note is that the continued presentation of Nightingale (as a nurse) and Hurston (as a folklorist) in specific ways, does not duly acknowledge their scholarly and activist contributions any place in the larger history of ideas and the practice of the social sciences.

So in an effort to recover women as theorists and analysts on their own merit, in an independent capacity, I introduced to my undergraduate students the works of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), known amongst very few as the 'first woman sociologist' but otherwise completely unknown to most social scientists. In this particular course, I have not only introduced the name of Harriet Martineau, but also allocated lectures and topics for tutorial discussions and have assigned to students excerpts from her original readings, alongside those of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. I see this as a powerful strategy for the recovery, and rightful location of women thinkers in narrating any story of the social sciences.

HARRIET MARTINEAU (1802-1876)

In trying to read Harriet Martineau in the two lectures allocated to her, I learnt several things very quickly: how much ground I would have to cover, how rapidly, and mostly the impossibility of doing full justice to her in this short period of time. In introducing Harriet Martineau, I began with her biography. In this case I deemed a biographical sketch to be even more necessary and crucial because most students of sociology are unfamiliar with even her name and identity, let alone her writings. Thankfully, in the case of Martineau, a condensed body of information about her life is already available and archived through the pioneering works of such scholars as Lynn McDonald, Paul Riedesdel, Mary Jo Deegan and Michael R. Hill. Apart from this personal and biographical portrait, I also surveyed and presented the range of Martineau's writings. By referring to the corpus of her writings, my intention was to give a sense of the diverse issues that Martineau was interested in, and I assigned excerpts from her original writings as part of the required reading for this section of the course. There is also a crucial pedagogical issue here. There was necessarily a time lag between my decision to include Harriet Martineau in the course and the actual time when I did so. This mainly had to do with the fact that I had to first educate myself before I could teach Harriet Martineau, since knowledge about this scholar was not part of my own training as a sociologist. In a sense I learnt and acquired knowledge almost simultaneously with my students every time I prepared a lecture on Harriet Martineau or any other woman scholar in the course of teaching this module.

Given that I was making an argument about how Martineau was missing in a conventional historical account of sociology's founding, I also wanted to explore if she had any interaction with the formal, academic domains in the social

sciences. It is not without significance that if sociologists know anything at all about Martineau it is through her association with the name of Auguste Comte. The story of how Martineau 'freely' translated, condensed and interpreted Comte's, *The Positive Philosophy* from French to English is recorded, as is Comte's positive appraisal and assessment of her work. A single-most important effect of Martineau's translation is that she introduced English-reading audiences to Comte's ideas, not an insignificant contribution in the history of institutionalised sociology. This intellectual venture is also Martineau's closest encounter with the domain of formal sociology, from which she otherwise remained marginalized, which is interesting in itself. Despite being so closely associated with Comte's text, it is intriguing that subsequent generations of sociologists were not at least curious about Harriet Martineau, who additionally did make quite a name for herself in her lifetime through a large corpus of writings.

Finally, in an effort to demonstrate that in order to consider Martineau's writings and ideas seriously, I discuss her works on methodology and theorising. I emphasized to my students that it is important not to pre-judge the issue but to assess her work thoughtfully before deciding if it is possible to derive sociological relevance and insight there from. In the lectures, I focussed on two of Martineau's texts: *Society in America* (1837) and *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838). Here, I want to use my discussion of Martineau as a methodologist to illustrate and demonstrate*how I used aspects from this text for the purpose of teaching.

MARTINEAU AS A METHODOLOGIST

I used Martineau's text, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838) to demonstrate that it is possible to abstract methodological insight and principles from her writings. Arising out of her 2-year trip to the United States, Martineau produced her methodological treatise *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), a classic text that I think has been completely ignored and by-passed by generations of social scientists. Coincidentally, I also handled the lectures on Emile Durkheim, including his *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895). Interestingly, this provided a perfect comparative context in which to discuss Martineau as a methodologist. I invited students to reflect on the following scenario. It is not without significance that Martineau's 'How to' text appeared almost six decades *before* Durkheim's text, which is the one that is embraced by sociologists now as a classic methodological text. Martineau's text, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), is an early document attempting to systematically and methodically observe and investigate society and culture. I suggested that Martineau's concern with defining precisely and systematically a 'science of morals and manners' reveals almost uncanny parallels and similarities with Durkheim's

project vis-à-vis the ‘realm of the social’ and demarcating ‘sociology’ as a discipline, that he sets out in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, written almost sixty years later, without any reference or acknowledgement to Martineau’s text.

Clearly, the two-and a half lecture hours and one tutorial discussion allocated to the themes of androcentrism and Harriet Martineau are nowhere near sufficient to fully do justice to the complexity and centrality of these themes and ideas. Interestingly, then, I was quite pleasantly surprised at how often students even in ‘other’ tutorial discussions (which were not explicitly devoted to the theme of women thinkers), on their initiative, raised the question of female invisibility in the social sciences and Harriet Martineau, and in a comparative framework vis-à-vis Marx, Weber and Durkheim. The following student responses are thus abstracted from discussions throughout the teaching semester, and not confined to a single tutorial session.

STUDENT RESPONSES TO HARRIET MARTINEAU

By far, the most illuminating aspects of teaching Martineau for me, surfaced during tutorial discussions. Generally, I found students responding quite positively to the introduction of a female social theorist, but it was further interesting that she was perceived first and foremost as a ‘woman’ thinker. Most students (male and female) were at least open to the idea of considering ‘newer’ candidates for entry into a realm dominated by ‘dead, white men’ (a phrase used by many of my students). However, they wanted ‘evidence’ that she was really worthy of being included. Interestingly, the same evidence was not demanded of Marx, Weber or Durkheim, in whose case it appeared that the matter was settled and their membership into the domain of theorists undisputed.

Given that the twin themes of ‘Eurocentrism’ and ‘androcentrism’ provided the contextual frames for the module, questions were automatically raised about whether Martineau was ‘Eurocentric’, ‘androcentric’ or both. Additionally, students wondered whether she should be included as a ‘thinker’ or a ‘theorist’ if there was evidence of androcentrism or Eurocentrism in her work. One astute student noted that if these were criteria for exclusion, then Marx, Weber and Durkheim also would not qualify as theorists. I, on my part noted that it was indeed ironic that despite evidence of androcentric elements in Martineau’s writings, I was arguing for her inclusion as a way of countering androcentrism in the field of classical social thought and theory. Another line of thinking explicitly compared Martineau with Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Some students suggested that even if one accepts that Martineau is a thinker and a methodologist, surely she is not in the same league as the founding fathers. These were some queries students posed: Is her work not merely descriptive and anecdotal as compared to the theoretical and analytical work of the founding fathers? Does Martineau theorise at all? Is her work of universal significance and value, like

Marx's for example? Is Martineau a real sociologist? Is she qualified to be a sociologist? Other students noted that in Martineau, they encountered a rather different writing style, adding that she wrote like a layperson, was 'easy' to read and not like a social theorist as her writing was not 'abstract, difficult and confusing'. I found these to be revealing comments about the criteria that students use to recognise 'sociological' or 'theoretical' writing.

In this context, Martineau's methodological text inspired lively discussion and disagreement. Most students noted that the text pre-dates methodological texts of formalised social science disciplines. They agreed that the language appeared dated and archaic, the tone they felt was overly pedantic and the imagery jarring from the perspective of the present. This allowed me to propose this argument. I suggested that it was important to avoid translating Martineau's text into the language of contemporary social science discourse to illustrate the following: first, that much of what she said is undoubtedly familiar to all students of social sciences – it is not novel, but in fact has now become part of our commonsense knowledge about how to do ethnographic research; second, what has historically been claimed by the various social sciences (sociology, psychology and anthropology, in particular) as *their* methodological apparatus can in fact be shown to *pre-date the formalisation of these disciplines*, and further can be traced to other arenas, such as the genre of travel writing (Thornton 1983), from which anthropology in particular has drawn many strands, in defining itself as an independent, autonomous discipline. Furthermore, much of what Martineau had to say about how to observe, i.e., her practical suggestions for doing research were subsequently *systematized* and *codified* in formal methodological precepts of ethnographic fieldwork in the various social science disciplines. It was interesting that this led to questions about the claimed 'uniqueness' and 'distinction' of various social science domains.

Some students observed that given Martineau's un-trained, lay perspective, her language not academic, her writing lack abstraction and can even sound naïve and unsophisticated at times from the perspective of disciplined discourse, but the methodological insight carried in her writing is indisputable, an argument I had made myself. Many of my students thought this a reasonable defence of Martineau.

It was not lost upon the class that Martineau had been doing all of these decades before the founding fathers of the formal disciplines would even appear on the scene, indeed well before the label 'sociology' was coined, and the discipline institutionalised. This also provided the right context to note that Alexis de Tocqueville (a contemporary of Harriet Martineau and a fellow European traveller to USA) is not only claimed as a founding member of this latter discipline but that his writings, including *Democracy in America* (1835), are assigned for reading and critique in classical sociological theory syllabi in many departments of sociology around the world. The silent treatment doled out to Martineau, in contrast, speaks volumes about how the history of the discipline

omits some contributions and not others, something students picked up on immediately and said this was an instance of 'male bias' in the social sciences.

At this point, I shared with students what my own reactions (as a sociologist) to having made a late acquaintance with Martineau and other women social thinkers. I asked myself this question: If my reading of Harriet Martineau's work suggests that there was evidence that she contributed to theorising modernity in society, through an approach and orientation she labelled the 'science of morals and manners', why was her work 'new' and 'unfamiliar' to me (and to numerous others) as a student of social sciences? I suggested that at least part of the answer lay in the criteria by which the various social science disciplines have recognized founders, pioneers, thinkers and theorists. As had been noted by Martineau's biographers and others interested in her work, she was a woman who did not receive much formal education. It seems unnecessary to state here that women in nineteenth century Europe (but not only here) operated under a number of structural constraints. They did not have access to formal, academic, institutionalised domains where the bulk of the work that now gets recognized as 'sociological', or 'anthropological' or 'theoretical' was being produced. So if one is to look for women pioneers in these formally circumscribed disciplined settings through such evidence as journal publications and other scholarly writings, teaching positions in universities, appointments in research centres, band of students and followers, one is obviously not going to find too many women.

I was also careful about not being wrongly read as making an argument about a 'male conspiracy theory' in the social sciences to keep women out. I noted that it would be highly simplistic and reductionist to see women's absence from the historical narrative of the social sciences as a self-conscious and deliberately crafted male plot. As a sociologist I emphasized the need to attend instead to the range of social structural forces, dominant ways of thinking and institutional mechanism that had produced a condition of 'female invisibility' in the recorded history of the social sciences. This description makes the point that women's contributions to sociological theorizing remained unacknowledged and unrecognised, leading to Lynn McDonald's more than justifiable claim, that in the history of the social sciences, women theorists are 'missing persons'.

Other students picked up on the limited space allocated to Martineau. They wanted to know why only two lectures were devoted to a discussion of Martineau's ideas. Here is a sampling of their questions: Does this suggest that we are merely paying lip service to the idea of including women? Why are not there more lectures on women pioneers? Maybe there really are not any suitable women candidates? Is it not counter-productive to devote only two lectures to Martineau? Are we not guilty of the same charge about selectively including a woman theorist but not substantively? Are we only doing it because it is fashionable? Yet, others wanted an explanation as to why only one woman theorist (in the first round) was included and why no non-Western women⁴ were considered?

Another line of questioning asked why it was a woman⁵ who handled the lectures on androcentrism and not the male lecturer, and did this not perpetuate the problem of androcentric bias in a different way. I was also asked if I was including Martineau because I am a woman myself, and thus I might have 'womanly' sympathy for her.⁶ This provided a most opportune moment to make the point that a case was made for including Martineau and Ramabai, not because of their gender or ethnicity but on the basis and strength of their ideas.

Collectively, these discussions with students were crucial and allowed us as a class to address and debate the following themes: criteria for defining a social thinker and theorist; the nature of androcentrism in the social sciences and its relationship to patriarchy; the meanings of Eurocentrism and the possibility of avoiding Eurocentrism, just to mention a few. Most significantly, the conversations I have had with students in the two semesters that I taught women social thinkers have been productive in helping me to further rethink what shape a course syllabus on social thought and social theory should take.

The difficult but challenging task of 'recovering' women from the list of 'missing persons' has been initiated and what I have said in this paper so far is an overt attempt to translate this awareness into practice. My own encounter with Harriet Martineau has so far produced two significant effects. First, I came to Martineau in an effort to teach classical sociological theory differently and thus to consciously address the androcentrism of the field. This reading of Martineau helped me to achieve my stated aims of revealing female invisibility in classical sociological theory and of attempting to overcome the phenomenon. Second, without intending to, it is also through Martineau that I ended up returning to my on-going interest in counter-Eurocentric discourses in the social sciences. In so doing I have come to see counter-androcentric and counter-Eurocentric theorising as analogous discourses in some crucial respects. The remainder of the paper outlines these parallels.

MARTINEAU, ANDROCENTRISM AND COUNTER-EUROCENTRIC DISCOURSES

The discourse and practice of social sciences that are today defined by the term 'indigenisation' are by no means recent, but have been around in varied formulations for at least half a century. The need to purge the social sciences of Eurocentrism and thus register a crucial break from the dominant influence of a colonial past is a call made by the Third World (mostly non-Western) scholars who perceive the rationale of this project to be self-evident. Interested scholars are ultimately critiquing received mainstream traditions and challenging and/or exposing the assumptions, which under gird their various disciplines. Such questionings have led to the serious notice that different kinds of biases and distortions typify the dominant discourse of the social sciences. Examples of

such bias include charges of orientalism, textualism, essentialism and Eurocentrism. The particular strength of the 'indigenisation' discourse for me is precisely its overt political position that questions existing theoretical and methodological foundations of the social sciences as well as the prevailing institutional structures, hence its capacity for reflexivity and self-empowerment.

The discourse on indigenisation is complex and multi-faceted, although as I had argued elsewhere (Sinha 1997), its conceptual foundations have not received adequate attention. A weak conceptualisation of the term 'indigenisation' leads to a problematic and unworkable indigenisation project in practice. I had proposed that the term 'indigenisation' need to be reconceptualised in specific ways, perhaps now even rejected.

In addition to other kinds of limitations, androcentrism or male-centeredness is yet another kind of 'partiality'⁷ in the social sciences that needs to be addressed by scholars concerned with the issue of indigenisation. The discourse on indigenisation⁸ has so far been silent on the obvious numerical and ideological domination by male concerns in mainstream social sciences. The critique of androcentrism in the social sciences, has however, come from another group of scholars i.e., feminists who have taken the lead in highlighting and responding to the male-bias in the theoretical formulations and institutional practice of the social sciences. Interestingly, therefore, although the proponents of indigenisation positions define their agenda as being fundamentally 'different' from mainstream social science discourse, the two do share a common ground, given that the former has yet to place the issue of androcentrism on its agenda. Having said that, it does remain to be seen, if given the politics of this discourse, which by its very definition has to be open to 'multiplicities,' would welcome and support this paper as an effort to address the noted vacuum.

It is interesting that through my attention to Harriet Martineau, I was able to engage both counter-androcentric and indigenisation discourses, and to see points of conflation and divergence between the two. Here, I pick up on one of the four⁹ suggested dimensions along which the discourse on indigenisation can be reformulated: the need to recognize multiple (non-Western and Western) centres of socio-cultural theorising and hence to work towards an elimination of intellectual specialization. Building upon this I want to select and emphasize the notion of 'multiplicity' and pluralism for discussion vis-à-vis Harriet Martineau and her contributions as a social thinker. In my assessment, a major strength of indigenisation projects is how their political agenda is defined as being intimately inter-twined with (in fact even inseparable from), a recognition of multiple centres of theorising. So far the desire for such a plurality has rightly tended to call for an acknowledgement of non-Western/non-European input in theorising modernity.

With the example of Harriet Martineau, I am now calling for an expansion of this notion of multiplicity to move beyond the 'non-West/West' divide. The search for *multiple sites* from which theoretical contributions can be recognised

as valid and legitimate needs to include the variations in socio-political and cultural identity such as class, gender, and ethnicity, just to mention a few examples. These markers may actually cut across the non-West/West dichotomy and further problematize the notion of difference between the two categories, as the discussion with regard to Martineau clearly demonstrates. Her inclusion in the discourse on indigenisation addresses the issue of androcentrism, yet one would certainly recognise and critique the obvious Eurocentrism of many of her own writings (see for example Martineau 1857, 1848). At the same time, if Martineau is defined as marginal or viewed as irrelevant to the indigenisation discourse because of her 'Western' origins, this would indeed confirm interpretations which view indigenisation as nativistic and chauvinistic – which are limited and limiting positions. With regard to feminist concerns, it is perhaps ironic that Harriet Martineau is today selected to counter androcentrism of mainstream social sciences, *despite* the obvious androcentrism of some of her own writings. But I would argue that Martineau's contributions should not to be dismissed on account of her androcentrism, unless one is prepared to also dismiss most founding fathers of social sciences on the same grounds.

If the discourse on indigenisation is to have any effect on how mainstream social sciences is practised and not just talked about in academic conferences and workshops, then what is said in journal articles and other scholarly publications has to be translated through teaching methodologies and other practical and applied avenues.¹⁰ Thus, in the spirit of expanding rather than restricting the pool from which to recognise contributions, I would include Harriet Martineau as a thinker and analyst in the history of the social sciences. In an effort to put my money where my mouth is, I do not just want to write conference papers about Martineau and talk to my peers and colleagues, but also translate my own awareness of Martineau's historical standing through the work that engages me most and takes up the bulk of my time as an academic i.e., university teaching. It is at the level of undergraduate teaching that the reproduction of the discipline and its canon has the most serious implications, thus deserving attention.

I end this discussion by raising some central problematics that have surfaced via a specific focus on Martineau and the commentary this has made possible on counter-androcentric and indigenisation discourses. First, how is alternative discourse to be conceptualised. Proponents working from these perspectives do make some claim to being 'alternative' discourses, and hence 'different' from dominant discourses. The sharing of common ground between indigenisation theories and classical sociological theory (as I have shown in being androcentric), raises the much bigger question of what is meant by 'alternative' discourses, and how similar or different they are from dominant/mainstream positions. In this context a query that I continue to find engaging is: what shape would a non-androcentric and non-Eurocentric narrative of the social sciences assume?

Second, is the question of what constitutes theorising and what are the criteria through which one should recognize theoretical contributions. It is clear that it would be valuable to look outside the usual given boundaries, 'western,' 'male,' 'formal, institutionalised disciplines' as domains within which evidence of sociological thinking or theorising is located. If women (or non-Western scholars) are not found in these settings, does it mean there have not been any contributions from these quarters? Clearly, theorising and sense making is not the exclusive province of disciplines or any other specific category of individuals. A related question we might ask is what genres other than explicit formally defined social science domains were women, for example, pushed into, and found an outlet for their ideas?¹¹ What I am suggesting is that in order to respond to the androcentrism at the level of locating pioneering theorists, it would be instructive to rethink the existing yardsticks through which we distinguish between thinkers/ theorists and non-thinkers/non-theorists.

Additionally, a close scrutiny of those genres/domains that have so far been dismissed as 'non-sociological' or 'non-theoretical' might allow one to consider without prejudice, the various contributions emanating from them, and gauge the weight of social thought or theorising carried therein. Such an approach would produce a history of ideas within the social sciences that reflects more accurately the theoretical contributions of individuals of diverse identities, intellectual backgrounds and located in varied regions. The example of Harriet Martineau shows clearly that if the historiography of the social sciences has not found any suitable women pioneers, it is not because they were not there or were unworthy candidates, but rather that the narrators of history have possibly been looking in the wrong places, using loaded and biased criteria. I argue therefore for a serious questioning of these measures.

Disciplinary claims over Harriet Martineau as a pioneer, founding member of 'their' fields are interesting though not consequential issues ultimately. It does not matter to my argument if Martineau is subsequently appropriated as a 'sociologist,' 'political scientist' or an 'economist.' Rather, it has been possible to demonstrate that she can be read as a social thinker, that her writings confronted current problematics and that she attempted to deal with them intellectually and analytically and in so doing, responded to the conditions of her time. Thus, it is fitting indeed that Harriet Martineau should be named, recognised, included as a social thinker and analyst, and taught alongside Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Most importantly, her writings should be subjected to the same rigorous critique we would subject the ideas of our founding fathers to, although the silence of a majority of social scientists on the androcentrism (and other biases) of their discipline's founders suggests that much work needs to be done in the latter area as well.

Finally, this encounter with Harriet Martineau has propelled me to think about other strategies for identifying and dealing with the different kinds of partialities and limitations in received social science traditions. Most crucially, it

enables one to seek an unprejudiced and autonomous mode of narrating the history/histories of the social sciences, one that takes into account a diverse range of contributors and inputs. Clearly, the task is not about producing total and complete accounts, but about asking what may have been either left out, or selectively emphasized, in specific historical renditions. This recognition allows one to at least begin to imagine, and thus produce different narratives vis-à-vis the history of social thought and theory.

NOTES

1. This attempt to address both Eurocentrism and androcentrism in the teaching of the module raised for me related important conceptual and methodological questions. How does one attend in practice, to a number of different problematics, simultaneously? Clearly, it is important not to view any of these limitations in isolation, but to pay attention to the intersections and interface between them.
2. A contemporary example of such invisibility comes from Lutz's (1990) focus on the discipline of anthropology. She demonstrated how the lack of citation in anthropological writing functions to 'erase' women anthropologists' contributions to the discipline. Anthropology is by no means unique in this respect.
3. A good example of this is Florence Nightingale, who is popularly known as the ever-sympathetic nurse, the 'lady with the lamp'; hers is a romantic image of the compassionate, humane nurse for whom care of the sick and healing was a vocation. It is less well-known that Nightingale was also a statistician and methodologist in her own right and her many contributions, political and intellectual, have only recently been given due visibility and notice (McDonald 1994, 1996). Another example is the case of Zora Neale Hurston, a trained anthropologist, a student of Franz Boas, a contemporary of Ruth Benedict, but remembered primarily as a novelist and folklorist. It is interesting that Hurston has not been claimed as a pioneering anthropologist by the discipline but has been bestowed a different title: a folklorist of African-American culture.
4. In the second round of teaching the module, I did include Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (1858-1922), a woman who is seen by some as a pioneering sociologist of family and kinship in nineteenth century India (Gupta 1982a and 1982b), as a 'woman leader' and as having contributed to the women's movement in Maharashtra (Kosambi 1988), in addition to being labelled a 'builder of modern India' (MacNicol 1996). Ramabai is also mentioned in Mary Jo Deegan's edited volume, *Women in Sociology: A bio-bibliographical Sourcebook* (1991) as the 'Indian scholar and religious leader'.
5. The course was co-taught with a male colleague and while I delivered the lectures on androcentrism, both of us handled the tutorial discussions.
6. Similar questions were also raised about the ethnic background of Ramabai (seen as an Indian) and my own ethnicity (also seen as an Indian). Some students wondered aloud if Ramabai was chosen because of her gender and ethnicity, given the affinities they perceived between her and myself.
7. I use the term 'partiality' with caution. I do not mean to invoke notions of wholeness or completeness in talking about partial discourses. I am not suggesting that it

is possible to even speak of anything resembling a complete, total story about the founding of the social sciences. However, I do submit that some accounts can be fragmented and fractional, missing out and ignoring certain things.

8. Whether the discourse on indigenisation is itself androcentric, is a different but important question that needs to be further investigated and one I would like to address in a different paper.
9. These are the four ways in which I suggest that the term 'indigenisation' should be reconceptualised (Sinha 1997):
 - (a) to problematize and question the epistemological and methodological status of all social science categories, including of course 'indigenous' and 'native'.
 - (b) To embed social theorising in the socio-cultural and political particularities of a region or a locale, without rejecting all 'Western' input and contribution.
 - (c) To articulate and theorise global politics of academia and its complex role in perpetuating the traditional intellectual division of labour: non-Western scholars as gatherers of empirical material, which forms the grounding for theoretical arguments advanced by Western scholars.
 - (d) To recognise multiple centres (non-Western and Western) of socio-cultural theorising and hence to eliminate the prevailing intellectual specialisation.
10. This argument is parallel to the Eurocentric critique of the social sciences (Alatas & Sinha: 2001).
11. The genre of professional writing for nineteenth century European women seems to be such an example. Here we find overwhelming evidence of women as writers of fiction (novels, poetry, children's books), and of women's presence in journalism.

REFERENCES

- Alatas, Syed Farid. 1994. The Status of Feminist Theory in Malaysia. *Kajian Malaysia, Journal of Malaysian Studies* XII, 1(2): 25-46.
- Alatas, Syed Farid & Vineeta Sinha. 2001. Teaching Classical Sociological Theory in Singapore: The Context of Eurocentrism. *Teaching Sociology* (forthcoming).
- Bologh, Roslyn. 1990. *Love or Greatness: Max Weber and Masculine Thinking – a Feminist Inquiry*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Deegan, Mary Jo. 1988. Transcending a Patriarchal Past: Teaching the History of Women in Sociology, 1892-1920. *Teaching Sociology* 16(April): 141-150.
- _____. 1991. *Women in Sociology; A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1895 (1982). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: Free Press.
- Gupta, Kuntesh. 1982a. Family Patterns and Role Definitions in Jodhpur City. Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Sociology, Meerut University.
- _____. 1982b. Female Sociologists and Family Sociology in India: Theoretical and Empirical Concerns. *Indian Journal of Social Research* 23.
- Haraway, Donna. 1994. A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s. In Herrman, Anne C and Abigail J. Stewart (eds.). *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Boulder: Westview Press, pp 82-118.

- _____. 1995. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In Andrew Feenberg and Alastair Hamsay (eds.), *Technology and the Politics of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp 175-194.
- _____. 1996. Modest Witness: Feminist Diffractions in Science Studies. In Peter Galison & David J. Stumps (eds.), *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Context and Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp 428-442.
- Herrman, Anne C & Abigail J. Stewart (eds.). 1994. *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Hill, Michael R. 1989. Empiricism and Reason in Harriet Martineau's Sociology. In Harriet Martineau. *How to Observe Morals and Manners*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, pp xv-lx.
- Kosambi, Meera. 1988. Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause. *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 29: 38-49.
- Lutz, Catherine. 1990. The Erasure of Women's Writing in Socio-Cultural Anthropology. *American Ethnologist* 17: 611-624.
- MacNicol, Nicol & Vishal Mangalwadi. 1996. *What Liberates a Woman? The Story of Pandita Ramabai: A Builder of Modern India*. Nivedit Good Books Distributors and The MacLarin Institute.
- March, Artemis. 1982. Female Invisibility and in Androcentric Sociological Theory. *Insurgent Sociologist* XI(2): 99-107.
- McDonald, Lynn. 1994. *The Early Origins of the Social Sciences*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- McDonald, Lynn. 1996. *The Women Founders of the Social Sciences*. Carleton University Press.
- Martineau, Harriet. 1837/1962. *Society in America*. ed. S.M. Lipset. New York: Anchor.
- _____. 1838. *How to Observe Morals and Manners*. London: Knight.
- _____. 1848. *Eastern Life: Past and Present*. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard
- _____. 1857. *British Rule In India: A Historical Sketch*. London: Smith, Elder & Co.
- Osborne, Richard & Borin Van Loon. 1996. *Sociology for Beginners*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- Riedesel, Paul. 1981. Who was Harriet Martineau? *Journal of History of Sociology* 3(2): 63-80.
- _____. 1980. Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Sociology. *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 8(1): 61-62.
- Seidman, Steven (ed.). 1994. *The Post modern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shope, Janet Hinson. 1994. Separate but Equal: Durkheim's Response to the Woman Question. *Sociological Inquiry* 64(1): 23-36.
- Sinha, Vineeta. 1997. Reconceptualizing the Social Sciences in non-Western settings: Challenges and Dilemmas. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 25(1): 167-181.
- Sydie, R.A. 1987. *Natural Women, Cultured Men: A Feminist Perspective on Sociological Theory*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- _____. 1994. Sex and the Sociological Fathers. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 31(2): 117-138.

- Thornton, Robert. 1983. Narrative Ethnography in Africa. 1850-1920: The Creation and Capture of an Appropriate Domain for Anthropology. *Man* 18(3): 502-520.
- Tocqueville Alexis. 1835/1967. *Democracy in America*. 2 vols. Trans. By Henry Reeve. New York: Schocken Books.
- Zeitlin, Irving. 1997. *Ideology and Development of Sociological Theory*. 6th edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Dr. Vineeta Sinha
Lecturer
Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore
11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570
e-mail: socvs@nus.edu.sg