Farewell to Ethnography?

Global embourgeoisement and the disprivileging of the narrative

Raymond L.M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman
University of Malaya

Introduction

The history of anthropological writing has been largely a history of representation. In recent years, postmodern debates have turned this history on its head by raising moral and methodological issues that ironize the ethnographic enterprise. Basically, ethnographic writing, as Strathern (1987: 269) has advocated, 'must continue to endorse . . . the question of relationships involved in communication'. These relationships are implicated in 'battles against provincialism' (Geertz, 1984) in the service of 'critical cosmopolitanism' (Rabinow, 1986). For Linstead (1993: 116), '[t]his will require of the ethnographer a self-reflexive capacity in order to recognize the processes of self-construction within accounts, and complement this with a self-deconstructive capacity'. A consequence of this self-reflexive capacity is the problematization of the relationship between ethnographers, subjects and readers.

Yet, one can say that this problematic masks an ideological stance, one which is 'so inescapably part of the imaginary of the West' (Scott, 1992: 388). Sangren (1988: 423), however, is more direct in saying that 'the privileging of "experience" or the actor's point of view reproduces a bourgeois, Western, individualistic ideology'. Both Scott and Sangren, nevertheless, seem to conclude that this ideological masking is located within institutional structures in the West that continue to empower the 'smug self-satisfaction' (Scott, 1992: 386) and 'paternal humanism' (Sangren, 1988: 422) of bourgeois liberalism. It is in the context of this liberalism that the 'primitive' other was constituted, for as Lee (1992: 482) had argued, 'When anthropologists look at "primitive" peoples they are seeking something else: a vision of human life and human possibilities without the pomp and glory, but also without the misery and inequity of

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state and class society.' This vision is undoubtedly a legacy of the Enlightenment ideal of universal humanity, the irony of which – as postmodernists are wont to say – is the refraction of bourgeois essentialism in the constitution of the 'primitive' other.

However, the 'primitive' other as a representation of liberal bourgeois ethnographers is in decline, not only because of postmodern deconstruction but also because of globalization (Robertson, 1992) which has gradually transformed many pre-literate, agricultural, developing societies into 'mimetic' bourgeois enclaves through their absorption of the elements of world capitalism. Despite the contention by Lee (1992: 483) that the world system is powerful but not omnipotent and that indigenous resistance persists in all parts of the world, it would be remiss of us to dismiss global embourgeoisement[1] as another postmodern myth. Today, the 'primitive' other as depicted in the classical ethnographies of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard speaks the language of international imperialism, dresses in the attire of the 'civilized' West and conducts him/herself with the aplomb of the Western gentleman/lady.[2] No longer can we speak holistically, pathetically or with great curiosity about the 'primitive' other who, at the end of the twentieth century, has been (or is being) transformed into a mimetic bourgeois other through globalization.

It is in this context of global change, itself an ironic consequence of Western colonialism, that the problem of representation becomes even more critical. If the postmodern ethnographer pontificates over his representations with a newly acquired self-reflexive capacity – a revivification of bourgeois individualism (Sangren, 1988: 422) – then it is not far-fetched to envisage the permeation of this individualism to the mimetic bourgeois other who may be empowered by this new-found value to challenge any ethnographic representation. We may speak plausibly of a new subject-consciousness which accentuates the other's individuality, to modulate his being in the struggle for self-representation against those who wish to represent him. Under these conditions of global embourgeoisement, the critical cosmopolitanism advocated by Rabinow (1986: 258) – 'an ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness . . . of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates' – appears even more ironic since the representer is forced to confront the identity choices of the represented that are beyond the former's control.

In this climate of ethnographic uncertainty, since bourgeois individualism is no longer the sole property of the representer, who then has the power to represent and the privilege to perform writing? This question is

more crucial for ethnographers who have few opportunities to exit from the field than for those whose field-presence is limited only to the period of fieldwork and does not extend beyond it. The former tend to be in-group researchers or indigenous ethnographers whose relationships with subjects are grounded in the institutionalized routines and practices of the community in question. The latter are generally out-group or foreign ethnographers who are merely passing through and have no entrenched positions in the institutional networks of their host community. The consequences of these different researcher roles are highly significant in terms of relations of power between the representer and the represented.

In the first instance, the indigenous ethnographer studies his/her own people, some of whom may have experienced embourgeoisement.[3] The implication is that any effort towards cosmopolitanism is tension-producing since institutional ties between the representer and the represented are not easily severed, and the latter can draw upon these institutional resources to challenge the representation. This situation applies under conditions of embourgeoisement where the privileges of the ethnographer are not sealed off from the scrutiny of bourgeois subjects. In the case of the foreign ethnographer, the privilege to represent can still be exercised with minimal costs to his/her professional position, since exit from the field provides a type of escape from the immediate challenges of bourgeois subjects.

Thus, global embourgeoisement has intruded into the critical cosmopolitanism of the bourgeois ethnographers to suggest new relations of power in representation, especially for indigenous researchers whose co-evalness with their bourgeois subjects is potentially confrontational. The implications of this scenario for identity-formation and ethnographic writing will be examined in this paper. We will first describe our personal experiences in a crisis of representation as background data for discussing the changing nature of ethnographic privilege under conditions of global embourgeoisement.

A contested ethnography

During the colonial era, hardly any ethnographers from the colonizing countries were publicly held accountable for their representations of the natives or indigenes, at least not from the perspectives of the represented. On the contrary, ethnographic writing possessed an air of scientific realism because it was assumed that the bourgeois ethnographer from the developed world was epistemologically more sophisticated than the

peoples he/she studied. In most cases, the 'primitive' others were not even aware that they were the central characters in ethnographic publications.

Following the Second World War and the spread of mass Western education in the former colonies, the indigenes cultivated a new consciousness which was embedded in a rapidly modernizing, industrializing and bureaucratizing world. Malaysia is one such country in Southeast Asia which had experienced British colonial rule.[4] After receiving its independence in 1957, Malaysia embarked on a programme of industrialization beginning in the 1960s and intensifying in the 1970s and 1980s. Although English was replaced by Malay as the official language of administration and education in the late 1960s, it is still widely spoken and used in many public places. In the area of education, all Malaysians are entitled to primary and secondary education sponsored by the government, but compete for limited places in the nation's seven universities. In short, Malaysia has made tremendous achievements in its social and economic development since independence. The maintenance of this level of development has been possible not only because of Malaysia's natural wealth, but also because of its important trading position in international markets. It is, therefore, not surprising that global embourgeoisement has occurred at a more rapid pace in Malaysia than in many countries in the Third World.

It is in this context of global embourgeoisement in Malaysia that we shall locate our experiences of a contested ethnography concerning an urban religious movement. For about six years, from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, we had conducted research on several urban religious movements, exploring their emergence in relation to ethnic tensions developing in the wake of religious revivals in Malaysia. The nature of the research was largely ethnographic in the sense that we participated in these movements but without becoming full-fledged members. Our relationship with members was cordial and we received co-operation from them. Among the movements which offered us almost unqualified assistance was a new syncretic movement led by an English-speaking, middle-aged professional. We established good rapport with him and his followers. During the six-year period that we knew him, he did not try to convert us. Instead, he allowed us to freely interview him and his followers, conduct a survey, photograph the movement's activities, attend their rituals and read their publications. There seemed to be an implicit understanding between the leader and us that we were the unofficial historians of the movement. On several occasions, we were urged to write down everything he said or did.

In the early 1980s the movement was involved in a series of legal crises. It was at this time that we completed our fieldwork on the movement.

Although the leader knew that we were writing about his movement, he did not ask to see the manuscript. Neither did we offer him a copy because we knew he expected to read a hagiography. When the book was eventually published, we had already lost contact with the movement. Several years later, the leader and some of his followers identified themselves as readers who had been allegedly defamed by us. This was communicated to us through their legal counsel who eventually filed a suit against us.[5]

At the time of writing the book, the movement was experiencing legal problems. These events were publicized in the local press and we believed that we were writing a realist narrative of a closed set of events. We did not entertain the possibility that the leader and his followers could ever find grounds for litigation against us. The issue of a contested representation did not arise because we took literally the leader's encouragement to write about the development of the movement, and his apparent respect for us as serious researchers.[6]

The suit focused on several passages of our text which alluded to conflicts involving moral contestations in the movement. It was alleged by the movement's attorney that these passages amounted to a wrongful imputation to the leader of improper conduct. The question of our lack of malicious intent in the publication of these passages could only be raised with much difficulty in a legal system that follows closely the tort of strict liability.[7] Consequently, our two main legal defences rested on justification and public interest which entailed opening a Pandora's box of ethical dilemmas. The former strategy required the public exposure of our fieldnotes and, possibly, the production of witnesses to substantiate our statements, thus nullifying the confidentiality of our research interviews and notes. The latter strategy required that we relinquish our neutral stance, no matter how tenuous, in order to demonstrate that the research had been undertaken to expose to the general public the inner workings of a controversial movement. Both strategies juxtaposed the problem of exposing our informants' identities to that of our survival in a court of law. The only solution to this dilemma was an amicable out-of-court settlement which was finally reached after several weeks of tense negotiations.

Our experiences suggest that the radically differing perspectives of authors and subjects-turned-readers are a source of potential conflict in the ongoing relationships generated by ethnographic texts. While the authors of postmodern and experimental ethnographies may be self-consciously playful, ironic and critical in their celebration of diversity, ethnographic subjects more often than not share little of this consciousness. They tend to be grimly serious about their self-representations. The subjects/readers of

ethnographic texts expect an authorial voice to be congruent with their self-representations. A text that violates this criterion of validity invites an aggrieved response. The possibilities include informal expressions of displeasure such as withdrawal of co-operation and threats of violence or, as in our case, formal legal action.

Our settlement conceded to the subjects/readers their authority to determine ethnographic narratives through the threat of potentially ruinous legal action to suppress an aloof authorial voice. What is significant about the subject/reader as litigant is the institutionalized power relations that stand outside and above the narrative. Narratives may be constituted by persuasive fictions (Strathern, 1987), but are ultimately subject to constraint by objectified forms of power. The bourgeois subject in contrast to the subaltern subject is particularly well situated to bring such power to bear upon the narrative. The consciousness of the bourgeois subject in relation to his self-identity is implicated in strivings to monopolize the power to represent.

The politics of representation

About thirty years ago, Barnes (1963: 123) commented that

> . . . in the colonial era before the advent of 'development', even the administration's ideas of right and wrong impinged on the lives of its dependent peoples only in a limited number of contexts. But if tribesmen, administration and ethnographer are now all part of one social system, this inter-cultural ethical indifference disappears.

In a sense, Barnes's comment was prophetic to the extent that he was invariably speaking of global embourgeoisement; only that instead of tribesmen we are concerned with English-speaking bourgeois members of a religious movement.

Ethnographers working in alien cultures during the colonial era had little difficulty representing in print the native peoples they observed because they were the sole possessors of bourgeois consciousness towards cultural relativism, but not necessarily 'to efface its complicities in the moment of authorization' (Scott, 1992: 378). Not only had they the backing of the colonial administration and imperial power, but they also maintained the belief in their representation of the other as a mode of bourgeois knowledge production and consumption. In short, bourgeois liberal values underlying this belief provided a type of screen against the power implications of representation as knowledge. These were the values that allowed colonial ethnographers to underemphasize their implicit involvement in politicizing relativism, and to overemphasize their position as

producers of cultural knowledge. What happens, then, when these values are disseminated to and appropriated by the other?

As our case so clearly demonstrates, the people we studied were not isolated from the sources of bourgeois knowledge production. In fact, they had the technical facilities to record and reproduce the teachings and instructions of their leader. The leader and members of his inner circle were English-educated (some at the tertiary level), held professional positions and were cosmopolitan in the sense that they were well informed of international and local events. There was a high awareness of legal matters since the movement had been embroiled in many court proceedings. All these characteristics suggested a strong bourgeois element in the movement. It was precisely this element that made the public identity of the movement a sensitive one. There was much concern about the public image of the leader and the movement. The eventual resolution of the movement's legal problems implied that greater bourgeois respectability was needed to efface the negativity of past events. It is in the context of this struggle over public image that the legal system, as an enshrinement of bourgeois rights, came to be seen as providing an appropriate defence of their self-representation. Ironically, this same system had been used to limit the movement's activities several years earlier.

Our unwitting involvement in this struggle must be analysed within the changing conditions of privilege in representing the other. Our representations of the movement were meant to capture the process of conflict and solidarity in an emergent religious group. However, what we had defined as straightforward, realist-type ethnography turned out several years later to be a problematic discourse of identity. The irony is that the privilege which we thought we had in publishing the ethnography eventuated as the privilege of the other in establishing a legal suit against us. The liberal bourgeois values underlying this privilege revealed themselves as a double-edged sword – the privilege to represent is also the privilege to legally deconstruct that representation, if the other is now a member of the international bourgeoisie.[8]

The power to represent, under conditions of global embourgeoisement, is therefore no longer the exclusive right of the ethnographer. It is perforce to be shared with the other, especially if the representer and represented are members of the same social and legal system. This necessarily entails increased risks in ethnographic representations. The reduced distance between the ethnographer and bourgeois subjects renders the former vulnerable to challenges from those whose identities and consciousness have become politicized by the same system that professionalized ethnography in the first place. Under these conditions of distance reduction

through global embourgeoisement, an ethnographic text can no longer be considered a representation for a specialized audience. It has become a public document that represents other representations which may not be congruent with it. The increased risks occur when the 'public-ness' of the ethnographic representation is politically juxtaposed to that of the bourgeois subject whose sense of self is no longer constrained by an artificial distance erected by academe.

This changing power relation in representation suggests that the smugness of traditional ethnography cannot be maintained. The bourgeois subject has to a certain extent become a primary determinant in the process of representation, since under appropriate conditions he/she can effectively undermine the ethnographer's will to represent by retroactively withdrawing permission to represent. There may even come a time when all ethnographers, working and living in the same system as their subjects, are required to obtain such permission in writing in order to legally protect themselves. In the absence of such legal protection, ethnographic texts can be safely produced only through the authors' capacity to establish distance from the subjects. This may be more easily achieved by out-group researchers than those who find it difficult to exit permanently from the field. The question then arises that if risks exceed potential rewards in ethnography, or if the persuasive fictions of ethnographers no longer enjoy unlimited immunity from the consciousness of the other, will ethnography be abandoned or will it assume new forms that take the politics of representation as an inherent aspect of writing itself?

Identity, legality and communication

The dissolution of the illusion of 'otherness' (Lee, 1992: 476–7) discloses the highly politicized space in which ethnographic texts are produced. Ethnographers and subjects as participants within this space share a common concern with the process of identity and difference making. The crucial issue for all the participants in this politicized communication enterprise is control over representation. Through the representation of identities and differences, participants pursue their respective interests which are often contentious. Ethnographic texts, in representing identities and interests that are potentially in conflict, are always at least implicitly political documents. The inherently politicized character of ethnographic texts reflects the increasing differentiation of bourgeois subjectivity around the world.

The ever-widening scope of capitalist enterprise and its concomitant incorporation of diverse groups within an internationalized system of

production and exchange has transformed bourgeois subjectivity based on the Enlightenment idea of culture as 'relatively stable, commonly held beliefs' (Coombe, 1991: 199, n. 3). The bourgeois concept of the public sphere, which presupposed cultural homogeneity, became an arena of contention from the nineteenth century onwards as literacy spread across gender and class lines. The idea of a cohesive public sphere became even more tenuous in the twentieth century with the dissemination of the English language across national and ethnic boundaries, 'creating a proliferation of reading and writing publics that contest and interrogate each other's assumptions about cultural legitimacy and value' (Coombe, 1991: 199, n.3).

The acquisition of bourgeois subjectivity through literacy, particularly English, on the part of marginal groups has rendered problematic the boundaries of hegemonic identities and the constitution of the public sphere. Post-colonial speaking, reading and writing publics that employ the English language have dislocated advanced capitalist societies' speech from their identities (Eagleton, 1922: 32). The emergence of an inclusive, decentred bourgeois subjectivity has undermined the 'otherness' presupposed by the privileging of bourgeois narratives.

The increasing ambiguity of hegemonic identities accompanying differentiation of the public sphere weakens the plausibility and authority of representations and their embedding narratives. Emergence of peripheral groups as reading and writing publics challenges the claims to uniqueness and superiority that define the boundaries of hegemonic identities. Reduction of distance between peripheral and hegemonic identities in the public sphere entails the end of narrative privilege and unproblematic representation. Culture becomes an arena of struggle with the destabilization of meaning accompanying the breakdown of hegemonic communication.

In the highly differentiated public sphere, narrative privilege is superseded by market forces and legal/administrative regulation, giving rise to a political economy of discourse. The persuasiveness of representations and the narratives to which they refer is established through the complementary strategies of marketing, public debate, rhetorical appeals (to universality or local authenticity), litigation and coercion (threatened or actual use of force). The flexibility of these strategies is such that contestants can simultaneously or sequentially draw upon all of them. Litigation is of particular significance as a legitimate regulator of the pluralized public sphere of communication. The legal system is endowed with the authority to decisively determine authorial positioning and textual meanings, and to impose legally specified concrete consequences ensuing from authorship.

Legal regulation of public communication parallels that of market

relations. The competitive market situation where discourse is now located engenders struggle between the multiplicity of reading and writing publics through which a pluralized bourgeois subjectivity is expressed. Attempts to secure audiences and to establish control over representations intensifies as authoritative, hegemonic discourse is transformed into a proliferation of contending discourses. Claims and counter-claims to authority are asserted from diverse segments of the public sphere. Power-driven discourses generate strategic, coercively oriented communication. Competing worlds of meaning are objectified through assertion of distinctive identities within the public sphere. Representation of these identities also creates vehicles for the pursuit of interests. Intra-bourgeois conflicts of interest, therefore, easily become contests over representation.[9]

The bourgeoisie, as the class that possesses the means of communication – literacy, access to print and electronic media, and to the courts – evidences a readiness to engage in the politics of representation. In that bourgeois economic, political and cultural activities involve commodification of representations, material interests are at least indirectly at stake when representations are contested. Contestants' attitudes towards their respective representations tend to be neither playful nor ironic. Their idealized worlds and selves have market value and therefore are treated with great seriousness. The defence of representations requires rhetoric made persuasive by institutional power. The bourgeois capacity to objectively empower rhetoric politicizes the representation of conflicting worlds and selves.

Deployment of bourgeois economic and administrative power in contests over representation distorts what Habermas (1984, 1987) refers to as 'communicative action'. Communication oriented to seeking understanding is conceptualized as communicative action. Uncoerced, spontaneous communication, the basis of everyday social interaction as theorized by Habermas, is subject to the deforming process of colonization disclosed in the politics of representation. Application of knowledge and power on the part of the bourgeoisie makes possible the separation of formally organized domains of action, the basis of Habermas's division of the social world into systems and lifeworlds. Through this process of differentiation, systems emerge out of communicatively based lifeworlds. The sub-systems of the economy and polity – the organizing principles of which are money and power – turn back on the lifeworld and colonize it by undermining its communicative basis. The economic system distorts communicative action in the private sphere, while the administrative system does so in the public sphere (1987: 325).

Embourgeoisement and accompanying legal empowerment of the

individual threaten the communicative basis of the lifeworld. Acquisition of bourgeois subjectivity and access to the means of communication on the part of peripheral groups do not entail the emergence of a speaking and writing community oriented towards consensus. The diverse speakers and writers who participate in the public sphere within the lifeworld have no a priori commitment to uncoerced communication. Representation of identities is a power-driven process that involves deconstructive strategy. The legal system is an effective instrument for such purposes. Mobilization of legal resources on the part of participants in the public sphere introduces institutionalized coercion into communication.

The law as an instrument to deconstruct texts transforms public communication into an ongoing struggle over the right to present accounts in the public sphere. Legal action unmasks the claims of the ethnographic text. As a realist narrative, the ethnographic text is intended to produce and represent information in isolation from authorship and desire. The realist narrative neither defines nor locates the author's position. In litigation, the suppressed authorial presence and desire may surface as the subtext which discloses the realist text's artifice in the construction of seemingly impersonal, authoritative representations.

The recovery of the lived identity of author and subject through legal action compels recognition of the obdurately personal, political character of textual production. The inherent subjectivity of textuality is juxtaposed with the institutionalized power of the legal system to objectively fix textual meaning under conditions of contestation. Juridified communication in the public sphere legitimizes assertion of power in the representation of identities, and thus undercuts the autonomy of textual production. The breakdown of communicative action in the lifeworld, resulting from legal/administrative domination, reduces the social actor to a legal entity. Ethnographers and subjects, as legal entities, orient their action towards strategic control of textual production. This is a hazardous and uncertain undertaking. The 'truth' of a text may ultimately become a matter of legal judgement or informal coercion. In legal systems that adhere to the principle of strict liability, the ethnographer encounters greater incalculability. Under these conditions of communication within the public sphere, how is the production of ethnographic texts possible?

The legal risks entailed by representation motivate the ethnographer to reposition him/herself with respect to subjects. Alternative forms of communicative relationships with subjects are essential to reduce the ethnographer's vulnerability to subjects as readers. The ethnographer may transform him/herself into a scribe who writes for rather than about the subject. In doing so the ethnographer becomes an extension of the subject.

The autonomy of the text is dissolved in subject-generated representation. The project of ethnography as cultural description and critique is superseded by objectification of subjects' idealized self-images and representations.

Another possible relationship of textual production is co-authorship in which the ethnographer writes with and for the subject. Under the conditions of an increasingly contentious and juridified public sphere, negotiated representation becomes a pragmatic option for the ethnographer. Through co-authorship, as compared with scribeship, some space may be opened for critique as ethnographers and subjects discuss the production of representations with an orientation towards consensus. Ethnographers and subjects align their respective perspectives in seeking agreement over representation. The disprivileging of the realist narrative and the ethnographer's relinquishment of claims to textual autonomy makes possible the emergence of negotiated representation, and thus a communicatively based mode of textual production.

As a descriptive project, ethnography can be practised as textual presentation and clarification. The ethnographer introduces, records and edits texts produced by subjects. Provision of technical support for subjects' self-representations contributes to the expansion and diversification of reading and writing publics. In this capacity the ethnographer becomes a link in a sequence of communicative action. These modes of textual production by no means foreclose conflict in the context of public communication. Conflict is merely transformed. The ethnographer no longer stands alone as the sole producer of texts. Authorship and responsibility for consequences are shared between ethnographers and subjects. Contests over ethnographic representation will be restructured but not eliminated as authorship, and thus accompanying risks, becomes diffused.

Conclusion

Global embourgeoisement has problematized the ethnographic enterprise by reducing the personal and institutional distance between the author and subjects. The privilege claimed by the ethnographer in representing the other, without calling into question his/her own identity in textual production, has become *passé* with the transformed consciousness of subjects whose newly acquired bourgeois status widens the scope for confrontation through use of the legal and other apparatuses of the bourgeois social system. The implication of this global development for ethnography is clear: no longer is self-reflexivity in ethnography a

privileged undertaking done at one's leisure or within the confines of academe; it has been co-opted into textual production to articulate the ethnographer's identity as a scribe or co-author of a document whose existence is an intended reification of the conscious other. A rejection of scribeship or a denial of co-authorship, and an insistence on realist narrativity blanketing out the author's presence, can be fatally challenged by the subjects' resort to litigation as our case has amply demonstrated.

Our experience with litigious subjects suggests that Habermasian communicative action is both an enabling and constraining process with respect to identity formation. Communicative action in ethnography comprises action and reaction. As action, communicative action provides the groundwork and medium for constructing identities, hitherto undefined or vaguely acknowledged, between the author and subjects as members of a lifeworld. It enables an ideal, reciprocal exchange of privileges between the author and subjects – the former's writing privileges are matched by the latter's revelational privileges. In our case, a six-year contact with the movement's lifeworld provided the opportunity for personal engagement with members whose identification of us as researchers and historians of their lifeworld was reciprocated by our sympathetic response to their difficulty in legitimating their religious worldviews in an ethnically plural society. When we eventually removed ourselves from the movement's lifeworld, we did not and could not simultaneously exit from the system that continued to bind us to the movement's members. It was being within this system, linked to global embourgeoisement, that permitted the members' reaction to our narrative to take the form of a legal suit. Communicative reaction in this sense constrained our realist attempt to diminish authorial identity within the text, but enabled the members to legally reconstruct their identities in contrast to our representations.

What this implies is that as global embourgeoisement becomes more pervasive, ethnographic practice needs to be redefined not only to provide legal protection to authors, but also to clarify authorial identity within the ethnographic text. This redefinition will distinguish clearly lifeworld participation from systemic membership, so that bourgeois ethnographers will no longer take for granted similarities between the two. To assume such similarities may have been the privilege of bourgeois ethnographers working in undifferentiated societies. In highly differentiated societies, this distinction poses an entirely different set of problems concerning identity formation stemming from lifeworld interactions, systemic impingements, and the adversity of ethnographic risks.

NOTES

1. We use the term 'global embourgeoisement' to describe the world-wide spread of Western bourgeois values, principally through the influences of Western education, the English language as an international medium of communication, trading and business relationships involving Western partners, the pursuit of Western science and technology, and the profound effects of the Western mass media. We do not mean to imply that global embourgeoisement is an automatic and unproblematic process, but that it faces resistance and is not irreversible. However, in its present development global embourgeoisement has affected many people in the former Western colonies that are now experiencing modernization and industrialization.
2. It may be noted that Western etiquette classes are in demand in various non-Western societies that are experiencing embourgeoisement (e.g. Malaysia). In these classes, proper public conduct defined by Western bourgeois norms (e.g. how to use Western cutlery) is meticulously demonstrated to the non-Western other, still unschooled in the use of various implements produced for the fulfilment of Western bourgeois comforts.
3. If the indigenous ethnographer has received training in the West, then he/she may be considered an in-group researcher studying mimetic bourgeois others. However, a foreign ethnographer who has chosen not to depart from the community of his/her subjects may be considered both an in-group researcher in the sense of being subject to the institutional constraints of the community, and at the same time an out-group researcher studying mimetic bourgeois others.
4. During British colonial rule from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, many Chinese and Indian labourers were brought to the Malaysian peninsula to work in tin mines and rubber estates. Today, peninsular Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation comprising about 55 percent Malays, 34 percent Chinese, 10 percent Indians and 1 percent others (Eurasians, Europeans, aborigines). Politically, it is governed by a multi-ethnic coalition dominated by the United Malay National Organization. For further discussion of the complex relationship between ethnicity, religion and class in Malaysian politics, see Means (1991), Kahn and Loh (1992) and Lee (1986, 1990).
5. We believe the suit was initiated not only as a personal challenge to our representation but also as a political strategy to strengthen the leader's and the movement's image in the face of certain threatening events. The politics of this suit will not be discussed here, as we are concerned mainly with the consequences of such a suit for ethnography in general.
6. Because we considered the movement's activities as a matter of public record, we chose not to provide pseudonyms for the movement and the leader. Although this may seem to be a careless strategy in hindsight, we were advised by our legal counsel that pseudonyms are of little protective value if the plaintiff is able to identify him/herself through the procedure of legal inference.
7. According to this tort, the defendant must intentionally make a statement although he/she need not know of the defamatory nature of the statement. 'He is

liable, for example, if he does not know of facts which make the statement defamatory of the plaintiff, or if he does not realise that the statement refers to the plaintiff' (Baker, 1991: 336).

8. Under the terms of a realist narrative, the author's privilege would necessarily conceal his/her desire, or as Clough (1992: 3) puts it, 'It is realist narrativity that makes narrative appear as if nearly dead, dead to desire.' But the bourgeois subjects' legal consciousness and privilege in pursuing litigation have the potential for disclosing and distorting desire suppressed by realist narrative.
9. The commodification of texts in this case facilitates conflicts of interest and leads to the question of the extent of neutrality in textual representation and the degree of partisanship in ethnography. The consequences of textual commodification pose serious questions for the future of ethnography which may be taken up in another project.

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