

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Identity as Discursive Practice: Historical, Social-Cultural and
Political Interactions in Understanding Workers' Identities in Tea
Plantations in Sri Lanka**

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by

Geetha Priyanthi Karunanayake

B. Com. (Special), University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

**MBA (Postgraduate Institute of Management), University of Sri
Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka**

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Dedicated to

my loving parents, son, daughter and husband

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Abstract

This study examines how the self-identities of workers in Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations are produced, reproduced and modified in their day-to-day interactions. According to the social constructionist assumptions underpinning the research, I suggest that individual self-identity is how individuals experience and shape their social reality as an outward-inward process which takes place as they interact in public and private spaces.

Accordingly, the first research objective is to analyse the interplay of historical, socio-cultural, and political macro discourses in the formation of worker self-identities. The second objective is to analyse how micro discourses and processes affect the multiple identities of workers in the Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations.

The research methodology incorporates a combination of ethnography and discourse analysis into a single analysis to examine how plantation workers incorporate macro discourses and micro discourses/processes in constructing, reconstructing and changing their self-identity as an ongoing process. By adapting discourse analysis as the method of data analysis, this study threads gender, caste, ethnicity and class differences as multiple dimensions of understanding self-identity and collective identity to show how self-identities in this context are simultaneously traditional and new, ongoing and fragile.

This research can be considered as a theoretical contribution to identity scholarship and discusses subjectivity associated with self-identity. Through data, by interweaving of macro discourses and micro interactions, convincing grounds are provided to understand self-identity construction as an ongoing process of compliance and contestation. It is suggested that historical, social-cultural and political realities that workers encounter as objective structures are socially constructed by workers through their daily practices and conversation. Within this context, how workers articulate the fundamentally ambiguous and contradictory nature of their self-identity as singular and collective is discussed. It is stable and emergent, and contested as it becomes intertwined with public and private experiences. The research also makes a contribution to our understanding of cultural identities, because it is the first study of self-identity carried out in a Sri-Lankan tea plantation context, which incorporates both public and private spaces, gender, ethnicity and caste into a single analysis.

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Abbreviations

SI	Social Identity
CI	Collective Identity
RI	Role Identity
SFO	Senior Field Officer
AFO	Assistant Field Officer
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
TU	Trade Union

PART 1

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Part 1 consists the Chapter 1 of the thesis. Here an overview of the research is provided by setting the research context. This chapter highlights the complexities associated with understanding individual's self-identity and its relationship to the society, culture and organization. Then a brief overview of the concept 'self-identity', how it is theorized, interpreted and studied is discussed. As far as the contemporary organizational researches are concerned, it is evident that we cannot view the self-identity as an internal thought process any longer. Within this context, the research questions that will be explored in this research are discussed. Thereafter, a brief overview of the Sri Lankan up-country plantations is provided.

The two specific objectives of this research are stated as little has been revealed on how macro historical, social and cultural, and political discourses and the micro interpretations to extend our understanding of how workers' self-identities are shaped in the Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations. Thereafter overviews of the broader practical and theoretical issues that justify this research are considered. This is followed by the chapter organization, which will provide a guideline for the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 1

Setting the Research Context

Introduction

The Koha/Cuckoo/Koel bird, which is symbolic of the Sinhala and Hindu New Year festivities in Sri Lanka, does not lay eggs in her own nest. She lays eggs in the crow's nest. The crow hatches the eggs without knowing that she has cuckoo eggs in her nest. When young ones come out, the crow feeds them until they are big. When the young crows start cawing, the cuckoos start singing in their own way. When this happens, the crow knows that there are strangers in her nest. She chases them away by pecking them.

I begin this study of understanding self-identity with the tragedy that the cuckoo bird faces in an unknown territory. I believe that establishing one's self-identity is very much the same as the above for many people, either in their day-to-day lives or in their workplaces. Some are happy with their self-identity and some are not. Some are secure and privileged while some are threatened and marginalized due to their self-identity. According to Simpson and Carroll (2008), both self and self-identity are temporary, precarious, and fluid, achieved through struggle. Self-identity also creates paradox, tension and conflicts from time to time in individuals' lives, which in turn affect their behaviour in organizations (Ford, 2006; Pullen and Linstead, 2005; Simon and Oakes, 2006; Watson, 2008). Hence, it is important to understand the complex nature of people's self-identity and its relationship to the society, culture and organizations in which they live and work.

While we were discussing each other's research progress, a Ph.D. colleague once explained to me how he understood self-identity: "*When I am in the university, I am a student and need to complete my Ph.D. as soon as possible. In the evening at the pub I am a boozer, I need a few drinks with my friends. When I go home, I am a father and a husband...it is interesting to know how this self-identity works with us*". Although he tried to associate self-identity with his needs and roles, this shows the nature and complexity of self-identity and its impact on behaviour. Once self-identity becomes part of us it influences our decisions, motivates our actions, gives justifications to such actions and confirms them as taken-for-granted (Schwartz, 2006).

It is apparent from the literature that there is little agreement about the meaning of the term 'self-identity' among researchers (Commuri, 2010). Therefore, giving a widely accepted definition of self-identity is difficult. According to Leary and Tangney (2003), 'self-identity' is an aggregate of loosely related subtopics. For example, 'self-identity' is used interchangeably with 'self', 'self concept', 'self-esteem', and 'self evaluation' (Cerulo, 1997; Demo, 1992; Leary and Tangney, 2003; Mischenko, 2005; Sherwood, 1965; Watson, 2008), while other writers use the concept independently (Demo, 1992; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). It is widely acknowledged that self-identity refers to 'I', 'me' or 'personal identity', inner or private aspects that give stability to the self (Kihlstrom et al., 2003). Some authors discuss self-identity and its related issues by distinguishing self from the outside world, which is considered as 'other' (Hermans, 2003), while a third stream of identity literature discusses what happens when a person focuses on the overt and public aspects of self, including her /his interactions with society (Collinson, 2003; Serpe, 1987). The self-identity arising out of this process is socially and publicly situated, which can lead to the emergence of multiple identities as an individual takes on a number of social/collective identities. Identities such formed are interdependent as they intermingle with each other in a complex way (Bjurström, 1997; Taylor and Robichaud, 2004).

In other words, the concept of 'self-identity', whether conceived of as independent or mutual, personal or collective, looking inward or outward, means different things to different researchers. This not only shows the complexities associated with the concept but can also cause confusion when theorizing. Consequently, the concept has been subject to argument within and across different theoretical perspectives during the past few decades (Brewer, 2001; Commuri, 2010; Demo, 1992).

Self-identity is theorized and explained in different ways. One of the most influential but oldest is internal-oriented theories, which regard human action and self-identity as essentially governed by individuals' self interest, purposes and intention. Thus, construction of self-identity is a rational process. With the assumption that we live in an orderly common world supposed to be same for everybody, the individual formulated self-identity can be placed within the 'existentialist' or 'classical' way of understanding self-identity. With this understanding, it is believed that there is an 'objective social reality' that exists independent from the individual. The individual who is born into the already formed world possesses an authentic inner self within the self.

During the late 20th century, following linguistic and interpretive turns, challenges were posed to the above classical ways of understanding. Instead of the individual's thought process being innate, social theorists claim that the individual's actions and thought process are socially constructed (Deetz, 1996/2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2004; Ybema et al., 2009). These social theories, such as pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, post-structuralism and social constructionism come from wider philosophical and theoretical traditions. They differ in the way they understand social realities. Pragmatism theorizes human action and self-identity by locating the social in the individual mind. Symbolic interactionists locate 'self' and 'other' or 'society' as intersubjective, while post-structuralists see society and self-identity as subjective constructions of discourses and intertextuality. Social constructionists locate social actions and reality construction including the process of self-identity construction as an ongoing process of social practice. According to social constructionists central components such as human action, social order, the body, mental process or cognition, knowledge, material aspects, structure or process, text, language or discourse, human agency, etc, can be conceptualized and explored through their embeddedness in social practice and ways of communication (Cunliffe, 2010b).

Self-identity is also differentiated in three levels as individual (essentially as a unique individual psychological process), interpersonal (by acknowledging the interdependency of individual's self-identity in relation to ones roles) and collective (discussed as social identity by focusing on the individual as an ideal member who confirms the group).

Organization studies scholars have yielded insight on identity-related subject matters such as motivation, communication, leadership (Ford, 2006), professional and managerial identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2009b). The security or insecurity of social change, workplace power relations and construction of workplace self-identity (Collinson, 2003), the impact of organizational controls and organizational change on self-identity (Doolin, 2002; Symon and Clegg, 2005), the significance of work to self-identity (Ardichvili and Kuchinke 2009; Doherty, 2009) and gender, religion and ethnicity (Bamberger and Barhom-Kidron, 1998; Barry et al., 2000; Blomberg, 2009; Essers and Benschop, 2009) are also popular topics of research. These scholars, by taking either objective or

subjective or intersubjective positions, contribute to identity scholarship in different ways.

Thus, studying and understanding self-identity has become no easier. It is problematic, yet understanding the dynamics of self-identity in personal, interpersonal and collective terms by incorporating both public and private space experiences is crucial in organizational scholarship (Albert et al., 2000). This is the challenge I have undertaken in this study.

From the emergence of contemporary organizational research, it is evident that we cannot view the self as an internal thought process any longer. Within this context, the following questions arise: Is self-identity singular or plural? Is it stable or changing? How can we conceptualize and capture situations that give workers the meaning or sense of their self-identity? Can we separate private and public life in understanding self-identity or if they are mutual, how can we articulate the ways in which private and public life experiences intertwine in studying self-identity formation, continuity and change? Although an increasing number of studies are being undertaken on self-identity by organizational researchers, very little focus is placed on answering these questions in a single study to develop a holistic understanding of the concept and the issues relating to it. Further, a considerable amount of scholarly research has been undertaken on managerial identity and related issues (e.g. Pullen and Linstead, 2005; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2008) but research insights into the self-identity of workers and how individuals understand their self-identity within everyday practices are few.

By taking a social constructionist perspective, this study narrows the above research gaps by providing insights as to how the self-identity becomes singular and plural, stable and emergent and also contested. How it is intertwined with worker's public and private experiences is also discussed. In this research, self-identity is referred to as how the individual makes sense of her/himself in relation to others and it is an experiential outward-inward process of self-reflexivity arising largely through social practices and conversation (Watson, 2009b).

1.1. Overview of the Sri Lankan Up-country Tea Plantations

The issues of the self-identity of people of different groups are very controversial in the Sri Lankan context, because it is interwoven with the political hostilities that the country has been subjected to for over 25 years. This research focuses on a more specific aspect than the macro level political unrest that the country faced until 2009, due to the ethnic identity problem; that of the self-identity issues of workers on up-country tea plantations in Sri Lanka.

The larger tea plantations, which are situated between the elevations of 4000 feet to more than 6000 feet above sea level, constitute 27.7% of the tea-growing area¹ in Sri Lanka. They are mostly found in the hilly central parts of the island (up-country). As a part of the British colonial legacy, during 1886 the growth of tea plantations was facilitated by the enactment of various ordinances (Wesumperuma, 1986). At the outset, the plantations had to depend on indentured immigrant labour from the poverty-ridden areas of Southern India. The culture of these workers is different from the national culture, which is mostly based on Sinhalese Buddhist values, beliefs and artifacts, whereas Hindu culture is more prominent among the tea plantation workers. Their behaviour is mainly governed by Hinduism and later by Christianity. Within the tea plantations, there is a clear gender division of labour in the domestic space as well as public space and it is male dominated.

Although the management structure of the plantations has undergone change, this has not significantly changed the internal structure, which is highly hierarchical. Within this arrangement, a staff-inmate split between the workers and the management levels, developed over the colonial history through caste and class, seems to be visible even today. From the inception, the relationship between the management and the workers is a superior-subordination relationship. This has not permitted the development of an empathic relationship between the management and the work force. In this situation, servility and docile attitudes have at times erupted into open violence within the plantations.

¹ Tea plantations are classified according to elevation: tea grown below 2000 feet is considered as 'Low grown', between 2000 and 4000 feet as 'Mid grown' and 4000 feet and above as 'High grown'. They are also classified by ownership: 60% of the plantations are owned by large plantation companies, which contribute 40% of the national tea production. The remaining 40% are Small Holdings (small scale and home garden tea growers) which contribute 60% of the national tea production (Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka, 2000).

The influx of Indian Tamil migrant labour to work in the tea plantations in Ceylon ceased from about the mid 1940s. Politically the tea plantation workers of Indian origin have begun to be articulate only in recent times. For a long time they have been socially and politically excluded. Moreover, a part of the stateless Indian population has been repatriated, while the remaining plantation workers of Indian origin have been given citizenship and enfranchised (Caspersz, 2005; Devaraj, 2008). One consequence of the statelessness and disenfranchisement of the plantation workers was that it created the environment for the emergence of highly vocal and active workers' unions assertive of their rights. With the enfranchisement of the plantation constituencies along with the trade union influence, they have become politically hyperactive, capable of bringing pressure on the plantation management and on the national government.

Over the years, Sri Lanka had gained a reputation in the international market as a leading producer of quality tea. In recent years, the industry faces increasing competition. Hence, to be competitive in the global market it is important that Sri Lanka diversify its tea products, while also raising the productivity of the tea plantations. It is immediately evident that the question of raising the productivity of the tea plantations has been approached primarily from an agronomic point of view. However, labour shortage has been one of the major problems that affect the long-term survival of the tea plantations. Although much has been discussed about economic, social and political issues surrounding Tamil tea plantation workers, the implications of these for the plantation workers' sense of self-identity as 'those who belong to plantations' are either overlooked or neglected. The government has promised these workers a better life, but the estate population is not sure of their place in Sri Lanka. The future remains uncertain, as change is everywhere and tea plantations are in crisis.

Therefore, these historical, social, cultural and political impacts on workers' behaviour cannot be ignored, because these workers are part of a wider society. All these factors not only have a great impact on plantation workers' day-to-day social life but affect their sense of 'who they are' in society. In other words, the competing socio-cultural, political and economic macrocosms they encounter lead to ambiguity and to the emergence of multiple identities as singular/collective. These also generate paradoxes, tension, conflicts and change which influence their behaviour. This affects their performance on the plantation, which in turn becomes a deciding factor in labour productivity. Although this research does not directly address the issue of productivity

of workers, many issues faced by the tea plantation companies today will be brought to light in a holistic perspective. By recognizing and acknowledging the interrelationship and influence of micro and macrocosms, how workers articulate fundamentally ambiguous and contradictory nature of their self-identity as multiple and the impact of the same on their behaviour on the plantations is discussed.

Within this context, the main research issues are how to explore the social realities of the life world situations that workers in Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations encounter in their day-to-day interactions, and how these interactions contribute in producing, reproducing and modifying their self-identities as an ongoing process. Thus, the specific objectives of this research are stated below.

1.2. Objectives

- (i) To analyse the interplay of historical, socio-cultural, and political macro discourses in the formation of worker self-identities in the Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations.
- (ii) To analyse how micro processes affect the multiple identities of workers in the Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations.

1.3. Justification for the Research

Subjectivism proposes that we cannot view 'self' as an experientially centred cognitive process any longer. Therefore the question of how we conceptualize and document the ways 'self' and 'self-identity' are constructed and enacted at macro and micro levels needs to be explored by designing an overall research approach. In order to answer this question, the framework for the overall research process is designed and it is shown in Table 1.1. Answering multiple theoretical elements such as 'What, How, Why, When, Where and Who' reflect thorough thinking, convey completeness and give the research a conceptually well grounded quality (Whetten, 1989).

Table 1.1: Framework for Crafting Research

What puzzles/ intrigues me? What do I want to know more about/understand better or what is the research question?
<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) To analyse the interplay of macro historical, socio-cultural and political forces in the formation of worker self-identities on the up-country tea plantations.(ii) To analyse how micro processes affect the multiple identities of workers on the up-country tea plantations.
Why can this research be considered as a contribution to knowledge?
<p>Theoretical Contribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ In this research, I suggest that social interactions as significant in theorizing social phenomena including self-identity. There is no real world for us to apprehend externally. Individuals' interactions with each other bring multiple social realities and many dimensions to self-identity. There is no single truth but multiple versions of it.➤ I emphasize consideration of the social context by exploring and paying attention to daily practices and conversation and their variations at the local level. Incorporating both macro and micro processes into the discussion as to how self-identity is discursively constructed and contested by workers on plantations provides a better understanding that self-identity is not only embedded in the present but is linked to past and future.➤ By incorporating public and private spaces into organizational research, this research explores how people create their own knowledge and understandings of the way they live their daily life along with their organizational lives. These understandings should be part of the broader academic knowledge base.➤ Incorporating social science-based ethnography into organizational research and also documentary survey provides primary data for examining complex lived experiences and cultural meanings. These findings reveal how particular values, beliefs and ways of interpreting our social world are imbued in everyday practices to realize an objective reality that exists independent of us as facts, true and false. <p>Empirical Contribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ This research suggests that organizations should not account only for the historical establishment of knowledge. Paying attention to the importance of creation and transmission of knowledge is vital for organization survival and also to face competition. This means that individuals' or groups' feelings of marginalization, subordination and oppression in organizations or in societies can be changed by changing our social practices and ways of conversation.

How do I conceptualize my research?

Ontological Assumptions:

- The social worlds that workers experience as reality are significant in understanding 'who they are' on the plantation.
- Plantation workers are not mere actors; they have the capacity to create and interpret the meanings including their self-identities through their social interactions.
- The social realities and meaning associated with social phenomena do not exist on their own independent of workers', discursively shaped understandings.

Epistemological Assumptions:

In this research knowledge claims are made through connectedness to the subject under investigation rather than separation in the following ways:

- My relationship as a researcher with the respondents is subjective.
- Exploring how self-identity is produced, reproduced and changed over time in a holistic way becomes possible by capturing both private and public life experiences and incorporating them into a single analysis.
- Exploring everyday language and social practices is important in studying self-identity.

How Practical? What investigative styles and techniques will I apply to gain and maintain access to information and analyse it?

Methods of Data Collection:

- Desk research: Documentary analysis for understanding macro discourses.
- Ethnographic research for understanding micro discourses: Lengthy conversations with workers; in-depth, semi-structured interviews with senior managers, governmental policy makers and union leaders; participatory observations; maintaining a reflexive journal.

Method of Data Analysis: Discourse Analysis

- Analysing text and documents for macro discourses.
- Listening to recordings of interviews.
- Translating and transcribing interviews and rechecking with the recorded interviews for accuracy.
- Reading over the transcribed scripts for commonalities and differences.
- Developing broader themes and sub themes.
- Observing and interpreting discursive practices.

(Source: Adapted from Watson, 1994: S80)

In this research, both public and private discourses are incorporated into a single analysis in understanding how self-identity is established, maintained and changed as an ongoing process. This research can be seen as a significant departure from other

organizational research and discourse based studies, which consider these as two independent variables. Also by incorporating macro-micro discourses as a locally constructed phenomenon, the well-established prior understandings of macro discourses as stable structures that situate individuals in different positions are challenged. Through data analysis, theoretical insights into the ways in which workers become intentional and reflexive creators and enactors of social realities and their self-identities are provided.

This research is unique in focusing on the self-identity of workers on plantations from a development context. Most current conceptual and empirical studies within Western contexts address self-identity as stable entities that actors construct as they go on interacting with stable social and political settings. It is posited that this Eurocentric conceptualization is not necessarily applicable in a developing Asian context.

Further, an understanding of self-identities of workers on plantations and their impact on work, an area that has been under researched in a Sri Lankan context, will provide an insight to open up new avenues for managers to critically understand the problems that they encounter on plantations. Therefore, the findings of this study will have a significant bearing on improving plantation labour-management relationship.

I incorporate my 'reflexivity' into this research; thus, my interpretations are knowledge (co) constructions between the research subject and myself. I request the readers of this research not to look for generalizability of self-identity or to look for the 'real meaning' of respondents' explanations and discussions. I suggest seeing the coherent as well as fundamentally ambiguous and contradictory nature of social constructionist understanding of how workers' and managers' organizational and social practices intertwined with each other bring coherent, contradictory and contested multiple self-identities as an ongoing process. I have tried to bring an aesthetic quality into my research from the way I have selected the wording in writing and to present my data findings and discussion in a manner (e.g. let us see, I see that, I suggest that, what we can see and so on) that shows how language becomes a social construction. In doing so, I invite the reader to see how she/he 'makes sense' of what I discuss. This way of crafting my research in my own style can stand in its own right as an aesthetically distinctive work (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Watson, 1994).

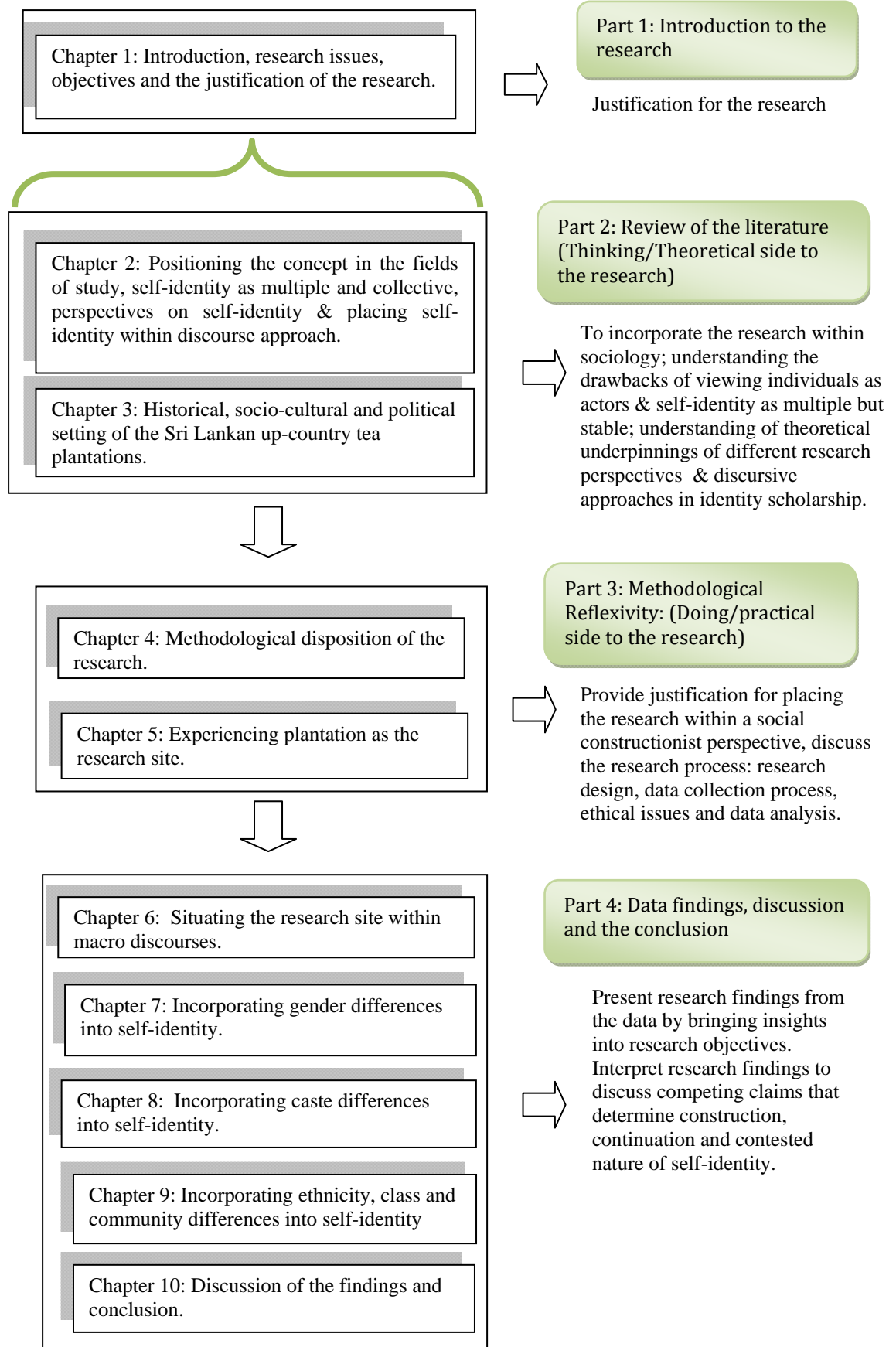
1.4. Chapter Organization

The thesis is organized into four parts with ten chapters. Figure 1.1 below illustrates how the thesis is organized into parts and chapters, with the objectives of each.

1.5. Summary

In this introductory chapter, the concept ‘self-identity’ is discussed and a brief overview of the Sri Lankan up-country plantations is provided. Thereafter the overarching research objectives and the overviews of the broader practical and theoretical issues that justify this research are considered. This is followed by the chapter organization, which will provide the guideline for the rest of the thesis.

Figure 1.1: Chapter Organization of the Thesis



PART 2

OVERVIEW OF THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data, and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed” (Hart, 1998:13).

Part 2 consists of Chapters 2 and 3, which deal with the review of literature. Chapter 2 is a road map highlighting different paths for understanding the underlying theoretical bases of the concept of self-identity. By tracing the historical development of self-identity, various conceptualizations of self-identity emerged within the broader disciplines of psychology, social-psychology and sociology over time are discussed. Thereafter the literatures on social identity (SI), collective identity (CI) and role identity (RI) followed by a discussion of post-structuralist, symbolic interactionist and social constructionist perspectives on self-identity are explored. Finally, theoretical underpinnings within discourses in exploring self-identity are discussed. This literature review is undertaken with the intention of mapping out multiple ways of looking at self-identity and related issues, so that a deeper understanding of the subject can be developed. This also forms the basis for locating my research stance in understanding the self-identity of tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka within a social constructionist perspective. This empirical study is situated within the interdisciplinary field of organization studies and sociology.

In Chapter 3, the historical setting of the Sri Lankan tea plantations, the social-cultural, political and economic genealogy of ethnicity, class, caste and gender identity within the national cultural setting, and thereafter with special reference to up-country tea plantation workers are discussed. Looking into some definitions and interpretations of tea plantations provides the basis for seeing to what extent they represent the present organizational context. Also discussed are the drawbacks associated with the popular historical notion of a ‘Total Institution’ concept in defining plantations and its impact on understanding self-identity in today’s context.

Chapter 2

Reviewing Literature on Self-identity

Introduction

Below I explore how the concept of self-identity evolved historically over time, and how conceptualizations in different disciplines such as psychology, social-psychology and sociology underpin work in organization studies. As discussed in sociological literature, the subjective nature of self-identity is an outcome of one's social interactions, which are largely intertwined with socio-cultural, political and economical complexities in society. This is a fact that has been ignored or under-emphasized in both the psychology and social-psychology disciplines. It is suggested that the tendency to over-emphasize cognitive, rational linear approaches in examining self-identity construction leads to inadequate appreciation of the importance of one's daily interactions within public and private spaces. This means that the power and agency of the self in deciding and changing daily discursive practices either in private or in public life need to be acknowledged. Through this research, a complementary approach to scientific and objectivist investigations and interpretations that establish causal relationships is suggested. How workers give meaning to their experiences in their daily life and how such experiences are subjectively shared and interpreted as their own self-identity as an interactional accomplishment is also discussed. This becomes the basis for the justification for placing this research within the Sociology discipline, with emphasis on the broader historical, socio-cultural and political context in understanding the self-identity of workers in Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations.

Thereafter, how the popular notion of self-identity as multiple and collective is examined. Collective identity (CI) and social identity (SI) are two terms often used when considering an individual's affiliations with groups. They deal with how the individual categorizes her/himself with others in social groups and multiple identities are constructed in a collective way. A third term, role identity (RI) focuses on individual roles and their significance in self-identity construction. These literatures propose that the ways in which an individual places her/himself along with 'others' or with her/his 'roles' result in the acquisition of multiple identities. All these three consider self-

identity as multiple but stable as an outcome of a cognitive process associated with collective ways of thinking. This can be considered as a research gap, as relatively little attention has been given to providing insight into the very practical nature of the self-identity construction process. In other words, how an individual's self-identity emerges, and is sustained and changed over time as she/he interacts with society on an ongoing basis is not considered.

How essentialist views of self-identity have been questioned from post-structuralist, symbolic interactionist and social constructionist perspectives are examined thereafter. In the former, the notion of fragmented self-identity comes to the forefront, along with a critique of the unitary notion of self-identity. In this research I argue that both post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives undermine human agency but promote the notion of social structures and their significance in self-identity formation. The social constructionist perspective acknowledges the variation in situations and the individual and collective enactment of discourses in creating, revising, editing and upgrading self-identity and CI. It is evident that this perspective is more appropriate to explore my research problem than the other two perspectives because this provides a more holistic understanding of the complexities associated with self-identity: how it is produced, reproduced and changed as an ongoing process.

Following this, the broader ontological and epistemological underpinnings within a discourse perspective are discussed. The debate on how social realities and self-identities are created and maintained by bringing social objects into being provides insights into how 'discourse' is placed differently within the linguistic sphere. These understandings provide the justification for the discourse perspective and the rationale for adopting discourse analysis in this research.

2.1. Historical Development of Self-identity

The early theoretical development of 'self-identity' can be traced back to the 17th century, first in the field of philosophy and thereafter in psychology, where much attention has been paid to the concept of 'self' and associated personal factors. Often the terms 'self' and 'self-identity' have been used interchangeably. According to the historical and traditional view, the self-identity emerges within the individual's mind, and is known as the 'Transcendental self'/ 'Cartesian self'. Much prominence is attached to human beings' 'thought process' and the 'body'. Both have been

conceptualized as something controlled by the mind (Budgeon, 2003). According to Descartes, who proposed the notion of ‘Transcendental/Cartesian self-identity’, the self is a unique person, originating through one’s cognitive thought process. Humans are therefore unique and autonomous individuals with a unified self-identity and can be separable from others (Adams and Diamond, 1999; Collinson, 2003; Hermans, 2003). The personal self is viewed as singular, supreme and transcending time and context by possessing knowledge not only about her / himself but also about all other possible selves (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Within this understanding, the personal self ‘I’ became the subject of early studies within the discipline of psychology. Self-identity is discussed as a stable, single, autonomous one that emerges from the individual’s thought process.

Understanding the personal self with its roots from European thoughts gives much recognition to psychological aspects of self-identity formation, such as consciousness, memory, feelings, emotions, personality, perception, etc, (Adams and Diamond, 1999; Brown, 2001; Demo, 1992; Smith and Sparkes, 2008).

As will be discussed later, the assertion that ‘the conscious self emerges within the person’ was later challenged for ignoring the social experiences a person encounters with others and the impact of the same on self-identity formation. Transcendental self-identity, also known as ‘essentialism’ or scientific realism (Greenwood, 1992), was criticized by pragmatists as unhelpful in understanding the ordinary experiential self-identity of a person (Cooley, 1956; Giddens, 1991).

American pragmatists of the late 19th and early 20th century began to consider the significance of social experiences, activities and interactions encountered by an individual in developing self-identity. Within this context, development of symbolic interactionism can be seen as an extension of the same philosophical background of pragmatism (Ticineto Clough, 2009).

With the linguistic turn during the 20th century, identity scholars began to focus on understanding the impact of language on self-identity construction. This can be considered as a new turn as these scholars view the social world in a different way. Within this context, social constructionism and post-structuralism can be considered as a comparatively more recent focus of identity scholarship.

Although presenting the historical development of identity scholarship briefly in a sequential manner for easy comprehension, the literature that follows in this chapter will show that the concept of self-identity itself is in confusion in the academic realm as scholars research the concept from different perspectives and disciplines.

2.2. Placing Self-identity in Different Disciplines

Mapping the terrain from different disciplines is carried out with the intention of understanding how self-identity is placed within the broader disciplines of psychology, social-psychology and sociology. This discussion is an extension of the historical development, and provides a foundation to suggest that the distinctive nature of the self-identity construction process cannot be understood as a linear process, as proposed by psychological and social-psychological scholars. Rather it is a contested process emerging out of one's social interactions, as proposed by sociological scholars. Although an attempt is made to understand self-identity within disciplines, demarcating boundaries and placing research within a discipline is a difficult and complicated task because much contemporary research is interdisciplinary. Smith and Sparkes (2008) discuss the risk associated with this type of alignment, where readers may not be convinced that each study has been properly placed within each perspective. Therefore, it is also important to acknowledge that the themes discussed under each discipline are very dynamic, while at the same time blurred and messy. As they shift boundaries, they form different meanings and each of these concepts contributes different theoretical frameworks to the understanding of self-identity. Table 2.1. provides an overview of the general focus of each of the disciplines which is elaborated below.

Table 2.1: An Overview of the General Concentrations of Identity Scholarship from and within Psychology, Social-psychology and Sociology

Psychology	Social-psychology	Sociology
<p>Self-identity as personal identity.</p> <p>Multiple identities are possible but largely situated within the person's consciousness and unconsciousness as unified and coherent.</p> <p>Personal characteristics give uniqueness to individuals and differentiate them from one another to form a separate self-identity.</p> <p>Gender, racial, ethnic, sex and class identities are social identities an individual can possess as one interacts with social categories.</p> <p>Study individual mental representations. Focuses on 'I', 'Me' and 'other' in relation to self-concept, self-schema, self-esteem, etc.</p> <p>Captures self-identity at a particular moment of time. Not concerned with the changing nature of self-identity.</p>	<p>Personal self-identity in relation to social environment.</p> <p>Causal relationships between individual and social structures are sought.</p> <p>Application of individual's thoughts, feelings, perception, emotions, personality and behaviour in relation to human activities and interactions in society.</p> <p>Normative understanding of individuals multiple identities such as gender, race, ethnic, class, etc, arising out of conscious and unconscious processes.</p> <p>Focus on 'I', 'me' and 'other' in relation to social categories as a reflective process.</p> <p>Discuss broader identities as role, social, spiritual and potential / ideal / imaginary and view body as a self-identity makers.</p> <p>Not concerned with the changing nature of self-identity.</p>	<p>Self-identity as subjectively experienced but becoming objectified in relation to social structures and institutions.</p> <p>Social structures consist of entities and groups with relatively enduring patterns of behaviour/relationships with each other.</p> <p>How norms get embedded into social systems and shape the behaviour of actors within those social systems are considered.</p> <p>Causal relationships between individual and social structures are sought in understanding multiple identities such as gender, race, sex, etc.</p> <p>Weaves both public and private life of individuals. Changing identity as a consequence of social interaction.</p> <p>Links self with social experiences (which are present and temporal) and with historical, social-cultural, economic and political trajectories (which are sometimes contradictory).</p>

2.2.1. Self-identity within the Discipline of Psychology

(2.2.1.a) Self-identity as Unified: An Individual Thought Process

Significant attention has been paid by psychologists to the development of identity scholarship: the main theoretical debate being whether the self-identity is singular or multiple. The justification for the theoretical approach in studying the self 'I' that

frames a singular self-identity as an ‘object’ can be seen as an outcome of the individual psychological development process. Within this understanding self-identity is defined as “*a unified, purposeful aspect of self and hence is only part of the self-concept*” (Frable, 1997:140), the total attributes of the self (Sherwood, 1965), or “*a consistent and coherent self-understanding and an ability to take charge of and be responsible for one’s decisions and life course*” (Schwartz, 2006:778). The commonality in these definitions is that self-identity is an individual process of self construction. It is considered that individual conscious and unconscious thought processes along with idiosyncratic aspects give uniqueness to the individual and these become significant in developing a stable self with a unified self-identity (Demo, 1992; Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Schwartz, 2006). Other people are not only external to us but are also essentially of a different nature (Hermans, 2003; Murray, 1993). The terms ‘Cartesian self’ and ‘Transcendental self’ are used interchangeably to refer to personal identity: a stable objective product comprehended by self reflection.

Acknowledging the supremacy of psychological processes, personal identity and related issues such as self-construction, self-enhancement, self-deception, self-monitoring, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-presentation, self-guide, self-verification and self-image became research topics (Callero, 2003; Schwartz, 2006). Researchers also explore the cognitive development of attitudes, commitment, feelings, moral stance, personality and their relation to personal identity (Cerulo, 1997).

(2.2.1.b) Self-identity as Multiple: An Individual Thought Process

While acknowledging the significance of an individual’s psychological process, pragmatist researchers propose the notion of individual as an interacting agent of society. The self acquires multiple identities especially when the individual consciously or unconsciously assesses the different identities available and selects which identity to invoke at a particular time, within and across social interactions (Brewer, 2001; Parekh, 2009). This seems to be the social-psychological foundation of understanding both personal and SI in relation to self.

Within this context, pragmatic scholars explain how individuals apprehend “who I am” in relation to others. The result is that the ‘other’ is incorporated into one’s self. This is an unconscious or conscious psychological process where one tries to imitate a significant other(s) who serve(s) as a model. This takes place through a process of

socialization and internalization where the individual establishes her/his belongingness to a particular social group based on 'content of identity' which are referred to as psychological traits, expectations, customs, beliefs and ideologies. Thus, the self is viewed "*as an organized system that structures the relationships among different identities*" (Brewer, 2001:121).

While providing a rationale for their notions, pragmatists generalize their findings to prove that covert/self related issues such as self-concept, self-esteem, personality, perception, attitudes including self-identity are relatively stable cognitive entities (Abrams and Brown, 1989). However, researchers contend that it is possible to develop new cognitive and intellectual capabilities through the process of socialization. As a result, self-identity and covert aspects of an individual can be modified over time (Demo, 1992; Showers and Zeigler-Hill, 2003).

Drawing from this notion, self related concepts such as gender constancy (Martin and Halverson, 1983), gender internalization traits (Yaremko and Lawson, 2007), affective and cognitive experiences of activities and coherent gender identity (Sharpa et al., 2007), the impact of gender roles and racial identity on self-esteem (Buckley and Carter, 2005), adult gender roles as personal construct (Jackson and Tein, 1998), self-concept and group behaviour (Abrams and Brown, 1989), ethnic identity and self-esteem (Phinney and Chavira, 1992), race-ethnicity and self schemas (Oyserman et al., 2003), problem behaviour, self-esteem and ethnic identity (Wissink et al., 2008) and family characteristics and identity formation among young adults (Mullis et al., 2003) are explored as research concerns. These researches give prominence to the individual's biological and psychological processes. They also view gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class as structures or constants that have an impact on SI construction.

(2.2.1.c) Pragmatists' Contribution to Organizational Research

It is evident that psychological pragmatists extended their work to understanding self-identity in organizations, but studies are few. Those that do exist emphasize organizational dynamics as outcomes of intrapersonal and inter-subjective experiences residing within the consciousness and unconsciousness of organizational members. For example, Adams and Diamond (1999) provide insights into organizations and self-identity as consequences of individual interpretations of meaning, which they encounter, either through individual or collective actions. However, they ignore the

changing nature of organizations or self-identity and their struggle, as an ongoing process that takes place when an individual interacts in/with organizations. Also in organizational research, religion has been discussed as a psychological process that affects the individual's job satisfaction and career adaptability in organizations (King, 2008). Although organizational researchers have started to explore religion as significant in understanding employees' behaviour in organizations, it seems that the focus is to seek and establish causes and effects of religion on self. Such research does not provide insights on anything beyond that (e.g. how religion is interwoven with organizational practices, influencing the mental wellbeing of the workers are ignored).

2.2.2. Limitations of Understanding Self-identity within the Discipline of Psychology

Contemporary social and organizational researchers view this as a 'reductionist approach': a single dimensional focus that considers only the psychological aspects of an individual (Frable, 1997; Mullis et al., 2003; Watson, 2008). This is the main limitation in psychological notions. The self is viewed from an essentialist position where the self-identity is largely situated within the person, as a unified and coherent entity. This limits our understanding in studying the self-identity of workers in organizations as it completely ignores the potentially important social features of self that may interact with society in complex ways (Callero, 2003; Collinson, 2003; Murray, 1993; Parameswaran, 2001).

Even though pragmatist ways of understanding self-identity acknowledge the significance of society and social interactions in the construction of multiple selves and identities, to what extent they address these issues is still questionable and subject to criticism. They often do not give due recognition to the subjective voice of the respondents or to the changing nature of self-identity (Demo, 1992; Grandy, 2008; Somers, 1994).

It is evident that subjective narratives have been used in discovering the predispositions underlying self-identity by a few contemporary researchers (e.g. Koh et al., 2009; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). These can be considered as a significant departure from the traditional positivist approaches to data collection as they bring subjectivity and multiplicity to our understanding of self-identity. However, their assumptions, underlying hypotheses, analysis and interpretations do not provide rich insights into

identity related issues and how self-identity changes over time into our understanding. Therefore, it is justified to say that most of the research findings in this discipline are questionable as they ignore the multiplicity, complexity and contradictory nature of the moment-to-moment changing nature of self-identity.

Having discussed the theoretical debate of unified self-identity and multiple self-identities in the psychology discipline and the limitations of such understanding in organizational research, now I will discuss how the concept is placed in social-psychology.

2.2.3. Self-identity within the Discipline of Social-psychology

The social-psychological view on self-identity is an outcome of interdisciplinary fields of pragmatic psychology and sociology. Its adherents revitalized identity scholarship by acknowledging the composition of multiple selves emerging out of social interactions. This can be seen as a more convincing way of understanding self-identity, both empirically and experientially, than the psychological views. Self-identity is built up as an individual reflects consciously about his/her relationship with society (Brewer, 2001). William James, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead are some of the pioneering contributors in the 20th century in the development of identity scholarship in this discipline. By challenging the metaphysical transcendental self-identity, the 'self' is understood subjectively and objectively as a reflexive outcome of common experience as one interacts socially. Within this context, the concepts 'I', 'me' and 'other' seem to be the major building blocks of the multiple self-identities. However, in the literature they are discussed in different ways.

(2.2.3.a) Self as 'I' and 'Me'

In the literature, one way of discussing 'I' and 'me' is by associating the two terms with 'self'. The self is constituted of both subjective 'I' and objective 'me'. 'I' comes into existence with the person's daily experiences and with self-awareness. It is an outcome of a continuous sense of sameness and becomes part of self-identity through time (James, 1890). 'I' is a mental representation of the self, a sense of individuality and can be seen as an active processor of experience (Hermans, 2003; Parekh, 2009; Watson, 2008). On the other hand, 'me' is a product of the 'I' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Another way of discussing the terms 'I' and 'me' is that 'me' takes place first and then 'I' develops as a reaction towards 'me' (Mead, 1934).

The concepts 'I', 'Me', 'My', 'Myself', 'Mine' and 'Other' are also discussed as multiple dimensions of self, an outcome of a socialization process that takes place as individuals interact with society (e.g. James, 1890; Mead, 1934). The elaboration of 'me' in terms of 'material me', 'social me' and 'spiritual me' by James (1890) can be considered as a contribution to identity scholarship. Following on this line of thought, identity theorists try to draw meaningful relationships between person and things by incorporating the concept of material aspects as a central component in the identity process (Stets and Burke, 2000). I suggest that inability to access or to possess material things that develop 'material me' becomes the basis for most people in Sri Lanka to view themselves as poor people.

(2.2.3.b) Self and 'Other'

Within this discipline, the self-identity is also discussed as part and parcel of the process of referring to 'ourselves' to 'others' and to the world as an 'object'. 'I' (what 'I' think of myself which gives the self-concept) is considered as an outcome of self-consciousness, whereas the 'other' is considered as an outcome of social-consciousness which emerges through social interaction (Cooley, 1956). Accordingly the self-identity is viewed as the totality of the person's self attributes at a given moment in time, which arises as an outcome of the cognitive process of perceiving 'self' in relation to 'other' (Hogg et al., 2004; Sherwood, 1965). As a result, a relational self is activated. A person not only conceives and evaluates her /himself in relation to "*significant other(s) but also exhibits associated affective, motivational, self-regulatory, and behavioural responses*" (Chen et al., 2006: 154). In literature, this cognitive process is discussed in a number of ways and two such views are discussed below.

(a) Self as Perceived by 'Significant Others'

Cooley's (1956) famous concept, '*looking-glass self*', has become popular in research when addressing 'who a person is in respect to significant others'. This is a process where we make comparison with one or more significant or imagined other and reflect upon such feedback. By doing so, we perceive our self in terms of how others see us. The impact of this process is that our self-identity becomes a self-reflective process. Not only does the concept '*looking-glass self*' seem to have a far-reaching effect in understanding self-identity in social-psychology but also '*managing the image*' has

become a concern in the disciplines of sociology and organizational studies (Callero, 2003; Cahill, 1998; Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Watson, 2008).

(b) Nature of Interaction and Portraying Different Selves

Another way of understanding ‘self’ and ‘other’ depends on the nature of the interaction that we establish in different circumstances. As and when the situation changes, we acquire more than one self that can be distinguishable from one another as:

“...We do not show ourselves to our children as to our club companions, to our customers as to the laborers we employ, to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends. From this there results what particularly is a division of the man into several selves; and this may be a discordant splitting, as where one is afraid to let one set of his acquaintances know him as he is elsewhere; or it may be a perfectly harmonious division of labor, as where one tender to his children is stern to the soldiers or prisoners under his command” (James, 1890:294).

As a result, not everyone sees us the same way, nor do we show the same self to everyone. By this process, an individual not only becomes a part of a structured society, but also stands in contrast to ‘others’ in the society (e.g. as black/white, rich/poor, tax payer/benefit seeker, local/foreign). It is evident that a self with manifold selves can be developed out of social experiences.

As we interact with others, we form attitudes of the others and organize these attitudes as our own. As a result we begin to coordinate our own actions in relation to others and become accountable to ourselves as well as to each other. According to Mead (1934) the particular selves we form help us to manage our social actions through reflexivity. In this way, the community or social group begins to control the responses of the individual. Mead categorizes this community or social group as the ‘*generalized other*’. By taking the attitudes of the generalized other, individuals develop CI.

From the above literature, it is evident that the discussions on the concepts ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘other’ have given significant contribution not only to the discipline of socio-psychology but also to psychology and sociology in theorizing the empirical self. With and across these disciplines, self-identity is considered as an object. It is discussed as an outcome of psychological as well as cognitive processes taking place as an individual interacts with society.

Now the attention is paid to the ‘spiritual self’ and ‘imaginary self’ as ways of understanding the self-identity. This discussion can provide insights into how these

aspects become constituents of self-identity and to what extent I could take these insights into my own study.

(2.2.3.c) The Spiritual Self

Within this discipline, the spiritual self is considered as the person's inner psychic disposition. The apprehension of the spiritual self is possible by analysing how an individual deals with different situations as a conscious process of reflection (James, 1890). What is not clear in James' discussion is how to explore inner psychic dispositions that construct the spiritual self empirically and whether the spiritual self is stable or changes over time. Roland's (2006) differentiation of 'self' in Asian and American contexts gives better empirical understanding of how the 'spiritual self' becomes part of the 'self' than James' (1890) explanation. Roland (2006) claims that in the Asian context the 'self' is more horizontally entangled with extended family, community, and group. This self also becomes vertical when the person attaches 'self' with the past and future destiny, which gives the sense of spirituality to the self. This is applicable to the Sri Lankan context, where a person's whole life including one's past, present and future destiny is very much subject to astrological forecasts, palmistry and the religious belief in 'Karma'. All these become significant in constructing the 'spiritual self' for most individuals in Sri Lanka.

(2.2.3.d) Potential / Ideal / Imaginary Social Self

In literature self is also discussed in relation to 'potential social self/ ideal /imaginary social self. This is an ideological 'self' arising out of emotions. A person may not realize this state of self during her/his lifetime but may expect that at least future generations will achieve it (James, 1890). This can be achieved by seeking recognition that enables the individual to shift from a lower position to a higher position to reach the ideal social self. However, there are researchers who discuss this state as an ongoing process of self-interpretation. This arises not as a psychological process or as an emotional process, but constructed out of shared social practices and it is known as 'social imaginaries'. According to Taylor (2004), social imaginaries refers to "*the way people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations*" (Brinkmann, 2008:405). This way of understanding one's potential self as a 'social imaginary' seems

to be more practical than James' (1890) discussion as Taylor discusses this as internal thought process arising out of social interactions.

2.2.4. Limitations of Understanding Self-identity within the Discipline of Social-psychology

As discussed above, contemporary researchers in this discipline understand self-identity by incorporating individual representations with social processes that generate changing configurations of self-identity as 'I', 'me' and 'other'. Nevertheless, it can be considered as an approach somewhat similar to natural or essentialist ways of understanding self-identity. Smith and Sparkes (2008) classified the discipline as '*thick individual*' and '*thin social relational*' as it places more emphasis on individual cognition, and overlooks the impact of the social interaction. There is a danger, when attaching greater significance to individual psychology, that it can become a 'reductionist analysis' that focuses on "*what goes on in people's minds*' at the expense of attention to the part that is played by the social structures, cultures and discourses within which the individual is located" (Watson, 2008:112).

It seems that the ways of understanding social, cultural and political forces in psychology and social-psychology are more or less the same. Both assume these to be structural components, which are stable and individual self-identity is seen as separable from these forces. In other words, both structural forces and individual exist independent of each other but interact with each other according to the circumstances. The nature of such interaction constructs multiple self-identities, which are rational and coherent.

The relevance or significance of these ways of understanding self-identity in organizational research should not be underestimated. However, there is more to express that will enrich our understanding about this subject matter if we explore the ways in which self-identity is created, maintained and changed as an ongoing process in a context where individuals cannot be separated from organizational context. This is the emphasis of my research. It is worth quoting from Gergen (1991: x) to highlight the tribulations that lie in identity scholarship in this discipline:

"Traditional assumptions about the nature of identity are now in jeopardy. It is not simply that the present turn of events has altered the emphasis placed on rationality, the emotions, and the like, or that it adds new concepts to the traditional vernacular. Rather, like the concept of truth, objectivity,

and knowledge, the very idea of individual selves-in possession of mental qualities-is now threatened with eradication. The implications of this outcome for our lives together are both unsettling and stimulating, and deserve broader discussion”.

2.2.5. Self-identity within the Discipline of Sociology

Early classical work in sociology seems to be built around the ‘family’ and related issues (gender, kinship, family structure, birth order, children’s socialization, etc.). After the 1960s, researchers’ attention shifted to focus on work-related issues (division of labour, work specialization, paid work, gender division, class consciousness, work and family relationship, income distribution, property right, employment crisis, etc.) (Parker, 1977; Smith, 1977; Watson, 2009a; Wolkowitz, 2009). The classical sociological research with the intention of simplifying issues, distinguished ‘work/family’ or ‘private/public’ as two domains with which individuals interact, and studied them separately in relation to identity scholarship. By embracing the logic of scientific discovery with quantitative, empiricist, positivistic methodologies, these researchers brought stability, predictability and generalizability to their research findings (Ticineto Clough, 2009).

These researchers made valuable contributions to the development of identity scholarship by exploring and understanding how personal structures relate to the macro and micro structures and the historical circumstances within which they arise. Nevertheless, they do not give a holistic understanding of the self-identity construction process. They ignore the issues relating to self-identity struggle or conflicts that people often come across in everyday life.

Within contemporary sociology, the question of how self-identity and its related issues should be understood in relation to public/ private or work/ family is still debated. During the past two decades, sociological researchers have tried to understand the significance and the influence of sociological aspects including life-world experiences in understanding self and its related issues (Brown, 2001; Cerulo, 1997; Fraser, 2009; Koot and Ybema, 2000; Watson, 2008). The significance of these developments in relation to other scholarly work has been discussed by Callero (2003:128) as follows:

“At a time when many the poststructural and postmodern scholars have declared the end of the self as a political, philosophical, and scientific concept, the self continues to thrive in academia and is especially vibrant in sociology”.

Rather than considering 'work and family' as independent variables; their interaction and interdependency began to capture the attention of sociological and organizational researchers (e.g. Brooks and Wee, 2008; Watson, 2009a; Wolkowitz, 2009). This shifting of research focus in addressing the complexities associated with the construction of workers' self-identity can be considered as a marked development in identity scholarship. Halford and Strangleman (2009:821) see integrating complexities associated with work-life interactions as a way forward in sociological research:

“Indeed, this is a critical distinctiveness to the sociology of work, allowing us to understand how social forms are embedded in work and in turn what work tells us about the social more widely. It provides us with the methodological and theoretical tools that allow us access to the lived experience of work in all its richness, diversity and complexity”.

Sociological research became more complex but resourceful by linking self with myriad social experiences (which are present and temporal) and with historical, social-cultural, economic and political trajectories (which are sometimes contradictory).

Within this context research discussions on self-identity became more interpretive, complex and political (Fraser, 2009; Halford and Strangleman, 2009; Watson, 2009a). Researchers argue that *“People’s experience of being a worker, the relationships they form at work or how they orient themselves around particular working identities are not confined to specific temporal or geographic locations-they spill out into all areas of life”* (Fincham, 2008: 630).

(2.2.5.a) Person rather than Individual

In sociological literature, differentiations are made between the 'person' and 'individual' and sometimes these two are used interchangeably. The 'individual' is differentiated from the 'person' as a conscious being with a mental representation or as a material object in which 'person' is embedded. On the other hand, a 'person' is considered as a collective representation that is socially embedded. Further, the 'person' is not inherent in a bodily individual (Cahill, 1998). This is the basis for sociological studies to shift their focus from 'individual' to 'person'.

It is evident that the sociological way of differentiating and understanding 'individual' and 'person' is different from the psychological and socio-psychological views. In the latter disciplines, much significance is placed on the 'individual', while the 'person' is either ignored or given less prominence. Person or personal identity is considered as a psychological or cognitive feeling of sameness an individual holds for a period of time

(Sen, 2009). On the other hand, sociologists acknowledge the impact of societal interaction on the construction of person and self-identity. They argue that self-identity is a function of situational demands and variations and is subject to revision, edition and upgrading (Cahill, 1998; Callero, 2003; Demo, 1992; Frable, 1997).

In this research, both these terms are used interchangeably due to the practical difficulty of separating and reasoning one's mental/ cognitive representations and social representations when understanding self-identity.

(2.2.5.b) Self-identity as Historical, Social, Cultural and Political Construction

Scholars seem to be in general agreement that social interaction and the responses from members of social groups appropriately account for developing the individual's multiple self-identities (Smith, 1977; Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Stets and Bruke, 2003; Watson, 2008). Callero (2003: 121) too confirms this fact as follows:

“... there is today a consensus within the discipline that the self is at some level a social construction. Whether phenomenal or discursive, fragmentary or unitary, stable or transitory, emotional or rational, linguistic or embodied, the self is assumed to be a product of social interaction. It is this fundamental principle that frames most contemporary research on the sociological self”.

However, mapping the terrain of the research in sociology, there are different ways of interpreting the social dimension in terms of culture, religion, politics, class, ethnicity, caste, gender, occupation, etc, and their impact in constructing self-identity. Due to these differences, the way self-identity is conceptualized in the sociological literature is often debated among pragmatists, phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists and social constructionists as to how an individual constructs self-identity. Below, objective and subjective ways of mapping social, cultural and political contexts and self-identity are explored in order to further theoretical understanding.

(a) Self-identity as 'Objective' Constructions

By aligning with positivist phenomenological stance, self-identity construction is discussed as a linear process. Individuals are constructed by structures but they are nevertheless empowered to act even though the social world is rapidly changing. Therefore, studying causal relationships is necessary to describe, interpret and understand the social world (Crompton, 2008). Within this standpoint researchers discuss the impact of birthplace, residence, ethnicity and ancestry in national identity (Bond, 2006), the collective practices, faith, patrimony, myth, discipline, charismatic

figures, etc, as normative reference makers of identity (Kellerhals et al., 2002) and how deprivation of material, symbolic, spiritual and essential goods constructs poverty and poverty related identity issues (De Gialdino, 2006).

Phenomenologists also take a somewhat interpretive stance but still favour positivism. They discuss the role of historical, social, cultural and political factors and their interaction in constructing self-identity. From this standpoint, scholars have discussed how people experience and manage risk of violence within particular political and economic settings (Blokland, 2008), how the class identity and individual identity become articulations of one another (Lawler, 2005; Savage, 2005), how religion infuses ethnic and communal identities (Mitchell, 2006) and how young people's social and spatial identities are constructed through their relationships with local community and how these identities are transferred into behaviour (Jones, 1999).

Phenomenological scholars, by taking philosophical approaches such as 'hermeneutics' and 'dialogical self', bring new ontological and methodological insights into the disciplines of socio-psychology and sociology. The hermeneutic approach discusses 'self' in relation to 'others', but not in an existentialist way that separates the 'self' from the 'other' as having its own actions, emotions and responsibility. Based on phenomenological ontological assumptions, the hermeneutic approach addresses the interpretive nature of experience, self-identity and awareness in relation to 'others' (Brinkmann, 2008; Cunliffe, 2009; Reed and Alexander, 2009). The 'other' is seen as an integral part of one's self in understanding 'who one is'. The self encompasses both continuity and discontinuity. It comes into existence as a result of multiple voices in relation to 'other' people. Hence, others cannot be separated from self. The 'other' mediates our bodily experiences and our consciousness. Thus, consciousness is not an outcome of our own but emerges in relation to 'others'. We respond to 'others' with self agency and our self-identity is responsiveness to 'others' too.

By reformulating different theoretical notions in relation to sociology, authors also discuss the topic of identity as 'dialogical self' (Hermans, 2003). Hermans discusses a number of dimensions of self-identity in a very complex and highly theoretical way. He incorporates both individual and social when discussing self-identity as socialized, historical, cultural, embodied and decentralized. Beech (2008) incorporates Wittgenstein's notion (of how words are used in particular context) and Bakhtin's notion (of identity as relational construction of language 'utterances' with respect to

others) to discuss how identity becomes meaningful to people and how change of self-identity becomes a complex dialogic process.

Both these phenomenological standpoints provide rich evidence to study self-identity as an interactional accomplishment with macro social, cultural, political and economic structures as objectivities. These research discussions can be considered as more empirical than the discussions of psychological and socio-psychology as the former discusses the causal relationships between the structures and the self in constructing multiple dimensions in relation to others as a way of understanding self-identity (Fraser, 2009).

The above standpoints highlight the significance of history, social practices and language in enabling people to understand self-identity as a discursive practice, subject to continuity and change. This brings subjectivity into interpretations of self-identity of both the respondents and researcher. Further, these ways of understanding require a researcher to become an insider to the research.

Both sociological pragmatism (derived from American and European pragmatism) and symbolic interactionism can be considered as two other traditions that generally acknowledge the impact of human interactions in producing social realities as objectivities. Their philosophical backgrounds are largely influenced by socio-psychological conceptualizations (Ticineto Clough, 2009). Accordingly, the historical, social, political and economic processes and the institutional frameworks which make up society are objectively situated. All these profoundly shape the kind of people we are, with values, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and experiences (Shalin, 1991). These also give meaning to people's daily experiences and in turn construct realities in society (Deetz, 2003; Giddens, 1991; Smith, 1977). The above notion of construction of 'social reality' recognizes and declares the existence of an independent 'objective' reality.

Aligned with the above understanding, the self-identity is discussed as an individual process, taking place as one consciously interacts with social structures. These discussions are similar to what have been discussed above under the phenomenological standpoint. Literature suggests seeing self-identity as a continuous process across time, interpreted reflexively by the agent. This reflexive construction of self-identity can be seen as an unconscious and conscious process resulting from myriad interactions with others. It is assembled out of cultural raw material such as language, symbols, sets of

meanings, values, etc, which one derives from early life experiences of socialization (Giddens, 1991; Li and Seale, 2008). Society through socialization influences individuals to acquire shared language and meanings. This enables “*a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect on oneself as an object*” (Stets and Burke, 2003:128).

Butt and Langdrige (2003), drawing principally on pragmatism and phenomenology claim that an ‘individual’ once constructed as a social phenomenon through social interaction, becomes a person with agency with pre-reflectivity. A stable self-identity arises as a result of this reflective process. Although the individual’s self-identity is apprehended through discursive meanings, it is considered as unique, concrete and specific object produced in a specific socio-historical context (Chalaby, 1996).

It seems that pragmatic sociological studies often intertwine with socio-psychology discuss psychological and cognitive processes involved in constructing the social/collective mind of the self to form SI and CI and this will be discussed later.

It is evident from the above discussion that the objectivist tradition brings societal impact on self-identity construction into mainstream debate. It adopts the common premise that it is possible to understand individual self-identity by identifying universal principles that exist independent of any particular context and their impact in constructing self-identity.

Advocates of this stance also propose different philosophical and methodological standpoints. Symbolic interactionism and sociological pragmatism when understanding self-identity incorporate distinctive internal personal factors and discursive social factors. Both acknowledge self-identity as an outcome of a reflective process. In doing so, they try to understand how the individual’s self-identity is situated in structural sociological processes (Watson, 2008). Thus, understanding self-identity is possible by understanding the different meanings and discourses embedded in social interactions, symbols and artifacts.

While not discounting the rationale behind these traditions, it is justified to say that many of the above assumptions behind their notions can be debated today. Despite the insights they provide, the limitation of these approaches is that they leave us with no adequate means of explaining ‘how’ and ‘why’ these universal social-cultural, political structures come into existence. Nor do they address what happens if these structures

change and their impact in changing self-identity on an ongoing basis. Also, considering environmental factors, especially attributing culture as given and as the main determinant of construction of self-identity is also criticized (Callero, 2003; Pullen and Linstead, 2005). Even though these traditions provide changing definitions and meanings of the public person, there are limitations when generalizing self-identity. Thus, self-identity needs to be understood as a continuous process as and when the person passes through cultural phases of past and future.

(b) Self-identity as Subjectivity

It is evident that often authors, academics and researchers in the subjective tradition of inquiry, especially in sociology, social sciences and organizational studies, look into the changing process of self-identity construction within different historical, social-political and economic settings.

They challenge the assumption of objectivity of the social world and self-identity with the claim that there cannot be universal and stable social categories or structures. This challenge seems to be reasonable, because what we claim as social categories or social structures come into existence as and when individuals actively interact with each other. Out of such interactions, people create culture, politics and society and they are either maintained or reshaped over time through social conformation or alteration. Thus, the subjectivist notion takes a step further in exploring multiple processes and states of affairs, which become the basis of understanding self-identity as routinely embedded.

Routine embeddedness of material practices and self-identity

Subjectivists within this tradition investigate the routine embeddedness of material practices in society and their significance in constructing self-identity. These discussions are relevant to this study as they acknowledge that people are embedded in myriad social relations from birth and throughout their lives; therefore ‘society’ and ‘individual’ cannot be separated (Giddens, 1991).

The research discussions take a different path from the ‘objective tradition’ discussed above when theorizing how people’s common-sense knowledge of their everyday life is constructed. Within this tradition, construction of meanings and realities is not stable and linear, but a complex process. Therefore, researchers should explore the nature of the social reality within which individuals live, and how these meanings and realities

are established in society. Such discussion is important to this study, as it concerns how and of what the whole society, including self-identities of people, is constructed. According to Crow and Pope (2008: 597) *“The daily interactions and encounters, the rituals and repeated behaviour that make up everyday life create and sustain meaning and structures from which sociologists can learn a great deal”*.

(2.2.5.c) Sociological Contribution to Organizational Research

This tradition often relies on shared language and discursive practices in understanding the historical, social, cultural, political and economic processes that make sense of everyday life. In understanding self-identity, discussions bring aspects of individuals and groups and their interaction to the surface in interrogating the subjective voices of respondents. Examples include how work experiences and social relationships become self-identity constructions of low status occupants (e.g. Ghidina, 1992), how discourse based talk and interactive routines, time and space bring power to managers (e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2005) and how organizational realities are created through social interactions and how identity is negotiated as an interactional accomplishment (e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2004; Symon and Clegg, 2005). All these discussions indicate that self-identity is not just an individual cognitive experience but numerous individual interactions shape and reshape self-identity. These discussions also suggest the need to explore macro and micro sociological processes of the individual’s life-world experiences as means of understanding self-identity on an ongoing basis (Cerulo, 1997; Cunliffe, 2008; Koot and Ybema, 2000).

2.3. Situating Research within Sociology

Having discussed literature on understanding self-identity and its theoretical development over time in three different disciplines; now it is important to decide my stance in understanding the self-identity of workers in Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations. It is clear that sociology has contributed much towards identity scholarship. By taking an interpretive approach, it breaks up the configurations of classical empiricism, positivism and scientism in understanding self-identity. In addition, moving away from positivist approaches as in the case of psychology and socio-psychology, the researchers in sociology acknowledge the political nature of identity construction (Deetz, 2003; Ticineto Clough, 2009). According to Halford and Strangleman (2009: 821), *“The distinctiveness in the field of sociology is that it allows us to understand how*

social forms are embedded in work and in turn what work tells about the social more widely. It provides us with the methodological and theoretical tools that allow us access to the lived experience of work in all its richness, diversity and complex”.

Further, sociology has diverse impacts on organizational research, both in theoretical and methodological ways of understanding self-identity. In this study, sociological knowledge is integrated into organizational research to understand the social realities of the life world situations that individuals encounter in their daily interactions. This offers insights into the process of how self-identity comes into existence as ‘reality’. In other words, alignment within this discipline becomes more relevant and practical for capturing individual, social and political issues that shape social realities and self-identity, and therefore are particularly relevant to my study. Therefore, integrating sociological approaches to understanding self-identity in an organizational context is necessary to acknowledge that social interactions that workers encounter in myriad ways have a significant impact in constituting their self-identity in organization. This is clearly important in the plantation set-up.

Within sociological ways of understanding, neither organizations nor individuals can be understood on their own. They are not binary opposites or distinctive elements, but mutually influence each other. Thus, separation is meaningless and narrows way of understanding reality and identity construction empirically (Fincham, 2008; Watson, 2009a). What workers experience cannot be confined or limited to what they encounter temporally or geographically within their organizations, as the latter extends to the social sphere. Moreover, seeing self-identity not as a distinctive trait or even a collection of traits possessed by the individual makes this study more compelling and timely. This study will unveil the nature of self-identity as sometimes stable and coherent and at other times fragmented and inconsistent. In order to bring these discussions into a single analysis, it is important to incorporate plantation workers’ public and private life interactions. Looking at how even trivial everyday actions, routines and artifacts come into existence in everyday life, their continuation, change and their relatedness to self-identity construction, from a sociological view point is the challenge that I undertake in this research. By embarking on this research in a way that incorporates sociology into organizational research, and trying to address these issues empirically, will no doubt provide rich insight and a fresh contribution to organizational research.

2.4. Self-identity as Multiple and Collective

Having discussed the broader disciplines of identity scholarship, it is important to examine how multiple identity construction processes have been discussed in literature. In doing so, the ways in which multiple identity affiliations are created in intergroup relations as individuals interact with society are explored.

Instead of the concept 'self-identity', concepts such as SI, CI and RI have been discussed within a variety of theoretical frameworks. The 'social identity theory' is often the approach taken from psychological and socio-psychological disciplines. In sociology and in organizational research 'collective identity theory' and 'role identity theory' are often the terms used.

2.4.1. Self-identity as Social Identity-A Cognitive Process of Self-categorization

Tajfel (1981:255) defines SI as an *“individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”*. For Stets and Burke (2000: 225), it *“is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group”*. The dominant logic and rationale behind these definitions is that one’s self-identity is often described as one’s knowledge/awareness of the self and her/his intra-group behaviour. This knowledge is an outcome of a pure cognitive process. Either consciously or unconsciously an individual incorporates the 'other' as an identity maker into her/his self-identity through self-categorization.

There are various ways in which individuals categorize and classify groups. For Ashforth and Mael (1989) it is a two way process: first, as a cognitive classification where an individual stereotypes the group according to prototypical characteristics. Secondly, it is a social classification, which enables the individual to locate and define her/himself in the social environment. For an individual to establish such cognitive and social classifications, three conditions should be fulfilled. First, the individual must be subjectively identified within a particular in-group, then the situation should permit intergroup evaluation and comparisons, and lastly the out-group must be sufficiently comparable (Brown, 2000). For Klein et al., (2007), in order to perform these classifications an individual must identify her/himself with a social category. Next, the SI must be salient for the individual. For this process to take place there has to be an

audience psychologically present and the individual must believe that she/he is an actor who is visible to the audience. Brewer (2001) too discusses distinctive ways of constructing her SI and CI and elaborates SI in terms of 'person-based', 'relational-based' and 'group-based'. This discussion seems interesting as the author brings her own practical examples in different ways to discuss SI and CI as a thought process. However, there are practical difficulties and drawbacks in the above discussions as they leave us with some questions: How can we explore empirically the process an individual undergoes in constructing, reconstructing and changing the SI and CI? How can SI and CI be brought into discussion as ongoing processes? What are the theoretical bases for differentiating CI and SI? These can be considered as gaps in knowledge in such research.

(2.4.1.a) Social identity as Stable Group Categorization

According to the organizational literature, individuals develop SI as they encounter 'other' by perceiving similarities in terms of their attitudes, beliefs, values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, styles of speech, etc, (Brewer, 2001; Brown, 2001; Stets and Burke, 2000). The general outcome of this process is a stable and coherent SI that is same for all members of the group (Klein et al., 2007). SI over time establishes and maintains individual self-esteem and reduces feelings of uncertainty within a group (Abrams and Brown, 1989; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg et al., 2004). Establishing a distinctive strong SI also shapes and regulates predictable, responsible behaviour among individuals in organizations (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006).

However, stereotyping self with others can result in depersonalizing individual identity (Abrams and Brown, 1989; Cerulo, 1997; Hogg et al., 2004). Depersonalization can have both positive outcomes to groups and negative outcomes to individuals. Developing group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, cooperation and altruism are some of the positive outcomes, which become group norms and social regularities. They bind group members and describe each other's behaviour. The negative impact is stereotyping, which limits one's privacy, controls individual emotion and expression and finally, can result in subordination of individual identity to SI (Whyte, 1957).

Viewing group members positively will result in a decision to remain in the in-group and try to maintain the social order of the group. Either by physical action, verbal expression of representation or through attitudes, one begins to affirm, conform or

strengthen the group SI and behaviour. If one experiences negative outcomes, then the group is categorized as an 'out-group'. Then the individual would relinquish SI associated with that group and cross boundaries to become a member of another group. These orientations could generate power relations between group members, perceptual bias and discrimination when taking decisions and evaluating others. This becomes the basis of how in-groups and out-groups are fabricated as a cognitive process and how the power struggles of groups are understood in research (Klein et al., 2007; Luring, 2008).

Researchers by exploring large-scale intergroup relations and group phenomenon discuss how individuals manage SI in multicultural settings. Minority group identification, in-group bias and discrimination (Brown, 2000), leadership, deviance, group decision-making and group culture (Hogg et al., 2004), motive fulfilment and group identification (Riketta, 2008) are a few topics in this area.

There are contemporary writers who assert that SI scholarship should deviate from focusing on macro intergroup relations between large-scale social categories such as national, ethnicity and religion, to explore differentiations within small research groups. Within this context, Luring (2008) explores micro aspects such as leadership, deviance behaviour, group decision making, computer media communication, etc, as negotiated forms of language that construct SI. By challenging the notion of linear relationship in narrative forms of language in understanding coherent SI, Luring uses language as an object of expression. Rather than assuming wider social and national origins as variables or as structures, the author discusses how SI is negotiated through language. Luring provides insight into SI construction as an ongoing process through symbolic meaning embedded in everyday speech, an issue often disregarded by SI researchers. By adopting ethnographic fieldwork as a methodology, the author provides rich findings that generate insight into how subjectivities associated with SI come into existence. Luring's research can open the way to incorporating interpretive research approaches when exploring and understanding multiplicity associated with SI. Rich insights can be brought to light in research by recognizing differences rather than seeking for stability and by exploring inherent power negotiations and their impact on identity.

2.4.2. Self-identity as Social Identity/Collective Identity as a Reflective Process

There are sociological and organizational scholars who reject the notion of singularity but promote multiplicity as a way of understanding the theoretical formation of SI/CI. Within this context self-identity becomes not an autonomous object or a property possessed by individuals, but a process through which social actors come to recognize themselves, and be recognized by others as a cohesive group (Munday, 2006). The premise here is that differences associated with social systems create different social relationships within groups. These social relations become more structured unless they are changed by a different social system. This becomes the basis of creating SI as an ongoing process of social outcome (Jenkins, 2000).

The CI / SI is also discussed as a social object with a unique combination of individual agency and democracy. This notion has a far-reaching effect in understanding self-identity in a more empirical way because reflectivity allows the self to face the possible emancipation and political movements by becoming an embodied agent: a knowledgeable, creative problem-solving actor (Callero, 2003). This is considered as a form of anti-essentialist inquiry, as against the cognitive process discussed previously (Cerulo, 1997).

(2.4.2.a) Collective/Social Identity and Agency

The agency of the individual associated with self-categorization with the group is discussed in two different ways. One approach brings the notion that there is no self or group agency. There are boundaries (e.g. gender, ethnicity, caste) around individuals or groups. They are actor/s who become subject to mainstream discourses without subjectivity and self agency (Anthias, 2002).

The second way of theorization is referred to as ‘identity politics’ or ‘identity work’. Here, the interest lies in discovering how collective agency relates to the social environment. The collective agency that develops through collective self-consciousness coordinates actions of group members by developing “*offences and defences, consciously insulate, differentiate and mark, cooperate and compete, persuade and coerce*” (Cerulo, 1997:393). Discussion of CI and SI also considers how individuals and groups reflectively pursue or renegotiate their inclusion in and exclusion from a particular society in achieving full social rights (Somers, 1994).

2.4.3. Self-identity as Role Identity-A Cognitive Process of Role Performance

Role taking and self-representations as originally discussed by Ervin Goffman (1969) seem to be the foreground of role identity theory. According to identity theory formulated by Sheldon Stryker, an individual's role performance and his/her relationship with a particular social structure become significant in understanding RI.

Within this context, Demo (1997: 306) views that "*our lives are lived in constantly changing roles and situations embedded in the course of human development and social change*". Berger (1967) emphasizes that our RI is socially bestowed, sustained and transformed by our role performance in society. RI cannot be sustained on its own, unless others recognize it. It will collapse or will get transformed into another RI according to how others see the 'role'. Thus, social recognition or non-recognition has a significant impact in determining RI.

What is evident from the above is that roles are subjected to societal expectations. Other than societal expectations, the meaningfulness one associates with ones role (e.g. the ability to control resources, authority, hierarchy, autonomy), role flexibility, role interaction and negotiations are also important in developing the 'identity salience or hierarchy' associated with RI (Atkinson, 1987; McInnes et al., 2008; Serpe, 1987).

Social-psychological researchers also devote greater attention to integrating workers' role engagements to suggest that these roles objectively create RI. The main premise is that roles and the one who occupies the role can be differentiated from each other. With this understanding, researchers often explore what 'role' means to organizational actors, how actors engage with their 'role' conversations and also how we can better theorize this as part of the identity construction process (e.g. Simpson and Carroll, 2008). According to RI theory, the social systems such as class, race, status, roles, etc, which we play within different contexts affect our self-identity as to who we are in relation to them. These social systems provide status positions, which in turn lead to construction of RI (Brewer, 2001).

Researchers also try to understand what happens to an individual's self-identity when the individual categorizes her/him self with a particular role. Arguing in a similar vein to what is discussed above under SI, the depersonalization process can operate across various roles and situations when an individual acquires RI. This is a self-verification

process. If the self-identity cannot reside well with RI, then the individual might maintain the self-identity irrespective of the RI. The outcome is that, while confirming the arrangements of the social structures, one tries to balance the demands of RI with the self-identity as a cognitive adjustment (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Although organizational researchers address the dynamic nature of role in relation to role conflicts (e.g. Kossek and Ozeki, 1998) and changing roles and role transitions (e.g. Ashforth, 2001), these researchers seem to be taking a functionalist approach as they reveal little about the process of RI construction. They fail to capture the multiplicity, fluidity and fragmented aspects that characterize the contemporary, dynamic nature of such constructions. Furthermore, these approaches give prominence to social structures. They presume that under normal conditions, entities within a given category will act uniformly and predictably construct stable self-identity categories (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; De Bruin, 2009).

It is also important to note that there are challenges to the structured or functionalist notions of RI formation. Contemporary researchers, by taking a more interpretive subjective notion, consider roles as fundamentally relational. For example Kroska (1997) claims that gender ideology is not what we normally see as a stable set of beliefs that affect gender division and patterns of work on the domestic front. They are largely understood as networks of interdependent roles (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). Further, McInnes et al., (2008) argue that institutional policies, human resource practices and training, change management and roles that individuals encounter cannot be generalized as given or as outcomes of individual mind process but these are given multiple meanings as individuals interact with them. Therefore, what is evident from contemporary research is that it begins to acknowledge social recognition and interaction. However, the answers to the question 'who am I?' do not reflect the subjectivity or the complexity associated with the self-identity construction process.

The significance of this discussion on SI, CI and RI for understanding self-identity is they provide insights to see how different approaches in different disciplines of study address the multifaceted nature of the identity construction process. Both SI and CI discuss the ways in which individuals apprehend their intergroup relations as a cognitive or as a reflective process as they relate to society. The RI is a process where an individual through her/his role relationships mutually comes to understand RI in relation to others.

In this study there is a possibility of exploring how tea plantation workers form a self-categorization as belonging to a particular social group/s and to macro structures such as gender, ethnicity, caste, etc, and how they perceive the differences of others as out-groups. It is also possible to explore how roles that a worker engages in construct RI. Further, it is also possible to study workers' common ways of establishing stable self-identity in relation to SI or CI more or less as a cognitive process. However, this will not address the ways in which workers construct their differences in self-identity as an ongoing social process. Furthermore, these findings do not provide insights to discuss how workers conform to particular ways of behaviour with self agency, or the impact of daily interactions in constructing workers' moment-to-moment self-identity on a collective and individual basis, which can be stable and consistent at times, and chaotic and conflicting at other times. Therefore, it is suggested that rather than seeking to establish truth and generalizability, there is a need to enrich our understanding about the complexities associated with self-identity, how the self-identity construction process changes from moment-to-moment as an ongoing process. Within this context, this research is deemed to be both timely and compelling as I unveil how individuals and groups interact with each other on an ongoing basis, and how this results in creating, sustaining and changing multiple collective identities.

2.5. Perspectives in Understanding Self-identity

Having discussed the multiple ways of theorizing SI, CI and RI, how self-identity is expressed within 'post-structuralism', 'symbolic interactionism' and 'social constructionism' perspectives are explored below. The ontological stance of these three perspectives will be discussed to see how such notions extend our understandings about self-identity construction processes, agency, and discourse. This review will assist in selecting the most appropriate research perspective and identifying the limitations of others. It will provide with insights to clarify the research design in terms of the type of evidence gathered, and how such evidence is to be analysed and interpreted. This review will also allow 'generativity': the ability of the researcher to build upon the scholarship of those who have come before, as a way of ensuring the integrity and sophistication of the research (Gary, 2009). Table 2.2. provides an overview of the general focus of each of the perspectives which is elaborated below.

Table 2.2: An Overview of General Constructions of Three Broader Perspectives: Post-structuralism, Symbolic Interactionism and Social Constructionism

	Post-structuralism	Symbolic Interactionism	Social Constructionism
Ontology	<p>Social realities are the product of various and contradictory discursive & non discursive practices; they can be causally separated from actors.</p> <p>The beliefs and ideologies embedded in discourse have material consequences as they impose power and bring domination and oppression.</p> <p>Through language the sense of self as distinct subjectivities are constructed.</p> <p>Self-identity, once constructed, becomes a subject position or an object with material constraints around which actor must behave.</p>	<p>The objective reality exists independently from the individual and it can be apprehended by individuals.</p> <p>People interpret the meaning of objects and actions of the social world and act upon them reflectively.</p> <p>The self-identity as CI arises out of social interactions.</p> <p>The self-identity once formed becomes stable over time but may change as one reflectively categorized self with others.</p>	<p>The social world is a continuous process, created afresh in each encounter of everyday life as individuals impose themselves on their world to establish a realm of meaningful definitions.</p> <p>The meanings are constructed moment-to- moment by social interactions.</p> <p>Self-identity is about ‘who I am’, a way of experiencing ones interactions with others.</p> <p>The self and the social world are dialectically related. This is an inward-outward process.</p>
Epistemology	<p>Self-identity as pragmatic. They are intertextual.</p> <p>They are ideological constructions with political consequences.</p> <p>Self-identity as embedded and embodied.</p> <p>Focuses on macro/micro levels of discourses.</p>	<p>Self-identity as pragmatic, something possessed by actors.</p> <p>Interdependently/ dependently individuals establish relationships with structures and manage their multiple self-identities.</p> <p>Focuses on macro level discourses as structures.</p>	<p>Self-identity as commonsense knowledge.</p> <p>Self-identity emerges in everyday social practice and conversation.</p> <p>Focuses on macro and micro level discourses.</p>
Methodology	<p>Critical reflexivity, deconstructing narratives and discourses for their different interpretations by multiple readers.</p> <p>Explores how one text gets privilege over another as a political process.</p> <p>Detached researcher.</p>	<p>Deductive interpretive procedures.</p> <p>Explores symbolic meaning attached with material and non material structures.</p> <p>Detached researcher.</p>	<p>Inductive or deductive procedures.</p> <p>Explores relative differences/ similarities and changes of discursive actions and practices over time.</p> <p>Detached or involved researcher.</p>

2.5.1. Self-identity according to the Post-structuralist Perspective

The pioneering scholarly work of Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida seems to be influential in understanding subjectivity associated with identity scholarship in a post-structuralist context. Within this perspective, the topic is often discussed not as self-identity but as CI from a social, discursive and organizational context (Brown, 2001).

(2.5.1.a) The Ontological Positioning of the Perspective

The ontological assumptions are that the social world can be created out of specific instruments, procedures, institutions, goals and aspirations that are available at a particular moment. The social world is not constructed spontaneously, but arise out of earlier existing knowledge and are transmitted to others through discourse (Deetz, 2003).

Post-structuralist approaches acknowledge that social subjectivities including self-identity are products of various discursive and non-discursive practices. The discursive practices are linguistic systems, which can vary from ways of talking to written text and can include ways of thinking. The non-discursive practices are institutional structures, organizational culture, social practices, rules, techniques, etc. Both discursive and non-discursive practices are often contradictory and can be causally separated from actors. Thus, beliefs and ideologies embedded in discourse can have diverse material consequences to self as they impose power and bring domination to certain individuals and oppression to others (Baxter, 2002; Collinson, 2003). This perspective also contends that self-identity, once constructed, can impose subjective positions or objective material constraints around which actors must behave.

(2.5.1.b) Impact of Power on Self and Self-identity

The primary contribution of this perspective is the notion that man is a product of distinctive discourses of power and knowledge. This understanding was built on the notion of power as discussed by Foucault (1977). Foucault discusses two types of power. The first is disciplinary practice, where those who have power impose power over others' 'body'. The second is how material aspects such as architecture and technology that work through the minds of individuals discipline and control their behaviour. When power is imposed on the minds of people, this power disciplines their body and mind. This can result in producing subjective bodies or in other words 'docile' bodies (Foucault, 1977). The outcomes of this are that even a knowledgeable person

who is aware of her/his individuality, consciousness and own behaviour can become a product of a distinctive discourse of power or knowledge (Callero, 2003). In this way, the disciplinary practices and power manifested through material structures and technology can control not only the individual but also a crowd.

For example, while in the UK, one of the things that I noticed was the behaviour of adults who come to collect their children from school. While waiting for the children, I often noticed that people (often elderly women and also a few elderly men) were standing keeping their legs straight and close to each other. This posture was new to me. I thought of this as good manners. I clarified this matter when following the module 'Ethnography as a Research Method'. A professor who was listening to me said that she had taken this fact for granted for over 50 years. She recalled her childhood experiences and explained how this behaviour was formed in children's minds by the schools in Britain in the early days. Pupils were expected to stand straight and those who did not confirm to this rule were punished. This provides me with the understanding that the power of discipline imposed on children in schools can continue to control their behaviour even after they become adults.

Exploring material aspects such as organizational buildings, architecture, physical arrangement in office spaces, logos, signs, etc, and their impact on the self-identity construction process became research interests. Especially these provide new insight for organizational researchers in understanding how these influence human behaviour in organizations (Chia, 2000). Researchers discuss how discursive practices, power and ideological domination create new social realities to exercise political power over others (Flowerdew, 1997) and how political speeches, posters, advertisements, slogans, newspaper articles and focus group discussions construct and re-construct national identity (De Cillia et al., 1999).

(2.5.1.c) Body as an Embodiment of the Self

The significance of the human body and its impact on organizations has captured the attention of researchers. According to Budgeon (2003), the body is an object of control and scrutiny, governed through relations of power and knowledge. Exploring the materiality of body, which is termed as 'embodiment', can be considered as a new development of organizational research. Central to this understanding are "what body means to those who live in them", "what is the processes through which understandings

about self and body arise” and “how it is that the body becomes meaningful as they establish social relations”. For example, Trethewey (1999), from a feminist Foucauldian perspective, discusses how bodies of professional women are constructed as ‘other’ and how they are normalized and made docile within organizations through discourses. This discussion takes the premise that gendered ways of performing identity are not culturally relative and the body is an object that becomes subject to the control of the already prescribed disciplinary regimes of femininity. In doing so, the researcher objectifies the body and self-identity as something that is subject to the construction or control of externalities, with no self agency.

(2.5.1.d) Self and Agency

Post-structuralists claim that social life in organizations is created through discursive struggle, where different interest groups try to establish their own discourses that privilege a certain worldview over others. Within this context, researchers discuss the consequences of various articulations, disciplinary practices, and ways of communication in studying self-identity and their related issues (e.g. Collinson, 2003). Self-identity is a political construction. These political forms of subjectivities situate individual actors’ self-identity differently in society due to their power relations (Mumby, 1997).

Equally important to examine is the critical orientation of post-structuralists who paid attention to power relations in revealing ways of emancipating human agency from various oppressive relations. The pioneering scholarly work of Jürgen Habermas suggests discourse ethics: an ethical foundation for productive dialogue on how people should resolve their conflicts and come to a common ground of consensus (Gergen, 1999). Within this context, a critical reflexive approach became a way forward in understanding paradoxes and contradictions associated with power, control and resistance in contemporary relations in self-identity construction within organizations (Alvesson et al., 2008; Mumby, 1997). Resistance can be understood as a constant process of adaptation, subversion and re-inscription of dominant discourses. Resistance takes place as an individual confronts, reflects her/his own self-identity performance (Thomas and Davies, 2005). By doing so, an individual tries to ‘re-sort’ or shift meaning in a subtle way, so that new meaning can be created. What this discussion suggests, both theoretically and empirically, is that self-identity and self agency

associated with resistance are discursively produced. These discourses take different forms in different contexts, constructing self-identities in a subjective manner.

(2.5.1.e) Self as Fragmented and Fluid

It is acknowledged that there is no stability or continuity to self-identity but it is fluid and fragmented. Self-identity is not singular but multiple. Thus, one can become a 'multiphrenic self' (Mischenko, 2005). These multiple self-identities can be apprehended by deconstructing² already established self-identities and their accomplishing rhetoric within which such self-identity discourses came into existence as truth (Hall, 1996). According to Callero (2003: 118) "*to deconstruct the self is to challenge essentialist assumptions and lay bare the manner in which the self is wholly dependent upon discourse*". Therefore understanding the particular historical, social, political and institutional context within which the discourse is produced become important. The self-identity that comes into existence in a particular context can disappear as and when the context changes (Boje, 1994; Hatch with Cunliffe, 2006).

There are discussions that deal with issues such as what happen to the self and self-identity when the world becomes complex due to globalization and introduction of new technology. The outcome can be that 'self' can lose the distinct self-identity. Distinguishing one's self as an individual can become extremely difficult as self-identity can fall out of one's control. It can get immersed in and consumed by social connections. The result can be a fragmented self-conception, with no self at all (Gergen, 1991). Drawing upon the literature, it is evident that globalization together with contemporary media and technology control a person's behaviour and interactions unconsciously. This can cause self-identity confusion, especially when one's traditional practices are disrupted (Callero, 2003; Collinson, 2003).

(2.5.1.f) Myriad Self-identities through Language Meaning

The post-structuralists recognize the significance of language in understanding the construction of self-identity in organizations. Language not only defines the possibilities of meaningful existence of reality but also limits them. In line with Jacques Derrida's arguments on language, post-structuralists claim that language whether written or

² 'Deconstruction' is an analysis of reading and rereading discourse in different context, originated historically and institutionally in order to understand the fundamental differences, instabilities and multiple interpretations that discourse can have (Hatch with Cunliffe, 2006).

spoken, is unstable and has no fixed meaning. It carries multiple meanings as they are put into practice through use. The subjectivities arise as a result of myriad discursive practices of talk, writing, argumentation and representation and these become part of cognition which provide meaning to ones self-identity (Alvesson and Karreman 2000; Baxter, 2002).

By incorporating different social and organizational contexts, researchers discuss how the macro discourses and discursive practices in organizations craft individuals' self-identities as multiple, contradictory or fragmented identities that individuals experience from moment-to-moment (e.g. Ford, 2006). Ford's study can be considered as a new way of elucidating identity scholarship within this perspective. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) demonstrate the possibilities and consequences of various articulations, disciplinary practices, and ways of communication and their related issues in studying self-identity in organizations. However, viewing that discourses are grounded on object-oriented and material-based activities, all these authors position the 'self' as an actor within already existing discourses. What is lacking here is that they do not discuss interactions or interconnection between discourses and people and the impact of these interactions on self-identity, which is the main concern of my study.

2.5.2. Limitations of the Post-structuralist Perspective

Having discussed the insights of post-structuralist literature, it is evident that this perspective leaves us with some questions. Is it particularly meaningful to consider social structures and their associated macro discourses as given or in other words as historical consequences? Can macro discourses and their associated power be separated from the individual, or in other words can they exist independently of each other? How does hierarchy of power exist in a particular social structure and come into existence in relation to practices in economic, historical and political context? If the self and self-identity become subjectivities constructed by external forces and power relations, what happens to one's self agency can be seen as some questions that are left unanswered in this perspective.

By objectifying macro social, political and economic discourses and their embeddedness in language researchers downplay or ignore the actors' agency over discourses in shaping their self-identity. According to Mischenko (2005: 211), "*Power is continually performed by people, with people, in a complex interplay of numerous*

discourses, practices, institutions and interactions, like a fluid network that constantly forms and reforms". According to Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), adopting an objective orientation in exploring macro discourses facilitates the examination of wide array of contextual influences but it downplays the individual power influence on discourses in lieu of the broader social, political or economic setting, which can be easily captured through micro discourses. Moreover, distancing the researcher from what is being studied also ignores the subjectivity of the researcher and the research findings. In contrast to the above literature, I argue that the researcher and the research process are not independent entities. The researcher interacts with the subject under investigation and the research findings are subjected to the interpretation of the researcher.

2.5.3. Self-identity according to the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

(2.5.3.a) The Ontological Positioning of the Perspective

The ontological assumption behind symbolic interactionism is that the social world is "*a pattern of symbolic relationships and meanings sustained through a process of human action and interaction*" (Morgan and Smircich, 1980: 494). This means that there exists a social world independently from the individual and it fashions the psychology of the individual. Both symbolic interactionists and post-structuralists consider individuals as social actors having the capacity to interpret the symbolic relationships and meanings, including their own self-identities. Within this understanding, symbolic interactionists conceptualize self-identity as stable, an enduring yet distinctive state of being in relation to status and roles (Rane and McBride, 2000).

(a) Socially Dynamic Self-identity as a Cognitive Process

Scholars are concerned with the relationship between the person and the society with the notion that these two are mutually constructed in the course of social interaction (Chen et al., 2006). As discussed previously, Cooley's (1956) 'looking glass self'; Mead's (1934) concept of 'generalized other' along with Blumer's (1969) three premises on symbolic interactionism and Goffman's (1969) 'presentation of the self in everyday' can be considered as foundations of this perspective. All these pioneering scholars commonly agree that the self-identity is an outcome of one's interactions with stable structures.

Within this perspective, it is assumed that historical, religious, cultural and political circumstances are given structures. Because of the stability of the structures, the self-identity one develops out of the relationships with these structures also becomes relatively stable over time (Serpe, 1987). Individuals or groups, by apprehending these social structures, try to interpret their roles and interactions as given. By doing so, they contribute to the continuation of these structures as objectified realities. Therefore, it is possible to transmit these stable social realities to others through a socialization process (Cerulo, 1997; Gergen, 1999). This results in individuals producing and reproducing the world within which they function based on categorization and identification (Jenkins, 2000). This becomes the basis of cultural continuity, the main determinant of the construction of self-identity.

Within this understanding, meanings associated with symbols, situation, roles, socialization and the emergence of the self-identity among Tamils have been studied (e.g. Roberts, 2004). Interestingly Arena and Arrigo (2005) and Michael and Bruce (2005) discuss symbolic meanings associated with militants and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terrorist group in Sri Lanka in developing their identities. In addition, physical buildings and space locations are considered as overt symbolic representations of self-identity makers (e.g. Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). Gender, religion, race and ethnicity are studied as stable social categories that produce self-identity as a relatively stable cultural outcome (e.g. Byrne, 2005; James, 2008). In these researches, symbols, roles, socialization, etc, are conceptualized as objects carrying meanings and interpretations on their own. However, it is evident that understanding symbols, roles, situations and socialization as independent stable entities that give meaning to those who interact with these elements has limitations, especially, when the meanings, words and phrases associated with symbolic aspects are understood only in their literal meaning and represented as reality. Any differences or subjective meanings that arise out of individual interactions are understood as misunderstandings or perceptual biases (Ford, 1999). James (2008) too discusses how culture provides changing definitions and meanings of the public person. The limitation in James' discussion is that when generalizing self-identity, especially when the focus is only on immediate cultural situations, the historical continuity or the changing process of culture and its impact on the self-identity is overlooked (Callero, 2003).

Although many aspects of self-identity are discussed, these scholars underestimate the complexities embedded within society and how it constructs changing and multiple self-identities as an ongoing process. In this study, I argue that social categories such as gender, race, religion, culture, etc, and the self cannot be differentiated as they are intertwined with each other.

(2.5.3.b) Agency and Self-identity

This perspective ignores self agency, instead, it views that power, inherent within structures, gives meanings to society. This means that individuals and their self-identity are constructed in the relationship between perceived external forces in the society. Therefore, understanding of self-identity is possible by exploring meanings and discourses embedded in symbols, artifacts and social interactions that exist outside. This is the basis for organizational researchers in exploring culture, strategic decisions, leadership, symbols, artifacts, etc, as significant organizational structural components with agency (Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Corley, 2004).

Within this context, organizational researchers discuss how shared meanings, values, beliefs, ideas and symbols become key elements of normative organizational control in constructing managers' identity as an elite (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006), how values become normative beliefs which orient individuals actions in interpreting social realities (Walker, 1990) and how events, imaginations, significant others, routines and habits create self-identities temporally (Ezzy, 1998). Although these discussions bring subjectivity into their research findings, the authors treat objects, events, language, interactions, symbols and artifacts as objective realities that produce discursive practices. In other words, symbolic interactionist ways of understanding phenomena privilege structure over self agency (Thomas and Linstead, 2002).

However, there are researchers who challenge the popular notion discussed above. By measuring six theoretical properties of self, Burke (1980) discusses roles and self-identity as cognitive impositions on self. Burke acknowledges the agency of actors in constructing and (re)constructing meaning through the enactment of these roles reflexively. Prasad and Prasad (2000), by adopting a more subjective construction, contest the commonly held position that workplace resistance is a conscious, calculated and planned action. These researchers bring insight into the understanding of multiple ways in which resistance is discursively produced and reproduced in everyday language

in the workplace. Although they draw on roles and symbolic meaning in interactions and address the part of the actors' agency associated with resistance, they do not adequately illustrate the process of resistance and its impact on self-identity as a result of individuals' ongoing struggle or how it takes place in everyday interactions.

2.5.4. Limitations of Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Although symbolic interactionism seems to be practical from a sociological understanding as to how people behave in organizations, this perspective provides limited insight in terms of the context and orientation of my study. Theoretically the self-identity work is presented more or less as a neutral process, or as a set of cognitive activities. This can be considered as a structural-functionalist view, in which individuals are aligned, fitted or adapted to the situation (Ford, 1999; Smith and Sparkes, 2008).

The implication is that one's self-identity becomes a 'variable', which can be manipulated according to the environment. What could happen when a researcher takes this notion is that both the process of meaning making and its impact on self-identity construction is ignored. Also, the subjective notions underpinning multiple ways of constructing self-identity can be overlooked. Issues such as how meanings come into existence and change over time, what impact these different meanings have on self-identity at different times and how people bring their self-identity, as a reflexive process, cannot be explained.

A holistic understanding of the interplay of historical, socio-cultural, and political macro discourses in the construction, reconstruction and change of self-identity as an ongoing process is lacking when addressing self-identity issues related only to one dimension of the individual's life (e.g. either the public or private domain). Such a limited view ignores the complex self-identity construction process that results from an individual's myriad social interactions.

Further, this undermines the self agency, as much emphasis is placed on structure and the socialization process. What facilitates unchanging fixed behaviour with absolute roles are often discussed as an outcome of significant others or by society. According to Callero (2003:120), "*The symbolic Interactionist tradition has, for the most part, failed to develop a sophisticated conceptual understanding of the self in which relations of power are presumed to be constitutive*".

2.5.5. Self-identity according to the Social Constructionist Perspective

The post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives provide insights into how self and self-identity can be understood within broader discursive practices or through symbolic interactions and meanings. These perspectives address the multiplicity and complex nature of self-identity in relation to changes in macro structures/ discourses. The researchers often explore uninterrupted discourses of text, talk, facts and data to bring subjective understanding of reality, with the notion that discourses are largely historically constructed realities. The theoretical underpinning assumption behind all these is the 'realist' notion: an external world exists independent of the knower's representation of it. This leaves a gap in understanding how different experiences of realities emerge, how they are sustained, and what are the power relations involved in changing and shaping these realities. For this reason, these approaches are insufficient to capture the complexities associated with construction of self-identity within a broader social experience. Further, little empirical attempt is being made to incorporate both macro and micro, public and private interactions into our understanding, showing how these are interwoven with each other in constructing, reconstructing and changing self-identity as and when people interact with the society in a spontaneous and responsive ways.

As an attempt to complement the various shortcomings and inadequacies presented above, it is intended to explore the up-country tea plantation worker's social and organizational interactions that inform our understanding of how self-identity is produced and reproduced on an ongoing basis.

Social constructionism invites us to experiment with new ways of experiencing, describing and explaining social experiences. Rather than seeking for the truth or validity of a given construction, this perspective encourages us to reflect critically on our taken-for-granted worlds of reality, and the ways in which our lives are affected by these constructions. The notion is that there cannot be grounds for postulating or investigating a reality independent of the knower. Essentially, this is an anti-realist assertion (Luckmann, 2008; Nightingale and Cromby, 2002; Shotter, 1992).

The work of Ludwig Fleck, a physician, is considered as a forerunner of this perspective. In early 1935, Fleck brought divergent thinking into the scientific way of understanding the phenomenological world as he contended that facts are not

discoveries of individual scientists but they are creations of research collectivities (Liebrucks, 2001). Thereafter, this brought the notion of subjectivity into sociological research, to re-conceptualize perspectives and methodologies to incorporate everyday discourse, practices, experiences and interactions into our understanding of reality construction (Gergen, 1999; Liebrucks, 2001).

(2.5.5.a) The Ontological Positioning of the Perspective

What differentiate social constructionism from the perspectives discussed above are the underpinning assumptions regarding the construction of reality in the social world. Social constructionists claim the interconnection between individuals and reality as an ongoing discursive practice. Accordingly, *“the social world is a continuous process, created afresh in each encounter of everyday life as individuals impose themselves on their world to establish a realm of meaningful definition”* (Morgan and Smircich, 1980: 494). Acknowledging social constructionism, in general, means that there is no truth or accurate answer to the question under investigation. It is a misconception to think that such truth and accuracy portray reality (Ford, 1999; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Shotter, 1993b).

The next assumption is that social reality is not a production of an individual mind, but constructed through social interactions (Gergen, 1999; Luckmann, 2008). The critical shift lies here in the notion of discourses and other forms of representations. All these gain their respective meanings from the ways in which they are used within relationships. Through these relationships, descriptions and explanations are sought by way of shared language and knowledge is produced thereafter.

Both these assumptions provide significant insights to see that self-identity is not something given or a cognitive formation within the self, but a complex political process arising out of an individual’s myriad social interactions.

Looking through the lens of the social constructionist perspective lies a range of work with subtle differences in the ways in which researchers give meaning to the perspective, and the circumstances in which they apply this perspective in research. Researchers usually take social constructionism as proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) when exploring how myriad social relationships that people establish in society become interactional accomplishments as individuals’ co-ordinate their relationships with each other. Those who take a ‘subjective cognitive approach’ explore how reality

is selectively perceived, rearranged and negotiated as a cognitive process, so that reality gets objectified (Weick,1995). Shotter (1993b) discusses taken-for-granted conversational practices and the embodied aspects of interaction as significant in reality construction and proposes this as ‘rhetorical-responsive social constructionism’. Those who explore micro interactions and how these create meaning relationally adopt ‘intersubjectivity’ (Cunliffe, 2010a /2010b). In addition, Cunliffe (2008) emphasizes the emergent and contested nature of experience as ‘dialectical understanding of social constructionism’. As discussed earlier, the ‘hermeneutic approach’ within sociology is also an approach within social constructionism. These readings suggest that there are highly complex theoretical and contested philosophical notions underpinning social constructionist approaches.

Studies that explicitly take the sociology of knowledge as proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) into the social constructionist perspective examine ‘self-identity’ within two different propositions, ‘objective’ and ‘objective-subjective’ ways of reality construction and they are elaborated below.

(2.5.5.b) The Social World as Objective Constructions

Proposition (A): The reality of the social world is created from social facts, institutional practices and symbolic products. People negotiate meanings within social situations.

The basic assumption on objective ways of reality construction is that people understand the world as they interact with their social worlds. The social worlds constitute both physical (buildings, models, etc.) and ideological structures (institutions, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.). As we interact with these physical and ideological structures, they provide knowledge as to ‘what is right and wrong’, ‘what to say and how to act’ and ‘who we are in society’. This ‘knowledge’ is not normative, it is grounded in the notion that “...our ways of talking depend upon the world; they are ‘rooted’ or ‘grounded’ in its nature: to that extent our talk is about what we ‘find’ to be there” (Shotter, 1993b:25). According to social constructionists, emotions are not merely individual feelings but are discursive phenomena, manifested as part of talk (Edley, 2001). People experience this reality in an objective manner by separating themselves from the reality construction process. Everyday language provides the person with objectification and also sets the order of reality to act upon. In other words, language provides descriptions about everything including doing things

in a practical way. This results in individuals becoming actors who interpret both symbolically and linguistically, the social world, which exists objectively outside the person, through language (Cunliffe 2010b; Ford, 1999). People become knowledgeable about the social reality through the socialization process. From this socialization, collective knowledge is produced, transmitted and maintained. By doing so, knowledge becomes common sense an individual shares with others as normal and self-evident routines of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Ford, 1999; Luckmann, 2008).

Although the objectified social reality is generally acknowledged, a marked development can be seen in proposition (A) above, which differentiates this from symbolic interactionism and post-structuralism. Proposition (A) brings into the discussion the variations in situation and situational demands that are created by the individual through collective discourses. It discusses how these discourses revise, edit and change social realities within different contexts as an ongoing process. Within this context, it puts forward the notion that the social world becomes a subjective understanding of the individual as she/he interacts with the objectified social world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), a view that is overlooked by the two perspectives discussed above. This perspective is distinguished as more empirically practical than the post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives, because by not aligning with the notion of cognitive formation, it explores subjective construction of social phenomena (Cahill, 1998).

(a) Self-identity as Identity Regulation and Identity Work

Social constructionists in organizational research articulate self-identity in two ways: ‘identity regulation’ and ‘identity work’. With the notion of objectivity, the researchers conceptualize self-identity as ‘identity regulation’: “*a process through which people develop narratives of the self within a context in which external influences seek to impact on or regulate the nature of the self-meaning*” (Beech, 2008: 52). According to Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 627) identity regulation is “*Discursive practices concerned with identity definition that condition processes of identity formation and transformation*”. The general claim is that the social reality is already constructed. It is given meaning and maintained or shaped discursively by communicative practices of language and social actions. With this understanding, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003:1165) explain the same process as ‘identity work’: an internal process whereby people are “*engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the*

constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness". All these definitions suggest that self-identity is not necessarily a reflexive process but concerned with adopting practices and discourse that are more or less positioned 'within' a person. Although Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) use the term 'identity work', it is evident that the term 'identity regulation' is the term commonly used when incorporating the 'internal state' into social constructionists' work. On the other hand, the term 'identity work' is used when taking a subjective/objective notion and this will be discussed further under proposition (B).

(b) Self-identity as Collective Identity

How CI is constructed over time is discussed by exploring how individuals as actors make sense of their surroundings by way of language use and ways of talking about their work experiences, etc. All these become significant in constructing and negotiating collective meanings that bring subjective social definitions, prescribed actions and expectations in creating shared understanding as gender, national, family, and ethnic identities (Yen et al., 2008). What is evident here is that researchers objectify social phenomena (maleness, femaleness, nationality, etc.) as stable social discourses with which people interact as significant in constructing multiple CI within a particular context.

CI is also considered as a complicated and contradictory compilation of discursive constructions with some shared elements of social reality (Brown, 2006). Within this context, researchers acknowledge that reality is constructed through specific historical, cultural and political contexts but discuss how workers continuously construct and negotiate meanings, models and concepts to make sense of what they experience in constructing their self-identity (e.g. Grandy, 2008). Another theme of discussion is the ways in which discourses construct managerial self-identities in relation to organizations (e.g. Hardy et al., 2005; Pullen and Linstead, 2005; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003). These discussions reveal how organizational discourses, roles and material arrangements affect CI construction not as a stable process but as a conflicting process of struggle. Here, material arrangements, artifacts, routines, roles, rules, stories, discursive practices and language systems become significant in producing and reproducing organizations and the self-identity of individuals. Also discussed are how individuals in organizations claim multiple identities in terms of organizational identities, how identities are socially and symbolically constructed through different

rhetorical strategies, and how organizations use different rhetorical strategies to acquire and maintain legitimacy under ambiguous situations (e.g. Sillince and Brown, 2009).

All these discussions suggest that history, culture, politics, etc, serve as macro discourses within which people engage in constructing multiple identities (e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, profession, etc.). They in turn become part of self-identity. Moreover, these multiple identities are continually negotiated through language and social interaction (Allen, 1998). The different language practices in different contexts will give different constructions, and understanding of reality, including different self-identities of individuals, in a subjective way.

What can be drawn from the above discussion is that, although researchers generally acknowledge objective reality, they bring in the variations in situation and situational demands that are created by the individual through collective discourses. These in turn are shown to revise edit, and upgrade CI, both individually and collectively within different contexts as an ongoing process.

(c) Self and Agency

While acknowledging the self agency of individuals, the scholars in this realm believe that self-identities are produced, reproduced and contested by reflexive agents, and come into existence through conversation.

Organizational researchers examine the self agency of the managers and their constant struggle to shape their self-identities in organizations and how they are shaped by discursive forces (Thomas and Linstead, 2002). As discussed earlier, Grandy (2008) too provides evidence that individual agency gives meaning to macro discourses constructs the CI of workers. What makes these researches important for us is that they provide understanding of the relationship between self and macro discourses. They are not independent of but interwoven through language. With this understanding, these authors discuss the consequences of discursive processes in forming, continuing and changing self-identity of managers and workers as a reflexive process. A marked development in this notion is the attention paid to how different practices bring conflicting identities with power inequalities (Hong and Fiona, 2009). This is a fact often overlooked by other perspectives, including SI/CI and RI literature.

However, separating macro social, political and cultural aspects that come into the world through language as objective constructions and separating them from the ‘self’ has its drawbacks. When organization, control, culture, change, leadership, strategy, politics, etc, are considered as macro structures or objects of our experience, they constitute an existing reality or a world which our current construction of self-identity cannot escape (Michael, 1997). According to Gergen (1999: 67) this is “*a repository of sense data deposited by the passing world*”, a passive way of understanding how people experience reality. The repercussion is that self can become a ‘commodified object’, which could hide the true self-identity (Watson, 2008). This is the same criticism that is directed to the symbolic interactionist and post-structuralist perspectives. Nevertheless, unlike symbolic interactionism and post-structuralism, here much emphasis is given to the differences in language constructions and ways of talk, and the impact of self agency in understanding self-identity and its related issues.

The questions yet to be answered are how do we recognize and bring to our discussion the continuous but unsystematic hurly-burly of everyday meanings that constitute the world and how it brings multiple self-identities into individual’s life? How can we explore and incorporate the precarious nature of continuation, rise and fall of various discourses? What is the relationship between the macro discourses and micro interactions that will assist us in understanding our self-identities? How do changes take place at the abstract level of reality construction, and what is their impact in change in self-identity over time? Exploring these and bringing them into our discussion can enrich our theoretical understanding of the subject.

Perhaps a significant development that can be seen in the social constructionist perspective is the objective-subjective dialectical construction process of self-identity, as discussed below. This can be considered as a way forward that provides responses to the above questions and research gaps that are unanswered by the previously discussed perspectives.

(2.5.5.c) The Social World as Objective-Subjective Dialectical Construction

Proposition (B): The reality of the social world is created, enacted and maintained by people through discursive practices. People are intentional and reflexive subjects.

As opposed to the proposition A, the second way of understanding self-identity is in relation to people’s social interactions. This is by and large a process of people’s

historical, social, cultural and political accomplishment of discursive social practices and ongoing conversation. It is the following ontological grounds that differentiate propositions (A) discussed above and (B).

(a) Social World as Interactional Accomplishment

Although there is evidence that there is no common agreement within constructionists' inquiry about subjective voices of respondents, they all agree that self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even an internal mental process. It is how the individual reflexively understands self as she/he experiences sameness and different circumstances in society that constructs self-identity. Thus, self-identity can be seen as an interactional accomplishment in which people act on their interpretations (Ford, 1999; Gergen, 1999; Sandberg, 2001; Shotter, 1993b; Watson, 2008). Through interactions, people create subjective meaning and realities with others in a spontaneous and responsive way. As they get objectified they become part of daily practices (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). It is worth quoting from Deetz (2003: 422) where he refers to Husserl (1913/1962) to explain this process as follows:

“...specific personal experiences and objects of the world are not given in a constant way but are outcomes of a presubjective, preobjective inseparable relationship between constitutive activities and the ‘stuff’ being constituted. Thus, the science of objects was enabled by a prior but invisible set of practices that constituted specific objects and presented them as given in nature”

What can be argued from the above discussion is that unlike proposition (A), proposition (B) claims that knowledge about social reality is constructed, given meaning and maintained or shaped by discursive practices that are enacted by individuals. This is of interest because here the notion of objectivity associated with the social world is rejected. Social realities are not given in the facts or data of the situation itself, nor are they direct instruments or mediated observations (Ford, 1999; Shotter, 1992; Taylor and Robichaud, 2004). It is people who create and shape the environment and it in turn shapes people. Thus, our social worlds are not direct evolutionary products on their own but they are products of an evolutionary emergence over the generation, which is called 'History' (Luckmann, 2008).

Proposition (B) argues that individual sense making, interpreting and applying norms, values, skills, etc, depends on practical rather than scientific rationality (Hammersley, 2003). Within this context, realities are not explicitly passed on to others through the

“socialization process”. According to post-structuralists, symbolic interactionists and also as noted by SI and CI theorists, one who undergoes a socialization process acquires values, norms and skills as a normative transition process. As a result, an individual interprets the objectified reality so that she/he will carry the same meaning, which ensures the continuity of the reality. A critical shift taken by researchers who suggest proposition (B) is that realities are not institutionalized through a normative process of ‘socialization’. Rather, realities are brought into existence by being embedded in daily practices and ways of communication. This whole process is a dialectical process and is described by the terms externalization, objectivation and internalization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

As we interact with society, we become engaged in social practices and conversation. Through these interactions common ways of doing things are negotiated and they become common practices. This is called ‘externalization’. As these get embedded in discursive practices they construct a particular context. This context in turn brings objectified social realities into existence. This is known as ‘objectification’. One confirms ways of being-in-the-world by objectifying and engaging in these specific discursive practices. Then these objective realities are interpreted and given meaning by the individual. These practices over time bring shared understanding, and in turn provide directions and means of organizing our activities (Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Yen et al., 2008). By engaging in this way, we try to understand ourselves as subjects but we also become objects as we take these practices for granted. This is known as ‘internalization’.

Therefore, what can be suggested is that meanings do not emerge just by conversation or mere practices. For this to take place there should be coordination, agreement, negotiation and affirmation among persons (Gergen, 1999). This becomes a ‘common construction’ of discursive objects as participants collaboratively negotiate a general agreement regarding the causes, symptoms, assumptions, and potential solutions that relate to the issue (Hardy et al., 2005). Thus, meaning becomes a joint enactment; “*an emergent property of coordinated action*” (Gergen, 1999: 145) that brings the sense of self-identity to people.

Within this understanding, organizational studies have shown their interest in exploring the process of construction of a changing self-identity within different historical, social, cultural, political and economic settings (e.g. Pullen and Linstead, 2005; Watson, 2008).

Proposition (B) can be considered as a marked development as they incorporate sociology into organizational studies. Researchers under this proposition challenge the positivist view ‘that individuals are only actors who have the capacity to interpret the meanings in their social world and their self-identities’. By moving away from the grip of the functionalist/ positivist approaches which reveal little about the self-identity construction process, they explore how self-identity is created, negotiated, threatened and reproduced as an ongoing process. This is what sheds light on the theoretical foundation of my study.

(b) Self-identity as Outward-Inward Process of Identity Work

In literature it is argued that self-identity becomes meaningful as a result of a dialectic process. This process is known as ‘identity work’. According to McInnes et al., (2008) it is not only how people categorize themselves and are categorized by others, but is concerned with how physical, symbolic, verbal, textual and behavioural acts become imbued with meaning and are taken as culturally embedded. For Storey et al., (2005) it is a reflexive process where individuals incorporate, modify or reject the objectified discourses and practices in narrating their self-identity. By discussing the limitations associated with focusing on ‘identity regulation’ purely as an internal process, Watson (2008) suggests that identity work should be seen as an ‘external-internal’ process. According to Watson, the contextual macro discourses that come from outside become discursive resources that can be used as externalities to act on a person. The macro discourses become absorbed into the self through micro interactions. This becomes an internal process when one incorporates ones reflexive understanding of self to influence social interactions accordingly. Watson (2008: 129) discusses how individuals become active agents of makers of society and how they are made by society as outward-inward process of self-reflexivity as follows:

“Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live their lives”.

The author incorporates both agency of the individual and the construction of structures of the social world to show how the individual sees these as objective realities and how these two are interwoven with each other to create self-identity. His discussion is relevant as he provides insight into how the individual defines self by defining the

others in the society and how multiple SI are invoked through diverse discursive practices. Thus, this can be seen as an external social process as opposed to the SI and CI discussed and also what is discussed under other perspectives and propositions above.

(c) Self-identity and Agency

Based on the literature, it is argued that proposition (B) provides empirical evidence of how individuals act and react to oppressive forces that threaten their self-identities in terms of self- agency, resistance and struggle.

From post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives, the individual's struggle and resistance for self-identity maintenance or change is under-emphasized. This is because they subordinate the self-agency of individuals to relatively powerful discourses that exist independent of the individual.

From a social constructionist objective-subjective standpoint, rather than identifying how different meanings associated with discourses produce and control individuals, more attention is paid to exploring individuals' engagement in interpretive struggle among discourses and practices. This is often discussed as a dialectic process where individuals strive to shape their daily practices, either individually or collectively, in a routine or unorganised way (Ashcraft, 2005; Mumby, 2005; Putnam et al., 2005). Within this notion, resistance is understood as a social construction among participants, either willingly or otherwise (Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Prasad and Prasad, 2000). This standpoint considers the ways in which social power is derived from social interactions and through formation of groups. Within this context, attention is paid to exploring how social power is enacted and negotiated within shared and sometimes contested discursive practices (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Through social interactions, various discourses are brought into society. Over time, these discourses become transformed into common understanding. They in turn get ratified as taken-for-granted, and ultimately incorporated into one's own words and actions, which become significant in experiencing self-identity (Beech, 2008; Deetz, 2003). Thus, self-identity so constructed through discourses can be dynamic. It can have the capacity not only to develop and grow over time but also to be altered through interactions with everyday life situations. Thus, self-identity that comes into being through conversation and social practices has the agency to actively stand on its own to the responses of others,

show resistance and adapt to social demands (Callero, 2003; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009; Taylor and Robichaud, 2004). This process is somewhat underemphasized in proposition (A).

Recently, attention has been paid by organizational scholars to empirically accounting for subtle ways in which individuals cause resistance and how they construct their self-identity within organizations. This is considered as a political accomplishment of social interactions (Symon and Clegg, 2005). Within this politically constructed and contested process, organizational participants bring different legitimate identities which are constructed by talk (Kornberger and Brown, 2007; Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004). Researchers also explain how managers actively draw on different discourses in producing a range of subjective outcomes in relation to organizational change (Doolin, 2002) and how managers' powerful discursive practices achieve their power, despite the resistance and conflicting interest of workers (Ford and Ford, 1995). All these provide insights into self-identity construction as a compromise and collaboration between management and workers' discursive power. Collins (1989) provides evidence that individuals are not passive victims who lack self-agency or motivation to challenge political activism, oppressiveness, economic status, power groups, colonial value systems, imperialism, slavery, apartheid and racial discrimination and so on. By such challenges, they reflexively encourage CI, which is a different view of themselves and their world from the one offered by the established societal order. According to Weick (1995) self-identity is not a deliberate effort, and not a process of performing a script. It is a result of a sense-making process and how self-interpretation takes place in life history. As a result of this sense-making process, an individual acts with commitment towards others and as a result self-identity is brought to the surface as a coherent story of events (Cunliffe, 2009). What is evident is that it is possible for individuals to bring new forms of meaning to social life, but this involves political struggle.

2.6. Justification for taking a Social Constructionist Perspective

From the above discussion, the justification is presented for taking a social constructionist perspective in this research. The recent developments of the social constructionist perspective with an interpretivistic approach challenge the functionalist, positivist approach by trying to create awareness of reality of the social world as a complex and fluid process. They challenge the taken-for-granted assumption that individuals work in terms of inner mental representations, which resemble and structure

the social world. They question the ontological assumptions about how individuals live with independently existing social structures, and act within them to gain everyday knowledge of 'who I am'. Within this context some of the questions raised by these scholars are: Is language given or do we form our language that shapes our ways of seeing the world as we do? How do we externalize our macro discourses?

The ontological stances that social constructionists take in answering these questions are especially relevant to my study. In particular, those who adopt proposition (B) discuss how the meaning of 'who I am' involves myriad interactions, which are spontaneous, responsive, practical, and unconscious and these can also be contested. As a result of this interaction, we knowingly or unknowingly 'shape' or 'construct' not only the sense of our own self-identity but also our sense of the social world. Self-identities arising out of this process can be studied through discourses or narratives as to 'who one can be' and 'how one should act' (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004; Brown 2006; Thomas and Davies, 2005; Watson, 2008). Here, self-agency is not considered as a private 'internal' state, but largely an outcome of how we respond to people, depending on the way they talk and act. This is the basis for me to take an anti-realist notion in this study, to argue that self-identities are created, negotiated, threatened, bolstered, reproduced and overhauled by individuals through ongoing, embodied interaction. By doing so, this research is positioned within the social constructionist perspective (as already shown in Table 2.2) which is in harmony with the interpretive research.

Within this context, proposition (B) within the social constructionist perspective can be best applied to understanding the discursive construction of social reality as opposed to the material construction of reality and is more appropriate in understanding self-identity of workers on plantations. Favouring closeness, complexity and locality of reality production, it helps to explore complex and ambiguous situations that could offer rich insights in terms of both methodology and methods, for my study (Thrope, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2004).

2.7. Criticisms against Social Constructionism

When reviewing the literature, it became evident that the social constructionist perspective is challenged by the post-structuralists. They argue that sociological ways of understanding do not adequately address the social constructionist ontological approaches, nor do they adequately conceptualize the significance of discursive power in

shaping the self (Callero, 2003; Cerulo, 1997). When responding to this criticism, social constructionists argue the limitations associated with post-structuralism, which fails to acknowledge the significance of historical, social and political discursive practices, or that the self-identity emerges through such practices. Simply, post-structuralists do not believe in the existence of self-identity with individual reflexivity and agency. Callero (2003) contended that even though post-structuralists provide changing definitions and meanings of the public person, there are limitations when generalizing self-identity, especially when focusing only on immediate situations. In order to overcome the above drawbacks, social constructionists suggest viewing self-identity as a continuous process as and when the person passes through cultural phases of past and future. This notion supports organizational scholars in providing better empirical accounts of self-identity by exploring and discussing it as a continuous process constituted and reconstituted through discursive practices.

2.8. Understanding Self-identity through Discourse

The intention of this discussion below is to bring to our understanding various ontological and epistemological positions within a discourse perspective. This review will provide a basis for justifying a discourse-based perspective that is consistent with the research objectives stated in the Chapter 1. How the terminology is used in research, and the main arguments behind objective-subjective ways of mapping discourses within symbolic interactionist, post-structuralist and social constructionist perspectives are explored below. Thereafter ways of making meanings through discourse and the main debate underpinning agency and discourse are considered in order to justify the selection of discourse analysis in this study.

2.8.1. What Constitutes Discourse?

From different definitions, it is apparent that discourse is a collection of text embodied in practices of talking and writing, that brings objects into existence (Hardy, 2001; Taylor and Robichaud, 2004; Woodilla, 1998). These objects can be knowledge, social objects, forms of self, social relationships and even conceptual frameworks (Grant and Hardy, 2004). Discourse is not confined to talk, but also covers a wider range, such as written text, language meaning embedded in physical and symbolic artifacts and also social practices (Cunliffe, 2008).

2.8.2. Debate on Discourse

(2.8.2.a) Objective and Subjective Approaches to Discourse

A review of the literature reveals that discourse perspectives draw on both objective and subjective ontologies and epistemologies (Cunliffe, 2010b). From an objectivist's standpoint, discourses carry a certain truth and logic and are embedded in a particular language and practices that constitute the social world. Therefore discourses have both an ideational/ideological and practical/ structural element (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Pullen and Simpson, 2009). Accordingly, metaphors, stories and narratives are also considered as structures. Objective approaches to discourse bring stability to self-identity. This understanding is largely in harmony with the symbolic interactionist perspective, as discourse refers to the use of language as a social practice that represents the world and locates actors' own positions and relationships within it (Butt and Langdrige, 2003). It is assumed that relationships exist 'out there' in a relatively fixed state. The individual makes sense of the objective reality by treating language and social practices as systems of representations to be neutralized and made transparent, so that the presumed shared world can be understood. It is assumed that the natural social order is embedded in language and is unproblematic. Thus, conflicts and fragmentation associated with language use are either ignored or disregarded. Within this context, researchers elucidate how the religious, social, cultural, economic and political discourses provide identity categories (e.g. Stapleton and Wilson, 2004).

However, authors by taking a subjective notion of discourses challenge the objective notion. Hammersley (2003: 756) provides the basis for subjectivists to question the objectivists' notion as follows:

"...a distinction is drawn between how social phenomena appear to people, as objective things existing in the world, and their true nature, which is that they are discursively constructed-and constructed precisely in such a way as to appear to be objectified features of the world. Central here, then, is the notion of reification: the question of how social phenomena are discursively constructed to appear as non-discursively given"

This is the basis for both post-structuralists and social constructionists to take a subjective notion of discourses, with their own similarities and differences. Both perspectives commonly view discourses as multiple, fragmented and competing. However, the differences lie in the way they understand discourse and its construction.

From a post-structuralist perspective, power is embedded in discourses (text, documents, records, reports, organizational structures, technology, etc.). The meanings arising out of such discourses are multiple and fragmented and they shape multiple and conflicting realities. Research concerns are how power relations are shaped by organizational structures as well as micro and macro discourses and interactions (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009), and how the discourses of gender, race, class, ethnicity, technology, etc, position and change self-identity (Collinson, 2003). On the other hand social constructionists explore more fragile subjectivities of socially constructed realities. They explore 'how and why' social phenomena or discourses are constructed the way they are and the process by which they become objective social realities (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Cunliffe, 2008; Hammersley, 2003).

Having looked into the objective-subjective debate on discourses, it is important to see how discourses produce their meaning in such a way that they bring social realities.

2.8.3. Discourse Approaches to Meaning Making and Self-identity

Here I explore the ways in which discourse-based researches discuss how people make sense about the world and their self-identity as real. These insights are important to understand how workers on plantations make meanings about their social world, including work, the workplace, managers and their self-identity as real.

In literature, attention is given to the contextual and temporal aspect of interaction with the notion that realities that people construct are situational. Therefore it is suggested that in order to understand organizational realities, one needs to study discourse interventions as collaborative practices that people bring into dialogue within their context (Boje, 1994). Thus, understanding the context within which these realities are constructed is important. Social phenomena come into existence through the stabilizing effect of generic discursive process or through shared meanings (Hardy, 2001). Also social reality and meaningful material objects are created through certain social collective behavioural patterns. Thus, different meanings that come into existence become context specific (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Interdiscursivity and intertextuality seem to be two terms important in understanding the context within which meanings emerge. Interdiscursivity means how a single/individual text/context is constructed from diverse discourses (Fairclough, 1995). Intertextuality refers to the link of a context/text to a chain of other context/text (Cunliffe et al., 2004;

Hardy, 2001). What is important is not only the context/text that is under consideration but also other context/text that can be brought into the interpretation process (Fairclough, 1992; Grant and Hardy, 2004).

Identifying discourses in context and the text produced at different levels will help to discover the availability of multifaceted discourses that are established as taken-for-granted or, if not, contested and reinterpreted. What is evident is that some discourses bring stability and agreement to individuals' relationships, while others attempt to isolate individuals to make sense of the turbulence in their relationships (Samra-Fredericks, 2005). Individuals by encountering both these ways bring collaborative association of past and present into being (Ford, 1999).

Therefore, the applicability of discourses in this research goes beyond exploring a single meaning or a concrete reality, which brings a more or less stable or linear self-identity into existence in organizations. Instead, it explores subjective multiple meanings and multiple realities that result in construction of multiple and inconsistent self-identities within different contexts over time.

Within this context, it is evident that language and conversation, social practices, symbols and body become discourses that give meanings to our understanding of 'who we are' and this will be discussed further, below.

(2.8.3.a) Language and Conversation as Meaning Making

From what is discussed above it is evident that language is central in constructing and communicating self-identity. It is through language that people in social settings exchange information, make sense of their situations and bring reality into existence (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Bryman and Bell, 2003; Chia, 2000; Ford and Ford, 1995; Hall, 1996; Hardy, 2001; Sandberg, 2001).

As mentioned before, discourse can be conversation, a single speech act or an extensive network of speech acts with arguments and narratives. It may also include auditory and visual, events such as singing, dancing, symbols and artifacts that are used in conjunction with or as substitutes for what is spoken. Facial expressions and body movements also constitute conversation (Ford, 1999). Metaphors and stories, too, can bring discourse to create common sense to allow people to act within a context. The embodied and powerful webs of ideas, arguments, and ways of talking, symbols in

operation at any time in history, represent and sustain particular ways of understanding the world. Interview discussions and written texts (annual reports, brochures, general presentations, etc.) also can be discourses (Gunnarsson, 2000). All these bring strong impressions, images and feelings so that connections can be established with others (Barry et al., 2000; Cunliffe, 2001).

Fairclough (1995) and Prasad and Prasad (2000) view discourse as language use. They acknowledge that language is a social practice that helps to locate actors' positions and relationships in the world. Taking an objectivist standpoint, they consider language and text as autonomous in bringing an objective world into being to locate the actors within it. It is not only a mode of communication; it is also significant in creating realities and self-identities of people in societies. Language and emotional display such as blaming, denying, justifying, etc, also have become part of discursive matters that interest researchers. These are personal experiences, which provide culturally derived practical knowledge about what is right and wrong, norms, obligations and what are appropriate forms of emotional expressiveness under different circumstances. These also become matters of configurations of social and political realities constituting self-identities in organizations (Samra-Fredericks, 2004).

In a very interesting and practical way Gergen (1999:36) discusses how language brings realities and truth to our understanding as "*...the words themselves do not describe the world; but because of their successful functioning within the relational ritual, they become truth telling*". Accordingly, reality emerges in a context where people's interactions constitute and are constituted by communication (Ford and Ford, 1995; Giddens 1991; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Patriotta and Spedale, 2009). If this is the case, self-identity can be understood as a process that occurs within and is also driven by language as it shapes, creates and defines reality. Therefore, self-identity can be considered as a recursive process of social construction, each time new realities are created, sustained and modified in the process of communication.

Within this context, organizational researchers explore language as a way of understanding organizational processes, such as how meanings get attached to organizational phenomenon, how the self-identity is constructed, communicated and negotiated within and outside organizations (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Grant and Hardy, 2004; Van Der Valk, 2003), how managers create, sustain and focus on use of conversation to achieve intentional change in the organization

(Doolin, 2002; Ford and Ford,1995), how language produce common meaning across organizations worldwide and how they differ as a result of variations in culture (Gunnarsson, 2000). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) discuss Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of 'language games' to understand language and its relationship to self. For Wittgenstein, every word has a meaning, which is correlated with the word. What matters is not the actual written form but what is envisioned or the meaning it forms. The meanings of words depend on how they are actually used. The construction of meaning as 'common reality' takes place only when people take part in constituting and sustaining conversation where both parties develop the context. Otherwise, it becomes a matter of an individual saying a sentence and the listener just understanding it. Thus, meaning making and developing the context is a back-and-forth process of negotiation between people (Shotter, 1993a). The outcome of this is that language becomes a process of specifying new meaning, rearticulating old objects, assigning both old and new connotations to terms of reference. Thus, the self as to 'who we are' comes up continually through the living language that we use in contemporary life (Cohen, 1997). Therefore, it is evident that when exploring self-identity in research, it is important to consider the significance of language to everyday life. This requires interpreting the meanings that we assign through language, which in turn produce the 'self' in our daily life.

(2.8.3.b) Social Practices as Meaning Making

Other than language and conversation as discussed above, individual and collective social practices and their significance in constructing meanings to self-identity are also the focus of research discussions.

In recent years, practice-based discourse approaches to self-identity have captured its attention within organizational studies. A small stream of literature in organizational studies highlights how politically infused discourse practices can construct, reconstruct or even manipulate subjectivities. They can control the behaviour of employees and their self-identity construction process (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Storey et al., 2005). Within this context, researchers are concerned with how the daily practices become historical, social, cultural converge national, class and gender into workers' self-identity (Yen et al., 2008), how paradoxes, ambiguities and relationality become experiences and enactments of gender identities within a gendered division of labour (Blain, 1994). Pullen and Simpson (2009), too, give insights both theoretically and

practically in understanding self-identity as an ongoing process of discursive practices which construct the research subject as conflicting, fragmented and contradictory. These studies provide insights into this study about the instability, contradictory and ambiguous nature of gender identity that emerges through enactment of discourses. Sandberg and Dall'Alba (2009) provide a 'life world perspective' as an alternative to 'objective' approaches of exploring and understanding self-identity. They suggest that practices cannot be treated as structural entities but they are social activities which are purposive. They are enacted through social interactions rather than an individual thought process. The shared understanding of these practices provides directions to individual behaviour in organizing activities in a continuous way.

Although the same life world perspective is not adopted here in this study, Sandberg and Dall'Alba's discussions on how individuals make meaning to their social practices in a responsive way offer insights to our understanding. Their discussion on how the interplay of macro discourses and micro enactments can provide understanding in relation to how workers shape their self-identities in tea plantations. Further, Saunders' (2007) study is interesting as the author discusses how discursive practices assist people to make connections and interpret their affiliation to the home county, while distancing them from the immediate context within which they live. By doing so, they maintain their ethnic, religious and caste identity. It is interesting to see how this takes place on the plantation context, as I observed the same being enacted among the Tamil plantation workers in Sri Lanka.

(2.8.3.c) Symbols as Meaning Makers

It is evident that material aspects and symbols that carry meanings construct discourse reality within a particular situation. One way of such understanding considers material aspects and symbols as objective discourses consisting of physical structures that can be referred to, designated with, or acted towards. These give shared meaning to human actions and they are passed on to newcomers through socialization. The symbols help in interpreting and situating the individual in the interactive process (Arena and Arrigo, 2005; Saunders, 2007). As the names imply, symbolic interactionists and also post-structuralists take this as the basis of their understanding of self-identity.

The second way of understanding symbols is by considering them as abstract interpretations. Material aspects or symbols are the outcome of social discourses,

which are created by people. As and when they interact with people, they are given interpretations, which are multiple meanings (Ford, 1999). This is the theoretical rationale of social constructionists, which interests me in considering how material aspects including symbols are given meaning by individuals as they interact with them.

(2.8.3.d) Body as Meaning Makers

Discourse-based research suggests that it is not only the language, social practices and symbols that produce discursive meanings but also one's 'body' and 'bodily practices' become meaning makers. Researchers, relying on a social constructionist perspective, view the body and the signification of the same in self-identity construction in two different ways by 'objectifying' and 'subjectifying' the body. For both these schools of thoughts, the body is not purely a natural construction, or submissive where meanings are inscribed by discursive systems external to it. In other words, they reject the 'naturalness' of the body as taken-for-granted (Budgeon, 2003). In addition, both acknowledge 'embodiment', which gives meaning to self-identity as flexible and increasingly fragmented and pluralistic. It reflects the lived experience of a social and cultural world, and can be understood as an ongoing process that develops through language and social interaction (Gergen, 1999; Mead, 1934). However, the two schools of thought differ in research approaches. Objectifying 'body' means self-identity is discussed as a functional outcome. It is the world around the 'body' and the relationship the 'body' establishes with the world that brings meaning to the 'body'. On the other hand, studies also provide insight into the nature of subjectivity, the material aspects of the body as aspects of the self-identity makers (Bean and Durant, 2005; Trethewey, 1999). This is what interest post-structuralists to explore how the 'body', subject to externalities, constructs myriad self-identities. Social constructionists do not see the 'body' as an object, but as a process of negotiating and re-negotiating self-identity. By taking a subjective standpoint, social constructionists consider the 'body' as a cultural representation constructed through discursive practices rather than determined on its own (Budgeon, 2003).

As far as the organizational context is concerned, the material embodiment of either managers or subordinates has an impact on each other's subjective understanding of 'who they are' in organizations. With this understanding, both managers and subordinates differentiate each other's self-identity. Researchers discuss discursive practices such as presence of the manager through continuous supervision, walking and

talking to workers as significant in controlling workers (e.g. Harding, 2002). In addition, the manager's body is used without any verbal communication or instructions to function as a means of control over the employees. This is called 'aesthetisation' of the managerial body: a careful arrangement and manipulation of the manager's physical appearance (e.g. dress code, hair, clean shaved face, etc.) to signify the superiority and power of the managers in the minds of employees (Harding, 2002).

Having discussed what constitutes meaning, now we can discuss types of discourses with the intention of deciding how to interpret macro and micro discourses, consistent with my research objectives.

2.8.4. Types of Discourses

Literature provides different ways of mapping discourse (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004; Gergen, 1999; Grant and Hardy, 2004; Iedema and Wodak, 1999; Reed, 2000). Micro, meta, grand, meso and macro are found to be some of the different types of discourses. The terms macro and micro are the main concern of this study as the research objectives are to explore how macro and micro interactions become significant in understanding one's self-identity. The term micro discourse is denoted by lower case 'discourse': what one encounters in terms of language use and daily practices as one comes to understand her/him self through daily interactions (Grandy, 2008). It is always evolving due to the variation in interaction. Exploring the micro discourses will provide evidence of practices through which mundane knowledge is constructed and co-constructed on a collective basis (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009; Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004).

Macro discourses, denoted by the upper case 'Discourse', refer to the larger patterns of talk inscribed in language. They become part of the collective heritage of a given society (Taylor and Robichaud, 2004). They are used as universal, historically situated set of vocabularies referring to or constituting a particular phenomenon. They consist of long-range macro-systemic discourses (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). The macro discourses become patterns of talk and daily practices, which neutralize the world of experiences. They shape and legitimize the social and material world and establish power relations within a given society (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009; Taylor and Robichaud, 2004). In other words, the ongoing historical, social, cultural and political

considerations are referred to as broad macro discourses and they are power driven, and are capable of constituting objective realities over time (Grandy, 2008).

Scholars state that it is difficult in practice to incorporate micro and macro discourses into one analysis (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). However, based on Fairclough (1995) we see the possibility of incorporating these into a single analysis. Although we see macro and micro discourse as separable, they are interwoven with each other at some point. Macro discourses give *a priori* understanding into emergent and local construction of micro discourses, and micro discourse over time may become macro discourses through practice.

In this study, I consider micro discourse as daily interactions including patterns of relatively intimate social relations formed during face-to-face interaction of workers with managers, trade union members, colleagues, and other community level members. Macro discourses are considered as socially constructed realities that arise as a result of continuous social practices and linguistic agreements. Over time, their existences become historically, socially-culturally, politically and economically taken-for-granted structures.

The historical, socio-cultural political and economic contexts often referred in this research are about workers' everyday life, how people manage or organize themselves through their interactions with others. They are not mere external structures which impose stable self-identity, as viewed by pragmatists, symbolic interactionists or post-structuralists, but are outcomes of workers' ongoing interactions and embedded in conversations and actions.

Studies exploring macro-micro discourses that constitute social realities of workers and their impact in self-identity construction seem to be few. I try to bridge this knowledge gap by threading macro-micro discourses in elucidating the process of how self-identity comes into being and how they/it change/s over time. These discussions can open new ways of understanding self-identity in organizational context. Thus, this research can be considered as a contribution to discourse-based research in organizational studies.

2.8.5. Discourse and Agency

The terms 'agency of the individual' and 'agency of the discourse' are debated, defined and theorized in different ways in literature. Individual 'agency' generally means one's

ability to create, recreate and transform social reality (Hays, 1994). Discourse as autonomous on the one hand and as an interactional accomplishment on the other hand is a main debate that can be seen in the literature.

(2.8.5.a) Discourse as Autonomous vs. Discourse as an Interactional Accomplishment

At one end of the continuum of such debate, 'discourse' is considered as autonomous. It has its own existence and therefore cannot be considered as linguistic or as paralinguistic such as text, language, emotion, pitch, etc, produced by individuals (Chalaby, 1996; Hays, 1994). This justification seems to be in alignment with the symbolic interactionist and also post-structuralist perspectives. The central argument is that a separation can be made only between the individual and discourses. For these two perspectives, discourses are patterns of social life that are not reducible to individuals, as individuals are not fully formed subjects but only participate in particular discourses. These discourses are patterns that have dynamics with an underlying logic of their own. They contribute to their production and reproduction over time and are durable enough to withstand the whims of individuals who would try to change them (Hays, 1994).

Such discourses have the agency to shape the subjective experience and the actions of the actors. These discourses can be institutionalized practices or common understandings, which are produced and reproduced as individuals get socialized into a system. They are connected to other discourses but also can compete with myriad other discourses, which are produced in other contexts (Hardy and Phillips, 1999). Thus, discourses so produced in different contexts carry different power, and they compete with each other and cause discourse struggle.

The review of the literature on the subjective continuum argues that discursive meanings are not something given or fixed, but they exist and are maintained from the repeated verbal and nonverbal interactions of individuals. Understanding of specific processes and situations of discourse construction in and around individuals' interactions are what is significant for them. As a result of the ongoing pattern of interaction, these discursive meanings become set rules, norms and guidelines, and in turn shape future interactions. They are in harmony if the discursive event contributes in preserving and reproducing existing realities on an ongoing basis.

There are instances where meanings so created are contested as a result of different discursive interactions among different individuals and groups. This results in conflicts and struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interest. As a result of changing subjective positions, contradictions can become apparent in social relations. When contradictions become apparent, people encounter dilemmas. They try to resolve these dilemmas in innovative and creative ways: by adopting existing practices in new ways, so they contribute in changing existing discourse. What can be seen in this situation is that discourses are not in harmony, but struggle occurs at the individual, institutional and social levels (Fairclough, 1992; Hardy, 2001).

As a result of this struggle, some meanings get marginalized while dominant meanings emerge as reality. When producers or interpreters bring new discursive practices, they disarticulate the existing order of discourse, and rearticulate a new order of discourses. This is a negotiation process, which may result in structural changes at institutional or social levels. In doing so, different contexts and new meanings can be created (Samra-Fredericks, 2005; Fairclough, 1992). Thus, change in existing realities becomes a political process.

The discursive meanings that get privileged become reified as real objects. The more coherent, structured social realities with a unified view become easily transmitted as taken-for-granted, especially when supported by other discourses, and not contested by competing discourses (Grant and Hardy, 2004). In the course of their transmission, such discourses generated at the micro level can get distanced from their original production of text and context and can get located in a new context.

Individuals and their relationships with structures, as favoured by the symbolic interactionists is not the concern of this study. Understanding individuals' practices and language is the basis of my understanding of the historical, socio-cultural, and political circumstances within which the discourses are produced and reproduced by individuals and groups through their interactions. What is also relevant for this study is not the agency of the discourses as given but how one discourse gets privileged over others through individual power and self-understanding.

2.9. Summary and Conclusion

In addition to exploring its historical development, the concept of ‘self-identity’ has been examined within different disciplines, with the intention of understanding how self-identity is placed within the broader subject disciplines of psychology, social-psychology and sociology.

It is evident that although researchers in these disciplines look at the same phenomenon, the concept ‘self-identity’, it is studied and discussed entirely differently. This is because of the different conceptual backgrounds and different practical lenses they use. In psychology, either ‘individual self’ or ‘pragmatic self’ often comprehend “who I am” as a psychological development process. On the other hand, social-psychological researches provide a more practical and realistic understanding of self-identity than the psychological understandings. However, the popular notion that the natural world including self-identity can be studied by common experimental logic taken up by these two disciplines is criticized.

In this discussion, it is evident that sociological research often carries the premise that there is a reciprocal relationship between self-identity and social realities. Thus, self-identity is not just an individual experience but is shaped by numerous historical, social-cultural and political interactions.

With these understandings, I provided the justification for intertwining sociology into organizational research as the former captures the macro and micro issues that shape self-identity of workers in plantations, and therefore is particularly relevant to this study.

It is also evident that scholars often explore the ways in which multiple identity affiliations are created in intergroup relations, especially when individuals interact with society. Although different terms such as SI, CI and RI are used to place their stances, in general the ‘self’ is viewed as an object. The common theme in discussion in the literature is SI/CI as self-categorization in relation to a particular social group. RI on the other hand is a process where an individual through her/his role relationships mutually comes to understand RI in relation to others. However, most of these studies fail to capture the subtle and complex ways in which self-identity is constructed, maintained and changed, which is the concern of my study. Therefore, what can be suggested is that they lack an in-depth analysis of more practical aspects of how individuals’ attempt to

preserve or change their self-identity individually or collectively as a continuous process.

Thereafter three main perspectives: 'post-structuralism', 'symbolic interactionism' and 'social constructionism' and their respective ontological and epistemological underpinnings in research are discussed. Symbolic interactionists conceive the relationship between the self and social structures as central to understanding self-identity. Post-structuralists discuss the fluidity and complex nature of self-identity in relation to changes in macro structures or discourses. However, issues such as how different social realities emerge, how they are changed over time and the impact of self-agency in sustaining and changing such realities are overlooked by both these perspectives. Thus, their knowledge production seems to be insufficient to capture the complexities associated with the construction of self-identity, as people experience 'who they are' as and when they interact with myriad social experiences, which is the main thrust of my research.

Within this context, this research is positioned within the social constructionist perspective in understanding the self-identity of workers in the up-country tea plantations in Sri Lanka. Social constructionism questions the positivist tradition of looking for consistency and stability of structures and self-identities. While looking for diversity, social constructionists assert the impossibility of gaining the 'truth' or 'objective knowledge' of the social reality. Rather than objectifying phenomena under investigation or understanding self-identity as a product of 'others' or as a mere effect of social surrounding, as suggested by proposition (A); this research is placed within proposition (B) which discusses self-identity as a dialectic process. Within this context, it is believed that the emerging nature of individual and collective self-identity construction processes, their continuation and change within macro and micro historical, socio-cultural and political processes can be fruitfully understood within the subjectivist notion of the social constructionist perspective.

It is also evident that discourse based issues such as agency, the meaning making ability of discourse, and using different approaches in research are debated and vary from perspective to perspective. The above discussion also highlights the two main domains of discourse studies. In one continuum, discourse reflects or represents 'objective' social realities and social relations that construct and constitute self-identity. This is the notion of the symbolic interactionist and post-structuralist perspectives. In the subjectivist

continuum lies the social constructionists' view. They try not only to understand how language and daily practices construct realities but also to understand how individuals' self-identities are fashioned in their social practices within a particular context. The main ontological assumption is that discourses do not spring into existence on their own but through individuals' social interactions. This is the basis for me to argue that discourses are created by individuals through their daily interactions and are shaped and reshaped as and when the interactions change.

From this perspective, in this research, self-identity is referred to as how the individual makes sense of her/himself in relation to others and it is an experiential outward-inward process of self-reflexivity arising largely through social practices and conversation.

According to the research objectives, macro and micro discourses are the major concerns of this research. In this research macro discourses are considered as socially constructed realities. They are not stable structures that can be objectified as given realities but arise as a result of continuous social practices and linguistic agreements that workers establish in their daily interactions. They become historical, social-cultural, political and economic taken-for-granted realities as a result of continuous social practices and conversations. Micro discourses are considered as daily interactions that constitute patterns of relatively intimate face-to-face relationships that workers form in public and private spaces. Exploring micro interactions will provide the insights to understand how daily practices are constructed, co-constructed and changed and their impact in producing, reproducing and changing nature of self-identity.

In this chapter divergent areas of conceptualization of self-identity are mapped out so that connections might be made known and a better understanding of self-identity may be developed. This is particularly valuable as relatively little attention has been paid in research to illuminating and mapping out, concurrently, multiple ways of understanding self-identity. This way of presenting the identity research is very informative in many ways as there is much to learn in each discipline and perspective.

Chapter 3

Historical, Socio-cultural and Political Setting and the Evolution of Sri Lankan Up-country Tea Plantations

Introduction

The historical mainstream of ancient Ceylon³ was essentially a monastic tradition with an exclusive focus on Buddhism and the Buddhist custodianship of the state. Even today, Theravada Buddhism remains the main religion of the country. The majority of the population are Sinhalese, whose native Sinhala language is a member of the Indo-European language family. In terms of ethnicity, the Sinhalese are descendents of a North Indian prince, Wijaya, who settled on the island in around 500 BC. The low-country Sinhalese resided traditionally in the plains while up-country Sinhalese resided in the midland. The indigenous ‘Vaddhas’ are the smallest ethnic group, who live in the rural jungle of the country even today.

Traditionally there was no significant distinction between the labour of men and women due to the feudal structure of production, which tied the whole family to socially productive labour. However, a clear social stratification based on strong caste and class structures existed through different occupations (Bandarage, 1982; Jayawardena, 2001; Naidu, 2002).

The country was predominantly under the ruling powers of the Kings of the Kandyan Kingdom from the 15th to 19th century. Invasions that took place from time to time from India during the 17th century brought South Indian cultural, economic and political influences especially into the northern region, as they concentrated in the Northern part of the country, in the Jaffna Peninsula. They were ethnically identified as ‘Sri Lankan Tamils/Jaffna Tamils’. By religion, they were Hindu and adopted the Dravidian language, Tamil. Later, Arab traders who found the country to be a desirable place made Ceylon their permanent residence and established themselves as ‘Sri Lankan

³ In this study, the name ‘Ceylon’ is used to refer the country before independence. After independence in 1948, it is referred to as Sri Lanka.

Moors', followed by 'Indian Moors' (Malays) from the East Indies. Both Moors and Malays follow the Islamic religion. Moors generally spoke Tamil while Malays spoke the Malay Language. However, the socio-cultural and political impacts on the country as a whole from these migrations were insignificant and the country remained more or less the same (Little, 2003; Warnapala, 1994).

In this study, I will not recall the macro ethnic issues and calamities the country faced over three decades until 2009, although it had some impact on plantation workers. In this chapter, my main concern is with examining the experiences of Indian Tamil origin workers, who construct their self-identity from a historical perspective. This review will provide understanding of the interplay of various forces and factors that shaped the historical, social, cultural and political development of the plantations as a capitalist mode of production, and distinct relationships between the 'capitalist colonial masters' and the 'working class poor'.

First, the impact of colonialism in transforming a subsistence economy to a capitalist society is explored. It is evident that a long history of colonialism and the capitalist mode of enterprise resulted in the formation of national, ethnic, class, and caste ideologies that became significant in forming, reforming and changing people's self-identity. The political transformation the country underwent after independence, the impact of the same on the plantation and Indian migrant labour, the major transitions of nationalization and thereafter privatization, and productivity issues are also discussed in this chapter. All these have an impact on workers' understanding of 'who they are' in a plantation context. Thereafter, different interpretations of plantations are sought with the view of giving my own interpretation as an alternative way of understanding plantations as an extension to the popular notion of understanding them as 'total institutions'.

Considering these becomes relevant when the scope of the study extends beyond the understanding of the plantations as a formal institution and the self-identity of workers as 'present here and now' to a historical evolutionary ongoing process.

3.1. Colonialism and Elite Caste, Class and Ethnic Contradictions

From the literature, it is evident that at times, the historically formed religious, socio-cultural, economic and political ideologies laid by the colonial powers appear to have operated side by side with the traditional subsistence economy, and at other times, they overrode the traditional subsistence economy. Whatever the outcome, they were

significant in forming, reforming and transforming the class, caste, religion and ethnic differences of Ceylonese as a historical outgrowth.

Significant changes both socially and culturally took place in the country with the invasion of Portuguese traders who ruled the coastal area from 1505-1656. They formed a new ethnic identity as 'Burghers' and introduced 'Roman Catholicism' to the people in coastal areas. They converted high caste natives (e.g. Sinhalese Goigama and Tamil Vellalas who claimed land ownership and were engaged in farming) to Christianity by imposing severe restrictions on the practice of native religions. These castes became educated and were able to occupy government administrative positions. This laid the foundation for a native class of Sinhalese and Tamils who became English speaking, white collar workers (Arasaratnam, 1998; Alawattage, 2005; Codrington, 1970; De Silva, 2001).

The Dutch defeated the Portuguese in 1656 and ruled the country other than the Kandyan Kingdom until 1797. The 'Dutch Burghers', the descendents of this group imposed Protestant Christianity and Roman Dutch law, which remains part of the country's jurisdiction today. They reinforced caste to serve their economic interest, and promoted sub-caste Sinhalese (e.g. Salagama) to become an influential class by engaging in cash crop cultivation. The low castes living in the coastal areas in the low-country (e.g. Karava who were predominantly Sinhalese and Tamil Karaiyar who were engaged in fishing) were offered government positions.

The Portuguese and Dutch invasions can be considered as the first wave of capitalism. Vast areas of paddy land were converted to cash crops such as pepper, coffee, cardamom, etc, and licenses were issued for liquor sale which brought new working classes in the low-country. The imposition of religion, class, caste and language strongly influenced the historical formation of CI among Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors and Christians in the low-country. However, according to Tennent (1859), these actions were not strong enough to cause much economic, social or cultural change to the native mode of production or to the life style of the Kandyan people until the British invasion, which will be discussed below.

3.2. Imposition of British Colonial Legacy through Political, Social and Economic Hegemony

The British invasion that took place in 1796 not only defeated the Dutch, but also captured the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. Thereafter the British controlled the whole country until 1948. By 1802, the country was declared a crown colony and the dual control of Britain and the British East India Company which was imposed from 1797 was brought to an end. Sir Fredrick North was appointed as the first governor. The imposition of the Westminster parliamentary system, Anglican religion, police and armed services and universal franchises brought social-economic and political changes to the country. Through missionary education, the elite Sinhalese and Tamils reserved their representation in the legislative assembly (Ceylon National Congress) and in colonial administrative services. Professionals, governmental officers and landed families, irrespective of their caste, who owned cash crop plantations and graphite mining sites, became a wealthy class (Jayawardena, 2001; Roberts et al., 1989).

The noticeable reforms that took place from 1815 to 1835 not only ‘opened’ the country but also imposed political, social and economical hegemonies; some can be seen even today. In 1820, the construction of the Colombo-Kandy road facilitated both easy administration of the country and economic development by opening up of avenues for transporting commercial crops and products to ports. The country went through remarkable changes with the new economic opportunity available to various groups in Ceylon during the 19th century. This resulted in majority and minority identities and related issues, ethnically, religiously, economically and politically (Bandarage, 1982; Loganathan, 1990; Wesumperuma, 1986).

Within this context, in the rest of this chapter, the genealogy of the plantations and the emergence of tea plantations are presented.

3.3. Ceylonese Plantations under the British Raj

In 1833, the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire meant that workers were emancipated from slavery. They began to demand high wages as they tried to develop their own self-identities as free labourers. Britain began to search for new lands with cheap labour in order to meet the high demand for coffee from Europe. Its political stability, administrative unity and favourable tropical climatic conditions attracted the British to concentrate their investments in Ceylon. British enterprises began to invest in

coffee plantations⁴ on a large scale during 1825 and significant economic changes took place in the country. This can be considered as the second wave of capitalist production in the country. Large British investments flowed to the island for coffee plantations. Under 'indentured labour' workers from South India were brought for coffee plantations, road and port building work. This will be discussed further, below.

3.3.1. Opening up of the Closed Kingdom

It is evident that the impact of the above transformation brought an affluent class of 'haves' and a working class of "have nots". The subsistence economy, primarily based on paddy, was transformed radically to a capitalist plantation economy with the cash crops, mainly coffee. The traditional social structure based on values was changed to the growth of economic institutions. Ceylon was fully opened up to the world market with structural changes. The British made no distinction among castes as long as they serve their purpose. This resulted in the emergence of a considerable class of indigenous capitalists among the lower caste. Jayawardena (2001:xxi) discussed this transformation as follows:

“Colonialism, with its creation of new occupations, shook the foundations of caste society, the type of capitalism that emerged reordered the question of who was 'high' and 'low' in society. Caste, which was traditionally based on occupation and hierarchy, became less linked with occupation as people moved to new areas of economic activity that employed persons of diverse castes”.

The island's economy was transformed from subsistence to a typical export colony. This brought new opportunities of economic advancement to the peasants as well as disruption to traditional social relations through new migrations of diverse people and cultures into the previously isolated homeland (De Silva, 2001; Tennent, 1859). Lieutenant Governor Tennent (1859: 95) views the change as follows:

By the Sinhalese of the maritime provinces, long familiar with the energy and enterprise of Europeans, these results are regarded with satisfaction. But the Kandyan, brought into more recent contact with civilization, look on with uneasy surprise at the effect it is producing. The silence of their mountain solitudes has been broken by the din of the industry, and the seclusion of their villages invaded by bands of hired labourers from the Indian coast”.

⁴ At this time, a vast area of land was cultivated with coffee by Dutch as a cash crop. Arab traders initially introduced coffee as a cash crop to Ceylon.

When the coffee industry was at its peak in the late 1860s, it was attacked by the leaf disease and as a result collapsed. Thereafter the British investors concentrated on the establishment of tea plantations on a large scale.

3.3.2. Opening up of Tea Plantations

During the 1850s to 1880s, the growing tea market in Britain and the availability of quality tea seeds led British planters to seek for new lands for investment and Ceylon became their first choice. The private lands in the Kandyan up-country were acquired by the British Government at a very cheap price. Initially they were distributed to the Government officials and then to private entrepreneurs from Britain (Ranasinghe, 1982; Thondaman, 1987; Wesumperuma, 1986). Nearly 90% of the land in the country became crown property by law, enabling tea, rubber and coconut to become established as the commercial crops of the country, were owned by the Sterling companies in UK.

Although land was in abundance, there was a labour shortage. Even after the abolition of 'Rajakariya'⁵, the British planters were unable to attract the required labour for tea cultivation. Initially, forest clearing and the construction of factories and bungalows were undertaken up by the Kandyan Sinhalese people. However, they were reluctant to reside on the plantations to work regularly for low wages. Rather, they found their own paddy and homeland cultivations to be more attractive (Wenzlhuemer, 2005). Kandyans would have resented working in the plantation not only for the above reasons but also because they lost their prestigious identity as 'up-country Sinhalese', who made their labour available only to their Kandyan King.

Since tea plantations required year-round plucking, the British planters had to look for cheap labour from elsewhere, despite the resistance of Kandyan people. Cave (1900) describes native Sri Lankans as 'conservative', having 'repugnance for estate work' and 'effeminate'. According to Peebles (2001) the above description or way of seeing native workers by the British was a way of justifying the importance of Indian cheap labour.

⁵ Rajakariya is the compulsory labour that every person had to perform, without remuneration, for the King. The inhabitants who held the King's land had to pay their tenant fee periodically in lieu of providing services to King and the rest had to provide free labour for the betterment of the village (Wesumperuma 1986). This term 'Rajakariya' is used today in a different context to give the meaning 'one's official duty', which is paid.

Having discussed the reasons that led the British to seek new avenues of labour supply from south India, let us now see what caused the South Indian Tamil workers to migrate to an unknown land, as these causes can have profound impacts in forming their self-identities historically.

3.3.3. Unknowns in an Unknown Land

Reading the literature, it is evident that it was the economic and social characteristics of South Indian labour that influenced the workers to migrate to Ceylon. Political and economic reasons (e.g. unequal distribution of land by the British policy, extreme poverty and famine) and societal factors that affected individuals (e.g. low self-concept as worthless, marginalized and oppressed as low caste by the elite of the South Indians), encouraged Indian labour to migrate in mass to an unknown land in search of new identities and emancipation.

The British saw these oppressed people as easier to control than the local Kandyans. For Sir Frederick Weld, *“the South Indians were a peaceable and easily governed race”... They were ideally suited to a form of production that had been initiated with slave labour*” (Stenson 1980: 17). Further, Stenson’s (1980: 17) writing below explains the state of the deprivation of Indian workers and their contribution to slavery due to their caste identity:

“Recruited largely from the untouchable (or adi-dravida) castes of South Indian society, the Tamil and Telugu labourers were probably the most obedient, indeed, servile labourers then available in the colonial world...”

Jones (1999) discusses how identities are translated when young people move from one situation in which their identity is ascribed or derived from their families of origin, to a situation where their identity is negotiated between the self and other. The author also claims that youth emancipation takes place as they break the bounds of their own community and become free from the circumstance of their birth as a transition in developing an independent identity. Let us see how these workers were integrated into the unknown place and the transition process they went through in changing and establishing their self-identities.

(3.3.3.a) Slavery to Indentured Labour through the Kangany System and the Continuation of Class and Caste

This migration paved the ground for thousands of Indian labourers to enter Ceylon and settle down on the plantation sectors. It is evident that planters and Kanganies promoted the power imbalance between the planters and workers through the plantation institutional framework. The head 'Kangany', an elite from the South Indian higher sub castes (mainly the Sudra caste) was employed by the British planters to supply the labour requirements, initially for road building and then for the construction and maintenance of public utilities. Later he began to supply required labour to the coffee plantations and thereafter to the tea plantations. This specific recruitment system under 'indentured labour' was known as the 'Kangany system'. The cost of passage to the country was not paid to any governmental authority but incurred as a debt by the worker to the Kangany, to be paid over many years by working on the plantation. The planters paid the Head Kangany for each labourer he supplied. Through sub Kanganies (*silarai Kangany*), he accumulated the required labour force among kin groups from Trichinopoly, Salam, Tanjore, Madras, Ramnad, Pudukotti and Coimbatore in South India. The Head Kangany received interest free loans from the planters and advanced loans to workers who were in desperate situations to settle their dues in the homeland, and to cover their expenses during the journey to Ceylon. Transfer of labour became an organized business with capital outlay by shippers, recruiting agents and planters. Planters were given free passage tickets to transport labour and for this purpose, the government of Ceylon organized sailing vessels. The migration required no visa, passport or other governmental permission.

Each worker was issued a 'Tin Ticket' (*Thundu system*) a permit to travel and once they reached the plantation, these tickets were collected and kept with the Kangany, who sometimes misused them illegally to transfer workers from one estate to another (Alawattage, 2005). According to British planters Elliott and Whitehead (1926), under the *Thundu system* the labourers' indebtedness was recorded by the Kangany (e.g. money borrowed in settling dues in India, cost of travel incurred, outward cost to be incurred, expenses for weddings, funerals, puberty, sundry borrowing for daily living in Ceylon). No new planter would take labour into his service without the *Thundu* from the previous employer or Kangany, to the effect that the worker was released having paid the due amount. By all these means, the Kangany became the key figure and the

middleman in the organization, who ensured the attendance of workers to work on the plantations. Planters paid him 'head money' for each worker who turned up to work. He acquired power not only as the patron of the labourers but also by controlling them. Only the Kanganies were allowed to acquire or cultivate land, while all daily rations were supplied to workers through the estate shop known as 'cooperative store', run by the Kangany. In the research site, a retired worker, who had experienced the power of the early Kangany, recalled his memories in the following way:

Those days the Kanganies were like 'police'. They used to hit workers. Workers had to do what they said. They said not to send our fathers to school but to keep them like fools with no education. They thought that if workers got educated, they would also become equal to Kanganies. They did not allow the workers to tie their heads with the 'Talappawa'⁶, thinking that workers also would look like 'Periya Kangany'⁷. Periya Kanganies only wore 'Wëttiya'⁸ and the 'Coat' and were like Kings. That was how the Kanganies were.

This quotation shows how the Kanganies in Ceylon established class, caste, status hierarchy and power that were manifested in the organizational and social structural arrangements, living standard and dress. The Kangany brought not only the workers, but also the South Indian practices that established a caste-associated power structure in Ceylon. Under the Kangany, the workers started their new life in debt, worked in debt and died in debt. There were no visible changes to the plantation workers' working class poverty, caste and status but only the daily survival with food and shelter. The plantations can be seen as the only institutional framework that promoted the establishment of caste hierarchical practices, whereas in other institutions under the same regime, caste was insignificant (Elliott and Whitehead, 1926; Cave, 1900).

Until the establishment of tea plantations, the condition was that workers should go back to India if there was no work or if there was a slump in the coffee plantations. The early employment contract was only verbal, in which the name of the labourer was entered into the pay roll by the planter and the labourer accepted a quota of rice issued by the estate as part payment of wage (Wesumperuma, 1986). This was later replaced by the Emigration Ordinance of the British Indian Government: the employer and the

⁶ A cloth wrapped around the head.

⁷ Refers to the Head Kangany.

⁸ A traditional dress similar to a sarong but worn by upper class males to indicate their class hierarchy.

labourer had to enter into a contract under which the labourer had to serve a period set out in the contract of 'indenture'. The labourer, after serving the period, had the option of returning to India or could enter into a new contract to serve further. Labourers failing this agreement without reasonable cause could become liable for punishment and they would be sold from one employer to another without the workers' consent (Wenzlhuemer, 2007). The restriction of movement, employers' right to private arrest, illiteracy and poverty combined with the employers' economic power resulted in violation of the Emigration Ordinance, and the system became a form of slavery (Thondaman, 1987; Tinker, 1974).

(3.3.3.b) Integration of Female Labour into Tea Plantations

Along with indentured labour, the topic of female labour has emerged as a central part of discourse in literature. From the literature, it seems that women's subordination was strictly maintained both socially and politically through legislation and by other practices. These aspects will be dealt in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

The colonial attitude towards female recruitment reflects many contradictory discourses of Indian women. Recruitment of female labour was not favoured because females were seen as generally inferior to males. Female migration stood as low as 25 women per 100 men. They were recruited to cater to men's sexual needs and as a means of deterring male labour from returning back to India. They also served as producers and reproducers of labour so that heavy reliance on immigration labour could be stopped (Samarasinghe, 1999). However, murder of Indian women on plantations was a major problem in all major importing colonies, where women became victims of adultery and polyandry (Faruqee, 1996).

Unlike coffee cultivation, labour families including females and children were recruited from South India, as tea required more labour intensive work throughout the year. Tea bushes require constant care: a tea bush yields every six days and needs picking and being perishable, tea needs processing within a few hours of harvesting. Under these circumstances, women were recruited at a very cheap rate to work permanently as tea pluckers, engaged in the field for eight hours. Other than looking after the children and fulfilling the needs of the family, they engaged in working on the plantations from dawn to evening with short breaks for lunch and tea. They carried their infants bundled up in cloth and improvised a hammock, which was hung up on a tree, to keep the child. This

was the practice until crèches were introduced after the nationalization of plantations in 1975. At each feeding time the women rushed back to feed the child. In the pouring rain or in the burning sun the pickers climbed mountains slopes plucking leaves to fill their baskets, then carried them to the weighing sheds at the stipulated time. They emptied their tea bags, which they normally carried behind with a strap on their heads and climbed back to engage in the same task.

Although plantation females have a high wage employment rate today, their ability to spend money, their maternal health, physical quality of life, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate and life expectancy are lower than average for the country (Samarasinghe et al., 1990).

As Bandarage (1982) noted, the Kangany system of recruitment of an entire family as a labour unit virtually gave no opportunity for the female labourer to have a separate identity, but she was a part of a patriarchal unit under a male head. Female and child labour were placed as supplementary labour to male labour. Until 1978, the employer could terminate a married woman's services if the spouse's employment was terminated. Also until 1984 the males were paid more than the females as they were assigned sundry work (*silaral velai*) which consisted of different tasks such as tipping, pruning, manuring, weeding, uprooting, replanting, chemical and pesticide spraying, ground maintenance by preparing and repairing water drains holing, terracing, infilling and factory work. According to Weatherstone (1986), a former planter, men's work had become hard work because the planters who underwent training in these activities found it extremely difficult.

(3.3.3.c) Distinct Community in the Up-country

By all these colonial practices the up-country plantations situated in the central highlands of Ceylon with an elevation over 4000 feet covering mainly the Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Badulla districts became workers' places of work and places of living. Out of today's total Sri Lankan workforce, 5% reside on plantations and of these more than 50% are women. Workers' attachment to a particular geographical location and engaging in public work gave them a sense of belonging as a distinct community. Thus, belongingness to a particular place and space and engaging in particular practices become significant in understanding one's self-identity.

It is also evident that class distinctions are linked in varied ways with status distinctions are socially constructed and given meaning by the planters and workers. As opposed to Western societies with individualistic cultures, in collective cultures in the Asian context, workers' self-identity tends to be ascribed by birth and legitimized through religion and family status (Collinson, 2003). The plantations became a pluralized organization, in which the working class of hired labour as poor, uneducated, unskilled and low caste, and the British planters as the decision makers and entrepreneurs with 'superior status' could be separated by a rigid social-cultural and economical stratification (Ratnayake, 1979).

The class and status distinctions as superior and subordinate in terms of gender, property right, kinship and occupational affinity were established in Ceylonese tea plantations. These were facilitated through the establishment and continuity of the caste ideology that existed in India. Unlike the rest of the community in Ceylon, when the Indian labour were absorbed into the new environment, the plantation workers' social stigma attached to class become part of their self-identity as a result of capitalist social organization and the manner of production.

The Thundu system was abolished in 1921. Recruitment under the Kangan system was abolished in the 1960s. At present the field level supervision (bottom level) is carried out by Kanganies. Nevertheless, the continuation of the collectivist culture that prevailed in India, along with the relatively simple divisions of labour and Kanganies' supervision over workers, made the workers relatively stable and unambiguous in their self-identity construction on the new soil. Therefore, I see that self-identity formation, reformation or change individually or collectively is more or less a relationally embedded, historically constructed political process.

Within this context, the country became one of the leading producers and exporters of tea for many years because of this cheap labour. This history of immigration, the method of recruitment of Indian labour and the structural arrangements have an impact bearing on the life and the status of plantation workers. All these seem to be relevant in experiencing CI and self-identity as plantation workers.

3.3.4. Unknowns in Known Land and Becoming Known

In order to understand the self-identity of plantation workers, understanding the notion of political interaction within the plantations is of importance. Therefore, a close look at the political evolution and its impact upon plantations and workers in developing their self-identity is necessary in this study. Ethnicity, which is often associated with human diversity, has become a concept that is hotly debated in identity theory. Often ethnic identity issues in relation to developed contexts are in discussion (Frable, 1997). However, there is a dearth of research in a developing context and this research can be considered as a contribution to the available stock of knowledge of developing contexts.

An ethnic group can be defined “*as a social collectivity which possess distinctiveness by virtue of certain shared historical experience as well as certain attributes such as decent language and religion*” (Warnapala 1994:21). The British categorization of people based on origin, ethnicity or colour and their transformations in macro discourses are explained by Thondaman (1987: 8) as follows:

“The word native was, at that time, used by the British to denote all persons of indigenous origin or any other coloured or nondescript person resident in the island. Many years later, and very grudgingly at that, the word Ceylonese was used in respect of “educated” or “propertied” natives. Those who had come from India for employment were only “coolies”⁹ and “labourers”, and a handful of the more favoured among them, entrusted with minor supervisory functions were given such suffixes to their names as “kanganies” and Kanakapillais”.

The establishment and legitimization of ethnic identity through administrative policy decisions and subsequent legislative enactments can be seen as social constructions. The ethnic identity of Indian Tamil plantation workers was first manifested and legitimized by the official census in 1911. A single Tamil linguistic community in Ceylon was categorized as two ethnic groups as ‘Indian Tamils’ and ‘Sri Lankan/Jaffna Tamils’ based on the different historical and political circumstances of the given groups, until such time as both were categorized as ‘Sri Lankan Tamils’. Table 3.1. below indicates the relative strength of ethnic composition of Sri Lanka over the years.

⁹ A coolie is generally known to be a native burden carrier or hired labour. The term denotes a subordinate position or an “inferior” class (Samarasinghe et al., 1990).

Table 3.1: Distribution of Ethnic Groups from 1881 to 2001 (Figures in thousands)

Ethnic group	1881	1891	1911	1921	1946	1963	1981	2001*
Total	2,759.7	3,007.8	4,106.4	4,498.6	6,657.3	10582.0	14,846.8	16,864.7
Low-country Sinhalese	1,846.6	2,041.2	1,716.9	1,927.1	2,902.5	4,470.3	10,979.4	13,815.5
Kandyan Sinhalese**	**	**	998.6	1,089.1	1,718.0	3,042.6	**	**
Sri Lankan Tamils	687.2	723.9	528.0	517.3	733.7	1,164.7	1,886.9	730.2
Indian Tamils	-	-	531.0	602.7	780.6	1,123.0	818.7	855.9
Sri Lankan Moors	184.5	197.2	233.9	251.9	373.6	626.8	1,046.9	1,351.4
Indian Moors***	***	***	32.7	33.0	35.6	55.4	***	***
Europeans	4.8	4.7	7.6	8.1	5.4	***	***	***
Burghers and Eurasians	17.9	21.2	26.7	29.4	41.9	45.9	39.4	34.6
Malays	8.9	10.1	13.0	13.4	22.5	33.4	47.0	47.6
Veddahs***	2.2	1.2	5.3	4.5	2.4	0.4	***	***
Others	7.5	8.3	12.7	22.0	41.1	19.5	28.4	29.5

*Data is given for eighteen out of twenty five districts.

**Kandyan Sinhalese is combined with Low country Sinhalese.

***Incorporated with others

(Sources: Bass, 2004; Department of Census and Statistics, Statistical Abstract, 1997; Puvanarajan and De Silva, 2001)

What can be suggested from the above discussion is that the politics of the shared history, language and religion interwoven into a single thread fabricate multiple national ethnicities in the country. The country was granted the universal franchise in 1931 by the British. Through the Donoughmore Constitution, universal suffrage was introduced to protect the right of minorities by giving them voting right at the General Election in 1931 and 1936.

Majority-minority ethnic identity was not a salient issue until the 1940s, but later created several political issues regarding migration and permanent residency of the Tamil plantation workers (Devaraj, 2008; Peiris, 2006; Tambiah, 1986; Weerawardena, 2000). They were subjected to political and economic discrimination by the enactment of the Land Development Ordinance (1936). This excluded most of the Indian plantation workers from place of stay and also from local franchise. Restriction from buying land in the country as well as the right of ownership of houses on the plantation created much frustration and uncertainty among workers. The significance of these laws was not merely their discriminatory nature against the Indian-origin labour; they

discriminated against a working class who brought large foreign revenue to the country. These became the grounds for the Indian Government to prohibit further labour migration after 1939 (Hollup, 1994; Wesumperuma, 1986).

Thereafter, with political independence in 1948, the history of the plantation changed. The British owners of the plantations transferred their right of estate management to 'agency houses'¹⁰, who in turn appointed a Superintendent to reside within the plantation and manage the plantation on their behalf.

The Sri Lankan government implemented a series of parliamentary actions with the intention of defining the Indian migrant workers and the 'Citizenship Act' of 1948 and 1949 can be seen as crucial. Although most of the Indian Tamils were able to exercise their franchise in the 1947 parliamentary election, the new Citizenship Act not only deprived over one million Indian Tamils from exercising their voting rights in subsequent elections but also defined them as non-citizens. This made the plantation workers despair, as they were not defined as citizens of Sri Lanka.

Later, with the pressure of the Indian government and the recommendations of the Soulbury Commission, the Sri Lankan government agreed to absorb a certain amount of Indian labour as citizens¹¹ of the country. When the option was given to Indian labourers to decide the country of their choice, the majority chose Sri Lanka (Muthaya, 1980). In 2003, through the Sri Lankan Parliament Act, the remaining stateless plantation workers were granted citizenship. This was a significant landmark for the plantation workers, as they were issued with birth certificates, national identity cards, marriage certificates and death certificates.

Within this historical transformation of status and belongingness, the workers established their distinctiveness as 'typical Indian' ethnic identity by adopting Indian cultural traditions and ways of life.

¹⁰ In the early days, the agents in Colombo undertook the marketing of tea and other crops. Sometimes they provided the required working capital to the plantations. These agents gradually formed into corporate bodies called 'agency houses' and became a major part of the plantation setup.

¹¹ With the Srivastava-Shastri Pact-1964, out of 975,000 stateless Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, 525,000 were given citizenship in India and to be sent to India over a period of fifteen years, as agreed by the Sri Lankan and the Indian governments. Another 300,000 were to be granted citizenship in Ceylon. In 1974, the remaining 150,000 were to be divided equally between two countries. From the applications in 1970, it was found that only 421,207 requested Indian citizenship, compared to the stipulated 600,000. In 1986, Sri Lankan citizenship was granted to 469,000 and a further 85,000 left for India.

The statistical data on ethnicity and religion composition varies slightly in different literature. However, Table 3.2. indicates the religious composition of the population and the relative significance of each group in ethnic identity formation in Sri Lanka.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Religion - 1881 to 2001

Years	Buddhists %	Hindus %	Muslims %	Christians %	Others %	All religions (‘000)
1881	61.5	21.5	7.2	9.7	0.1	2759.8
1911	60.3	22.8	6.9	10.0	0.0**	4106.4
2001***	76.7	7.8	8.5	7.0	0.0**	16,929.7

** Since estimated to the first decimal place the statistic figure was insignificant

*** Data is given for the eighteen out of twenty five districts.

(Sources: Department of Census and Statistics, *Statistical Abstract, 1997*; Department of statistics web site: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Pocket%20Book/chap02.pdf>)

The literature on the Sri Lankan plantation context implicitly or explicitly addresses caste, gender, class and ethnicity as aspects of a structurally formed, historically situated context, where everything was ascribed to the colonial past, which normalized the self-consciousness of workers to be poor, marginalized, inferior, etc, (e.g. Bass, 2004; Hollup, 1994; Jilani, 1998; Kurian, 1999; Tambiah, 1986; Rote, 1986; Warnapala, 1994; Wijayatilake, 2003).

This study takes a somewhat different path from the above, to provide insights as to how workers in up-country plantations establish, maintain or change their self-identity in terms of caste, gender class and ethnicity as an ongoing process. It is evident that a combination of subjective perceptions and objective indicators constructed and shared by the members of the plantation construct caste, class and ethnic differences, which are either in harmony or in conflict. The harmony or conflict could easily be related to their persecution of the past and historical experiences at different points in time to present status of being a Tamil tea plantation worker. Thus, this research can be considered as a contribution to our understanding of cultural identities because it is the first study of self-identity carried out in a Sri-Lankan plantation context, which incorporates gender, ethnicity and caste into a single analysis.

Having examined the genesis of historical socio-cultural, economic and political constructions of plantations and their impact on workers’ caste, gender, class and ethnic

differences, it is important to situate the plantation society and plantations after the major turnover the country went through with the nationalization of plantations.

3.4. Nationalization of Plantations

The nationalization of plantations in 1975 can be seen purely as a structural transition that took place under two Ministries: 'Janatha Estate Development Board (JEDB)' and 'Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC)'. Nationalization brought with it the abolition of foreign agency houses, and developed a new state bureaucratic structure, which was centralized and politicized (Economic and Social Impact of Privatization of Plantations, 2000). Prior to the Land Reform Laws, which took place from 1972 and 1975, approximately 69% of the tea plantations were owned by foreign companies while the balance were owned by Sri Lankan companies, both government and private owned. The Land Reform Laws restricted private landholding to a maximum of 50 acres and the Government took over 55% of the land under tea, which exceeded the set acreage (Peiris, 2006).

Nationalization created a change of attitudes among workers and management through introduction of new concepts of industrial relations. Reforms such as maternity provisions, crèche facilities, improvements to women's health, and incentive payments for both males and females for family planning can be seen as some improvements. The entire management system changed from a quasi-military system to a participatory one with interrelationship between the workers and superintendents, where the workers could negotiate matters with the management (Gunaratne, 1995). However, the effect was not significant enough to alter the distinct class structure, economy or way of life of plantation workers.

Many outstanding problems began with this nationalization and they have been discussed in policy reports, research papers and by other interested parties (e.g. Asian Development Bank, 1995; Arumugam, 1995; Economic and Social Impact of Privatization of Plantations 2000; Shanmugaratnam, 1997). The outcome over the years was that state plantations became a burden to the government. They incurred heavy losses due to mismanagement and decline in productivity. The rising cost of production with considerable labour costs, inappropriate resource management, lack of capital accumulation, use of obsolete machinery and post-nationalization policies, along with political patronage, accounted for such losses. All these factors contributed to the

failure of the tea industry in Sri Lanka to maintain its competitive advantage over other countries such as Kenya and India. Only a few plantations, which were managed by the private sector, earned massive profits. The sector needed a market oriented entrepreneurial approach. Privatization became the alternative strategy.

3.5. Privatization of Plantations

In 1992, the Government, under pressure from the World Bank, partially divested two major state plantation corporations and restructured¹² the structure in order to improve performance. The management was contracted to the private sector for a 5-year period. However, this did not motivate the private sector to any capital investment, which was vital for the development of the sector during that time. In order to overcome this problem, in 1995 the shares of 20 Regional Plantation Companies were sold only to local private investors, mainly due to the pressures of trade unions.

After privatization there was an overall increase in employment in the tea industry. However, it did not bring much opportunity for the Tamil plantation workers to advance their job opportunities. The historically formed sense of social belonging to a specific society continued more or less unchanged (Economic and Social Impact of Privatization of Plantations, 2000; Kodithuwakku and Priyanath, 2007). The emphasis was more on financial and management control, appropriate cultivation practices, factory rationalism and new technology, estate diversification, human relation practices, marketing, etc, with a concern for company profitability and the sustainability of the industry, while labour was seen as a cost, not as a resource to be developed (Dunham et al., 1997).

What is evident from this discussion is that institutional establishment and transformation and their impact on workers and management at different times become a process of an increasingly encompassing a political process.

¹² The term privatization was replaced by terms such as reforms, restructuring and peoplization because privatization was a very sensitive issue in Sri Lanka during this period, particularly among the trade unions and workers. Workers felt that privatization might affect their social-economic status adversely.

3.6. Productivity of Up-country Tea Plantations

A number of researches have been undertaken regarding the productivity and related issues of up-country tea plantations. The productivity on the plantations is largely an outcome of both uncontrollable (land availability, the type and nature of the soil and terrain, climatic conditions, prices of world market and new competitors entering the world market) and controllable (quality, profit margins, welfare, etc.) variables. The worker related factors can be both controllable and uncontrollable, as their behaviour influences and is influenced by historical, socio-political and economic factors.

Labour productivity and the associated high cost of labour have become critical issues that management encounter on plantations because of the labour intensity. Out of the total cost of production, 55% is labour cost. It is evident that Sri Lanka labour productivity per worker in plucking (15-20 kg.) is the lowest compared to that of other countries (e.g. India 24 kg. and Kenya 30-35 kg.). Nevertheless, the Sri Lankan daily wage is highest when compared with these countries (Peiris, 2008; Yogaratnam, 2009a/2009b).

Although there was excess labour during the 1970s, today tea plantations are faced with an acute labour shortage. Repatriation of Indian Tamils, violent deaths, migration due to the ethnic problems of the country, open economic policy, opportunity for education and the introduction of vocational training on plantations by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have given some opportunity for youth to find employment outside plantations. This has resulted in reducing number of tea plantation workers from 12% in 1946 to less than 7% in 2001 (Selvaratnam, 2001). It is also found that female workers in Asian tea plantations have opted to spend their additional time on domestic chores or on leisure, with the negative attitudes that have developed over the present incentive rates on the plantation (Sivaram, 1996). What is evident is that workers' gender identity plays a more dominant role than their occupational identity as plantation workers. This negative attitude could lead to serious problems in the tea plantations in times to come.

Studies look into the factors that affect workers from an economic point of view to factors that go beyond workers' extrinsic wages and incentives to their intrinsic aspects (such as motivation, individual talents, experiences, absenteeism, health, training, age, pregnancies, nutritional status, living conditions, family problems and family earnings

of workers, etc.) which affect labour productivity (Arunatilake, 2001; Dhanapala and Wijayatunga, 2002; Jayaweera et al., 2004; Manikam, 1995; Ranasinghe, 1982; Selvaratnam, 2001; Sivaram and Herath, 1996; Sivaram, 1996; Sivapalan, 1988). Further, evidence shows that the dual role played by females in fulfilling their family needs while working on the plantation, the differences in their educational levels, age, physique and mental capacities also affect their capacity to work efficiently on plantations (International Labour Organization, 1998). These factors have a bearing on this study, as these affect the way workers experience their work, living environment and who they are on plantations.

The literature discusses economic and social factors such as gender, social welfare, health and sanitation, social exclusion, poverty and marginalization (e.g. Amarasinghe, 2002; Arunatilake, 2001; Dunham et al., 1997; Jayaweera et al., 2004; Selvaratnam, 2001; Sivaram and Herath, 1996) political construction of ethnicity, gender and labour process (e.g. Alawattage, 2005; Bass, 2004), poverty and under development (e.g. Beckford, 1983), violence in estates (e.g. Daniel, 1993), Sinhalese-Tamil relations on plantation (e.g. Meyer, 1990). These studies address identity issues to a certain extent from a historical point of view, as given. The processes of self-identity construction, reconstruction and change or issues relating to workers' self-identity as an ongoing basis are under-emphasized in these literatures. Within this context, this research can be considered as a contribution to existing knowledge as plantation workers' self-identity construction process and related issues in their natural context are discussed. This provides useful insights to management to decide their approaches in addressing the labour issues and productivity problems in the tea plantations.

This study provides insights into how gender, caste, ethnicity and class differences are enacted on plantations and how these are being experienced by workers either individually or in groups to cope up with the complexities of daily life. Depending on their life situations, there are multiple meanings and interpretations of what workers experience. Further, their social stigma associated with work and lifestyle can affect their commitment to work. All these in turn can become deciding factors of worker behaviour that affect labour productivity. Thus, identification of how workers make sense of 'who they are on the up-country tea plantations' and strategic utilization of such identifications for the betterment of the organizations can ease many of the problems that management encounters with labour today.

3.7. Tea Plantations: Multiple Interpretations

Having looked at the evolution of plantations, now we can examine different interpretations of tea plantations from a broader perspective. This is important as the intention is not to study the self-identity of workers per se but to explore how the macro discursive practices and micro historical, socio-cultural processes, which constitute workers' public and private life, interact with each other, and how workers who interact with these make sense of their work place and their own self-identity. The data gathered from the research site are used as a sense-making device to argue that popular historical interpretations do not provide a significantly broad understanding of what a plantation is in today's context.

First let us see how the plantations are classified, studied and discussed in literature to gain an understanding of different interpretations and to what extent they are important in understanding the self-identity of workers in tea plantations.

In literature, plantations are viewed and interpreted in different perspectives depending on the context within which writers situate their work. The International Labour Organization (1953) gives various definitions of plantations of 17 countries, with the intention of imposing legislative measures. However, they are insufficient to provide a broad understanding of the complexities associated with tea plantations.

According to Reddock and Jain (1998:4), a plantation is "*a class structured system of organization, strongly hierarchical and male dominated in nature...with considerable degree of centralized control*". This definition matches with the organizational behaviour perspective, where an organization can be considered as a 'social structure' with class and gender distinction due to the regular patterns of interactions and relationships that take place (Bratton et al., 2007). Beckford (1983) view plantations as a 'system of agricultural production as well as a social institution'. This view, though narrow, highlights the modernist perspective of systems theory and acknowledges a very important aspect, the social interactions encountered on the plantations.

However, when tea plantations are viewed as organizations, social structures or as systems with boundaries, this fails to address more subtle issues that contemporary organizations encounter. By emphasizing the formal social structures, the informal social structures are either ignored or under-emphasized. Under these circumstances the 'social embeddedness' that affects the behaviour of people is ignored (Bratton et al.,

2007). This means that social interactions, the cultural and political implications that naturally emerge out of the daily activities, the power struggle, alienation, racial, ethnic and gender oppression, resistance between workers and managers, trade union influence, and work sabotage may be overlooked. Further, human aspects of organizing such as emotions and conflict are underemphasized. The features of ‘total institutions’ suggested by Goffman (1968) can be seen as a better interpretation that may be applicable to tea plantations, as they can be seen as work institutions as well as social institutions, will be discussed below.

3.7.1. Plantations as Total Institutions

When describing plantations, reference is made to their mode of production (as plantation economy) and the work and social arrangements (as plantation society) (Rote, 1986). The term ‘plantation’ also refers to a capitalist type of agriculture (as an economic organization) on the one hand and as a specific institution of settlement (as a total institution) on the other (Alawattage, 2005; Hollup, 1994; Loganathan, 1990).

During the colonial period the applicability of the total institution concept (Goffman, 1968) was very visible in tea plantations, where the workers had no exposure to or interaction with the wider society. The division of private and public domains is very thin and almost non-existence in most instances. The coolie houses/ line rooms¹³ are situated on the estate itself. Therefore, in these circumstances it could appear that there may be an overlap of these two spaces. Unlike in organizations in the Western context, plantations cannot be seen solely as a public space. They are also the private social-economic units where workers are born, bred and die. The work and daily life take place within the same physical organizational setup.

A worker’s life is encircled by the field where the tea is grown and plucking takes place, the factory where the tea leaves are turned into the finished product, the dispensary where workers are treated, the line rooms where they live and the estate co-operative shop which supplies daily provisions. These on the one hand, and the superintendent bungalow and his office with a few clerks engaged in administrative work on the other

¹³ Workers’ living place was initially known as ‘barracks’/coolie houses. In order to give some status to the living place they are now known as ‘line rooms’ or ‘line houses’.

hand, restrict workers' interaction with the outside world (Samarasinghe et al., 1990). Their existential security depended on the economic base of the plantation.

Under these circumstances, the worker and the whole family became tied to the plantation by compulsion or by organizational and social mechanisms where the management had significant control over the lives of the worker, with no other outside influence or pressure. Thus, experiencing social life and work within the plantation became significant in establishing their bond to the plantation. On this basis, workers perceived and expressed their belongingness to the plantation, with no opportunity to change. This also becomes the basis on which most authors interpret plantations as 'total institutions' (e.g. Hollup, 1994; Loganathan, 1990).

However, as far as today's tea plantations are concerned, they have wider coverage than the historical interpretation of total institutions. On plantations, workers try to identify themselves not only with the work they perform, the peers they work with and supervisors in the workplace but also with the cultural and political micro and macro societal experiences they encounter as they interact with the larger society. Therefore, I argue that the 'total institution' concept, where organizations control the behaviour of workers by restricting members' interactions with the wider society, in such a way that individuals have little choice in constructing their own self-identities, cannot be applicable in understanding plantations or workers' self-identity today.

The opening up of the economy in 1977 facilitated greater opportunity for workers' mobility to urban or to nearby places or even to the Middle East where jobs are available (Dunham et al., 1997; Selvaratnam, 2001). This caused an annual decline of workforce of 10% to 20% (Yogaratnam, 2007). These myriad interactions and integrations mould and shape new aspirations and expectations of what it is like to be a plantation worker and what it means to work outside the plantation. Workers develop their own self-identities not only individually or as groups but also in relation to 'others' whom they work with as well.

Workers' dependence on trade unionism to voice their exploitations, typical in most of the developing Asian context, has become very prevalent in Sri Lankan plantations (Sivaram, 1996). It was found that on plantations, trade unions (TU) and party politics play major roles in almost all aspects, especially in controlling the behaviours of workers. It is evident that the complexities in the political networks not only control the

labour but encompass economic enterprises, civil society and the political state (Alawattage, 2005).

Today, TUs are dominant not only in negotiating labour matters but also in developing and establishing a volatile political environment on the plantations. Today they are active in organizing their members ethnically to become cohesive political groups with a distinct geographical base. The TU leaders use 'Plantation Tamil/ Indian-origin Tamileness' as an ethnic manifestation to represent themselves regionally in parliament. The main TUs that represent the estate workers are the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and the Up-country People's Front (UPF) whose leaders hold ministerial positions in the present Government. The next, the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers' Union (LJEWU) is linked to the opposition party. The TU representatives at the grass root level, called 'Talawar',¹⁴ usually have a strong hold over plantation workers, both ethnically and politically.

The Senior Manager of the research site explained that risks on estates could not be foreseen and violence can erupt at any time. He suggested that unions be brought into establish dialogue as a positive outcome. However, the benefit of having a TU has backfired. The main complaint is that TUs threaten the management: "*If you don't cooperate, we will pull the whole district out, not just the workers on your estate*" (Times, Sri Lanka, 20/03/1988). The same implication can be seen two decades after the above newspaper report, when a Senior Field Officer (SFO) of the estate explained (he spoke in English) today's situation as follows:

Some superintendents are afraid of labourers...Nowadays superintendents listen to labourers... They are afraid if labourers get together and strike...If loss for the company, problems for them also. Therefore, now they are not strict with workers...

Those days we worked under Europeans...in a disciplinary way. They are very tough and strict. At 7.30, you have to be there to meet him... If you come at 7.36, he will say "No! I can't talk to you, you go". That was the type of discipline those days.

Those days' labourers will carry out what we say. Now we have to carry out labourers' instructions. We have to be afraid of them and work. If we go and threaten they will ... not work. They will...strike. Those days not like

¹⁴ A designation assigned to a workers' representative. In matters with management, he represents workers. He also represents trade union and organizes trade union and political activities in the plantation. He is usually from high caste.

that. They obeyed management and staff... Nowadays very difficult to manage and control. For a small incidence, they will come down and say that they cannot work. Those days Europeans without an inquiry, they will suspend. Nowadays there will be an inquiry and then give the punishment.

What can be seen from the above quotation is that unlike colonial times, plantations are not independent units where management can exercise their authority and control over workers. Now, workers through unions have a significant power to impose pressure on management. Thus, Mumby and Clair (1997:182) see organizations not as social collectivities with shared meanings but as “*sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interest*”.

Moreover, the civil war in the country has compelled the government to be more considerate of the needs of the plantation workforce. The intervention of TUs and party politics brought the plantation Tamil workers within the framework of the wider political process, giving them the political capacity to agitate for better bargaining power. Further, there are large numbers of NGOs actively involved on plantations.

What can be seen under these circumstances is that, what manifests the ‘total institutional concept’ within the organization is not the ‘plantation economy’ or the control and the restrictions that the organization imposes on workers’ movements. It is the ‘political nature of the plantation’: a political, legal and economic intervention of the state, TUs and other interested parties along with the ‘welfare nature of the plantation society’ that provide the framework tying the workers to their plantation identity.

As far as the political nature of the plantation is concerned, the worker is compelled to continue employment through various means of constructing the plantation society that drive the worker to a state of permanency. Labour matters and the employment rights of plantation workers are decided by the Tri-Party Agreement¹⁵. Discrimination and marginalization of tea plantation workers are prohibited. Employment in the tea plantation is the legal right of a person (even if the person is a non-worker) who marries a worker already employed on the tea plantation. The same is applicable if a person who is employed on a tea plantation but gets married to a non-worker on another tea plantation and moves there. Then the worker is entitled to employment on the non-

¹⁵ This includes agreement between the Planters Association, Government and Trade unions.

worker's estate. The employment is made permanent and secured by this statutory legalization. Further, any worker who reports to work should be given a full day's work. TUs and a labour tribunal under the purview of the Department of Labour look into disciplinary actions, terminations and dismissals. A worker who is dismissed cannot be evicted from her/his line house on the plantation.

Another reason may be the education¹⁶ of the younger generation on the plantation community. Historically originated caste and class discrimination was manifested in primary education in the tea plantations until the 1970's by classifying and differentiating schools for the upper caste and class children of staff grades from the schools for the children of lower caste estate workers (Jayaweera et al., 2004; Little, 2003; Selvaratnam, 2001). However, the State Council Ordinances in 1939 and 1947 broadened the teaching of English language and also amalgamated estate schools with the nearest Tamil, Muslim or Sinhalese *Maha Vidyalaya*. In 1977, the plantation schools that remained outside the national education system were integrated with the national education system. This opened up opportunities for the plantation workers' children to access universal free education in the country. Plantation workers began to educate their younger generation as the main vehicle for their emancipation and escape from poverty.

However, the rate of literacy of the tea plantation population (76.9%) does not reflect the high literacy rate of the country generally (91%). Shortage of trained teachers and lack of facilities deprive plantation children of a proper education throughout the years in estate schools. Teaching and learning in Tamil medium also results in problems in accessing employment outside the plantation work, as education and language barriers restrict youth from exploring new job opportunities. Lack of marketable skills and inability to establish links or contacts outside the estate also leave them geographically marginalized (Sri Lanka: A framework for poverty reduction, 2000).

¹⁶ In Sri Lanka, the national mainstream education is free. However, there are private fee levying local and international schools too. The schools can be categorized as girls' schools, boys' schools and mixed schools. There are also ethnic linguistic differences in medium of instruction in national level schools and these schools can be categorized as Sinhala schools, Muslim schools, Tamil schools and plantation schools. In fee levying schools the medium of instruction is mostly English but there are options for Sinhalese and Tamil mediums too. It is considered that there are class differences manifested in location; with town schools considered as superior to village schools. It is the general perception that schools in towns cater to middle class and upper class children while village schools and plantation schools cater to poor village children and to Estate children. Having completed their primary education or their GCSE O/L in a village school or in a plantation school, the children can go to town schools, which are also called 'Maha Vidyalaya'. As far as the plantation children are concerned, the number of students who go to Maha Vidyalaya is very small.

People want better living conditions and social and political recognition, but problems remain, as actions were not taken on time to rectify problems. The present government has undertaken projects to appoint Tamil and Muslim teachers to estate schools in order to overcome the teacher shortage and also to streamline the education in estate schools. However, as I discussed with the school Principal while in the research site, reforms cannot take place immediately, unless policy decisions are implemented in such a way that improving school education is undertaken along with changes in the social-cultural lifestyle and economy of the plantation workers. Until such a time, there will be high dropout from schools and youths will go back to estate work with no other opportunity. These reasons lead me to argue that workers are tied to the plantations by the national politics.

The second reason behind my argument is the 'welfare' nature of the plantation society. It is evident that unlike in the past, today most youths have opportunity to seek employment in semi-skilled jobs or in Middle East countries, which do not require much education. All these experiences give better meaning to their life. These help them reshape their self-identities both economically and socially from being 'poor tea estate workers' on the estates to a better self-identity as workers 'who do not work on the estate'. However, this notion of being away and establishing a new self-identity is not realized for most. Older workers who had been working outside the plantation but later returned to the estate expressed their concerns and explained their return in the following manner:

I am happy. I clean the ground on the field. We will have food in the last stages of our lives. I do not have land but I have the line room, no rent, no burden. I can stay till I die... I have worked in Colombo. It is just work with no savings. No place to stay also. At the right age, I came to the estate for registration (A male worker).

Every day we work in the estate. We get Rs. 2000.00 advance... and Rs. 5000.00 or 4500.00 monthly with EPF and all... As I am the only one who works, I get a half a kilogram of tea leaves on the salary day. I take 2 kilograms of wheat flour every week and the cost will be deducted at the end of every month... I like working here... You know why? I have the house and a plot of land. They will not give me any of these if I do not work...in the estate. That is why I got registered (A female worker).

The work here suits us. We get leave if we get sick...If we get ill while working in the field they send us with the 'thundu' ((a slip issued by the field officer for approval of leave)) and mark our name as present...If we had to stay 10 days at home, all the days are marked as present. Also when a child is

born they give money...give us leave for vaccination for the child. These are not possible in the garment factory. It is better here. We can go home to feed the children... the supervisors listen if we say that we have problems with children (A female worker).

These justifications provide evidence that it is the political and welfare nature of the plantation that compels workers to return to the estate. Life away from the estate provides economic gains in the short term, but in the long term, these are not sufficient to raise a family or to enable workers to acquire their own place of stay. Before they exceed the age limit of 21 most return to the plantation. They get their registration as estate workers so that they can gain entitlement to claim residence in a line house without having to pay rent. Also, being registered as a worker brings entitlement to a number of welfare facilities provided by the estate management (e.g. free medical facilities with transport to government hospitals, a wheat flour ration, maternity leave, maternity benefit on birth of a child, milk food for children till the age of one, salary advances, crèche facility for children, free education for children on plantation schools, etc.). Even though the workers are dissatisfied on the plantation, these inducements are significant in reinforcing and reproducing workers' identity as 'estate workers'. All these resulted in retention of labour force and continuation of the plantation in the Sri Lankan context to a certain extent.

What can be seen is that while the job seems to dominate in describing the 'presentation of self'(Goffman,1969) as poor marginalized tea estate workers, the politically constructed ideas of community and welfare formulated around the job are also particularly significant in retention of such established self-identity.

3.8. Summary and Conclusion

The focus of this study is to examine how the Tamil up-country tea plantation workers produce, reproduce and change their self-identity as an ongoing discursive process. In order to study this it is important to understand the genealogy of plantations in Sri Lanka. First this chapter focused on the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial historical impact and legitimization of the formation, reformation and transformation of caste, class, gender and ethnic identities within early Ceylon. Then the discussion was based on the evolution of plantations, the reasons for Indian labour recruitment and how such recruitment took place along with the establishment of the rigid organizational structure where the low caste having to work under the higher caste supervisors. This is followed by the discussion on gender difference with superiority and inferiority within

the plantation context. From these discussions it is evident that the organizational structure and the social arrangement legitimized by both workers and management became significant in creating distinct self-identity differences among workers. These differences became necessary mechanisms for successful establishment of tea plantations. All these restricted Indian workers from acquiring a better self-identity on Ceylonese soil.

Then I proceeded to investigate the plantation context from independence to the present times and looked at any political and economic changes which may have had an influence on ethnic and class identity. How politicized legislations and institutional frameworks drove workers to articulate their distinctive ethnic identity from the rest of the Sri Lankans was discussed. Thereafter two major transitions that took place with the nationalization and privatization and the problem of productivity that are encountered by the tea plantations today were explored.

Lastly, while looking at the tea plantations as 'total institutions', which I believe meaningful; emphasis was placed on understanding how the total institutional concept is enacted over the workers through political and welfare nature of the organization. The part of the state education that becomes influential on the formation of self- identities of plantation workers was explored. What can be seen from the above discussion is that defining, confirming and re-defining self-identity and CI based on gender, caste, ethnicity and class are interactional outcomes of workers being victims and beneficiaries that have been closely related to political responses to capitalist interests with certain patterns of involvement.

PART 3

OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

“Analysis is not simply a matter of classifying, categorizing, coding, or collecting data. It is not simply a question of identifying forms of speech or regularities of action. Most fundamentally, analysis is about the representation or reconstruction of social phenomena. We do not simply “collect” data; we fashion them out of our transactions with other men and women. Likewise, we do not merely report what we find; we create accounts of social life, and in doing so we construct versions of social worlds and the social actors that we observe” (Jackson, 1955:108).

Part 3 consists of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. In order to answer the research objectives stated in Chapter 1, the underpinning methodological dispositions of this research process are discussed in Chapter 4. First, an overview of the overall traditions of philosophical debate underpinning research is presented as a basis for the justification for placing the research within an interpretive paradigm. The selection of subjectivism within a social constructionist perspective is justified by clarifying the theoretical rationale for the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this research. This is followed by a discussion on the research design, which is based on ethnography and discourse based methodology. Then two ways of collecting data for this study: utilizing desk research for documentary analysis and then three months ethnographic approach for data collection in the research site are elaborated. Thereafter, the selection of respondents, ethical considerations of the research and issues relating to data translation are also addressed. This chapter also provides justification for adopting discourse analysis, an interpretive approach to data analysis.

Chapter 5 will provide a reflexive account of my experiences in the research site, which is the plantation. In writing this autoethnographic research investigation, I interweave my own stories, revealing personal experiences of the respondents and myself that bear on the issues that are discussed in this research. In this chapter, by taking a more empathetic orientation, I give voice to a marginalized and unheard group of people in Sri Lankan society. By doing so, I try to generate an understanding of first-hand experience.

Chapter 4

Methodological Dispositions of the Research Process

Introduction

Social science and organizational studies literatures highlight two traditions of research inquiry in terms of quantitative/logical (also referred as the objectivist/positivist/functionalist/rational analytic approach) and qualitative/interpretive (also referred to as the subjectivist/ constructionist/phenomenological approach) (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Deetz 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Creswell, 1998; Collis and Hussey 2009; Thorpe, 2008). Each has its own assumptions and methodological implications. Positivists assume that reality is external and can be observed and apprehended objectively, while interpretivists hold that reality is socially constructed and given meaning by people. Within this context, subjective ways of understanding research seek for closeness, complexity and locality, while the rational analytic approaches seek for clarity and generalizability.

Cunliffe (2010b) revises Morgan and Smircich's (1980) typology of qualitative research to provide the base for broader grounds for theorizing organizational and management research. It seems the new revision is not merely a way of classifying methodological positions or a way for researchers to position themselves within a paradigm. It provides understanding of the complexities associated with today's research and suggests a deeper understanding of contemporary research beyond the subjectivist and objectivist paradigms. Cunliffe discusses intersubjectivism, subjectivism and objectivism as three knowledge problematics, which can be differentiated along a number of characteristics. Within subjectivism, the author elaborates how reality is constructed by individuals but experienced as objective and stable realities; how shared meanings emerge out of interactions; how time and place are subjectively experienced. Subjectivism acknowledges the workers' stable and also moment-to-moment 'relationships' with society. These relationships are 'contextualized' by workers as they interact with others. Subjectivism acknowledges the reflexivity of the workers in creating their social realities through discursive practices and how they are influenced by these discursive practices in making 'shared meanings' of 'who they are' on the plantations. Their past,

present and future are negotiated and are ‘subjectively experienced’ by workers. The researcher’s ‘embeddedness’ or subjectivity with the research process is also acknowledged. Thus, this research becomes a craft of myself as the researcher and the respondents. These insights discussed by Cunliffe (2010b) seem to be empirically relevant for this research in deciding the ontological, epistemological assumptions, method of data collection and analysis. These are particularly relevant as it is intended to explore the ways in which workers in Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations make sense of the social realities of the life-world situations that they encounter in daily interactions, and how these interactions contribute in producing, reproducing and modifying their self-identities. Within this context, the research is placed within the ‘subjectivist tradition’ where interactions constitute individuals’ social worlds, as shown in Table 4.1. below.

Table 4.1: An Overview of General Concentrations of Three Broader Knowledge Problematics

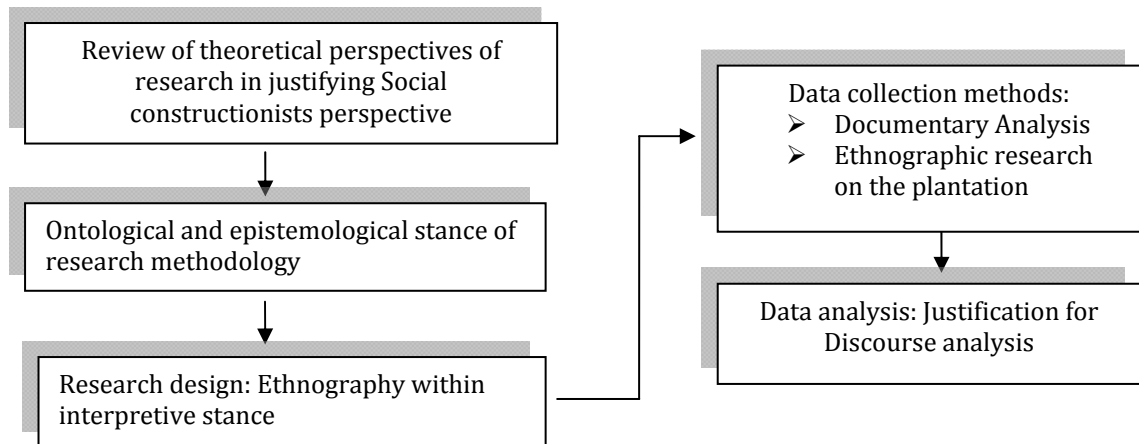
	Intersubjectivism	Subjectivism	Objectivism
Relationality- the nature of relationships.	Interrelationships emerging & shifting in a dialectical interplay between ourselves, others & our surroundings. Experienced differently by different people. <i>Intersubjectivity.</i>	Relationships contextualized between people & their surroundings. People are reflexively embedded in their social world, influenced by and influencing discursive practices, interpretive procedures etc. <i>Interactions.</i> <i>Intertext</i>	Relationships between entities in a pre-existing society, between network mechanisms & system/information processes, cognitive & behavioral elements. Or relationships between discourses (when treated as objects). <i>Inter-network/objects/discourses.</i> <i>-uality</i>
Durability- of society, meanings, knowledge etc., across time & space.	Social experience and meanings as ephemeral, fleeting moments. Although some common ‘sense’ of social & linguistic practices play through our interactions.	Social realities, meanings, discourses, knowledge are contextual: constructed yet experienced as objective and relatively stable. Perceived, interpreted & enacted in similar ways but open to change.	Enduring social structures (e.g., class), institutionalized rules, norms, practices, appropriate behaviors, and traits, etc. Discourses and net works have relative stability but are subject to resistance and change.
Meanings- what & where meaning is located.	Indeterminate. Neither fully in nor fully out of our control. Language is metaphorical & imaginative. Meanings in the moment between people.	Shared meanings immanent to the ‘artful practices of everyday life’, to discourses and texts. Negotiated & specific to time & place.	Common meaning situated in words, structures, roles, words, behaviors. Transcend time & space. Language is literal.
Historicity- concept of time & progress.	We are inherently embedded & embodied in historical, cultural & linguistic communities. Time experienced in the present- in living conversations with others.	Time & place are subjectively experienced. Progress as a situated human accomplishment - potentially iterative, ruptured or hegemonic.	Time experienced sequentially & universally. Progress is linear, recursive, or emerging over time.
Mediation- the place of the researcher in the research.	<i>Reflexive hermeneutic.</i> Research as a dialectical interplay between research participants. Focuses on experiences <i>between</i> people. Embodied & embedded researcher.	<i>Double hermeneutic.</i> Researcher embedded in the world, shaped by & shapes experiences & accounts, mediates meanings of actors. Experience <i>in</i> the world. Researcher as outsider or insider.	<i>Single hermeneutic.</i> Knowledge & researcher are separate from the world. Researcher observes, discovers facts & develops predictive theories. Experience <i>of</i> the world. Detached, sometimes critical researcher.

Form of knowledge-epistemology .	<i>Pragmatic knowing</i> : in-situ, knowing-from-within. Transitory understandings and 'witness' thinking (Shotter,2008). Micro level focus. Research as embedded and embodied.	<i>Pragmatic or syntagmatic</i> : common sense knowledge- naturally occurring actions, interactions, conversations. Mundane activities. Non-replicable knowledge, situated validity. Macro and micro level focus.	<i>Syntagmatic</i> : interdependent or dependent relationships between structural or linguistic elements. Sequences. Replicable or sharable knowledge leading to the accumulation of knowledge & social progress or emancipation. Mainly macro focus.			
Core ontological assumptions of research methodologies (<i>The nature of social reality</i>)	Social reality relative to interactions between people in moments of time & space. Relationally embedded. Social community.	Socially constructed realities, emerging, objectified, & sometimes contested in the routines & improvisations of people. Context is human action & interpretation.	Reality as symbolic & linguistic meanings & interpretation. Contextualized in a social site.	Discursive realities constructed by discursive & non-discursive practices & systems. Contested & fragmented. Discursively contextual.	Reality as process: interrelated actions, elements, structures, and systems. Generalizable or context dependent.	Reality as concrete structures & behavioral patterns, subject to rules & laws. Structural integration or disintegration. Naive realism.
	← Research as craft →		← Research as Science →			
Assumption about human nature (<i>How we relate to our world</i>)	Humans as inter-subjective, embodied, relational, & reflexively embedded.	Human as intentional & reflexive subjects, constructors & enactors of social realities within linguistic conventions or routine. Storytellers.	Actors, interpreters, sense makers. Choosing linguistic resources, managing impressions.	Human as subjectivities, products of discourse, contested & conflicted discursive sites.	Humans as an element in the process, adapting to & sometimes managing elements. Information processors & network Coordinators.	Humans determined by their environment, socialized into existing social & institutional practices & requirements. Characterized by traits etc.
Research approaches (<i>Philosophical /theoretical underpinnings</i>)	Hermeneutic phenomenology, relational constructionism, dialogism.	Ethnographic, existential phenomenology, hermeneutic. Constructionism & constructivism. Dialogic. Inductive.	Ethnomethodology, aesthetics, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutic, syntagmatic or pragmatic. Detached or involved researcher. Inductive. Interpretive procedures.	Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism. Syntagmatic. Detached researcher. A critical stance.	System & process theories. Critical realism. Critical theory. Institutional theories, Structuration theories, actor network theories.	Positivism, empiricism, functionalism, nomothetic science, statistical or structural connections. A-temporal laws & validity criteria. Rational choice models. Deductive approaches.
	← Interpretivism →		← Postpositivist/positivist →			
Research Methods (<i>Examples of methods used</i>)	Narrative ethnography, reflexive auto ethnography, dialogic action research, social poetics, dialogic analysis, poetry.	Narrative & discourse analysis, story, grounded theory, content analysis, poetry, participative inquiry, Autobiography.	Dramaturgy, story analysis, discourse & conversation analysis, symbolic analysis, grounded theory, content analysis, action research. Semiotics.	Semiotics, textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, deconstruction.	Network & systems analysis, historical analysis, material semiotics, boundary object analysis ideology critique.	Surveys, observations, structured/ Coded interviews, case studies, focus groups, grounded theory, action research.
	Dialogic		Monologic			
Some linguistic features of research (<i>Typical words used in research accounts</i>)	Betweenness, living conversation, possible meanings, la parole (embedded speech & relationships) interpretive insights.	Narratives, talk, text, metaphor, culture, themes, multiple meanings, sense making, la parole/la langue (Saussure, 1959).	Scripts, plots, performances, roles, stage, mask. Symbolic meaning, artifacts. Managing impressions, Actor, actions, & talk. La langue. Social practices	Discourses, marginalization, resistance, power, domination, colonization, suppression, subjectivity, body.	Materiality, objects, mechanisms, power, control, 'the system' 'the process mechanisms', emancipation.	Categories, norms, roles, properties, variables, schema, rules, structures, causality, patterns, efficiency, 'the organization', measurement. Progress.

(Source: Cunliffe, 2010b, pp.8/9).

This becomes the basis to examine the interplay of historical, socio-cultural and political macro discourses and the impact of the workers daily interactions in producing, reproducing and modifying their self-identity on plantations. Figure 4.1. summarizes the overall methodological disposition of the research.

Figure 4.1: Outline of Methodological Disposition of the Research



4.1. Research Methodology: A Philosophical Rationale

Research philosophy is an overarching term used to refer to the development of knowledge and the nature of such knowledge (Saunders et al., 2007). Philosophy establishes consistency between the ontological assumptions and the research methodology by indicating the kind of evidence needed to be gathered, from where, the methods by which data is to be collected and analysed and how such evidence is interpreted to provide rich answers to the basic research question or research objectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991).

Research methodology deals with the research design and underpinning epistemological assumptions. It is a process of conceptually linking philosophical theoretical frameworks and the research methods (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Crawford and Valsiner, 2002; Gray, 2009; Saunders et al., 2007). By linking philosophical and methodological coherence this research demonstrates the rigor and quality of the research, and ensures its internal consistency, logical organization and clarity, which facilitates readability (Van Maanen et al., 2007).

The arguments as to what methodologies best capture and analyse the social realities of a changing social, political and economic setting and the impact of the same in self-identity construction varies within different perspectives. Within this context,

researchers continue to provide rich insight in exploring and understanding self-identity issues both theoretically and practically. Mapping the terrain of methodological approaches to exploring and understanding issues of self-identity provides multiple ways of understanding the subject. These ways vary from the experimental to the interpretative subjective. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, it is evident that the subjective-objective proposition utilized in social constructionism captures individual, social and political issues that shape self-identity as an ongoing process, and therefore is particularly relevant to this study. The philosophical underpinnings of social constructionism are concerned with relationships between individuals and the ways in which knowledge about social reality is created. In this research, I acknowledge that knowledge is socially and historically constructed by individuals as an ongoing process of their social interactions and common sense knowledge is an outcome of their outward-inward process of reflexivity. Within this context, the ontological stance underpinning this research is elaborated below.

4.1.1. The Ontological Assumptions of the Research

The ontological consideration deals with the nature of the social world and assumptions about the nature of the social reality (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Cunliffe, 2010b; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The ontological assumption within the positivist research tradition contends that reality is objective, singular and external. Thus, it can be separated from the person who observes it. Discovering the laws that govern the relationships among variables and using the methods to verify such laws with generalizability are the main concerns of researchers.

By contrast, the interpretivist tradition assumes that the world and reality are subjective, multiple and not external. Thus, it can be interpreted differently by individuals depending on how they make sense of reality. I follow the latter way of understanding reality with the following three ontological assumptions, which situate this research within the interpretivist tradition.

(i) *The social worlds that workers experience as reality are significant in understanding ‘who they are’ on the plantation.*

I believe that social interactions that workers encounter on the plantation have a significant impact in invoking their self-identity. Producing, reproducing or modifying

one's self-identity is a continuous process. From the literature review Chapter 3, it is evident that what plantation workers encounter in the private and public spaces has a significant impact on their understanding of 'who they are'. This process is influenced by what, how and where they encounter these experiences in their everyday life. Some of these experiences are historically constructed through political, religious and cultural discursive practices and have become taken-for-granted realities. Thus, the knowledge of life itself is a reality interpreted by people. The literature discussed in Chapter 2, under the perspective of social constructionism proposition (B) suggests that what we know of ourselves and our self-identities are produced through our discursive practices and conversations. They are subjectively meaningful to those who encounter them but they are seen as 'truth' that constitutes a coherent world. By establishing a 'web of relationships' directly and indirectly, individuals construct the reality of everyday life in an inter-subjective world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

(ii) *Plantation workers are not mere actors; they have the capacity to create and interpret the meanings including their self-identity through their social interactions.*

Even though self-identity might appear as real and independent for the workers, it is constructed in the discursive practices that establish their interactive relationships with each other, a fact that has been already discussed in Chapter 2. This is not a purely mental process but a reflexive process to which individuals bring their own reflexive relationships with 'self' and 'others' as an outward - inward process of identity work (Watson, 2008). According to Callero (2003:119), "*The reflexive process refers to the uniquely human capacity to become an object to one's self, to be both subject and object. Reflexivity is not a biological given but rather emerges from the social experience*". The 'self' with the 'other' make sense of the social world they live in. Together they shape and reshape the social world and their own self-identity on an ongoing basis. The outcome of this ongoing process is that there cannot be a single meaning or concrete reality which brings self-identity into existence, but multiple meanings and multiple realities. Thus, self-identity is not singular but multiple.

Let us see what happens if these meanings are sustained through practices. The result will be that meanings attached to practices will become objectified realities. They become '*plausible structures*' (Gergen, 1999:53). People are comfortable with life as long as there is no challenge or disruption to the routine and taken-for-granted everyday

knowledge. If these discursive practices that lead to common ways of thinking are disrupted or enacted differently, then the already established realities become problematic and chaotic. As a result self-identities can disappear if the members cease to sustain them through their discursive meanings and practices.

Within this context, the social constructionist perspective seems to be more appropriate in this research in exploring how self-identity becomes an ongoing process as and when an individual establishes interaction with society. It is also justifiable for me to contend that “*the social world is a continuous process, created afresh in each encounter of everyday life as individuals impose themselves on their world to establish a realm of meaningful definition*” (Morgan and Smircich, 1980: 494).

(iii) *The social realities and meanings associated with social phenomena or objective structures such as ‘culture’, ‘religion’, ‘caste’, ‘class’, ‘politics’, ‘gender’ and even the ‘plantation’ as an ‘organization’ do not exist on their own independent of workers’ discursively shaped understandings.*

The objective realities that we see as culture, religion, caste, gender and so on, have to be forcibly carved out by the undifferentiated flux of raw experiences. We conceptually fix and label them as abstractions in order to bring them to the common experience as real (Chia, 2000). The reality is constructed through discursive practices: regularization and routinization of social interactions by way of differentiating, fixing, naming, labelling, classifying and relating them as intrinsic processes of discursive organization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Over time, these discursive practices become social practices and collective ways of doing things. They make sense only in relation to other practices (Brinkmann, 2008). This is the basis for me to argue that meanings that are considered as ‘truth’ about the world or ‘self’ are not productions of an individual mind; they are creations of people through coordination, agreements, negotiations and affirmation that take place as a result of myriad relationships that people establish with each other (Gergen, 1999).

If the members cease to sustain them through their discursive meanings and practices, then these realities so constructed can change or disappear within specific historical, cultural and political settings. Thus, a researcher should be sensitive to investigate the social and political implications of individuals’ descriptions of their experiences. This is important because the way individuals make descriptions about what they experience,

the way they justify or blame these situations have an impact on the way they construct their self-identity experientially (Thomas and Linstead, 2002).

Therefore, studying plantation workers' social world through these ontological assumptions aligned with the subjective notion of the social constructionist perspective provides an account of the formation, reformation and change of multiple self-identities within macro and micro contexts. This way of theorizing will help us to understand the ways in which interactions and experiences construct the research subject as an ongoing process, how stable they are, what constitutes their change over time, and how they in turn affect people in seeing and understanding each other.

4.1.2. The Epistemological Stances of the Research

The epistemological consideration primarily deals with the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline. It also establishes the relationship between the inquirer and the known (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Cunliffe, 2010b; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The primary epistemological assumption underpinning this research is that my knowledge claims are made through connectedness to the subject under investigation, rather than separation. This primary assumption can be elaborated under three sub assumptions, which are discussed below.

(i) *My relationship as a researcher is subjective and I am not independent from what is being researched.*

This assumption will minimize the distance between me and the research subject. The way the researcher sees her/himself as a character either absent/ detached or as present /attached will influence the researcher's involvement with the respondents in the data collection process and also when interpreting data. The qualitative interpretive research approaches acknowledge the fact that data such gathered cannot be understood in terms of causal relationships or by universal laws, as the researcher becomes part of the research subject (Dotson-Blake, 2010; Geertz, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Matteson and Lincoln, 2009).

In qualitative interpretive research, it is acknowledged that a research site cannot exist on its own but is an outcome of a discursive process between the respondents and the researcher (Crang 2003). Therefore, the data gathered in the research site are constructions of the researcher, respondents and the context within which such discourses are generated (Geertz, 1993). Thus, data gathered are subjective.

Subjectivism can be referred to as an “*epistemology whereby knowledge has to be personally experienced and is temporal in nature*” (Grandy, 2008:194). Also, my background, culture and language are different from those of plantation workers and this fact might have an impact in gathering and interpreting the data of this research.

Further, the task of my research goes beyond gathering facts and information and measuring them at a particular moment of time as stable constructs; to analysing a range of text and documents that inform the macro discourses and comparing them with the present micro discursive practices. Thus, I am aware that this research is discursively constructed through my own participation with workers and through the documentary analysis. These provide theoretical and practical insights in addressing the research objectives.

(ii) *Understanding self-identity in terms of how it is produced, reproduced and changed over time in a holistic way is possible by capturing both private and public interactions and incorporating them into a single analysis.*

In organizational studies, with the presumption that public space can be separated from private space, much emphasis is given to understanding the self-identity of workers in the workplace. Some of the drawbacks of such analyses are discussed in the literature review. A point to note is that the presumption of separation of public and private life does not hold true in this research. I will support this proposition with the data findings and through discussion of the findings. Therefore, this research provides novel explanations to enlighten the readers with new and potentially useful constructs by uncovering new ways of interpreting self-identity.

(iii) *Exploring everyday language and social practices are significant in studying self-identity.*

What is epistemologically significant here is exploring how historical, social-cultural and political discursive practices in terms of social activities or practices and conversations bring symbols, communicational strategies and social realities. This provides us with understanding of how these invoke meanings to self-identity.

Luckmann (2008:281) clarifies this in the following way:

“...the human social worlds are not a direct evolutionary product but the products of an evolutionary emergent: history. In other words, they are the result of human activity over the generations. More or less obligatory ways of doing things, traditions and institutions are not genetic programmes; they are constructed-and sedimented in a collective memory-in social, primarily,

if not exclusively, communicative interaction. Once they have become established, they are again transmitted in communicative interaction. Traditions and institutions, and, I may add, organizations, may appear less tangible than buildings and artifacts, but they are equally real. They are built up in human interaction just like buildings and artifacts”.

It is therefore important to study both micro and macro discourses, because discursive activities are not universal qualities of the self. They are embedded into a social context through interactions. These interactions are subject to interpretations of workers through the medium of language, mores, labels, actions, routines, morals, proverbs, values and beliefs, myths (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Moreover, the images and physical, symbolic, verbal, textual and behavioural presentations are given meaning. Also daily practices provide meaning to what, why and how people do their daily activities. All these in turn become self-identity makers (Beech, 2008).

The research design discussed from now onwards is primarily developed on the ontological and epistemological assumptions discussed above.

4.2. Research Design

The research methodology incorporates a combination of ethnography and discourse analysis into a single analysis. Incorporating both these facilitates studying how different discourses combine under particular social conditions to produce complex discourses.

4.2.1. Ethnography in the Research Site

Exploring and understanding the issues workers encounter in their daily interactions and their discursive practices that give meanings to their social realities requires a research design that will minimize the distance between the research participants and me as the investigator. This needs a research inquiry where I get involved in the data collection process so I become a skilled collaborator in knowledge production (Deetz, 1996; Kornberger and Brown, 2007).

Such an approach is ethnography, a methodology derived from anthropology, which has become popular within social sciences, but is underutilized in organizational research (Agar, 1980; Fincham, 2008). Ethnography can illuminate complexities in social phenomena which are important in understanding life-world situations in constructing self-identity (Fincham, 2008; Luring, 2008; Jenkins, 2010).

According to literature, ethnography can vary from a 'positivist approach' of selecting and testing hypotheses in scientific ways to a 'naturalist approach', which explores social processes in their natural state. Positivism acknowledges the detached researcher while naturalism acknowledges the researcher's involvement in the research site when collecting information. In this research, I favour naturalism, as it assists the researcher to engage reflexively in the research process in order to present the research findings as an interpretive process (Watson, 1994). As a researcher, my reflexivity throughout the data collection process establishes the validity of ethnography (Cunliffe, 2010a; Marcus and Fischer, 1986).

In a positivist stance data collection can be a method of establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing text, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary to provide an objective account which provides 'thin description' of the social phenomena under investigation. When ethnography is placed within an interpretive stance, data collection is an approach that goes beyond providing thin description, to the extent of intellectual effort or an elaborative venture of providing 'thick description' (Geertz,1993). 'Thick description' involves 'thinking and reflecting' and 'thinking of thought' of the researcher, in capturing subjective realities and also clarifying how meanings are produced, perceived and interpreted by the respondent.

The literature also provide evidences to suggest two ways of gaining access to the social setting, 'overtly' (disclose the fact that you are a researcher) or 'covertly' (do not disclose the fact that you are a researcher). In both ways the researcher participates in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions and collecting the data to throw light on the issues (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Gray, 2009; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

From the above discussion it is evident that ethnographic research methodology provides rich insights into micro interactions that workers encounter and their relation to macro dynamics and the significance of the same in self-identity construction. It is practical and seems to be relevant to this research as I acknowledge my subjective involvement in this research process, and it is also evident in the way I write this research.

4.2.2 Discourse Analysis to Explore Reality Claims

It is important to note that use of discourse analysis depends on different perspectives taken by researchers. For some it can simply be a method of data collection, for others it can be used as a methodology or it can be a data analysis tool. As a methodology, it is said to be built on social constructionist ontology (Grant and Hardy, 2004; Hammersley, 2003; Van Der Valk, 2003). Rather than trying to understand how individuals as actors make sense of social realities as concrete stable structures which exist 'outside', discourse analysis is often used as a methodology to explore what, by whom and how reality claims are made through discursive interactions and practices and how they become cultural resources for members to practise (Hammersley, 2003; Hardy, 2004).

The central argument is that discourse analysis provides a powerful methodology for exploring the construction and implications of fragmented, fluid, and ambiguous self-identities (Hardy, 2001; Van Der Valk, 2003). It is also used to study how different discourses combined under particular social conditions produce complex discourses (Fairclough, 1992).

Within this context, scholars discuss how differences in lifestyles and participation in different social actions bring ethnicity (De Fina, 2000) and how face-to-face linguistic exchanges facilitate our understanding of social realities and self-identities as an ongoing process (Flick, 2009). These researchers offer insight into this study, to see how discourse analysis can be used as a methodology to explore how workers construct and negotiate their self-identity through discursive interactions.

In this study, 'discourse analysis' provided the basis to explore documents that inform the macro discourses that shape the historical, social-cultural, religious and political context of the research participants.

4.3. Data Collection Process

4.3.1. Methods of Data Collection

The epistemological debate associated with binary divisions such as objectivity /subjectivity, macro/micro; fact/value; structure/agency; economy/culture; inner/outer and so on offers us a wider variety of research methods as positivist/quantitative versus interpretive/qualitative. An interesting study of Freeman (2001) also discusses how nation, social class, age, religion, caste, occupation, race, gender, education, town or

village of residence and political party become significant categories in constructing SI in the Sri Lankan context. In order to test four hypotheses, the researcher collected questionnaires from 603 respondents, statistically analysed the data and discussed eleven categories of identity salience in constructing SI. When exploring RI, deductive methods such as questionnaires and interviews seem to be popular methods of data collection. Establishing validity and reliability by testing models has become a popular method of analysis (e.g. Bielby and Bielby, 1989; Meyer et al., 2006; Krishna, 2003; Savage et al., 2001). Observing group interactions through focus group (e.g. Munday, 2006) and narrative method of respondents can be considered as superior to questionnaires as they give rich insight into how CI is constructed discursively (Bass, 2004; Brown, 2006).

Grounded theory, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis (e.g. Baxter, 2002; Brown, 2001; Budgeon, 2003; Deetz, 2003; De Cillia et al., 1999; Trethewey, 1999), case study (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), interviews, observations and reading text (e.g. Thomas and Davies, 2005) are some of the data collection and analysis tools adopted by post-structuralists.

Symbolic interactionists use experimental methods and theoretical models in conjunction with hypothesis testing. Sampling techniques and theoretical models with specialized language are also used in establishing validity and reliability and then generalizing the findings. In addition, inductive approaches such as observation, interview and ethnography (e.g. Byrne, 2005; Prasad and Prasad, 2000), case study, and non-participatory observation (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006), grounded theory, conversation analysis, action research, narrative analysis (Cunliffe, 2010b) are used.

The narrative approaches, discourse approaches, ethnography, actor network theory, case study, studying symbolic material, interactions and practices within organizations are popular research methods generally agreed by social constructionists. Textual analysis, conversation analysis, discourse analysis and narrative analysis are common ways of analysing language and conversations (e.g. Grandy, 2008; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Somers, 1994; Watson, 1994). Rather than using a single technique, researchers tend to use combinations of ethnographic, in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentary analysis, which harmonize with the subjective interpretive perspective (e.g. Crang, 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2004). Within this context, researchers who take social constructionist approaches do not pursue the material construction of

facts, hypotheses, theories, model testing or quantifying and generalizing the findings, as in the case of scientific approaches, when exploring and understanding the concept self-identity, as these do not give insight into how self-identity is developed, maintained and contested over time.

The method of data collection of this research is guided by the particular research question and the ontological and epistemological stances of the research phenomenon. The data collection indicates that data are not merely collected, but are derived or constructed through a process of empirical investigation (Crawford and Valsiner, 2002). In this study it is assumed that data are communicatively construed either linguistically or through social actions of the investigator and the participants. They are also mediated instrumentally by the researcher's observations, and how the observations are understood and interpreted by the researcher (Luckmann, 2008). Researchers combine both macro and micro discourses as a way of regulating themselves within social constructionism to approach the phenomena under investigation that are theoretically and practically significant and are consistent with their ontological, epistemological stances (Sandberg, 2001). In this research, data collection was carried out in two different stages as discussed below.

(4.3.1.a) Exploring Historical, Social-cultural and Political Macro Discourses through Documentary Analysis

In this research, I consider macro discourse as socially constructed realities that arise as a result of social practices and linguistic agreements over time that become taken-for-granted, historically, socially, culturally, religiously, politically and economically. In order to explore macro discourses at societal level, background information was collected through desk research utilizing published and unpublished material such as text, archive information, seminar papers, policy statements, other dissertations, media publications such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, etc. According to Prior (2008), these documents should not be regarded as mere literature. They provide evidence for the researcher to understand the macro discourses that lay the historical, social-cultural, political and economic foundation for the participants. They also provide evidence of how macro discourses influence episodes of social interaction and social organization of Tamil tea plantation workers in producing and reproducing their self-identities in Sri Lanka. Therefore, they are relevant for the analysis.

(4.3.1.b) Exploring Micro Discursive Interactions in Daily Practices

Having examined the literature on Tamil plantation workers that situates them within the plantation, an ‘Interview Framework for Tracing discourses on the Plantation’ was prepared before commencement of the research in Sri Lanka (Appendix: I). Aligning with the sociological approach to investigation that is in harmony with the social constructionist perspective, this was developed to guide me in probing into social realities of the workers. The nature of the subject warranted embarking on my journey for data collection, with this framework as a theoretical guideline. This was useful to direct the conversation to cover broader topics related to workers’ daily life. Over time, this became just guidance when having discussions with workers as they brought their experiences into the discussion in a complex and fragmented way.

In this research, micro discourses are considered as daily interactions including the patterns of relatively intimate social relations formed during face-to-face interaction of workers with the managers, trade union members, colleagues, and with other community level members (Bratton et al., 2007). These micro level relationships and social practices that influence self-identity of workers were studied primarily through conversations and interviews, and observation, as discussed below.

These micro level social practices were sought to understand how macro discourses are enacted in daily interactions. In this research, micro interactions are studied not only to understand conformity to the social order but also to see how differences and contradictions in actual practices come into enactment, and whether they can be significant in changing macro discourses over time. Some important issues that came under consideration are who controls interactions, to what extent these interactions are negotiated as a joint accomplishment of participants and if not, to what extent they are asymmetrically exercised by one participant (Fairclough, 1992). The data for micro analysis were collected over a period of three months in one of the tea plantations in Nuwera Eliya district, in Sri Lanka.

4.3.2. Selecting a Research Site

In literature, the words ‘field’ and ‘site’ are used interchangeably to refer to the place where the researcher gathers data or where the research is being carried out. A point emphasised here is that from now onwards the word ‘field’ represents the land where tea

is grown. Therefore, the words 'research site' or 'plantation' or 'estate' are used interchangeably to describe the place where the research was actually carried out.

Anthropological and organizational scholars provide different meanings and definitions for the place or the research site where data is gathered (e.g. Agar, 1980; Clifford, 1997; Geertz, 1993; Wolcott, 1995). Some scholars argue that the research site has to be a natural social setting in an open space or a specific cleared space (such as cultivations, work or a ground) (e.g. Clifford, 1997) while for some it varies from style of working, place, time, evidentiary approaches and field work practices (e.g. Van Maanen, 2006). Clifford (1997) provides the earlier notion of 'field' within anthropological studies as institutionalized practices of dwelling and travelling to and from, in and out and moving into another context. The limitation associated with this notion is that it limits the data collection process to a particular place or to a space, across borders. For Eichhorn (2001) it is not only the place where the research is carried out, it is a methodological construction. This interpretation can be considered as a better account of the research site as it covers any place or situation where the researcher gets immersed personally in inquiring into the ongoing social activities of individuals or groups for the purpose of research, irrespective of the time he/she spends.

Before embarking on ethnography in the research site, careful consideration was given to the politically sensitive nature of micro level aspects such as plantation management, workers, trade unions and how these parties perceived me and my involvement as a researcher. When I visited one of the tea plantations in December 2006, the superintendent of the plantation expressed his concern about my presence and talking to workers as follows:

"...When you talk to these workers, don't talk about what you teach in management such as motivation, conflict etc. If you put these into their heads, I will be in big trouble once you leave. I hope you know what I am trying to say, the situation now is very difficult to cope with."

Although this statement can be interpreted in different ways, I took it as a warning as well as a polite request to be aware of the prevailing situation in the tea plantations. Nevertheless, the Head Office turned down my formal request for permission to carry out the data collection in this plantation. Later it was possible to get official permission from the management of another plantation company to conduct this research. Thus, what can be seen is that selecting a site for data collection is a political negotiation

between the researcher and the parties concerned with the research site. This will be discussed further in the reflexive account provided in the Chapter 5.

(4.3.2.a) Study Location, Organizational Structure and the Demographic Variables

The selected tea estate¹⁷ belongs to a leading company which contributes 5% of Sri Lanka's total tea production. The study location is situated close to the small village of Nanu Oya in the Western part of the Nuwara Eliya district and the 'Orientation Map' is shown in Appendix II. During 1870s the plantation was owned by a British Company named the 'Ceylon Plantation Company'. It is now owned by a publicly quoted Sri Lankan company. The company owns 44 tea estates with approximately 19,500 hectares of land. The total area of the selected tea estate is 458.90 hectares. 427.38 hectares are cultivated, out of which 304.71 hectares is tea. The rest is cultivated with coffee, cocoa, cardamoms, paddy, timber, etc. It produces orthodox Black Tea comprising 4 main grades: Broken Orange Pekoe, Broken Orange Pekoe Fanning, Dust 1 and Pekoe 3.

The organizational structure of the selected estate (shown in the Appendix III) is headed by the Group Manager, historically called the superintendent of the estate. Workers usually address him as 'Loku Mahattaya (in Sinhala) and as Periya Dorai (in Tamil)'¹⁸. The Group Manager is an experienced Senior Manager, vested with authority and decision-making powers, who is in charge of more than one estate. Below the Group Manager is the Deputy Manager (Deputy Superintendent). He is followed by the Assistant Manager. Both of them are called 'Punchi Mahattaya (in Sinhala) or Sinna Dorai (in Tamil)'¹⁹ by the workers.

¹⁷The estates coming under the tea plantation have obtained a certificate of compliance by the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) Scheme which monitors the living and working conditions of workers on tea estates. The ETP ensures that the tea is produced in a socially responsible way; freely chosen employment, freedom of association, right to collective bargaining and establishing minimum age and wage levels. It prohibits child labour, ensures hours of work, safe and hygienic working conditions, maternity, health and safety, housing, and basic rights (no discrimination is practiced, and no harsh or inhuman treatment is allowed). Quality assurance and eco friendly practices are also adhered to in all factories.

¹⁸ The English equivalent to 'Periya Dorai' is 'Big Prince'. English equivalent to 'Loku Mahaththaya' is 'Big Boss'. In the Sinhala language, 'Loku Mahaththaya' is normally used to address a male with some respect, or to show obedience to a superior. This is a Sinhala word, though commonly used by Tamils as well. The direct use of the name of a superior can be considered as rude and unacceptable in Sri Lankan culture. Instead of using the person's name, it is often substituted by terms such as 'Mahaththaya'/'Sir'/ 'Mr', together with the name. In the case of females 'Nona'/'Madam'/'Mrs' is used. The term 'Mahaththaya' is also used by women in colloquial language to address the husband with some respect.

¹⁹ The English equivalent to 'Sinna Dorai' is 'Small Prince'. 'Punchi Mahaththaya' is referred to as 'Small Boss' in English.

The structure is then constructed with four significant sections: the ‘office’ which oversees the total administration, the ‘factory’ where the processing of the tea leaves to final product takes place; the ‘field’ where the tea bushes are planted for plucking operations, the ‘medical section’ to provide health care for the workers and the ‘welfare section’ which looks after housing, water, sanitation and other welfare facilities for the workers. There is also a Tea Sales Centre managed by the estate. Each of these sections is headed by the respective departmental heads and assistants and junior assistants who report to the hierarchy and are also directly accountable to the Group Manager. The bottom line represents the workers.

Overall statistics about the demographic and health condition of the estate population are given in Appendix IV. The ‘resident worker population of the estate’ by ethnicity is Tamil dominated. All this population lives in line houses (either single or double barrack)²⁰ or cottages provided by the plantation management. The tea estate selected for this study is an amalgamation of five divisions. The division under consideration in this research denoted by (CD) consists of 835 Tamil and 12 Sinhalese workers population. Out of this population the division employs 112 women and 138 men.

(4.3.2.b) Selection of the Respondents and Probing into the Research Subject

According to literature the gaining of knowledge about the research subject depends on the questions we ask, how they are answered by the respondents and how the answers are put together to explain what the researcher needs to say (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004).

The selection of respondents in this research was ‘purposive’ as the intention was to gain access to as many participants as possible in order to gain insight as to their distinctive views on the day-to-day practice of being a plantation worker. A few respondents were selected with the assistance of the midwife and owner of the estate grocery shop. Once familiar with the research site, I made acquaintance with the workers which made it easier to gain access to them on my own on a convenience basis.

²⁰ Comprising a gloomy 10 by 12 foot living room, a small verandha and a cooking area in front of each line house. There are new houses coming up in the estate with more space and facilities.

Primarily, data was gathered through formal and informal conversations with workers. I would not call them 'interviews'. Interviews are formal discussions of some matter. They may be facts or statements between two people where exchange of ideas and opinions may be restricted or may not take place freely (Thiruchandran, 1997). In a conversation there seems to be more space for interaction and discussion between the researcher and the participant than in an interview. In conversations the sense of equality between the respondents and the researcher can be maintained, which is important in a research of this nature to probe into the depth of the research subject.

Rather than asking specific self-identity questions, the workers were encouraged to talk about their daily practices in both the private and public life in order to explore how self-identity making emerged through their discussions. Grandy (2008) discusses the implications of asking direct questions about self-identity. Anthias (2002: 492) too suggests that *“asking someone a question about their ‘identity’ often produces a blank stare, a puzzled silence or a glib and formulaic response. This is not only because research subjects have not understood the question, but also because they cannot easily provide answers”*.

The conversations with respondents assisted me in probing with further questioning and directing respondents to open up their thoughts regarding their life experiences. The respondents were encouraged to talk basically on their daily life experiences (e.g. their childhood experiences, routine activities on the domestic front and in the workplace, social, cultural, religious values, beliefs and practices that constitute their daily life, their perceptions on work, their likes and dislikes on the plantation, how politics intervene in daily life, their future and feeling about being in a plantation community, etc.). These oral communication strategies provide valuable understanding of the nature of people and their reality construction compared to methods that depend on written responses or structured interviews (Stanfield, 1998).

From these conversations, it was possible to obtain the voices of the respondents regarding the issues relating to this research subject. The workers spoke about their experiences, feelings and emotions in an abstract sense but not through a theoretical lens. They spoke about what they did on a day-to-day basis, whom they associated with, why they did so and how they felt about others inside and outside the plantation.

Conversations were carried out with 38 workers (both male and female, including tea pluckers, sundry workers, factory workers, postman, a watcher, and 3 TU representatives/ Talawars), and with supervisors (senior field officer, chief store keeper, 2 field officers and 3 Kanganies). The owner of my accommodation who owned the estate grocery shop, the apothecary of the estate medical centre, the midwife, an assistant to the estate dispensary, crèche attendants, a religious leader, 3 area co-ordinating TU representatives, the principal of the estate school and his wife, who is a teacher in a private school, 3 other teachers of the estate school, the former Pradeshiya Saba Member, a doctor at Nanu Oya, the daughter of a worker and a leading businessman in the area also contributed to this study by providing with first hand information. All these conversations were recorded, except the discussions with the Doctor, the apothecary and the businessman, who asked me not to do so. All these became rich sources of data for this research.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the Secretary to the Plantations Ministry, Senior Manager, the Deputy Manager of the plantation and also with a regional secretary to a NGO. Only the Deputy Manager's interview was recorded, while others were not recorded due to their request. It is felt that semi-structured interviews have better potential of obtaining deep and valuable insight concerning the research subject in qualitative research than formal structured interviews (Matteson and Lincoln, 2009).

Both conversations and semi-structured interviews lasted from 25 minutes to two hours. In addition, field notes were taken down on observations and also on interviews not recorded. Pictures were taken of ritualistic practices, the physical surroundings of the private and public spaces, and routine activities, including my observations on the 'pay day' at the factory. What was displayed on the factory notice board, paintings on the walls of the entrance to the factory, etc, were made note of, as they all became sources of information that helped to explain the context of the research site. All these provide evidence of the authenticity of my presence in the research site, and of genuine experience, in writing up the account (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993).

After the first five interviews were recorded, selected excerpts were translated and transcribed, read a few times for emerging major themes and sent to the supervisor for comments. Following the comments of the supervisor, ways of asking some of the questions and probing into the subject matter were reframed in order to go into the depth of the subject.

4.4. Underpinning Ethics of the Research

According to the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth, adhering to ethics not only gives credibility to the research and safeguards the respondents, but also can help to avoid any threat or harm to research participants when collecting data in the field or when writing about them.

It is important to know that ‘ethical and legal dilemmas’ can occur at any stage in research process (e.g. in the selection of topic, area or population, choice of sponsor and source of funding, in negotiating access, conducting fieldwork, in interpreting and analysing results, publication of findings, storing and disposal of data). Scholars discuss the ethical and political dilemmas encountered in moral inquiry when embracing ambiguities of social practices in different cultural settings (e.g. Battaglia, 1999). While discussing the legalistic and situational positions on the ethics of data collection in the research site, Norris (1993) suggests that researchers should be their own moralists when publishing their findings honestly and truly without manipulating data to serve other interested parties.

Within this context, the underpinning research ethics adhered to in this research is discussed. Before commencement of the data collection, obtaining the approval from the Ethical Committee of the University of Hull was necessary. An official letter from the supervisor in supporting the research, along with my written request was sent through e-mail to the management of a private tea plantation company in Sri Lanka in order to get their approval for the research.

Ethical considerations are important when applying ethnography and discourse analysis as methods of data collection. In order to protect the research participants, before commencement of each discussion it was emphasised clearly to the respondents that whatever they discussed would not be revealed to the other parties concerned (e.g. managers or other workers). Assurances were given to respondents that their anonymity would be maintained in the research and in any publication that arises out of this research. Although some respondents were keen to include their names in the research, their names were not included, in order to maintain consistency.

At the discussion level, probing into informants’ daily practices, family issues, etc, brought to the surface insights on matters sensitive to the respondents. Therefore, a

conscious effort was made to respect the rights and sensitivities of informants by adhering to ethical standards at all times. Research objectives were explained in a manner that was understood by the workers. They were assured that their information would be used only for the research and related publications, and if they did not want to discuss or answer any questions, they could refrain. All these were conveyed before commencement of each conversation and interview. This not only helped to adhere to ethical standards of research but also helped me to gain the trust and confidence of the respondents.

When having conversations, freedom was given to the participants to talk on areas of interest, which might be of significance to the study. Some of the issues they raised were very personal and sensitive. I had never thought of these aspects when designing the 'Interview Framework for Tracing Discourses on the Plantation', nor did I imagine that they could bring these issues to the surface. Thus, maintaining the privacy of the respondents became very important. Most of the interviews were carried out individually in my place of residence. This created a good atmosphere for participants to talk about themselves and others without being disturbed by the members of their own family or others of their community. However, three conversations were carried out in participants' individual line rooms and five other conversations at the medical centre.

I was careful not to overstep the private boundaries of the respondents, which can harm the emotional and mental wellbeing of respondents. However, there were instances when I felt that my intervention could be useful in order to adhere to the ethical standards of the research and also to avoid any issues which could become critical ones after the discussion. More details are given in Chapter 5.

Having discussed the research design, data collection process and ethics of the research, below I will focus upon the conversion of qualitative data from respondents' conversations and interviews to text information. This was necessary so that interpretations could be made, to understand how the experiences and views reported resulted in producing, reproducing and modifying workers' self-identity as an ongoing process.

4.5. An Interpretive Approach to Data Analysis

The main thrust of the research study was to generate qualitative information in gaining insights into issues under investigation. Therefore, the analysis of the problem necessitated subjective data, which was required to capture the life-worlds of workers, and the manner in which they influenced the self-identities of workers.

Discussed below is how the data collected from the research site was transformed into information through data translation. Thereafter, the process of data analysis will be elaborated.

4.5.1. Data Translation

In qualitative research, usually the researcher is inundated with much data, which necessitates the reduction of data. This data redundancy is a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming data from interview transcripts to text information (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010). By doing so everyday experiences and taken-for-granted realities of the respondents are translated into knowledge (Flick, 2009). The issues encountered when translating personal accounts into knowledge are discussed below.

Most of the conversations were conducted in the Sinhalese language, giving rise to the necessity of translating the interviews into English. English translations and transcriptions of each interview were produced by listening to the tape recorder. The transcripts were then re-read while listening to the tape recorder to ensure the actual meanings were included in the written transcripts as far as possible. Then, written transcripts were edited where necessary.

Although the interpretive role of translation give the researcher authority to edit (Shope, 2006), I was faced with the dilemma of maintaining the originality of the interviewed text on the one hand and translating the text accurately to give the meaning to the English readers on the other. Since the data collected were in narrative form, translating respondents' daily practices including their experiences, perceptions, feelings, attitudes and emotions into English became a complex task. It took almost four months to reach the end of the process. This was unavoidable at that time, as the translation was not a straightforward process (Shope, 2006; Xian, 2008). The problems associated with

linguistic differences due to cross-cultural differences made it difficult to find exact meanings or equivalent words in English.

The problems of translating text in grammatically neat, perfect sentences that give clear meaning to the English reader also became an issue, especially, when translating gender-neutral words and personal pronouns, which are not always distinguishable in speech, unless the context is clear. Moreover, the meanings of the metaphors, idioms and proverbs, which are quite familiar to me, are context-bound. Translating them was not practical unless the context was explained. In these circumstances a 'meaning based approach' was used, where the embedded meaning of the text was extracted from the original text (Xian, 2008). However, the contexts within which idioms were manifested are discussed. Further, footnotes are also provided wherever appropriate to give the context and meaning of words and their use in different contexts.

Every effort was taken to convey the voices of the respondents by maintaining the originality as much as possible in order to bring out the social cultural elements embedded in the text. Within this context, foreign readers might find some translations 'odd' and hard to read, with no perfect meaning. This ambiguous, unstable, context-dependent nature inherent in translating cross-cultural research will not undermine the research (Xian, 2008). By acknowledging these issues as inherent within the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research, I try to bring to the notice of the reader the historical, social-cultural, political and economic context within which the research was carried out.

When transcribing data, three dots between words (...) are used to indicate statements that are deleted because it is felt that they are insignificant or repetitions or removal is necessary to safeguard the privacy of the respondent. Words within parenthesis (()) denote my edition, explanation of the meaning of the term/s or my observations made during the conversation. Symbols (?) for respondents' questioning and (=) for repeat utterances are used (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 2003).

In order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents, the data extracted as excerpts in the research do not carry the respondent's name. However, each transcript is identifiable and can be traced if necessary. They are referred to with three letters followed by numbers (e.g. DWA0003) generated by the recorder at the point of recording. Each of these auto generated numbers is then followed by the letter assigned by me (W/M) to

denote whether it is an excerpt taken from a discussion with a male (e.g. DWA 0033 M) or female (e.g. DWA 0043 W). There are a few transcripts without an auto generated number as I had to delete them from the recorder when the capacity of the recorder was full.

4.5.2. Discourse Analysis as an Interpretive Method of Data Analysis

Having discussed the debates underpinning what is discourse, what constitute discourse meanings into our understanding and two major types of discourses that are the concern of this research in Chapter 2, below we explore the methods used in analysing discourse-based researches that will inform the method adopted in this research. Within this context, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis and text analysis have become popular explorative approaches in the disciplines of psychological, social-psychology and sociology among the symbolic interactionists, post-structuralists and social constructionists.

Mapping the terrain of literature, it is evident that there is a wide variety of methods adopted in discourse perspective. Conversation analysis (Hammersley, 2003; Iedema and Wodak, 1999), narrative analysis (Adams and Diamond, 1999; Clandinin, 2006; Lee, 2008; Smith and Sparkes 2008; Watson, 2009b), critical discourse analysis (Chalaby, 1996; De Cillia et al., 1999; Deetz, 1996; Fairclough, 1995; Flowerdew, 1997; Hall, 1996; Michael, 1997) and discourse analysis are commonly used techniques in discourse-based research (Baxter, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008; Hammersley, 2003; Hardy, 2001).

(4.5.2.a) Conversation Analysis, Narrative Analysis and Critical Discourse

Analysis

Conversation analysis explores how conversation constructs a coherent self-identity. Analysing talk at its face value with limited emphasis on the interactions between individuals' talk and their actions are the main criticisms against the conversational analysis (Hammersley, 2003; Iedema and Wodak, 1999). Narrative analysis can be used as an approach for accessing inner conscious and unconscious patterns of work relations (e.g. Adams and Diamond, 1999; Brown, 2006; Ezzy, 1998; Maines, 1993; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). However, it has been criticized for over-emphasizing personal cognition (Lauring, 2008). Although critical discourse analysis explores how the meanings associated with discourses are produced, disseminated and interpreted by actors over

time from one situation to another, this way of exploring reality construction lacks empirical and theoretical consideration of the connection of the individual and the discourse production, reproduction and change, if any. Further, this leaves a gap in knowledge as to how conversation and social actions change over time, bringing new discourses into usage, or how conversation and social action get established as an ongoing process of interaction between people.

(4.5.2.b) Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis has been used in different contexts, within different perspectives, and it also differs with the subject under consideration by the researcher:

“A piece of discourse can be looked at with different lenses, from different angles, from different distances, with different filters over the lens...The kind of rich points you notice in discourse depends on the kind of the expectation you have, and the kind of frames you build to solve the problem will depend on which expectations need changing. There is no combination of lens and filters and so on that will be right for every shot. What you do is look at what you want to shoot, and then figure out what to do from there” (Agar, 2002:161).

According to literature, discourse analysis can be used as an analytical tool in studying macro and micro dimensions of self-identity (Boje, 1994; Van Der Valk, 2003). A wide range of methods are used in discourse analysis, both quantitatively (coding and content analysis) (e.g. De Fina, 2000; Holmes, 2005) and qualitatively (study of texts produced in varied instances such as talks in meetings, workshops, reports of public inquiry; board minutes, memos and letters; e-mail exchange, transcripts from scientific conferences and drafts of legislation) (e.g. Coupland and Brown, 2004; Grant and Hardy, 2004; Hardy, 2004). Broader historical, social, political contexts of text (organizational, government, cultural, published articles, journals, archival materials) (e.g. Gunnarsson, 2000; LeGreco and Tracy, 2009), films, novels and even cartoons are also used as qualitative methods to understand broader discourses (Cunliffe, 2008; Hardy, 2001).

The importance of language in studying the social world has been increasingly appreciated across a range of theoretical perspectives, giving rise to an interest in discourse analysis. However, this has rarely been the primary focus in management research because dialogue, discussions and debates are accorded secondary importance to actions (Grant et al., 1998). However, with the emergence of interest in social sciences and empirical studies on organizations and management theory, discourse

analysis began to capture attention by emphasizing language use as the central object of study (Hardy, 2001; Iedema and Wodak, 1999). Discourse analysis is used to analyse the 'text', 'emotions', 'stories' or 'conversations' in and about organizations. It is also seen as significant in constructing, facilitating and communicating the diverse cultural, institutional, political and socio-economic settings in organizations (Grant et al., 1998).

From an objectivist standpoint, textual analysis is used as an approach to discourse analysis. Textual analysis considers the formal properties of the text such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and the structure of the text in terms of changing conversation, etc, (Coupland, 2001). Further, the texts need to be understood within a particular context, and may be examined to understand the ideological, power and hegemonic practices that sustain or restrict power relations and discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992). In organizational research, texts are conceived as a common medium of establishing stability in organizational relationships (Michael, 1997). They are coherent but at the same time display agency in establishing stability in organizational activities.

From the subjectivists' standpoint, social constructionists use discourse analysis to explore and understand the meaning, expressions, themes, and routine ways of talk and practices, which shape reality. The ontological assumption is that discourses are largely produced by individuals and groups by their day-today interactions (Cunliffe, 2008; Hardy, 2001). In this research, this is the basis for me to focus on text, both written and spoken, and social practices as manifestations of discourse.

Discourse analysis is a method that can be used to systematically examine the patterns of macro discourses and micro interaction that can delineate the ways in which language use and social practices come into enactment in workers interactions that constitute self-identities. It also provides an opportunity for understanding the underlying assumptions of the respondents and interpreting the meanings they are making. This explorative ability gives it an advantage over other methods (e.g. case studies, narrative analysis, etc.).

4.5.3. Limitations of Discourse Analysis

Understanding reality and self-identity within a discourse perspective also has its drawbacks. Realists criticize the subjectivist notion of discourse, as it does not contemplate the construction of permanency, which gives order to the social reality.

Others, by taking a subjectivist position, criticize the limitations associated with objectivism.

The main criticism is that discourse analysis reduces everything to language flows, a constant state of movement and flux which the language generates and reproduces (Cunliffe, 2008; Hardy, 2001; Reed, 2000). (For example, it is claimed that the analysis fixes social action into a particular time and context as the coding scheme transforms actions into a single and unitary text). Thus, this also becomes similar to a reductionist analysis (Conrad, 2004).

Investigating talk as discourses becomes a complex task as talk varies with context as well as different respondents' verbal skills and creativity in producing accounts (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). In order to avoid this drawback, a researcher must systematically consider other empirical materials to understand the context. Exploring naturally occurring texts (report plans, newsletters, memos, brochures, films, novels and cartoons), talks and observations are vital in understanding the context (Hardy, 2001).

The labour intensity, problems associated with selecting the appropriate texts to be analysed among different types of texts, and selecting an appropriate method to explore the context of the text increase the work load of the researcher. It becomes difficult for the researcher to justify the methodology, due to the subjectivity in the analysis (Hardy, 2001).

4.6. Analysis of Data through Discourse Analysis

Within this research, discourse analysis is used to analyse data in exploring how macro discourses and micro interactions are made meaningful to workers in understanding their self-identity. Discourse analysis, which is largely interpretive and subjective in nature, suits the research perspective adopted, as I do not assume a pre-existing social reality.

In analysing macro discourses, the main emphasis is on exploring the constructive effect of text and social practices, and the ways in which social realities are produced and reproduced through historically situated discursive practices (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Documentary analysis of major themes, popular topics of discussions, arguments, justification, etc, provides the evidences for macro discourses. Thus, this documentary analysis provides the basis for ascertaining

historical, social, cultural, political and economic rational and social, cultural, religious philosophical underpinnings that govern rules, values, beliefs and perceptions of workers in the plantation setting. These macro discourses at the societal level provide the intertextuality to explore what and how other texts are drawn upon in the construction of the practice, how the micro interactions are enacted, whether they are coherent, or there have been any changes, and if so, how these changes take place over time, or whether the transformation is relatively stable or contested.

The data analysis to explore micro interactions was carried out in three stages. First, the major themes were extracted from the empirical material in the transcripts. When carefully reading the transcripts, it became evident that workers' 'self-identity' as emerging and embedded in their discussions could be categorized into five major themes: gender, caste, ethnicity, community and symbolic manifestation of the body signified through shared or common experiences.

These themes were labelled with different colours (i.e. Light Purple-Gender; Blue-Caste; Green-Ethnicity; Dark Purple-Community and Dark Yellow-Symbolic aspects). Especially, as there is a large amount of textual information in the transcripts, colour coding facilitated easy identification of the themes.

In the second stage, sub-themes were identified by studying the individual text. These texts were grouped into comparative tables. These became the basis for identifying the similarities and differences among discursive practices, both linguistically and as daily practices/activities. Similarities in terms of common ways of talking and social practices became very much significant in developing sub-themes within the main themes (e.g. Gender enactment on the domestic front, Enactment of caste in the organization, Ethnic difference in language and so on). The themes, metaphors, politeness, word meanings and transitivity (the agency, the expression of causality, and the attribution of responsibility) were sought in order to analyse linguistic practices. The order of discourse (the relationship of the discursive practice to the discourse-reproduction or discourse transformation) and ideological and political effect of the discourse became significant in analysing social practices in the transcripts. Due to the nature of the emerging themes, they were assigned descriptive labels. In this process, the selection of the major and sub-themes became purposive.

In the third stage of analysis, differences were identified within the sub-themes. In some transcripts, there were moments of crisis and they became visible aspects of practices that do not confirm to the normal pattern of social practices. These were selected by comparing the emergence of specific meanings attached to sameness and differences within sub-themes.

Once the analysis was completed, going through these excerpts certainly brought to the fore the interactional, relational, situational and locational factors, social practice and ways of talk that can be considered as 'self-identity' manifestations. It is important to emphasise that the concept of self-identity was not used in the questions or in conversation, so its emergence was genuine. Each interview provides different dimensions that constitute self-identity (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, symbolic aspects, etc.). The major five themes are then incorporated into three broader topics and are discussed in the data findings chapters. Centring the analysis on the subjective negotiations of meanings and exploring the ways in which a respondent articulates different dimensions, which construct her/his understanding of self-identity in a relational way can be considered as strength of this study.

4.7. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter explains the methodological setting of the research. The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this research required me to design the research to adopt an integrative approach by combining ethnography with a discourse analysis. Such an approach assists the researcher to become reflexively involved with the research process. This helps the researcher to become familiar with the macro discourses that lay to the historical, social-cultural and political foundation for the participants. This also facilitates exploring the ways in which macro discourses come into enactment in daily life and how worker's work place interactions with social life bring multiple self-identities to the surface. The selection of the research site and the political sensitivity of the research site were also discussed. It was shown that the two methods of data collection provide insights into macro and micro discourses, and the process of selecting respondents was discussed. The chapter also elucidated the complexities associated with interview translation and transcribing transcripts. Finally, justifications were provided for the interpretive approach and use of discourse analysis as the data analysis technique. This helps me to understand how individuals shape

meaning through their ways of talk and social practices, which ultimately leads to the answering of the research objectives.

Chapter 5

Experiencing the Plantation as the Research Site

Introduction

While staying in the research site, I tried to explore my personal experiences of capturing passing events, and the issues and challenges I faced in carrying out my data collection process and present this as a written account. The first person 'I' is used in writing this chapter to acknowledge the multiple realities that can exist in my interpretation. This is a reflexive account, where I construct interpretations of my experiences in the research site. Therefore, this is an experience that was storied both in the living and telling (Clandinin, 2006). Also, this discusses how I produce knowledge and claim the authority of the research by 'being in the research site' (Crang, 2003). I acknowledge Collins' (1989:769) statement that "*Knowledge comes from experience, the best way of understanding another person's ideas was to try to share the experiences that led the person to form those ideas*".

In this chapter, I have not attempted to fix my observations or descriptions as "eternal social and cultural forms" (Marcus, 1995). I admit the inevitable prejudice that can exist between the respondents and myself (Kondo, 1986). I am aware of myself as a researcher, an academic, and as a woman, which can have a bearing on my data collection and how I interpret data. The data collection process can be influenced by my social, cultural and religious ways of attaching meaning to social phenomena. However, during the interviews, I found that both participants and I shaped and established meanings, which constructed each other's self-identities in a deliberately unstructured manner.

Although I have made an attempt to include my story of autoethnographic practice on the plantations under different topics for readers' convenience, the issues relating to gaining access to the site, placing myself as an insider-outsider in the plantation, establishing rapport and trust, my identity on the plantation, boundary establishment and experiencing the unexpected, are complex social, cultural, political and economic interactions of both respondents and myself. They are interwoven and run throughout the story. Some of these events, issues and challenges may be common to other

researchers; some are my unique situational experiences because of the nature of the research I am engaged in.

5.1. Gaining Access to the Research Site

The experience of entering and encountering unfamiliar situations, as is often the case in ethnographic field research, is complex and sometimes problematic. This is inevitable when the researcher is immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of other individuals or groups for the purpose of research (Agar, 1980). I was aware of the practical difficulties that I might have to encounter when I actually conducted my data collection in a social, cultural, economic and political context, which was not familiar to me. However, there are publications by researchers who have conducted cross-cultural research (e.g. Agar, 1980; Clifford, 1997; Eichhorn, 2001; Malinowski 1922). Therefore, I acknowledge that *“journeying somewhere else, learning a language, putting oneself in odd situations and trying to figure them out can be a good way to learn something new, simultaneously about oneself and about the people and places one visits”* (Clifford,1997:91).

To understand daily discourses through observations and in-depth conversations requires the involvement of the researcher in the estate over a period of time. Through rapport, common understanding needs to be built between the researcher and the participant in order to gain entry (Suzuki et al., 2007). Through personal contacts of my husband, I obtained official permission from the Executive Member of the Group Management Committee of a well-known private company in Sri Lanka to carry out my research in one of their plantations. A meeting was arranged with the Executive Member of the Group Management Committee, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the particular plantation, and the General Manager of the estate. Having reviewed my study proposal, management approved one of the tea estates as the research site. A few hints were given as to what should not be done during my stay on the estate. I found that when assigning the estate, how my gender would be perceived in the society (*Are you going to the estate with your husband?...You will be all alone in the estate*) was a matter of concern to the management. They assigned an estate, which is managed by a manager who lives with his family, so that they would be available in the estate throughout, for me to access in case of any eventuality.

I spent the initial four days in a guesthouse in front of the Nuwera Eliya Race Course. The distance and the time involved in travelling to the plantation and back only gave me limited time to stay in the field to access respondents. I also knew that this could cause financial difficulties in the long run, as I was funding my own expenses. I needed to spend as much time as possible in the site, interacting with people, talking and observing them. Thus, distance and time became crucial factors.

Another practical problem I came across in this site was gaining access to the workers. The Senior Manager of the estate was concerned about my movements on the site, as I knew nothing about the estate. I had to seek the assistance of the staff each time I went to the site. From the first two interviews, I noticed the limitations associated with conducting interviews with workers in the presence of the management. Getting closer to the respondents, establishing trust, the privacy of the respondents and the ethical side of interviews became issues for me. I also noticed the practical difficulties in accessing the workers, when they were at work in the field or at home.

I had to make a choice between the place of my accommodation and the research site. I took a completely new turn and changed both the research site and the place of stay. I had not foreseen these issues before. They were unexpected events at the time I stepped into the plantation. I am writing this not just to describe the process I went through in approaching the research site, but to articulate that the data collection process was not a smooth process with a step-by-step approach. It became a political process that was fraught with confusion, mistakes, false turns and blind alleys, a fact that researchers rarely share (Shope, 2006).

Although I had official permission to access the first tea estate, it became necessary to get official clearance from the head office to gain access to a new research site. I came to understand the importance of establishing prior relationships or having links with the top management and the impact of such links in accessing information. On my request to change the initial research site and to move to another research site, a tea estate was approved immediately. I moved to my new research site, where I could reside within the estate. I found private accommodation next to the tea factory.

While staying in this place, I understood that power is not only associated with people and their knowledge but also with different places and physical objects, due to peoples' interactions and interpretations. The traditional old-looking grocery shop adjoining my

accommodation has a long history on the estate. It had been the main collecting centre for tea gathered from Nuwara Eliya to be transported to Colombo in colonial times. It was the cooperative store, which supplied dry rations, clothes, hardware and all other essentials to the estate workers. This place had also provided tea for the workers during their breaks. During the 1983 riots the shop owner, who is Sinhalese, had closed the shop and left it in the custody of a caretaker, who is also Sinhalese. Ultimately, the latter became the owner of the shop and the land, without any payment for the assets he acquired. Presently it does not provide tea for workers or sell clothes and no longer serves as a leaf-collecting centre. Instead, it serves as a collecting point for vegetables and strawberries to be transported to Colombo and to other markets.

The owner of the shop and of the four-storey building has a special identity in the estate. Almost all the respondents referred to the shop owner as 'Kadey Aiya'²¹ or as 'Mudalalie Aiya'²². Workers addressed him with respect, not by his name. They admired him and called him a 'Good Aiya'. This identity as a 'Good Aiya' was somewhat a superlative, as I perceived from my Colombo background, to identify a 'businessman'. Later, I understood that he had earned this title because of his generosity in selling things on credit, buying the estate workers' monthly tea entitlement (which workers received from the company and was meant for their own consumption), and also helping the workers in case of emergencies by acting as an unofficial pawn broker for them to pawn their jewellery and other valuables. I observed on several occasions how he tried to secure power in the estate. Once I observed how his interest clashed with the interests of the estate management when he tried to encroach on some land.

According to literature, an individual's 'name' is a sense making device with social and political power (Guenther, 2009; Warren and Fassett, 2002), but it had no such impact in the plantation. Instead, the name was often associated with a material possession of the person (e.g. Upstairs house 'Thangaiya'), a relationship (e.g. Sellasami's son

²¹ The shop is referred to in Sinhala as 'Kadey'. In Sinhala 'Aiya' refers to the older brother. The term brother is also used when talking to a male character, especially when we do not know him very well but want to establish a sense of closeness. In Tamil language, 'Aiya' is used to address one's father's older brother or to show respect to a male person, just like 'gentlemen' or 'Mr.' in English. Kade Aiya indicates the respect to the person and his ownership of the business.

²² In Sinhala 'Mudalalie' means businessman. Mudalalie Aiya indicates the businessman is addressed with respect.

‘Manoharan’), a location (e.g. Upper division ‘Weeramani’) or the work the person does (e.g. ‘watcher’), which manifested the power of the person.

5.2. A Stranger in the Plantation

Observing what people do and asking questions as to what people do can be considered as the two basic methods used in ethnographic research (Jenkins, 2010). To understand the daily discourses through observations and in-depth conversations requires the involvement of the researcher in the estate over a long period.

Being a Sri Lankan, familiar with the social and cultural values, gave me some confidence as an insider to approach the research site, but by and large made me an outsider as I was naive to the study location. Brought up in the Buddhist Sinhalese religious and cultural background; I was not sure of my own capability as a woman to go alone into an unfamiliar place to conduct research over a considerable time period.

Being familiar with my own culture and that of the country at large, I knew that being alone in the plantation for a considerable time would restrict my movement in the plantation. I employed two elderly adults, a man (age 70) and his wife (age 65) to stay with me in the plantation. The man accompanied me to different places, while his wife prepared meals. At times, the woman imposed maternal control over me, telling me not to go to certain houses, not to talk to people who seemed to be drunk. This approach was not strange to me. In my culture, it is natural for the elders to manifest such protective behaviour over younger ones, irrespective of age or relationship.

Experiencing isolation from the workers, and their suspicion and rejection, within the first two-three days, I felt uneasy. I was under pressure as to how I should approach the workers. In the evening of the second day of my stay in the site, I went for a walk in the direction of the line houses, thinking that I could speak to a few workers. I perceived that I was not welcome in their houses. One person switched off the lights and closed the door as I reached the line houses. Initially they saw me as an outsider and perceived me on the basis of their prior experiences of associating with outsiders. They were afraid to associate with me due to the macro ethnic problems facing the country at large. In addition, the police had warned them not to associate with strangers in the plantations. The following excerpt shows how a Talawar, who had been in police custody for a week for helping an unknown person, saw me at the beginning:

Actually, I wanted to come and meet you before. One Talawar warned me not to. He was afraid. He reminded me and warned me as I was in trouble once due to associating with an unknown person. He told me not to go to meet you and fall into trouble again, as we do not know who you are... We inquired about you from 'Kade Aiya'. He explained everything (DWA0045M/ DWA 0054 M).

When I tried to speak to a woman who was pregnant, she ran away without responding. Later she came and spoke to me a few times. When I asked her why she had run away, she replied with a smile:

I didn't talk because I was frightened. I knew that you are new to the estate but did not know who you are. The police come here and advise us not to harbour any strangers but to inform them immediately of the presence of strangers without getting into trouble. They warn us not to associate with outsiders. If something happened to us, my husband would scold me for talking to you. Then at the tea centre, we saw you having tea with Loku Mahattaya²³. We know that you are staying in Kadey Aiya's place. We were told by a Talawar that you came here to study us" (DWA 0004 W).

I was worried, seeking a way of securing social acceptance to establish my links to the community. I stayed in the shop for hours talking to the shop owner and his wife while they served the customers. I observed what they normally sold, how they sold (whether for cash or on credit) and how the shop owner turned away the children who came to buy cigars, beedi²⁴ and cigarettes for their elders. I smiled with the workers who came to the shop but did not start any conversation. Sometimes I just asked, "How are you?" I wanted to get myself acquainted with the estate workers. Sometimes the shop owner and his wife introduced me to the workers and they requested the workers to come and talk to me once they finished their work.

I experienced myself as different from the female workers I was interviewing. I was indeed viewed by them as different due to my dress, education, and where I came from. All these situated me in a very different class: a higher position than that of the respondents I was interviewing. Soon it became clear to me that as long as respondents saw me as 'other', as 'different', it would affect my data collection. What the respondents discussed with me depended on how they saw me. As both parties got to

²³ Sinhala term for Boss/Senior Manager.

²⁴ A popular smoke made of 'beedi leaves' which constitutes the most popular mode of smoking in plantations. Beedi is relatively much cheaper than the branded cigarette. It is considered to be the 'smoke of the poorest' for whom cigarettes are an unaffordable luxury.

know each other we began to identify or differentiate or like or dislike each other. These affect our representations and the data collection process (Bott, 2010).

My appearance, in particular my dress: T-shirt, long trousers, boots and also my short hair made me an outsider. Although I saw two women other than myself wearing long trousers, I came to understand that it was not the accepted dress for a woman on the estate. One of the women who wore long trousers had come from outside to work in the strawberry factory nearby. The other was a young girl who was born to an estate family but whose parents had died, compelling her to live on the estate with an old aunty. The girl was considered as 'other' and 'not one of us' not only because of the long trousers she wore but also because of her behaviour. She came to visit me a few times to translate a textbook into Sinhala from Tamil. She was called a '*Lesi kālla*' (easy going or a girl who is easily approachable) by boys. However, workers excused me for wearing trousers as I was an outsider and had come from Colombo.

My appearance in the front garden of the house, near the shop at night, caused the workers to question me, "*Why are you out here at this time?*" Although I did not take much notice of my appearance, I experienced that they were concerned about my behaviour because it did not conform to their social norms. This social norm, "when the sun goes down a woman should not stay out alone", was found to be of general validity not only in the plantations, but also in a cultural macro discourse of my country. Staying out at night gives a bad impression of a woman. Their concern helped me to start informal conversations with the estate workers.

Experiencing working in the field plucking tea leaves was a tiring but exciting experience for me. Tea bushes are cultivated in lines, and workers assigned to each line so that they can pluck tea leaves in a systematic manner without confusion, and move from one field to another without instructions. This system had to be explained to me a few times before I fully understood the situation. The ritualistic practices, the problems of caste and ethnicity, and the impact of the same in daily practices were not within my knowledge. I understood that becoming familiar with the culture of the research site is a complex process needing time. Establishing rapport and trust with the respondents cannot be realised overnight. These become issues especially when the researcher is not a part of the context. She/he becomes a stranger and does not know why people do what they do, or sometimes what they are doing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

These were problems that I had to encounter throughout my study. However, I believe that my outsider stance placed me in a unique position in the research site, making it possible to access inside information. Thus, my experience in the field was quite different from that of other researchers who were insiders or partial insiders to the research site (e.g. Sherif, 2001; Gallais, 2008).

5.3. Establishing Trust

Establishing trust in field research is often a topic of discussion in research papers. I decided to get closer to the community through reliable and trustworthy sources, which were closer to the workers. I came to know that the workers had inquired from the shop owner why I am there and my bona fide; they perceived me favourably on the basis of the trust they placed in the shop owner.

The midwife of the estate also became a suitable source of mediation. On the third day of my stay, visiting the line rooms with the midwife was a starting point in establishing my connections to the estate. When the midwife went on her official rounds in the estate, I joined her. She introduced me to the workers. I did not start questioning them straight away, but approached them later individually and requested them to come to my place. Most workers welcomed me when I visited them a second time. Gradually I came to be on a better footing.

My visit to the estate school helped to communicate my presence to the parents via the children. Furthermore, a great amount of trust was placed in me with my participation in the female workers' ritualistic practice on the first working day of the month, which I will discuss later.

I also participated in the Sunday evening Christian ceremony in the nearby church. It was conducted by estate women. However, there were a few men and boys present. Once the service was finished, I was taken to venerate statues of Jesus, Mary and certain Saints. Once it was finished, the food that was offered to the Saints was distributed among the devotees. By participating in these religious ceremonies, I realized how faith in unforeseen forces controls and keeps the conformity of the behaviour of communities.

I was invited by the youths to the 'Youth Centre' funded by a Christian NGO, where children took extra lessons in the evening. At the beginning, Christian rhymes were

sung by the tutor, followed by the students. All I could observe were girls and boys of age 9-15 playing games and role-plays inside the classroom. The observations gave me the opportunity to experience the taken-for-granted social world of the plantation workers on the one hand, and then on the other to explore the hidden assumptions of religion and their meanings so that I found myself continuously creating and interpreting participants' social world.

Being an educated woman also gave me a positive image among workers. I was told by a female respondent whose daughter used to visit me almost every evening after school, *"I do not mind my daughter coming here to talk to you as you are educated. We do not come across Nonas ((ladies)) like you coming here"*. I also experienced that my profession, education and reading for a Ph.D. in the UK gave me recognition and power. They helped me to establish trust with the Senior Management, School Principal, the doctor, TU representatives, and officials at Ministerial level. The Secretary to the Plantation Ministry said that she liked taking time to speak to students like me who pursued higher education, rather than talking to politicians. I became a familiar figure in the estate. The workers ceased to be alarmed and no longer viewed me as a disturbing element. This resulted in gaining trust within the community.

5.4. Conducting Conversations and Discussions

It is important for the researcher to have the research objective/s in mind. Otherwise, the researcher will spend long time collecting information, which might not have any significance to her/his research. It is important when initiating conversation to build rapport so that getting experience is easy. Anthropologists such as Agar (1980) and Malinowski (1922) both discuss the issues relating to trust and obtaining information from the informants. Malinowski (1922:12) emphasises the importance of the researcher using her/his *"scientifically trained mind to push the inquiry along really relevant lines, and towards aims possessing real importance"*.

The inquisitive nature of the workers, which has become a part of the culture, was also helpful for me to get the attention of the workers. When workers saw me speaking to a respondent or entering a neighbour's house, the others became inquisitive. This made others also come and have a chat, to see what I was talking about with their neighbour. Later, some made a point of coming to see me when they came to the shop to buy things. They were also interested in seeing the set-up, the furniture, number of rooms

and the facilities in the place where I was staying. By looking at these, they estimated the wealth of 'Kade Aiya'.

Normally, the narratives touched on working class issues which were often associated with macro and micro economic factors. Common experiences such as low income, high cost of living and hardships in their daily life, and low wages in the workplace became matters of workers' concern. These were often phenomena that the respondents and I experienced commonly in the Sri Lankan context as working class people. These topics also became common ground to start a discussion.

I began to experience a reciprocal relationship when talking to female respondents as they questioned me. This resulted in building two-way interaction between respondents and myself, giving more time for respondents to open up their thoughts. They asked about my marital status, motherhood role, and my physical appearance too. "*Are you married?*", "*You do not look like a mother with two children*", "*Did your husband allow you to come all the way from the UK to study us?*", "*How can you stay alone here without your children?*", "*Who is looking after your children?*", "*How do your children feel without you?*", "*It is strange to come across somebody like you coming alone to study us*" were frequent questions and statements. They questioned my independence in coming along to the estate without my family, my husband's attitude in sending me alone to an unknown place to live and also how I coped with the practical problems that they generally faced as women. At times, they expressed their surprise when my answers did not fit with their own experience.

Answering these questions gave me the chance to give my autobiography in brief. Further, explaining my purpose in being in the plantation was possible through these questions. As we entered into conversation, we tried to build relationship and our conversations become ongoing negotiations. Such negotiations occur moment by moment, within each encounter, sometimes in ways that we are not aware of, as well as intentional ways (Clandinin, 2006; Russell, 2005). In this way, we established mutual trust, and developed a basis for the respondents to talk about themselves.

When conversing with workers, I understood the significance of language in different contexts, and also how it imposes barriers to cross-cultural conversations. This became a matter of concern since respondents and I possessed different cultural membership (Sands et al., 2007). Language use brings culture into existence. The culture so created

becomes reality in society. It becomes significant in imposing power when assigning different meanings to language use. A particular way of using language may give different meanings within different cultures. I came across a situation where my way of using words in conversation needed reframing as it gave a different meaning to respondents. For example, when discussing their marriage, they did not like using some terms such as 'love affair' or 'falling in love', as these words were associated with sex. Thus, workers saw these as inappropriate words to use. Instead, they often used terms such as 'getting friendly with the children's father' or 'getting friendly with the children's mother'.

As mentioned earlier, although I was a stranger to the plantation at the beginning, my gender and some similarities between Sinhala and Tamil cultures helped me to establish common ground during interviews. Being a woman made my entry to the site somewhat easier. It also enabled me to open up the thoughts /opinions/emotions which had been held by the respondents for many years. The female respondents often discussed their gender issues, perceiving gender roles and gender responsibilities on the domestic front as socially and culturally bound phenomena, common to all Sri Lankan women. For this reason, often they used culture-bound phrases to establish empathy between themselves and me, which they thought required no further interpretation. They perceived the issues they faced as women are common to all women including me and often used the term 'we'. They used cultural macro discourse-based phrases such as "*we, being women, should know how to manage household affairs carefully*"; "*we should not create problems for our husbands*"; "*once you get married there are problems*" as shared understandings which needed no further interpretation. This shows how the CI as 'we' comes into discussion as experiential. According to De Bruin (2009:240), "we" refers "*to a set of human beings among whom there is common knowledge of expressed willingness to participate in some joint action*".

By listening to and developing conversation with respondents, I began to reflect on my personal experiences of being a woman, a wife and a mother. The respondents expected me to understand what they were saying by using cues like "Miss, you know the situation of the country, the economy, etc". I nodded my head to show that I knew the context. I needed to fill the gaps of what they did not say so that fragmented texts became meaningful. By doing so, I became a co-producer of the taken-for-granted realities (Cunliffe, 2001; Boje, 1991). At the same time, I came across instances where

the women educated me by providing detailed information about their poverty, lifestyle, problems, grievances, etc, as I was an outsider. I came to understand that what respondents narrated depended on how they perceived me, as an outsider or insider.

5.5. My Identity in the Plantation

Rather than describing my own disposition, here I try to reflect on the words and meaning of speech events of the respondents. This would give a better account of my self-identity and my disposition in the eyes of respondents.

The respondents used the terms ‘Nona’ or ‘Miss’ or ‘Madam’, but never asked me for my name. They introduced me to others in a variety of ways which gave distinct identities: as “a Sinhala Nona” (my ethnic identity), “Nona who is teaching in the University” (my professional identity), “Nona who has come from Colombo”(my geographical identity), “Nona who came from Engalanthey”²⁵ (my geographical identity in connection to England), “Nona who has come here to study us”(with my objective of being on the plantation), “Podi Miss”(identifying me by my *small* physical appearance), “Nona who is staying in the Kadey Aiya’s upstairs”(identifying me by my connection to the place where I was staying and the person who owned it).

Most of the respondents understood my purpose in visiting the estate. However, I faced a few difficulties while collecting data in the site. First, my identity became connected to my affiliation with management. On the first day of my arrival to the estate, the Senior Manager introduced me to the Assistant and Deputy Managers and to the midwife at the ‘Tea Centre’, while having tea. Having seen this, a man, no longer a worker on the estate, reached me later, requesting me to approach the management for him to obtain electricity to his house. Finding that it was not possible, he got drunk and came shouting and cursing the management. He stopped in front of the place where I was staying and criticized the Senior Manager and requested me to write everything he said in my research.

Identity confusion took place when I was going on the rounds of the line houses with the midwife. The workers thought that I was the new doctor to the estate. That evening,

²⁵ During the colonial period the word ‘Engalanthey’ was used by locals to refer to England. The respondents never used the abbreviation UK or the word England.

they took their children to the estate medical centre for treatment. The midwife and the 'doctor' (an apothecary in fact)²⁶ had to call the Senior Manager, as the number of patients was not manageable. Then, the Senior Manager had called a private doctor from another estate to treat the patients.

Stereotyping my gender identity and theirs, the female respondents took a free hand in narrating their gender related issues on their domestic front and in the workplace. They spoke of sensitive issues relating to their childhood; marriage; their love affairs; family issues: a woman facing rejection from her present husband as she had been a divorcee; religious conversion and related issues; the emotions a woman had to undergo in deciding to have an illegal abortion just because the man said so, and the economic and social problems that she faced when she decided to bring up an illegitimate child without any support from her own family and society. After having these conversations, some respondents showed a sense of relief at expressing their grievances and worries.

Male respondents, perceiving my gender and education positively, did not resist talking to me. They talked about their dissatisfaction with management, wages, trade unions, etc. An elderly male respondent in his discussion tried to make me aware of and educate me in my responsibilities as a married woman.

Researchers discuss the place and significance of being an insider in establishing rapport and accessing information from the respondents (e.g. Gallais, 2008; Sherif, 2001; Russell, 2005). However, my ethnic identity as an outsider helped me to position myself positively with the respondents. These narratives came as points of discussion not because I was perceived as an insider due to my gender identity, but also because I was an outsider to the context by my 'ethnicity'. Their accounts: "*Had you been a person from here, I would not have said these things to you*", "*I do not know why I said all these to you, I have not said these to anybody here in the estate*", "*I do not trust anybody here*", "*Others are jealous of us*", "*Please do not tell this to anybody here*" and so on show the trust they placed in an outsider.

²⁶ In some estates, resident apothecaries (equivalent to pharmacist in the UK) treat patients for simple ailments. There is a move to do away with this practice and integrate the estate health service with the government health service.

5.6. Boundary Establishment, Maintenance and Ethical Dilemma

When entering into ethnographic research, the researcher starts establishing her/his own identity by emphasizing the purpose of study, the role as a researcher and also what is expected from the respondent. In other words, researcher and respondent construct each other's boundaries in implicit and explicit ways. However, these boundaries are subject to change and renegotiation (Clandinin, 2006; Mutua-Kombo, 2009). As I became familiar with the setup, the boundaries became blurred. At times, I found myself getting involved with respondents' issues. This happened unconsciously and I began questioning myself as to how I should establish my boundaries as a researcher, while being a Sri Lankan investigating a community within my country.

According to the literature, a researcher should adopt an attitude of respect and appreciation towards the social world under investigation. A good empirical researcher should explore the world as it is (Gergen, 1999). Nevertheless, I found myself getting emotionally involved in a few incidents that took place in the site, so that I could not observe these situations as they happened. One such instance was when a two year-old boy got his hand severely burnt while he was trying to take some potatoes out of a pot of boiling water (while his mother was attending to something else) and was brought to the medical centre. I was talking to the 'apothecary' about the general health conditions of workers and some of the issues that he commonly came across. Workers' addiction to alcohol which prevent them from overcoming poverty, parents' attitudes towards children and their ignorance about children's emotions were some of his concerns. As we were talking, we heard people shouting and the midwife informed us that a small boy with a burnt hand had been taken for treatment. The apothecary pointed out that this illustrated what he had just been talking about and asked me to come to see the child. I heard the child crying, and much louder voices of elders shouting and crying. I could not go with the apothecary to see the child or to see what was happening. Then it struck me how difficult it could be in some circumstances to separate the researcher's emotions from the research (Russell, 2005). However, I was able to observe how the power relations between the in-laws created conflicts within the family by being open to unexpected events. The grandfather, who was one of my respondents, came to see me that evening crying (I think he was drunk). He told me that the child had been admitted to hospital. He criticized his daughter-in-law for not looking after the child and justified his action of hitting her in public.

Another instance was the ritual '*Sami Kumburu*', the sacrifice of a goat to propitiate the 'Factory God'. This is a very important ritualistic ceremony held in the factory premises to seek protection from the God. Although it is essential to investigate an important occurrence at the very moment of its happening (Malinowski, 1922) it was extremely difficult for me to make up my mind to participate in this significant event, due to my cultural and religious beliefs. The reader might consider this as inability of the researcher to keep a dispassionate distance between the self and the research subject, which limits the researcher's ability to understand particular situations. I suggest that even though one is involved in ethnographic research, there are many things that we miss in first hand/actual occurrences, but encounter these situations while having discussions with the respondents or through other literature. Rather than disregarding them, as they do not align with my values and beliefs, acknowledging what is being missed in actual sense and bringing the significance of such circumstances to the research in a genuine manner establishes the authenticity of me as a researcher (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). By doing so, I bring subjective involvement into the research process. Agar (1980) acknowledges the personal and cultural background of the ethnographer as critical. These influence the researcher in assessing the similarities and differences between her/himself and the group she/he is studying.

I also found myself advising a female respondent who told me about the pathetic situation that she and her children faced because her husband was serving an 8 months jail sentence. At one point I had to divert her attention to prevent her from feeling sorry for herself too much as she often said that she wanted to commit suicide. In the medical centre, quite unconsciously I became an adviser to an unmarried female respondent who was six months pregnant. The midwife was keeping an eye on her as she was thinking of getting an illegal abortion. These are not issues that organizational researchers in Western contexts normally face, as their respondents' public space is quite different from what I discuss here.

While on the plantation, I often faced questions of research ethics. I believe that interpretation of research ethics is very subjective and context specific. The ethics of a researcher in Western cultures may not necessarily fit into another culture (e.g. a developing Asian context). At times, finding a balance between research ethics of the researcher and the ethics of the plantation culture was an issue for me. In a context

where peoples' actions are conditioned by a transaction motive and they live in a give and take culture, adhering to the ethics of the research community made me an unethical person most of the time in the minds of the respondents. Being socio-economically better off, I felt that I had an obligation to see what I could do to help them, even in very small ways, but at the same time my purpose of being in the plantation as a researcher prevented this. Often I took the outsider's role as a researcher, as this was the most practical thing to do.

5.7. Experiencing the Unexpected

Experiencing the unexpected can occur at any stage, having either a positive or a negative impact on the research process. The following are some of the events I was exposed to while being involved in the data collection process.

Experiencing a bomb blast when returning from a leading newspaper publisher, situated in Colombo, was totally unexpected and had some adverse impact on accessing information from some places in Colombo. Getting fever, diarrhoea and vomiting within the first week of arrival to the plantation made me physically weak for a few days.

I also encountered an unexpected event, which created a positive image of me among the plantation workers. I observed and later became a participant in a ritualistic event, which female workers perform on the first working day of each month, just before they commence plucking. The ceremony starts with offering 'puja'²⁷ to the Gods to invoke the blessing, to get good health for the workers and their family members and also to ensure good crops throughout the month, without any adverse weather conditions. This ceremony ends with both the Assistant Field Officer (AFO) and Kangany putting hands full of tea leaves into the bags of women pluckers, which they hold in front. This practice invokes blessing to establish harmonious relationships with the immediate superiors and subordinate workers. This is an encouragement from the superiors to workers to work hard. When this was taking place, the AFO invited me to participate in the event. Observing what the AFO and Kangany did, I did the same.

²⁷ Pujawa/puja- refers to a ritualistic ceremony where people make offerings to Gods and Goddesses and make requests/plead from them. All Hindus and most Buddhists believe that through ritualistic practices they can invoke blessings from Gods and Goddesses.

Keeping faith in Gods in all aspects of life is not strange in Sri Lanka. What I encountered was very similar to what Shope (2006) experienced within the South African community. Later I came to know that May, June and July are normally the rainy season, where there is less work as the crops are less abundant. However, the month of June had been a very favourable month, with heavier crops due to the change in weather and workers continued their plucking even on Saturdays. From what a female worker said, I came to understand that my participation in the ritualistic event had created a positive image of myself among the workers, as they got more crops.

Yesterday ((Saturday)) also we had work and that is why I could not come. Normally we do not have much work this month due to rain. But not like previous years, this month is good. Good that you came to our 'Pujawa' and you blessed us by placing tea leaves in our bags. This month turned out to be a good month for us (From the field notes).

Living on the estate, I was able to see multiple interpretations and how people gave different justifications and meanings to the same event. During my stay in the plantation I was able to discover the difficulties that workers undergo with conflicting interests creating chaos to workers' and managers' normal daily activities. Notwithstanding this, workers' lives were interesting and full of pleasure. Altogether, these events were unpredictable.

5.8. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, by providing an autoethnographic research account, I attempted to reflexively bring my subjective position in understanding self-identity of up-country tea plantation workers in the Sri Lankan context. Having completed the data collection on the estate for three months, I understand the complexities associated with taking an ethnographic approach to carry out research in an unknown place. The data collection process is not an ideal, logical step by-step approach of deciding concepts, selecting an organization, preparing questionnaires and questioning a set number of respondents to gather data for a research. It is a complex process. This often requires the willingness of the researcher to change the research plan and to use common sense and knowledge as one interacts with different situations.

The success of the researcher in accessing the information mostly depends on how the respondents perceive the researcher. From the respondents, I came to understand that ethnic and gender identities had a significant impact on their placing trust on me. Women respondents viewed gender commonality as a bonding link between them and

me. The male respondents, on the other hand, viewed the difference of my gender as a bonding link. Both parties viewed my difference in ethnic identity as significant in establishing rapport and building trust.

I would mention that my field dilemmas are not new or unique to me, but I find that researchers do not address the reflexivity: the issues and dilemmas they encountered in the research process, perhaps due to the lack of space or due to their stance in the research.

Although I had a sincere concern to see the plantation workers' life through their eyes, I know my effort has its limitations. Moving into a community to study and describe their values, beliefs, and document their lifestyles, socially and publicly within a short period, is a difficult and incomplete task.

Finally, I see that ethnography is not merely a data collection process for finding the truth, what is correct, right or wrong about the description. It is a process of getting involved in discovering individuals, culture and society through experience. What I have given here is not a conclusive story of workers' experiences, but this is a small space given to represent the workers' voices, which have been neglected both by management in organizations and researchers in my own Sri Lankan context.

PART 4

OVERVIEW OF THE DATA FINDINGS

“Social worlds are historical communicative systems: historical stocks of knowledge and historical institutional structures are constructed, maintained, transmitted, transformed and, occasionally, destroyed in social interactions. Obviously, social interaction is more than individual action, but it presupposes individual action. Individual action is intentional-and intentional activities are meaningful to those who engage in them. They are meaningful when they lead to result that they were intended to achieve, and they are meaningful in another, often painful sense, when consequences of interaction differ from those that were originally anticipated” (Luckmann, 2008:281).

This Part Four consists of five chapters, of which four chapters present my data findings and the last chapter contains a discussion of the findings. A documentary analysis on Sri Lankan tea plantations and the Indian Tamil plantation community is undertaken in Chapter 6. This allows drawing out salient historical, religious, social cultural political and economic macro discourses, both philosophically and ideologically, which is important to situate the plantation workers in their particular macro context. This also provides the basis for understanding discursive formation, practices and change across time.

The broader themes identified when analysing the data are incorporated into three major themes, namely, gender, caste and ethnicity and they are discussed in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. Although an attempt is made to include these findings under different chapters for the convenience of analysis and for easy reading, it is important to note that these macro discourses and micro interactions are intertwined with each other. They influence and are influenced by each other, fabricating values, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and experiences of workers in a complex way. Gender, caste, ethnicity along with class and community create both harmony and sometimes conflicts within the community. They construct multiple dimensions of the self-identity of plantation workers as an ongoing process. During my three-month stay on the plantation, in order to address the research objectives, I attempted to understand how these complex processes play through participants’ daily practices. The findings discussed here are the result of my formal and informal conversations and interviews with workers, managers, trade union

representatives, and other officials. Here I also incorporate some of my observations at the plantation.

In order to interpret the data provided by various research participants, I have tried to bring both the context of these discourses as well as my own interpretation into this research. These interpretations are based on careful selection of words. In doing so, I align with the social constructionist perspective of co-constructing meaning by bringing in my experience and observations from the plantation. Here the term 'narratives' is often used to state the ways in which a meaningful whole is brought to our understanding by the respondents. I also use the word 'see' to acknowledge the subjective understanding of the subject matter.

The final Chapter 10 discusses the main thrust of the research by providing my interpretations through theoretical lenses. Lastly, the research conclusion the contribution of this research and the limitations of the research are discussed.

Chapter 6

Situating the Research Site within Historical, Socio-cultural, Political and Economic Macro Discourses

Introduction

In this chapter, the data gathered through desk research is analysed. Macro discourses of gender, caste, religion, class and ethnicity are identified by drawing on various public texts such as text books, research publications, policy reports, seminar papers, news papers, etc. These data become the basis for examining how macro discourses are played through the everyday interactions of workers. Also incorporated are observations at the research site.

Religion, social and cultural values, beliefs and ways of doing things are legitimized as laws, philosophies or as ideologies within the plantation community. These laws, philosophies or ideologies construct the realities that govern both private and public life of the plantation community in myriad ways. These realities legitimize ethnic, caste and gender differences in self-identity.

In this chapter, by exploring such historical, religious, social, cultural, political and economic constructions of gender, caste, ethnicity, etc, it is suggested that they are actually an outcome of various meanings developed through discursive practices by way of both social practices and conversation. As they are practised on an ongoing basis, they become either bedrocks or pillars of the society that result in producing, reproducing or transforming realities including individual's self-identity in multiple and complex ways.

6.1. Historical, Religious, Cultural and Political Macro Discourses of Gender Manifestations in Social Life

The ideologies related to Hindu religion, caste, and gender seem to be subjected to debate due to their complexities and vagueness. In this research, it is not the intention to bring those debates to the surface, but to understand some of the salient macro discourses that will facilitate our understanding about the Sri Lankan up-country tea

plantation context and what impact they have on workers' understanding of gender difference.

6.1.1. Females as Dialectical Binary Opposition /Males as Positive and Superior

The gender ideologies of female subordination and male domination among the up-country plantation community are an outgrowth of centuries of numerous religious ideological manifestations in Hindu historical and religious scripts that were originated in India. These scripts of the Hindu religious deities were used by their writers to claim for themselves a high caste as 'Brahmins'²⁸. They specify religious ideologies relating to codes of conduct and behaviour of both men and women. These religious and cultural ideologies bring biological sex differences to the forefront. According to literature, they are a collection of biases or common-sense knowledge, which circulate as anecdotes, stereotypes, maxims and sanctions and assign different roles, responsibilities, desires, abilities and behavioural patterns to both females and males on the plantations (Philips, 2005).

The Hindu religion is predominant in suggesting gender inequality and caste differences within the Tamil community. They stem from religious concerns with the binary division of Gods and Goddesses along with their assigned spiritual values. On the same basis a 'woman' is interpreted in terms of opposites and dichotomies as '*shakti*' (energy) and also a weaker sex, she is auspicious and also polluted, she is the maker and also the destroyer, as a young woman she is sexually dangerous and vulnerable but as a married woman she is harmless and passive" (Thiruchandran, 1997:55). These are popular Hindu religious discourses, which describe a 'woman' as dialectical binary opposition in Hindu society, whereas men are always the 'Shakti': the powerful creation of God with energy. The implication of these discourses in self-identity construction is that women are portrayed in contradictory ways, both positively and negatively, whereas men are always portrayed positively-a superior creation to women.

In Hindu philosophy, the social relationship of marital life positions the male (husband) as 'Pathi': an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient 'male God', who expects the

²⁸ A member of the priestly class, who claims to be created by the God, Brahma. They represented poets, priests, teachers and scholars.

devotion and fidelity of the woman with the divine moral soul called 'Bhakti' to the God. This religious macro discourse 'Pathi Bhakti' can be seen as a complex social construction, manifested in the marital life of a woman and enacted daily by being a loyal and committed 'wife' who should be ready to sacrifice herself for the wellbeing of the spouse. The idea of woman obeying and respecting, being kind and dedicated to her spouse has become a social and cultural expectation of society. When treating and establishing her relationship with her spouse, she should take care of him as a mother, she should provide love and affection, she should be the eternal friend to provide direction, and try to fulfil all the needs of the spouse. In all these circumstances, the moral subjugation of female to spouse is expected.

Further, this verse in Thiruchandran (1997:47) portrays the characteristics of an 'ideal' woman, and what she should and should not do as a housewife:

*“If the wife is confronting (or questioning the husband), she is death itself.
If she does not enter the kitchen early in the morning, she is (like) an
incurable disease.
If she doesn't cook for the husband, she is (like) a ghost in the house.
These three are in fact killer weapons to the husband”*

I came across many females and males on the plantation who valued this ideal image of a 'married woman' and almost all women tried to live up to it. Females wake up before everybody at home, engage in all household chores and go to work without expecting support from their spouses. They often do not question their husbands, as this would result in domestic violence or breakup of marital life. Even the physical violence of men against women on the domestic front is seen as the 'Karma' or fate of a woman. This is part of public discourse (e.g. the Sri Lankan newspaper, Daily News, 19 July, 2003: p 8 states that there is a high rate of gender violence, and women see this as their 'Karma of being women').

The *Tirukural*²⁹, considered as the ultimate moral and religious truth of Hinduism, clarifies the concept of the 'chastity' of women in society. The goddess '*Pattini*', venerated as the goddess of chastity, derived from it her power to destroy all evils and

²⁹ The *Tirukural* is used to take oaths in the court of Law in Tamil Nadu province, India.

to win her city. She is still immortalized for her commitment to chastity by Hindus in Kovils in Sri Lanka.

In ancient Hindu society in India, chastity was practised in three ways: where the woman died on hearing or realizing that her husband had died (*Mutananam*), where she sacrificed herself by burning herself with her dead husband in the cemetery (*Sati*), or where she remained a widow by practising widow-penance (*Tapatanilai*) (Rajan 1993; Thiruchandran, 1997). Although these are not practised in Sri Lankan Tamil society, women practise a strict code of conduct in order to maintain their physical and mental purity and confirm their chastity by worshiping their spouses.

The state of auspiciousness is bestowed upon a female once she is married and bears children. The feminine qualities of beauty and completeness of a woman refer not to her physical attractiveness but her ability to bear children. Tamil women's bodies are revered as repositories of divinity, sanctity and purity (Philips, 2005). Symbols such as the 'Thalie' (a necklace with nine knots in a yellow thread or a gold necklace with a pendant that symbolizes the Gods), and 'Pottu' (a red mark on the forehead that symbolizes the third eye that gives wisdom to women) are worn by a married woman to confirm her marital status. All these symbolize her prosperity, auspiciousness and chastity. These are removed when the husband dies. A barren woman, a divorcee or a widow is virtually considered as inauspicious and kept isolated from all auspicious events (e.g. weddings, house warming, and girls' puberty ceremony) even within her own family. A remarrying widow is looked down upon as being not pure but sexually permissive. These values are very much in practice today and became known when females discussed their family issues, etc, while having conversations with me.

Further, the Hindu religion considers the 'purity of the young woman' as supreme. The woman's chastity before and after marriage has to be protected and maintained by controlling her feelings and behaviour in social relationships with others, especially with the opposite sex. The honour of the family was historically built up with ideologies associated with the morality, purity and chastity of the woman. If an unmarried woman loses her chastity through either premarital sex or adultery, she is viewed as a destroyer, who brings disaster, disease, and poverty to the whole family. The whole family loses credibility and are viewed as a disgrace to the whole community. Within this context, love and sex are regulated and legitimized within the family institution for married women. The practice of testing the virginity of women on the first night of the marriage

is still followed in Sri Lankan society and very much adhered to on plantation society. These social discourses of the 'purity/impurity of a woman' are a strong manifestation of womanhood in the Asian context, where none of these are imposed on males (Amarasinghe, 2002; Jayaweera, et al., 2004).

The perception of a woman's body as polluted either generally or at a particular time period is common all over the world (Amarasinghe, 2002; Jayaweera et al., 2004). A menstruating woman or a woman who has just given birth are sources of impurity. A young girl after her first menstruation or a woman following childbirth is confined to a separate section outside the house, as they are seen to pollute the place and the other members of the house (Philips, 2005; Thiruchandran, 1997). Although these biological transformations are considered as pollutions, these events are celebrated with ceremonies. A girl's puberty is marked with dialectic meanings. She is unclean and should be separated from males, as this is a period when she unfolds her life from an asexual to a sexual one; thus, she must avoid men. On the other hand, this event is also celebrated as it represents symbolic marriage, which prepares the girl for eventual marriage and motherhood.

All these traditional cultural and religious ideological practices ascribe dialectical qualities such as superior-inferior, powerful-weak, active-passive, purity-impurity to men and women. These are necessary mechanisms that establish the social order with gender differences.

6.2. Historical, Religious, Cultural and Political Macro Discourses of Gender Manifestations in the Public Space

The gendered discourses of 'household work for women' and 'breadwinner: the man who puts rice on the plate' are popular and powerful macro discourses within Sri Lankan society. They position gender differences both ideologically and economically in terms of structuring and segregating the labour market (e.g. differences in jobs, promotion, allocation of spaces, time, freedom and supervision in the plantation).

6.2.1. The Division of Work

As far as the up-country tea plantations are concerned, a clear 'gender division' in the institutional setup emerged through the historical allocation of work in the organization. The tea plantations are always associated with female work. When harvesting tea

leaves, only the bud and the top two leaves are plucked. According to Daniel (1993) this represents the woman's life-cycle stages: the bud represents the virgin daughter, while the second leaf which is the shorter leaf (Kattai ilai) represents young and the mature coarse leaf (Karattai ilai) represents old women respectively.

In 1975, then Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranayake in her message to the Asian Regional Seminar in Sri Lanka Foundation Institute acknowledged the fact that more than 50% of the estate population were women and 90% of them were engaged mainly in the task of plucking the tea leaves. The situation is more or less the same even today. Plucking tea leaves in the fields is historically women's work because it requires care and precision in order to avoid damaging the tea bushes or tea leaves (Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, 1979). Thus, women essentially engage in the labour intensive and time consuming work of plucking tea leaves in the field for 8 hours a day but the female worker and her work are given less recognition than a male worker. Also, policy statements acknowledge and reinforce the position of female workers, employed for plucking, weeding, and other relatively light work, while male workers are described as sundry workers who are employed to do heavier work (e.g. Asian Development Bank, 1995).

This division of work as tea pluckers and sundry workers, which symbolize light work and heavy work, has resulted in creating gender differences, and in devaluing female labour (Philips, 2005). Since 1984, policy decisions have been taken to equalize the salary of males and females. However, women still work longer hours than men work and are also doubly burdened with responsibilities for the household chores, which leaves little time for their self-development or community participation (Asian Development Bank, 1995).

6.2.2. Labour Supervision and Promotional Opportunity

Patriarchal social practices are reproduced in organizational labour supervision mechanisms. They establish gender superiority and inferiority and power differences in the organization. Gender differences are also manifested in promotional opportunities where all the supervisory positions are exclusively for males (Philips, 2005). The supervision of female tea plucking by the male supervisor (Kangany) and his power to exercise authority over female workers on and off the work can be seen on a daily basis (Reddock and Jain, 1998; Philips, 2005; Wijayatilake, 2003). In addition, the

bureaucratic structural arrangements and supervisory styles at the plantation cause conflicts between female labourers and supervisor that can be seen even today. There is evidence that gender based violence has significant impact on women's security on plantations, as women are powerless when alone in the house or in the place of work. Women's lack of control over the situation, strict adherence to religious ideological practices, lack of ability to resist, cheating or misleading by men make women vulnerable and in need of security (Reddock and Jain, 1998; Wijayatilake, 2003). Kurian (1998:70) explains the outcome of this female inferiority and male superiority as follows:

“The notion of female inferiority has far-reaching implications for the position of the women on the estate, resulting in male dominating structures at every level, giving rise to constant male supervision over their activities as well as a devaluation of their material contributions to the production and reproduction process on the estate”.

6.2.3. Decision Making and Trade Union Involvement

The TU on plantations also have become centres of male domination even if females hold membership. Most of the females do not take part in the decision-making process, as it involves interaction with men. Due to this isolation, TUs take female issues lightly and rarely actions are taken to reduce the double burden of women workers (Kurian, 1982)

Accordingly plantations' trade union activities and decision making, often associated with national level politics, have become a male domain, a feature reinforced by the women themselves and derived in no small part from the patriarchal nature of the estate situation (Philips, 2005; Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, 1979).

6.2.4. Right to Representation and Responsibility for Spending

The historical patriarchal gender differences are institutionalized through organizational practice of payment and receipt of estate wages (Alawattage, 2005; Kurian, 1982/1998; Philips, 2005). Collection of the wage of a female worker by a male family member, normally the husband, father or an older brother, can be seen in some of the plantations even today, although it was prohibited in 1984. Males not only receive the wages of females but also are responsible for spending them. Females, on the other hand, by allowing this practice, acknowledge the superiority of the male. In addition to these cultural and religious traditions, organizational and familial practices, along with the

addiction to liquor or spending money in the betting centres by the husbands, provide evidence of women not having access to the money they earned through their hard labour.

It is commonly accepted that females are not educated enough to deal with money and they can easily become subject to duplicity and cheating. A common linguistic proverb is “*gānunnge mole handhimitte taramatie*”-women’s intellect can only be extended to the length of the handle of a spoon. This proverb downgrades women’s intellectual ability as inferior to that of men.

Through the gender division of labour, patriarchal ideological practices such as supervision, promotion, participation in decision making and receiving the wages of women are all tied up with the formal institutional framework of the organization, bringing male superiority and female inferiority to the plantation society.

6.3. Historical, Religious, Cultural and Political Macro Discourses of Caste Manifestations

6.3.1. Caste Binaries as Cultural Continuity with Social Order

Although the concept of caste is addressed as a separate issue here, it has to be noted that ancient Hindu cultural and religious practices intertwine caste and gender into one social fabric. These two are interwoven, but influence each other in myriad ways. The Hindu religious texts and practices create caste differences, and set the bedrock of caste hierarchy for the individuals and groups in society. The sanctions are such that nobody can escape the caste prescriptions. Each member’s social status and future occupation in society are decided by the caste acquired by kinship. These practices legitimize caste differences within society and over time become taken-for-granted so that they are inherent and not supposed to be questioned.

A review of religious and literary texts also reveals the relationship between caste, gender and social practices. The book of Hindu Law, ‘Manusmriti’³⁰, addresses the cardinal issue of ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’, an issue central to the caste system in Tamil society in a number of ways. The extended family structure strengthens the

³⁰ ‘*Manusmriti*’, a book of Hindu Law written by Brahmins, legitimizes the caste system in the social structure. The ‘Laws of Manu’ or ‘Institution of Man’ is fundamental to Hindu Law in ancient India. This deals with the laws, rules and codes of conduct to be applied by Hindu society and defines ‘purity and pollution’ as a religious ideology (Thiruchandran, 1997).

establishment of the caste system. According to Hindu Customary Law, if a man had more than one wife, all children 'belonged' to all wives as long as the wives concerned were of the same or equivalent caste (Thondaman, 1987). This is a visible norm in Tamil plantation society even today.

Among Plantation Tamils in Sri Lanka 'Aghamudiyar', 'Kudian', and 'Vellalan/Vellalar' are generally accepted as good castes and 'pure', while 'Paraiyar', 'Pallar', and 'Chakkiliyan' are the low castes, whose touch itself can pollute those of high caste; thus, interaction should be avoided (Baak, 1999). As discussed in Chapter 3, the ancestors of the present plantation workers who migrated from South India are seen as from the lowest caste of Adidrāvidas. They are not subject to a strict religious code of conduct (Pfaffenberger, 1982). Out of these, some such as Kanganies and sub Kanganies aspired to upward mobility in Ceylon by claiming themselves as Sudra caste (a process of sanskritization³¹). They internalized the caste 'Dharama' formulated for the Brahmins as their own. Moreover, in Ceylon they derived their power from their British masters and were given the privilege of educating their children. They became powerful, wealthy and derived their economic status by establishing their superiority in supervising and advancing cash to workers on the plantation. This was the basis for emergence of the elite caste 'Sudra-Vellalans', whereas the workers who were unable to uplift their status continued to experience the isolation from the privileges that were enjoyed by the high caste.

Although lower caste men could acquire the status of the higher caste by adhering to the caste 'Dharma' of the Brahmins, this did not result in emancipation of women in the tea plantations. Instead, they became subjugated by religious sanctions. The freedom enjoyed by low caste women disappeared, as they now had to conform to the same strict rules and code of practice as Brahmin women. Marriage became 'sacred' to these women and it has to be preserved through a strict code of conduct as a means of protecting their acquired caste hierarchy (Kurian, 1998).

A verse from the 'Bhagavadgita' (a part of the great epic of Mahābhārata which clarifies the religious philosophy of Hinduism) speaks of the evils of caste intermingling

³¹ Historical process by which castes move to a higher rank in the caste hierarchy (Kurian, 1982:54).

and brings caste difference to the surface in daily interactions and it is stated by Thiruchandran (1997:18) in the following manner:

*“We know what fate falls on families broken:
The rights are forgotten, voice rots the remnant,
Defiling the woman, and from this corruption,
Came mixing of caste, the curse of confusion
Degrades the victims, and damns the destroyers”*

It is expected that a high caste female's behaviour should be subject to 'proper conduct' as she can be polluted easily. Such pollution can be caused externally by touching lower caste person or eating food offered by them, and internally by sexual relationships with lower caste people. In Tamil society, having sexual relationships with a lower caste is viewed as mixing with impure blood. Thus, maintenance of purity by preventing mixing with the impure blood of a lower caste is established in number of ways. Controlling females' sexuality has become a deciding factor in caste continuity. Thus, females are subject to a strict code of conduct, with the internalization that contact with a low caste male contaminates the blood of the high caste female. These high-low caste stratifications bring caste differences within and among gender, which restrict free interaction among the plantation community.

By practice, high castes are vegetarians, teetotal and maintain their physical cleanliness through daily baths as ways of establishing their purity. As part of adhering to the customary laws, the low caste should take any food given by the high caste. This reaffirms the state of the low caste as polluted, but the converse should not take place as it is tantamount to the high caste eating someone's left-overs, which are polluted (Naidu, 2002).

6.3.2. Caste Binaries as Institutional Foundations

Caste differences are not only exemplified in interactions and relationships in the plantation society, as explained above, but they are also extended to the work place in a number of ways. The recruitment of workers through the Kangany system, already discussed, can be seen as the first. The politicization of Hindu caste systems during the colonial period can be seen as the second. The Dutch rulers passed orders marginalizing the low caste, as was made clear after the British invasion through an ordinance:

“All persons of the lower caste shall show to all persons of the higher caste such marks of respect as they are by ancient customs entitled to receive... All questions that relate to those rights and privileges which subsist in the said provinces between higher castes (on the other hand) and particularly the

Coviar, Nalavar and Pallar on the other shall be decided according to the said customs and usages of the provinces” (Arumainayagam, 1976 quoted in Pfaffenberger 1982:90).

Third, it can be seen as the establishment and preservation of significant features such as purity, power, responsibility and generosity as the privileges of the few, who are at the top of the class hierarchy, in the capitalist structure. The enactment of these features together with political ordinances of the Dutch and British and the recruitment of Indian labour through the Kangany system laid the institutional foundation for the continuation of the caste system on the Ceylon plantations.

Another striking point to note here is that caste differences become manifested in management, appropriation of resources and allocation of work in the organization. With independence, Sri Lankan tea plantations managed by the British were transferred to the public sector and later to the hands of private sector management. Thus, the management was largely in the hands of the affluent Sinhalese, who appointed the superintendents mostly from the high caste, whereas the workers were of Tamil origin, with low caste backgrounds. In the early days, caste differences were also manifested in the allocation of ‘line rooms’ on the plantations, which were assigned according to the caste hierarchy (Hollup, 1994; Kurian, 1982). Although the Kangany system and the allocation of ‘line rooms’ on caste superiority are no longer applicable, the presence of caste bias introduced historically is still in evidence when appointing supervisors (Reddock and Jain, 1998).

6.4. Discourses of Divine Religion

Tamil interpretations of divine imminence and localization of Gods show their persistent existence bringing order and disorder to society. The Kovil³² tradition posits the transcendence of the Gods. Thus, the power of the Gods, the Kovil, and the religious leader ‘Aiyar’³³ are significant manifestations of religious beliefs on the plantation. Hindus seek the Aiyar’s or Pusari’s intercession with the Gods, in the belief that the Aiyar/Pusari is closer to the Gods than ordinary individuals. The individual’s future, the progress of their status in terms of occupational, financial, health, wealth and

³² Religious place for worshipping Gods.

³³ Aiyar refers to the chief of the ‘Kovil’. Junior to the Aiyar is the ‘Pusaries’ whose main duty is to perform the routine temple rituals. Both are usually from the high caste.

happiness and also their children's future can be gained only to the extent of the Gods' approval and blessing. Any suffering is attributed to individuals' 'Karma'. Thus, worshipping Gods, practising rituals and offering 'pujas' to Gods become a way of life, as these are ways of pleasing the Gods to gain spiritual and material prosperity in the individual's life. Those who do not conform to these norms are considered as sinful deviants.

6.4.1. Rites and Rituals

The religious rituals and rites formally dominated by Brahmins were established and practised rigidly by Sudra-Vellalans on the plantation. The types of religious ceremonies differ according to caste. These rituals and ceremonies also strengthen hierarchical structure on the plantation, where lower castes are viewed as impure and are not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies of the higher caste. The religious ceremonies performed by the higher castes take place in Kovils. Normally, in Kovils 'ordered' deities are offered fruits and Pongal³⁴ and such offerings are later distributed to be consumed by all devotees. Both men and women participate in these rituals. In the case of low caste people's offerings, animal flesh and blood sacrifice are made to 'disordered' fierce deities. There is no female participation. This usually does not take place in the 'Kovil' but under a sacred tree or by a rock. The sacrificial animal is consumed at the same place where it was offered, because bringing the animal home could result in bringing disorder to the family. In addition, people who are of lower caste cannot touch the statues that symbolize Gods, but they can stay outside the Kovil and worship. Moreover, women are not allowed to set foot inside the Kovil, a sacred area, lest their action pollute the God (Kurian, 1998). All these religious rites and rituals ingrain caste hierarchy and also gender difference into the Tamil society.

³⁴ Milk rice made with Jaggery (Palm sugar).

6.5. Historical, Religious, Cultural and Political Macro Discourses of Ethnicity and Class Manifestations

Writings about the plantations and plantation community usually begin by emphasizing workers as ‘distinct communities’ based on their ethnic origin and historical evolution, along with differences of religion, culture, caste, gender, ethnicity and class within the general national milieu. Such understandings about similarities and differences between the national and plantation contexts raise a number of issues such as the marginalization of Tamil plantation workers from the mainstream.

It is evident that development of these macro discourses, which manifest class and ethnicity, can be seen in three different phases. First, a distinct ethnic identity as ‘Tamil estate labour/Tamil coolies’ emerged with the historical establishment of the colonial plantations in early Ceylon, with the labour migration from South India. In texts, documents, research papers and seminars, they are referred to as a historical, culturally, politically and economically powerless, marginalized, and underpaid ‘labour class’ (Bandarage, 1982; Caspersz, 2005; Daniel, 1993; Kurian, 1982; Ratnayake, 1979; Reddock and Jain, 1998).

Political-economic isolation, the separation of Indian Tamils from Sri Lankan Tamils as a different ethnic community in the official census, non-integration of plantation workers into the national mainstream and constitutional reforms that resulted in statelessness have become consequences of historical and political enactment. These can be seen as the second phase. All these were largely accountable for the emergence of poor working class plantation workers in Ceylon, as ‘Indian Tamils’ (Hollup, 1994; Wesumperuma, 1986). The third phase can be traced back to the mid sixties, when the granting of citizenship brought significant changes to their political position of statelessness. Indian Tamils who opted to stay in Sri Lanka are said to have benefited more than those repatriated to India (Indian Express, 1986). Since then, through political mobilization and trade union interventions, the ‘Tamil plantation/estate workers’ are trying to emerge as a separate ethnic group which needs help and assistance from the government. These labouring masses are often illiterate, seen as an oppressed community and identified as ‘working poor’, as acknowledged in policy reports (e.g. Asian Development Bank, 1995/1998; Sri Lanka Foundation Institute 1979).

All these resulted in identifying these up-country tea plantation workers not as a community of the nation but based on their origin and ethnicity. On this basis, they are differentiated from the rest of the Sri Lankan community by popular rhetoric, such as 'Tamil Estate workers', 'Plantation Tamils' and 'Indian Estate Tamils'.

6.5.1. Poor Working Class under Elite

As far as the class difference is concerned, the general class structure grew from the capitalist mode of production. The authoritative colonial masters were regarded as tough white men, who valued hard work and punctuality. Cruel at times, they stuck to their own decisions when taking actions such as dismissing people whom they disliked with no mercy (Hollup, 1994; Kurian, 1982/1998; Reddock and Jain, 1998; Wesumperuma, 1986). Such social practices from the powerful masters brought a pluralized class structure with poor, powerless marginalized workers at the bottom to the organizational structure (Ratnayake, 1979).

Today, masters are generally known as Superintendent or as managers are often stereotyped as colonial masters who enjoy a luxurious lifestyle and live in luxurious bungalows. The Deputy Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent also enjoy more or less the same facilities or a slightly lower scale of luxury than the Superintendent. Workers' perception of managers as high class, living a luxurious lifestyle at the expense of their exploitation, is a macro discourse prevalent in the literature (e.g. Little, 2003) and this was also manifested through workers' conversation. Next in line, the office clerical staff and supervisors are often Tamils of high caste and educated, with some English background. They often have more privileges than other workers, in claiming quarters, either single or twin cottages, with very much better conditions of living (Hollup, 1994).

The class system imposed historically can be observed symbolically and practically in the working and living conditions on the plantation even today. Worker poverty can be observed in the compact settlement referred to as 'line rooms', barrack type structures with one living room and a small sitting room for each family, with gloomy, unhygienic living conditions. This allocation of space according to rank in the organization is also a representation of hierarchy and form of control (Kurian, 1998). The historical 'higher' and 'lower' status of power is established in all ways and accepted as a way of life. At

every level there is fear and respect for superiors in the hierarchy. Thus, authority cannot be questioned.

6.5.2. Lack of Opportunity for Upward Mobility

Plantation Tamils' lack of opportunity to pursue higher education and negligible opportunities for getting employment outside the plantation in either public or private sector are highlighted in policy documents. Further, legislative enactments exclude them from acquiring land, a privilege which is enjoyed by the Sri Lankan Tamils. Also, they reinforce estate workers' status as the lowest working class group. They are bonded to the estate with virtually no avenues for upward social mobility; this is often a political discourse in public documents (e.g. Asian Development Bank, 1995/1998/2002; Hollup, 1994; Wesumperuma, 1986).

6.5.3. Binary Division of Tamilness

The division into Indian Tamils/Estate Tamils and Jaffna Tamils/ Sri Lankan Tamils can be seen as a historical, political and cultural institutional arrangement based on caste, class and religious discourses. The literature highlights the differences of caste in the formation of these two communities, where the Plantation Tamils have their ancestral roots from the untouchables whereas the Jaffna Tamils stem from the 'Sudra' caste. Differences can be seen in their own ritualistic practices. The class difference between Jaffna Tamils and plantation Tamils is manifested in the differences of educational backgrounds, sharing of property and resources and in securing political power. Jaffna Tamils became a more economically stable community by getting the opportunity to pursue education in English streams and also through not having to limit themselves to a particular secular space, such as plantations. After independence, they secured their ethnic power through an electoral basis. They also control a large share of land with property rights and resources in the Northern Province, whereas plantation Tamils are deprived of all these (Pfaffenberger, 1982).

6.5.4. Welfare State of Plantation

Another discourse that is somewhat under-emphasised is the welfare nature of the plantation. The Plantation Association admits that the sector has benefitted from economic, social and environmental amenities such as new housing schemes, schools, water and sanitation, electricity and other infrastructure facilities. Further, the national

identity of plantation workers has been recognized through the granting of citizenship and the issuing of identity cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates and death certificates, etc. Mainstream free education is open to all children. The effects of these changes are identified in the media and in policy documents ('National Plantation Industrial Policy' appeared in Sri Lankan Daily News 08/05/2007; 'Social Issues and Worker Productivity' appeared in Sri Lankan Daily News- 16/02/2009 and 23/02/2009).

6.6. Summary and Conclusion

Self-identity although singular, is multi-dimensional and exists within macro discourses such as policy documents, religious texts, media, etc. As discussed in this chapter, it is evident that Hindu religion, caste and gender ideologies are legitimized through practices. All these in turn bring myriad social, cultural, political and economic differences into the individual's understanding of self and related issues. Thus, an analysis of self-identity has to consider these broader discourses of gender, caste religion, ethnicity and class. The gender ideologies, which construct gender differences on the plantation, are historically and religiously situated, and ensure their continuation to-date. Caste ideologies and religious rituals and ceremonies also have a significant part in daily activities and interaction. They bring caste hierarchy and establish gender differences. Political and economic macro discourses, too, fabricate ethnic and class identities on the plantation. The implications of these entire macro processes are that they promote social relations and uphold the notions of power and respect for the hierarchy. They also facilitate labour control in organizations by differentiating them as superiors and subordinates. These macro discourses that stem from historical, social-cultural political and economic processes distinguish one group from another on the plantations. There are instances that cause feelings of insecurity, marginalization, inferiority, subordination and chaos on plantations and these will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 7

Gender Identity

Introduction

The term ‘gender’ captures attention in modern research, especially in the feminist and post modern perspectives in organizational studies. These scholarly works take place within their own disciplines with different theoretical perspectives or, occasionally, as interdisciplinary work. Often these approaches fail to provide a holistic view on how gender identity comes into play within the macro discourse and micro interpretations that extend our understanding of gender as a socially constructed process. Further, they focus only on organizational activities and their impact on workers’ self-identity construction within organizations. Due to the separation of private and public life, they overlook the individual as a ‘whole person’ who establishes myriad interactions by intertwining both private and public life.

Considering these issues becomes relevant when the scope of the study is extended beyond the organization setting to a private setting. This is one aspect in which this research is different from others, as it attempts to incorporate gender in public-private spaces into a single analysis in order to gain a holistic view of the construction of self-identity.

In reading through the transcripts, the interplay of macro and micro discourses of superiority-inferiority, pure-impure, strong-weak in workers’ life in a number of ways, is identified. In this chapter, how the macro discourses, discussed in Chapter 6 become taken-for-granted realities that influence gender differences in individuals’ understanding of self-identity is explored.

7.1. Constructing Gender in the Public Space

7.1.1. Plucking Tea Leaves vs. Sundry Work and Easy Jobs vs. Difficult Jobs

It is evident that historical definitions that brought gender division are still in practice in the estate selected for the study. The estate management records show 250 employees in the division selected for this study, of which 112 male workers are categorized as 'Sundry workers' and 138 female workers as 'Plucking workers'.

The most labour-intensive task on the plantation is the plucking of the tea leaves and is carried out by female workers. Although in literature this is referred as an unskilled task, I myself experienced and observed this as a task that requires practice to perform with precision.

The recruitment age for the plantation work is 18-21 years of age. Often a young girl picks up the skill of plucking leaves before joining the organization by watching her mother and helping her in plucking leaves (even though this is not allowed by the management). They gain this experience especially when they do not go to school or during weekends. Through practice, their fingers become supple enough for efficient plucking. Some females grow their thumbnails to facilitate plucking. Through practice, their capacity of plucking increases and they become efficient pluckers.

The women report to work by being present in their pre-assigned field at 7.30 am and continue their plucking till 4.30pm, with a break for tea from 9.30 am to 10.00 am and one for lunch from 12.30 to 1.30 pm. Usually they are required to pluck 16kg tea leaves. This is the norm to gain entitlement to the standard daily wage. Any extra kilogram they pluck will earn workers additional money. An experienced female worker normally plucks 45-50 kg. tea leaves over an eight-hour working day.

The beginning of the first working day of each month is marked with a ritualistic practice. It is organized and participated in by all the female workers and this will be discussed later. At the end of this ritualistic practice, each female worker is allocated a specific number by the Field Officer of the respective field. The female worker is identified by the number, which is called the 'row number' for the official attendance

records and pay role. Instead of the woman's name, this number is used when recording the weight of each worker's daily plucking.

In the fields, the tea bushes are planted in rows and each row is numbered. The female workers are allocated to each row by their pre-allocated number. Having completed the plucking in the assigned row the worker moves to the next field and engages in the same work. The work allocation according to rows establishes a control mechanism on the field. Below is an account from a SFO who explained (in English) how the work is allocated and how the control in the field is established in order to avoid conflicts:

(1). If we scold people, we cannot get more work. We have to explain things to them... We have to give them little interest. Then they are alright. They have their rows... The rows start from the border. All these tea bushes have been counted... Then they have been divided among the pluckers. That is how the work is divided. Each row is counted and assigned to each person... They cannot go and pluck as they want. They have their own rows... Sometimes others go and pluck another one's row. Then they fight and hit each other. Women hit each other (DWA 0080 M/SFO).

Due to the repetitive nature of this work, female workers who engage in plucking tea leaves are viewed as experienced and in need of no strict supervision. However, they are subject to the supervision of the 'Kangany' (immediate supervisor) and the AFO. Although there can be conflicts among female workers, these are resolved on a mutual basis as they know each other's boundaries of work. The female workers are not subjected to the harsh verbal abuse of the Kangany, as occurs in the case of male labourers. Motivation of females is maintained through creating awareness.

These practices not only establish discipline in the field but also reinforce gender differences, as it is only women who are allocated numbers, while males are not. This again gives insight to see how numbers create meanings for workers, as to how to behave, what to do and what not to do in the organization. These meanings are not embedded in the numbers but are creations of workers and managers through order and consent. By interacting within a particular space, performing the same activity over a period of time 'plucking in the field' becomes women's work. These practices in turn bring gender identity: women as tea pluckers.

As far as the men's work is concerned, their work varies from time to time depending on the task they have been assigned by the SFO in the Muster³⁵ at 7.00 am each day. Male workers normally engage in 'sundry work', which requires hard manual labour. Since these activities need pooling of effort, each task is allocated to a labour gang within a given area. Often male workers end up arguing with each other when they do not contribute equally towards the achievement of the target. Although females work an eight hour day in the field, males work only six hours a day, from 7.30 am to 1.30 pm, with the same break for morning tea as enjoyed by the women. However, unlike women, once the task is completed men can leave work even before 1.30 pm. Both men and female are paid equal wages irrespective of their working hours. From the AFO's excerpt below, it is evident that it is the work that workers engage in that creates gender differences and gender related issues:

(2). *It is difficult to settle men's problems. They do not work in one place. Some do weeding, pruning, spraying pesticide, preparing boundaries, etc., Some cannot do hard work when you allocate work to them. Then we have to network ...it is difficult; women are easy to supervise... women do only one work that is plucking, it is easy and do not need much supervision (DWA 0080 M/AFO).*

What is manifested from the above excerpt is that workers being engaged in particular tasks (plucking tea vs. sundry work, easy task vs. difficult tasks); the type of supervision they get (less supervision vs. more supervision) and the type of interaction (individual task vs. collective task) create considerable gender differences in the field.

The two excerpts below extracted from discussions with two male workers also support the same. It is evident that types of work carried out which need pooling of efforts become difficult. They become hard and problematic if there is no teamwork. On the other hand, work carried out independently with no pooling of effort can easily be accomplished within an 8-hour day. The workers who experience the differences in tasks, interactions and supervision internalize 'women's work as easy and men's work as hard', which becomes the basis for gender difference:

³⁵ Each field has a specific place where men report to work at 7.00 am. Usually workers come and stand in a row on either side of a shed (called the muster shed) and they report to the SFO. The SFO allocates work in turns by selecting workers from both sides and marks the register. The Assistant Manager or the Deputy Manager visits each of these places, signs the register, looks into any unresolved issues and gives the final decision.

(3). *Picking leaves is easy. We need to pick only 16 kilograms against the name. Sundry work is difficult. There are four workers assigned for an acre of land to work. That is difficult. We can pluck 16 kilos by 12 noon and we finish work (DWA 0070 M).*

(4). *I have worked in the factory; I have pruned the tea bushes. I have cut the firewood in the jungle by using the machine. The easiest work is plucking tea leaves (DWA 0067M).*

This is the basis for the common understanding that “men’s work is harder and more tiring” than women’s work. Moreover, these work activities legitimize gender difference as superior-subordinate in work at the institutional level on the plantation. In doing so, they legitimize males working fewer hours than females but being paid equally in the plantation setup of Sri Lanka.

The above discussion provides evidence to see how the work allocation in the organization constructs gender differences: ‘males do hard work and are difficult to supervise’ and ‘females do easy work and are easy to supervise’ in the organizational context. There are instances to see how the same macro discourse extends their meanings to private life as I discuss gender in private space.

7.1.2. Males Doing Female Job

It is evident from the discussion above that supervision, the nature of interaction and activities intertwined with each other have a significant impact in constructing stable gender differences and gender identity. However, discussed below are how these discourses are subject to challenge. There were situations where the taken-for-granted macro discourse ‘sundry work as male work and plucking as female work’, which has constructed stable gender differences historically, did not fall in harmony with actual practices on the plantation in the present context.

Since the concept of bonded labour is no longer practised in Sri Lankan tea plantations, the females at a young age leave the estate in search of better opportunities outside the plantation. They become domestic helpers in houses outside the plantation or in Middle Eastern countries or they work in garment factories. Due to these reasons, plantations experience a female labour shortage. Managers attempt to cover the labour shortage by using male labour as a substitute for female in plucking tea leaves. Assigning males to plucking work causes problems for management. While staying on the research site, visiting the early ‘muster’, I observed male workers resisting such allocation of work and the Deputy Manager expressed his concerns as follows:

(5). *Men do not like picking... If they work till 1.30 they get Rs.250/ salary, but if they pick they have to pick ((the)) norm...The workers have been picking before I came. Since they do not like it, I have to tell ((them)): “look, you...benefit by picking, more than you do Sundry work and get Rs.250/. You can pick 20-30 more kg and get more money” ...I have to struggle a lot to go for my target. I hire pensioners... waiting for their final due, and they are still willing to come and work... I cover up the shortage with men pluckers.*

We have to convince them that if they pluck only we can give them fertilizer. We have to explain things, otherwise they do not like ((it))...Men complain that there is no crop to pluck, but there is. They want very little crops...to pluck...soon and go by 1.30...Normally men do not have to pluck like women till 4.30. If they pluck the norm, they can go by 1.30. We mark red for women, blue for men for easy identification of the field (DWA 0038/0040/ DWB 0059 M-DM).

Here we see differences in the way management treat male and female workers who engage in the same work. In order to meet their targets with minimum resistance, managers take several measures and carry out trade-off between quality and labour cost. Males and females are assigned to different fields to minimize gender conflict. Interestingly, reversal of work hierarchization can be seen. Women are assigned to fields where quality tea is grown³⁶ and also where precision plucking is essential, whereas men are assigned to fields where the quality of plucking does not matter much³⁷. Further, plucking leaves and sundry work is rotated among male workers so that there is no bias in work allocation among men. In order to save cost, men who are assigned with plucking can leave the field once they reach the norm while, women are required to work until 4.30 pm.

The outcome of this transformational shift in the work allocation is that male workers confront issues relating to their already established status of masculinity. The following standpoints from two male workers confirm that plucking work was indeed a blow to their already established male identity:

(6). *Women have to pluck 16 kg. to claim their daily wage and then any extra plucking they get is additional. They have to work the whole day. It is beneficial to the estate...Men have to pluck 16kg only and by 12.00 they finish their plucking. They pluck any leaf and finish soon. If they are questioned as to why they plucked all the leaves but not the standard leaves, as an excuse they say that they do not know plucking. The men do not like to pluck leaves. They are assigned to plucking by force. Therefore, men say that they are not*

³⁶ 51% of the tea grown is VP (Vegetative propagated tea bushes).

³⁷ 49% comprise of old seedling from China Jat tea bushes.

used to plucking which is women's job and that is why they are plucking whatever comes within their reach (DWA 0052/55/56 M).

(7).I am a factory worker... I do not mind weeding but not plucking as it is women's work. We have to do what they ((managers)) say...What else can we do here? I have been working here for 25 years. I put tea leaves into the dryer. It is nothing for me now...Putting tea leaves onto the conveyor belt is the first work in the factory and that is men's work (DWA 0002M).

From the point of view of the males, this change in practice causes tension because they objectify and internalize that “plucking tea leaves is female work”. However, they comply with the work knowing that they lack power to resist management. Nevertheless, they try to keep their masculine identity status by showing resistance both individually and collectively to this counter-discursive practice. By not adhering to the prescribed standards for plucking tea leaves, they forgo precision and pluck whatever reaches their hands in order to achieve the minimum requirement by noon.

I did not come across a single female worker questioning or showing dissatisfaction at men working fewer hours than they do. This was because they preferred their men to be involved in some work at least till noon, rather than idling at home. Males who do not engage in work ask money from females to be spent on alcohol and gambling. Some male workers, once they finish plucking, go on searching for extra work outside the plantation and earn additional money. Some go to betting centres or to nearby taverns. Only a very few go home to look after the children until their wives come home.

Discussed below is how management along with the help of the NGOs (largely funded by local and foreign aid) implement programmes to bring gender equality in the plantation context. This can be seen as a strategic decision to bring changes to pre-established gender differences in work. Managers, in order to avoid long term normalization of gender division of labour, have instructed the crèche assistants and attendants to teach both male and female children about the importance of sharing the domestic work. When I visited the crèche, a boy of 9 years, by using a model, explained to me how to make and light the hearth. He could recognize 17 local spices used in Sri Lankan cuisines. Children are being taught to help mother at home and why they should do so. We can expect some blurring of gender distinctions in times to come as a result of these ways of cultivating different cultural value systems.

What can be seen from the above data is that a significant component of stable gender identity, once constructed historically by colonial management practices, is changing. It is under re-construction through deliberate action from management intervention. Due to shortage of female labour, this becomes necessary as the organization can no longer benefit from the historically constructed macro discourses of gender division of work. Since the management are responsible for providing work for those who report to work in the morning, they convince male workers to engage in female tasks by explaining things. The management also takes necessary steps to change the well-anchored gender discourse by linking the new discursive activities as rules and regulations to facilitate change in the future. By these means the pre-established macro discourse of 'plucking as female work' and 'sundry work as male work' will be changed in times to come. The change is taking place in spite of the resistance from workers. The male workers can no longer stick to their pre assigned work activities, which established gender superiority in the work place. They have to either perform the assigned task or leave the job. Almost all the workers opt for the former and get involved in plucking tea leaves on the plantation.

7.1.3. Gender Biasness in Promotional Opportunities

A patriarchal gender ideology of male superiority over female is also manifested in promotional opportunities in the organization. Only men are placed in supervisory positions. Although females from higher castes are employed as clerks, crèche teachers and attendants, in the estate administration, they are actually not holding supervisory positions. Here again we can see that the gender difference of superiority and inferiority is an outcome of discursive meanings attached to organizational practices. They are intertwined with social and cultural practices of both private and public spaces.

7.1.4. Work in the 'Field' and the 'Factory'

Gender difference associated with superiority-subordination is also an outcome of managers' and workers' interaction, which takes place within various spaces. From the following discussion it is evident that the spaces 'the field' and 'the factory' are given symbolic meaning. The meanings associated with these spaces in turn construct gender superiority and subordination.

The Senior Manager, in discussion, emphasised the factory as the most important place on the plantation, because it is the place that adds value to the finished product. During

the week, I observed him visiting the factory every morning at 9.30 am for supervision. On weekends it is supervised by the Deputy and the Assistant Managers. The value addition process takes place in the factory with the use of heavy machinery such as driers, grinders, rotorvane, etc, and these are operated by the factory officers. There are 58 male workers who work on a roster putting tea leaves onto the conveyer belt for drying and transferring dried leaves from one machine to another.

Precision is very important and delay should not take place as machines are continuously in operation once the process starts. Unlike in the fields, a number of measures are taken to discipline the workers strictly and control their work (e.g. reporting to work on time, wearing uniforms, maintaining proper hygiene, prohibition on taking alcohol while working, stealing tea leaves, etc.). They are paid overtime as an inducement.

From the following excerpts, it is evident how symbolic meanings get attached to the physical space and how these in turn invoke superiority and inferiority to workers. From what they encounter by working in these spaces, work in the factory becomes privileged over working in the field. Working in the factory is more comfortable than in the field as the workers do not have to face environmental issues or labour problems and they are paid more. This can be seen in the two excerpts below from an AFO and a male worker:

(8). *The factory work is good. It has work inside. In the field, there are a lot of labour problems... In the field, we have to be concerned about the target and the output. Our output is the input to the factory. In the factory, they have to grind the leaves. The field is not like the factory. In the field during the day we have to manage a lot of workers in order to get the work done. We get up early in the morning and go to the 'Muster'. In the 'Muster' we allocate work to men. Then they start fighting saying "Aiya ((Boss)), this cannot be done and that cannot be done". We have to tackle workers' problems. It is difficult (DWA 0080 M/AFO).*

(9). *I like working in the factory, it is good. Also the wages are more. Sunday also we have work. We can get more money than working in the field. Sunday in the factory we get one and half days wage with OT ((Overtime)) (DWA 0086 M).*

7.1.5. Job Selection and Promotion

Another instance is discussed here to show how gender identity is constructed and confirmed through organizational practices and conversation. In the absence of formal job selection criteria in terms of technical skills, education qualification, etc, the

selection of workers for the factory is a cautious decision of the managers. It is based on the worker's credible past record and trustworthiness in the eyes of the management. In order to maintain discipline and also to avoid the problem of theft of finished product, only people who can be trusted are employed in the factory. Access to the factory by the rest of the workers is restricted. Thus, both male and female workers perceive that only trustworthy, efficient workers get the opportunity of working in the factory. The following two excerpts from male workers show the basis of selection of workers to the factory not only gives significance to the place but also to the status of workers:

(10). *I work in the malay ((field)). Sometimes I work in the factory. If they want more workers or if Mahattaya ((Boss)) feels that others are stealing tea from the factory, he calls me ... Yesterday at the muster I was asked to work in the factory (DWA 0045M/DWA 0054M).*

(11). *I was working in the field; they came and asked for people to work in the factory. Everybody can't go to the factory. They see who is good and who is trustworthy and select us (DWA 0002M).*

What can be seen here is that working in the factory seems to be the most significant when compared with the field. The factory becomes a privileged place to work in terms of equipment used, discipline, benefit, selection process and protection from environmental hazards. On this basis the factory workers feel and are seen by others to have a higher status than the workers engaged in the field.

What is evident here is that discursive practices that construct work and symbolic meanings attached to the physical space (factory and field) have an impact on self-identity. It is evident that these discursive practices and symbolic meanings that construct trustworthiness, superior and privileged status of self are creations of workers' and managers' interactions, which take place as an ongoing process.

7.1.6. Symbolic Meaning Attached to the 'Factory' and the 'Field'

Discussed above is how males working in the factory construct their self-identity as privileged and more trustworthy compared to the males who work in the field. We can further discuss how females construct their gender inferiority to that of males, even if they work in the same space. In this case, it is not the place that carries the symbolic meaning but the work in which they engage.

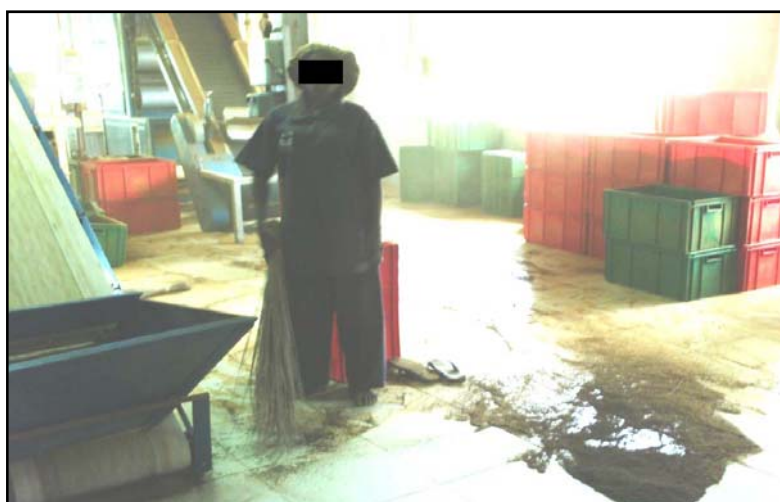
There are six female workers attached to the factory. They are involved in tasks such as straining, sorting, packing and cleaning, which require no machine apparatus or specific

skills. We can see the basis of differentiating male and female work along with the discussion I made above, and the excerpts from a male and a female given below:

(12). *The shifting, sorting, packing are women's work (DWA 0002M).*

(13). *I know how to strain the tea and packing it by sorting into grades. These are our work. I work as a strainer and once it is done, I sort the leaves into piles ... Packing and sifting rooms have women's work. Men dry the leaves, roll and give them to us. Their work is difficult as they work with machines. We have to strain them, separate them, weigh them and pack...they are not difficult (0006W).*

Just like the case where plucking leaves in the field is seen as easy, the workers assume that female work in the factory is easy, as it does not require physical strength or specific skill. I observed women using more or less the same type of utensils they use on the domestic front in collecting, sifting, sorting, and packing tea in the factory.



A female worker cleaning the factory floor with an ekel broom

Different types of spades and ekel brooms are used in collecting tea and in cleaning the factory floor respectively. Very light-weight spades are used in collecting and in packing tea into bags. These utensils are light and easy to handle. They cause no damage to dried tea leaves when handling. These tasks are assigned to females so that quality can be maintained in handling the finished product.

The above discussion further supports my earlier point that management decisions in allocating work, along with workers' experience of work activities, construct a taken-for-granted gendered and hierarchized work place in the field and factory. Superiority and subordination attached to the hierarchization of the work space in turn become significant in workers' understanding of their self-identity in relation to others in the organization. These in turn bring shared understanding to establish gender superiority

and inferiority in the domestic front. Men are seen as hard workers who need peace of mind once they return home, whereas women should take charge of domestic work as they engage in light and easy work in the organization, a view that will be discussed later.

7.1.7. Payment of Wages

Another way of bringing gender superiority and subordination in the workplace can be seen especially when societal patriarchal ideologies are facilitated through organization practices. According to the Sri Lankan Labour Law, the male and female of a family who work in the same place are two individual wage earners. Even though this is the case, I observed male workers receiving their spouse's wage on payday. The managers and workers both have a common understanding that this practice causes no problem for the male to receive the official payment of the spouse at the point of payment.

The excerpts below from a male and a female provide evidence that patriarchal ideologies in which the male is considered a more authoritative decision-maker than a female. He becomes the beneficiary of the woman's wage and has the power to utilize it:

(14). *My wife brings her salary and gives it to me. I manage everything. She does not know about those things. I go to the town to buy things... Those things are my work. She cannot go to the town to do that. She is not used to it. She tells me what we want for the month. I buy them. Sending the grandchildren to school and looking after them are her work (0002 M).*

(15). *Those days when I got my wages from the estate, I gave it to my brother. He looked after me. Now I give it to my husband. I do not mind doing that (DWA 0079 W).*

I had the opportunity of observing how the salary is paid to workers on payday, which normally falls on the 25th of each month. In the factory premises the Deputy Manager along with the SFO and AFOs represent the management. The workers stand outside the premises on either side of the entrance to the room. Clear gender demarcations are manifested here as the workers gather into groups. Men stand on one side and women on the other.



Workers waiting for their turn to collect wages

The respective AFO calls the names and as the worker comes forward the SFO marks the name in the register and gives the wage to the worker or to the spouse.

It seems that workers' gender differences and their associated issues such as superiority and subordination are an enactment of broader social, cultural macro discourses discussed in Chapter 6. These are objectified as taken-for-granted by both workers and managers and their continuation is established as an ongoing process.

7.1.8. Ritualistic Practices in the Workplace

I observed that Hindu ritualistic practices performed by workers bring significant gender differences into the organization. As discussed in chapter 5, the beginning of the first working day of each month is marked with a ritualistic practice, organized by the female workers. They offer 'pujas' with 'pongal' to female goddesses (stones symbolizing images of Gods are erected under a huge tree and rituals are performed, and the place is considered as sacred).



Getting ready for the ritualistic ceremony on the first working day of the month

As can be seen from the following account from the religious leader of the estate, this invokes blessings on workers' concerns and reduces their anxieties as they live and work under adverse weather conditions:

- (16). *On the first working day, women offer Pujawa and plead to the Goddess 'Pathhini Mani' to give them a good harvest throughout the month, and to keep the workers healthy so that they can work hard (DWA 0070 M).*

The religious leader and the AFOs are the only males who participate in this event. They establish their superiority by blessing the female workers at the end of the ritualistic practice.

While observing and participating in this event, I understood that this ritualistic practice not only reaffirms workers' religious ideological gender practices, but becomes the official meeting place where the field supervisors convey official messages to the female workers. This can be seen as top-to-bottom, one-way communication. This becomes the place where managers establish a control mechanism over female workers on the field by allocating their specific 'row number'.

As far as men's ritualistic practices are concerned, yearly a special ritualistic practice is held in which a goat is sacrificed to a male God called 'Sami Kumburu', believed to be the one who looks after the factory. This event is marked with a holiday and the ritual is performed with great devotion.

- (17). *In January or in July men give 'pujawa' but not under that tree like women...We have 'Sami Kumburu' inside the factory premises. The God lives inside the factory in the sacred place we have erected especially for him. He is fierce, keeps a knife in his hand to protect the workers. We call*

him 'Rothamuni sami'...There are... workers in the factory and they work on machines. We sacrifice a goat and offer it to God and request his blessing for us to work without any physical harm. People work at night also. The workers have to keep awake throughout when the machines start working. Therefore we ask God's protection...All the workers who work in the factory ...contribute money every month...for the ceremony...The Committee brings a single coloured goat, a white, brown or black. Only 'Pusari'³⁸ can sacrifice the goat and offer 'pujawa'. We cannot do it as we offer 'pujawa' to the Goddess 'Paththini mani'...'Alcohol' and 'Cigar' are also offered in 'Sami Kumburu pujawa'. This has been the practice from those days. Since he is a male God, these are offered to him and we implore the God to take revenge on the ones who do wrong.

Since 'Paththini mani' is a female Goddess, we do not offer her these...

There is an auspicious time to sacrifice the goat...and it is taken everywhere around the factory, even inside the factory, applying blood like a 'pottu' to each machine so that they will be looked after by the God...So that the workers who work on those machines will be protected. We plead God to protect us without causing any harm. Then we cook the meat, offer it to the God and then serve all the workers too.

Yesterday around 9-10 pm, three women who had been working in the factory had stolen about four and half kilos of tea leaves. There is a Muslim big person ((refers to the Senior Factory Officer)). He caught them... Now they have been suspended from work... We think that they were caught because the God punished them.

So how can we say that there is no God? Somebody would have worshipped the God and requested to help to catch the workers who are stealing tea from the factory. They would have asked God why the God does not punish them. So now the God punished them. Only last week we offered 'Sami Kumburu'... The God does not give punishments every day, he waits till the time comes to punish...Imagine those women in the factory stealing tea leaves every day... how many kilos per month?. We work very hard in the field, leeches bite us, and we work in the rain too. They stay inside the factory and steal tea leaves every day and sell them to others. It is a loss to all of us and a crime also (DWA 0070 M).

From the above account, we can see the importance of religious beliefs and practices in the organizational context. Often Western literature is silent about how religion interwoven with organizational practices becomes self-identity makers. As workers perform these ritualistic practices in the organization, they bring significant collective gender differences as 'females' offers associated with 'blessings and protection' and

³⁸ There are religious leaders who represent different Gods. They offer ritualistic practices only to that particular God depending on their caste hierarchy. Their devotion to different Gods restricts the food habits of the Pusary.

'males' offers associated with 'protection and punishment' to the physical spaces they work. Workers, by enacting these macro religious discourses, establish their own mechanism to control the proper behaviour in the workplace, where wrong is punished by forces, which they objectify as real and true. It is understood that managers also participate in and encourage these events as these bring discipline, control and positive moral values to the workers. These moral values are otherwise difficult to cultivate by implementing management rules and regulations along.

As a summary, it is evident that routine tasks, actions, rituals, and symbolic meanings associated with physical spaces and also ways of communication in the work place become significant in invoking gender differences in the self-identity of plantation workers. This provides an empirical record of how plantation work becomes gendered and how this in turn affects the pre-existing gender division of work in the organizational context. As explained before, the work performed by females in the factory is seen as inferior to males' work. Furthermore, through management practices, workers experience that the 'factory' is more significant than the 'field' and the field is considered as a hard and difficult place to work. These discursive practices, which are legitimized and taken-for-granted by workers and managers, bring different status in relation to gender to workers' self-identity.

However, there are instances where historical, social and cultural discursive productions of colonial practices need changing to suit the present context. Management are strategically trying to change the historically embedded discursive practices that are necessary for the survival of the organization in the long run. They do so through introduction of new discursive practices and by using conversation in a manner that persuades the male workers to engage in plucking tea leaves. What is evident here is that establishing new meaning to historically established discourses is not an easy task. It involves changing the meanings associated with such jobs and changing the perception associated with those who are engaged in such jobs. New discursive practices are subject to challenge by workers, as they bring tension to the workers.

7.2. Constructing Gender in Private Space

In the previous section, an attempt was made to understand how macro discourses and their interplay bring gender differences to the public life of the plantation workforce, which in turn have a significant impact on their self-identity. The construction of self-

identity should also be understood by exploring the ways in which the typical day-to-day practices and conversations of plantation workers become gendered, as these also have a significant impact. The interplay of religious, cultural and social macro discourses with the daily practices, interactions and conversations of plantation workers are explored here to understand how gender plays out and is enacted. In doing so, insights are provided to see how self-identity is developed, maintained and changed over time as an ongoing process.

7.2.1. Gendering the Domestic Space

The enactment of ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’ on the plantation extends across family life and workplace. The enactment of gender differences is clearly observable when walking through the estate line houses early in the mornings and in the evenings. In the morning, females engage in cooking, washing clothes, washing children and dressing them for school. On the other hand, males squat on the pavements in front of the line houses, sipping cup of tea while chatting with each other. I also observed a few men taking their cattle to the feeding grounds, while a few others carried milk containers to the nearby milk collecting centre.

From my conversations with workers, it is evident that these practices are taken-for-granted, as girls and boys on the plantation from a very young age engage in different forms of family chores or tasks. It is normal practice for female children to take part in cooking and look after their siblings while their mother is busy plucking tea leaves in the field. In addition, there are middle-men who find young girls employment away from the plantation to work as domestic workers in towns or find work in garment factories. This eases the burden on parents from having to look after or provide security to their young female children while parents are at work. In addition, it eases the burden of having an additional mouth to feed. Moreover, sending the female children to work is a source of income to the parents. Because of this, female children forgo their education and this was very true in the case of poorer families on the plantation. Whether they stay or go out of the plantation, girls get early experience of engaging in domestic work.

Moreover, when having conversations with both men and women they agreed that girls from a very young age are supposed to be disciplined and should be prepared to take responsibility for the household work, while boys do not have such commitment

towards the family wellbeing. From the excerpts below, it can be seen that gender differences therefore emerge from early childhood:

(18). *I have no regret for being a woman. I have never stayed like other women to be isolated. I am always aware of what I do...I stayed the way my mother advised me. She told me that it is alright to be friendly with boys, but she told me not to go anywhere with them. She told me to come and tell her if I found a good person. Since they advised, I did not get friendly. I did not go anywhere but I associated with boys. I went to school up to grade eleven. I know many things because my mother told them. That is why I am brought up like this. Even though we went to school, she taught me cooking and all the work... She assigned three of us ((refers to her sisters)) with work. She told us to look how she cooked if we did not know... She told us that once we got married and went to our husbands' places, if we said that we did not know how to cook, then the husbands would chase us back to our house. She told these things to us when we were small. So we got used to cooking and doing all the work that women should do well (DW A 0043 W).*

(19). *In those days when my mother came home she did all the work. I used to bring water from the well. My father and brothers never did work at home. Normally they do not do domestic work (DW 0001 W).*

What is emerging from the above is that gender differences are not natural, but emerge as female children follow their mother's footsteps and acquire her skills. A young girl learns what it means to be a 'wife' and a 'mother' through social practices relating to domestic life (such as cooking, fetching fire wood, fetching water from the common well/tap, etc.) and everyday conversation ("learn these things otherwise you will regret it in future"). She rarely questions these social practices but follows them as they are. By doing so, women continue to bring historical practices and legitimize them as traditions that have to be followed by all women.

It is also evident that early exposure of young girls to domestic work helps the female children to go through a smooth transition to enacting their gender responsibilities in adult life, while male children usually do not participate in domestic work but spend their time outside the home. During my stay on the plantation, I observed that young boys spent their evening in playgrounds or in the streets playing cricket.

Therefore, what can be derived from the above is that these practices and interactions reinforce gender differences at an early age. These everyday practices in turn become the basis of understanding one's own 'self' from childhood. These daily patterns of behaviour and conversation shape and reshape workers' shared understandings on a collective basis as a plantation woman or as a man.

7.2.2. Female Inferiority and Male Superiority on the Domestic Front

Various macro religious, social and cultural discourses which are discussed in Chapter 6 construct female inferiority to males and reinforce stable gender differences in a number of ways. Macro discourses of 'women as housewives and men as bread winners' are enacted in daily practices and are significant in gendering the work and family life of plantation workers. They establish and maintain gender harmony in the plantation society. I did not come across situations where these differences created conflicts on the domestic front. As far as female workers are concerned, the following excerpt explains a common understanding about their practices which bring the gender to the home front. In the example below we see the ways in which women and men enact their gender in the domestic setting:

(20). *I get up around five in the morning, wash myself. Then I clean the fire place. Wash the kettle and boil water. Then I cook rice for Mahattaya ((refers to her husband/addresses her husband with respect)) to take for his lunch. I prepare, two or three fish curries ((refer to vegetable curries)) and give him his meal. Then I iron his clothes, do everything for him. He does not do anything. Then I prepare my tea for 9 o'clock, then have my meal and get ready. I close all the windows and door and go to work. Then I come at noon; work in the plot a little, do some work in the house and then go to work again. When I come home at 4.30. I go to collect firewood. After that, I work in the plot. By the time I go home, it is around 6 or 7 at night. Then I cook rice for Mahattaya to eat. He comes, eats and goes out. That is all he does. I wash all his clothes and iron them...Sometimes I boil water and bath him (DWA 0051 W).*

This excerpt below from a female worker also suggests how gender inferiority and superiority comes into enactment with the domestic work as women establish relationships with significant others:

(21). *As women, we must treat our men well. He earns with a lot of difficulties. We just cook, wash clothes, look after children, stay at home and do house work. That's all. We need to dress clean and nice and talk to him nicely. We should say 'come' with a smile when husband comes home tired after work. When they go out, we do not know what tension they went through. If we trouble them as soon as they come home, they will get angry and could hit us. That is the way. When men are angry, they feel like hitting... The house is the place where love and kindness is. The house is the place where man has freedom. We must speak to them with love and affection. A woman should be able to read a man's face to see whether he is having a problem or not. We must try to solve their problems with affection. If we say things that will hurt them, they will get angry with us. Then they will go after other women. A woman should love her husband. Say if a man does not drink before marriage, but drinks after marriage; then the woman must have done something for the man to change like that. The slightest thing that a woman*

does can change a man's life. All these I came to experience when I went abroad. That is how the women live there. Those women all the time look after their men lovingly and provide everything...to keep them happy (DWA 0044 W).

These two excerpts clearly show different ways of understanding women's daily life chores and those of men. We can see how space becomes gender-demarcated as social, cultural macro discourse comes into everyday practices (e.g. *the house is the place where man has freedom*). The shops, public roads and line pavements where men congregate also become male spaces. The domestic work and maintaining the domestic harmony rest in the female domain. Moreover, ways of talk such as "*The house is the place where love and kindness is*" not only give symbolic meaning to the home, but also speak to a woman's identity and how she should relate to her surroundings so that the house becomes a peaceful place for the man. What also emerges from the above is that men's work outside or sundry work in the field are seen as more difficult and stressful, and therefore viewed as superior work. Here we can see that meanings associated with private spaces extend to public spaces and vice versa. They are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, we need to integrate both public and private spaces, their associated meanings and practices in understanding the holistic nature of self-identity as an interactional process.

It is interesting that the account given in excerpt (21), by a female worker who had been to the Middle East to work as a domestic helper, saw the same enactment of gender differences in a foreign context. This seemed to have reinforced her experience. What is evident from the above discussion is that recognizing the significance of what one is experiencing by interacting with others (e.g. working in the Middle East) and wanting to reinforce the same experiences in one's own behaviour (within the plantations) bring gender differences. This can be the basis on which the macro discourse of male superiority and female obedience to such superiority is established in the Asian and Eastern contexts as taken-for-granted reality.

A male while having a conversation with me described the qualities, attributes and skills that he expected from his wife as follows:

(22). *They should do the job, should look after the children and me lovingly. They should do the house work. If there are things they should eat, if not they should keep quiet but stay happily. They should not complain about what is lacking. They should not grumble. She should not scold me for this and that. Can I go and rob?... If I have money, I'll bring things. If not I can't. She*

should be united with all the family members and should help me if I am doing some work (DWA 0067M).

Both excerpts (21) and (22) show how the macro discourse of the 'ideal wife' and her 'chastity' are incorporated into both men and women's daily practices and talk. In Tamil society a mother is expected to be devoted, committed and also prepared to sacrifice herself to the wellbeing of children and husband without complaint. While managing the work involved in childrearing, caring with commitment, and providing labour to earn wages on the plantation, a woman's love, submissiveness, obedience, and uncomplaining helpfulness to her husband are essential qualities of a 'good married woman'. All these qualities will ensure a stable married life. Conflict and domestic violence in families are often attributed by both men and women to the weakness of the woman to meet the expectations of the man.

What can be suggested from the above discussion is that particular ways of talking, thinking and the acquisition of female qualities to behave in a particular way that shows women's subordination to men are culturally constructed and reinforced through daily practices. These become taken-for-granted knowledge, often unquestioned as these ensure harmony within the family setting.

I also found that girls or women who do not adhere to these social norms are marginalized and looked down upon as girls 'not brought up properly by their parents'. Further, as shown in the excerpts (18) and (21) above, we can see what happens to a woman who does not acquire these skills (e.g. *regret being a woman, be isolated, the husband would chase her back home, her husband will go after other women, get addicted to alcohol, etc.*). What is evident from this discussion is that certain skills that women acquire over a period, as they enact them in daily life, become accepted social realities. These in turn set norms for peoples' interrelationships. These become community standards of behaviour. One who breaks these norms is rejected and looked down on as 'the other'. It is also evident that the way people subsequently adapt to their lives depends significantly on how they give meaning and interpret the situations they come across.

Moreover, the above ways of talking and practising gender differences are strengthened as women acquire responsibility for daily practices that take place in relation to children and spouse on the domestic front, which cannot be given to others. In other words, women accept that no 'male' could or should perform 'women's work' as they are

either incompetent or not aware of it. This is well supported by the following account from a female worker:

(23). *When my children were small, I never asked my husband to look after the children. Men are not used to it. He takes the children to the crèche in the morning only if I do not have time. I take them home only when I finish my work at 12.30 and again in the evening. When he comes home he spent time with the children or go to his parent's house with the children (DWA 0005W).*

By undertaking these daily practices on the domestic front women collectively enact their gender identity on the plantation as a responsible 'housewives'. Males, on the other hand, by not engaging in domestic work, confirm the macro discourse 'that household work is not men's work'. They spend their time watching TV or chatting with other men. Thus, both women and men collaboratively sustain these realities. By doing so, men come to understand that certain practices do not fall within their domain, as they expressed in the following way:

(24). *When I go home I do not do any work. I play with the children, watch cartoons on the TV. My wife cooks at night for us to eat (DWA 0002M).*

(25). *I wake up at 6.30...Then worship Gods. Offer 'Puja' to Gods. Drink my tea. When it is dawn I go to the toilet... Then we chat till around 7 to 8 am with my children. Normally, we eat roti³⁹. Then if there is some work we do it in the estate. Then come home for lunch. Once we've had lunch, if there is time we bath (DWA 0039M).*

7.2.3. Females Not Bonded to Domestic Work as Passive Recipients

What is explained earlier largely accounts for the ways in which macro discourses play through daily practices and how traditional practices and ways of communication construct stable gender differences in the lives of plantation workers. However, I also came across instances where the macro gender differences are discussed above did not play out in the same way in micro level practices. These differentiations of 'self' from 'others' or 'self' within different circumstances can be seen not as an outcome of cognitive processes, but more or less a process arising out of workers' social experiences of interacting with rest of the community.

³⁹ Roti'-the staple food in the plantation, made of wheat flour mixed with oil or coconut. Generally, Roti is considered as a lower grade food item than rice, in terms of relative prices and affordability. Thus, 'eating roti' sometimes (but not necessarily) symbolizes poverty and lack of access to superior food.

The following excerpt is from a female worker to whom I have made reference in (21) above, shows that she does not conform to the macro discourse in the same way as other women do on the plantation:

(26). *I don't do most of the things for my husband like other women do for their husbands. Sometimes when I prepare food, if I have served his meals he eats. If not he serves himself, no problem for him (DWA 0044 W).*

It is the normal practice for a woman to serve her husband's, elderly males and male children's meals and wait until they finish their meals. However, the above account from a woman suggests that a woman may not necessarily treat her husband in just the way traditional plantation society expects. I state below her explanation of why she is different from other women:

(27). *When I wanted to go abroad my husband said not to, but I liked to and wanted to see a country. I wanted to earn too. When I went, my elder child was four years and the other one was two and half years. When I went others scolded me, but I'd breast-fed her for two and half years. Here, some women have left their children when they are just three months old. I did not do what others did. It is a sin to leave children when they are breast fed.*

When I came from abroad, I built the house. We all used to sleep in one room. Usually parents and children all sleep together here. After returning, I built a room for us, one for the children, a kitchen, a dining room, and a toilet. I changed many things. I saw how people in the Middle East do things.

When I came here, I wanted to change myself too... I decided most of the things. My husband does not take many decisions...When he wants money...he tells me. I get money from the church and return it on time. I decide all household things.

I did not understand how to live before going to Colombo and then abroad... I just lived like others...But when I went to Colombo, I saw that their lives are quite different from ours. Here we just don't bother...The ones in Colombo are not like us ...they save...here we do not (DWA 0044 W).

When the husband is at home, the wife is not supposed to go out to keep chatting with neighbours. It is not the practice in the patriarchal plantation society. Women usually engage in their daily chores and stay at home. This female worker however, often came and kept me company, as her husband did not restrict her from leaving the house. When she was abroad, her husband had looked after the children and their daily needs. Further, her husband ran a catering service in the town and often cooked at home. She differentiated herself from other women in the estate, as she did not leave her children when they were very small. She discharged her responsibility by breast-feeding them until they were much older. Unlike other women, she had money, which she earned

abroad. Therefore, she took decisions and influenced her spouse about financial matters, as said above. She had put up an extension to her house so that she could live differently from the rest of the plantation workers. She enjoyed the benefit of having electricity and some modern equipment at home, which most of her community lacked. She cooked with gas and did not go searching for firewood. Thus, she had more free time than the rest of the women. She said that she told her children and her husband about the life in Middle East and tried to impose some of what she experienced on her own domestic front. In the above excerpt, she brings difference to her own self-identity by distinguishing herself from rest of the community, which she refers to as 'others'.

The rest of the women who observed the way she lives were also tempted to go abroad so that they too could live better. By this process, society starts moving forward with new aspirations and expectations, obviously with change to their previous self-identity. When this takes place, in an ongoing basis, the management finds female labour shortage on the plantation.

It is also evident that within families, there are instances where gender differences are blurred due to the micro practices of everyday life. Although they do not occur at a broader social level, these changes seem to be emerging from individuals' interactions and also from what they encounter in different circumstances. These become significant in challenging and changing the already established macro discourses (e.g. Women searching for employment away from the plantation lead males to undertake domestic work; a female who is financially stable takes decisions at home). What is also evident is that different ways of doing things and ways of communication bring counter-discursive practices. These counter-discursive practices are reinforced by workers in their micro interactions within their own context.

The account below is from a female worker who had once divorced and had gone abroad as a domestic helper. Once she returned she got married again. Now she finds difficulties with her new married life. She suggests that the relationship of female subordination in a patriarchal society is not always a stable aspect of gender identity. Women can find their voices as circumstances change. This takes place as and when they get advice from family members and from others whom they trust. Such advice reinforces counter macro discourses, so that they become enacted in the micro practices with self agency:

(28). *Now think wisely. What are the things that woman cannot do. Woman can do anything. We are women. We have to live well. I think men and women are the same. They are men, we are women. We also must work as they do and see how it is... I work in the plot, I use the mamoty and plough the land...and chop firewood. I can use the axe. I can do all things that men do. My father said that even though I am a woman, there has to be a strong heart. He said to "Keep your heart strong, so that you do not have to be afraid of anything. The steps you take forward, do not take back" (DWA 0051 W).*

The account below is from a female who differentiates herself from other women on the plantation. She was brought up in the town with the Sinhalese where she acquired knowledge how the Sinhalese live. She was also one of the few who had continued her education up to Ordinary Level. She also recalled her memories about her backwardness when she came to the estate and the incident that changed her life and gave her confidence to encounter daily problems:

(29). *Before my husband went abroad, I was not very serious. I did not move with people. I was afraid at night. When my husband went abroad, I had to be strong. I had to stay with my daughter... I needed to do her work, shopping and everything. Those days I was frightened to go alone in a vehicle, but when he was gone, I had to do everything... After that, I was not afraid of others.*

I pleaded with him to not to go abroad, but ...he was determined to go...After a month or so, I was alright. He sent me money, but I did not take it because he left me and went... I thought that I would work, eat, and do everything with my money...Now even after his returning, I take most of the decisions at home. He wants to send the children to 'big schools'... I told him that with the money we earn it is not possible... For everything, I have to push him by telling him many times. If I do not push him, he will keep quiet. However, if he does it, he does the work neatly.

I do not like to stay like the women here. I play with the children. I listen to them. I dress well and teach them to dress well too, to wear clean dresses. I am not like other people here: they have nothing but work (DWA 0043W).

She said that she discovered herself as a different person with independence and perseverance as she encountered these life-world situations. Her education and willingness to come forward in voluntary work in the plantation had helped her to become a member of the crèche committee and to be actively involved in community work. She explained that other women in the estate are not aware of what is happening outside and they do not try to enhance their lives the way she does. She had observed how Sinhalese people live and tried to follow the same.

Therefore, what is evident is that encountering situations, observing what is happening outside and wanting to make a change to the way you respond to the situations can change one's self. The situations discussed above, whereby a woman who was submissive can become confident and dominant in daily life, or how listening to the advice of the elders and willingness to do things differently can give woman courage to do 'men's work' to meet challenges in life. These are not outcome of cognitive processes. Being a different woman is a process which, with outside reinforcement and self agency, takes place as an outward and inward focus of reflexivity.

7.2.4. Becoming a 'Family Man'

This lengthy excerpt from a worker shows that a man's behaviour is largely constructed and controlled by others and the circumstances he undergoes, rather than a conscious process:

(30). *I see that people have no time to think good things in the field. They...talk filthy jokes and use wrong words from morning to 2.00 pm. So where is the time for people to think? Until they come home no thinking. You can't work without talking. That is the place where filth starts; so people get angry with others and start quarrelling.*

To my knowledge and according to what I have learnt, people here do not think correctly. What I mean is... take this as one example: when people get up in the morning... they go to the toilet... brush their teeth and eat what is prepared by their wives. Then they go to 'perrettuwa' ((Muster)). Then they lose their senses at the 'Perrettuwa'. They start questioning "Aiya ((Boss)), why did you put me here to work? Why did you put him there to work?..." and so on. Then if there was a fight in the line in the previous night, then they talk about it on the field. By this time one hour has gone. Then one goes and buys Bidi to smoke. Do you think that they think while smoking? They do not think about themselves or about work. A man is not allowed to think because of this talk and that talk until 2.00 pm. On the one side he works and on the other side he talks but he does not think.

Do you think that they think when they go home after 2.00? Then they start watching TV. I am not generalising this but if you take a man for example this is what is going on... If he does not have a TV then he goes next door and watches TV until 5.00pm. In the field they discuss what is on the TV in the evening. When women come home, men talk with them while having tea. If the wife says "no rice or milk", again not thinking but finds ways of getting them. While women cook, what do men do? They go to the bar...drink on credit...come home around 8 or 10 pm...eat what is there. They do not think whether their wives and children are fed or not. Then sleep...next day also the same. Then I ask the question myself, "Where is the time for them to think? Why can't others think like me? (DWA 0003 M).

The above excerpt discusses the pattern of males' behaviour. Largely due to males' daily practices, they are often portrayed as irresponsible, addicted to liquor with no responsibility towards the family. What this worker says about other men is not something that he constructs as a conscious thought process, but largely what he has experienced by observing and interacting with others in the field. Again, this resonates with what I discussed before: how working in the field becomes difficult for workers, and why supervisors claim that it is difficult to control the male workers in the field.

Now to discuss a different scenario from what the above male worker brought to our attention about the behaviour of most men on the plantation. From the discussions I had with the males on the plantation, it is evident that the circumstances an adult male undergoes as a 'married man' confer responsibilities on him to meet the expectations of significant others:

(31). *When I was 18 years, I became a member of the 'Samithiya' ((refers to a committee organized by youths)). When there is a funeral or a puberty ceremony, we do everything from providing meals to cleaning the roads. They are all done by Kollo ((boys)) of the committee...I was the leader for 5 years. When I got married, I was fed up with the work and resigned. I was out most of the time and used to come home around 1.30 am. Say, if there was a funeral I had to stay there for 3-4 days. I can't come home. When I came home, I had trouble (DWA 0045M/DWA0054M).*

(32). *Now see, Miss, ((he was addressing me)) I have a house, I bought sand and stones and want to take an extension. I have two children. I have to make a living for both of them. As a father that is my duty (DWA 0003 M).*

(33). *When I had my three girls, I stopped drinking as I have lot of responsibilities. I need to look after their wellbeing (DWA 0002 M).*

What is emerging from above is that a man who understands the significance of his relationship with others realizes that he has to change his behaviour as and when the circumstances change. By becoming the breadwinner, the male needs to look after family and secure the future of the children. These ways of thinking are associated with commitment to the betterment of the family. While creating gender responsibilities, these relationships often bring a sense of social order to the male's behaviour. This shows that what is practised as routine is also subject to change due to the expectations of others with whom individuals interact within their daily life. A man starts doing things differently (e.g. comes home early, does not go out at night with friends, does not drink alcohol, saves money for the family wellbeing) with the willingness to change and to make a difference to his already formed behaviour to become a responsible person for

the sake of the family. These micro practices, which are an outcome of individual agency, become significant in changing the existing self-identity of a youth to acquire a new self-identity as a responsible person. This can be seen as an outward and inward process of self-reflexivity. These practices in turn are reinforced to some extent, to become community practices of married men.

When summarizing, it is evident that through daily practices and ways of talk in communication that individuals acquire from childhood become significant in forming the self-identity of workers in the adult life. These in turn become collective practices and accepted ways of behaviour and communication. As they become routine practices of a particular community, they establish macro discourses that ascribe meanings as 'women's work', 'men's work' 'our responsibility' 'not our responsibility' 'their responsibility' and so on. These meanings in terms of binary divisions inscribe the meaning shared by people in the society. Over time they form objective historical, social-cultural and religious structures in the minds of individuals. They become value driven as they constitute social realities. They are often taken-for-granted, not open to question. These macro discourses in turn set standards for different circumstances. They set community standards as to 'what to do', 'what not to do', 'how to behave', 'responsibilities of a married women/man' and so on. Individuals, by conforming to these standards, enact collective stable gender differences as part of their self-identity.

It is also evident that gender established differences can be changed or shaped by the others with whom the workers interact within social and relational ways. This happens when an individual claims to choose her/his own actions responsibly in relation to others. Thus, change in self-identity is a social experience rather than an individual cognitive process. These counter-discursive practices that individuals bring change and shape the historically, socially, culturally and religiously established gender differences in a responsive way. As a result, self-identity is never complete but it is a product of performances in specific situations associated with choice. This happens as and when the individual experiences the practicality of the difference and becomes reflexive to exert power to do things differently.

7.3. Constructing Gender in the Religious and Socio-cultural Setting

In the previous sections emphasis is given to the construction of gender identity as an enactment of discursive practices in domestic chores. Also discussed is how it is being subject to change as an ongoing process. We will now explore how gender identity is produced and reproduced within religious, social and cultural traditions and discourses, towards understanding self-identity.

It is evident that Hindu religious ideologies and social-cultural values and practices are legitimated by talk and through daily activities of the plantation workers. They are not only mere talk or enactments of practices, but by interacting with other members, they shape the gender identity as shared experiences.

7.3.1. Adhering to Religious and Social Norms

It is evident that girls are subject to strict adherence to the religious and social norms of Tamil society in a number of ways, whereas boys are not subject to such controls. Girls' mobility and affiliations are restricted and monitored by parents and neighbours. Female workers spoke about how they encountered religion in their childhood in the following ways:

(34). *Those days when my father's friends came to meet him we were not allowed going out to see who they are. We were not allowed to listen to their conversation. Parents thought that we would be spoiled by listening to adults' conversation.*

Also, we were not allowed to wear short dresses. Before marriage, we were not allowed to wear rings or necklaces. According to our traditional astrology, we couldn't wear two-coloured pottu. We could wear them only when the person to whom we were going to get married brought them. We couldn't wear bangles either...In those days, customs were practised as they were and nobody could act the way they wanted...but nowadays our children do not listen to us...in our days we never questioned parents(DWA 0046W).

(35). *Hindu religion says girls must stay nicely, to get a good name and reputation...Girls going here and there alone will get a bad name. We should not get a bad name. We should get a name as a 'good child'. When we go to a house, we should behave properly (DWA 0073 W).*

(36). *I have told my daughter not to change her dresses in front of anybody, not to let anybody to touch her body. I told her that she can associate with boys but if they try to touch her body to come and tell me...I tell her to worship the Gods, learn properly, and to do things neatly (DWA 0043W).*

It is evident that these religious and social practices as to what to do, what not to, with whom to associate and whom not etc, relate only to girls. These practices have a significant impact in constructing the gender identity of a female child. A girl learns about herself, her bodily differences and what is expected from her through the continuous advice and supervision of her mother. She understands that these religious and social norms which impose restrictions on her behaviour are common to all females on the plantation, and therefore they are a taken-for-granted part of life. In this way, they provide common knowledge, and continuation of the same ways is ensured.

The above voices by and large confirm the macro level religious discourse that ‘a girl’s behaviour should be controlled’ in order to avoid getting into trouble sexually and otherwise. While learning to see ‘men’ as those whom she should not mingle with, a girl comes to understand what is good and bad, what to do and what not to do and how to act as a ‘good’ girl in plantation society.

A point of discussion here is the interplay of macro discourse in the ways of talking (women should stay nicely and they should be clean) with ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’. We can see how the Hindu religious ideology intertwined with the cultural patterns of communication come into play in the plantation Tamil society in bringing women’s gender identity. It is evident through people’s conversations that these macro discourses produced, maintained and exerted their power as values, beliefs and ideologies. These are directed towards collective identity performance.

7.3.2. Collective Agency for Changes

A number of workers, both male and female, discussed how they understand and differentiate time as they experience differences. They often used ‘in those days’ ‘in our time’ and ‘nowadays’ to express such differences. These ways of conversation also show how people make sense of time experientially. In order to focus this discussion, we will discuss one such scenario only to show how the workers see how changes in their children’s self-identity cause a generation gap.

The female whose excerpt is given as (34) above stated, “*In those days, customs were practised as they were...but nowadays our children do not listen to us*”. This way of talk provides evidence that historical customs and practices are subject to change. The respondent said that her children questioned these customs, saying that they do not

make sense. Her three young daughters wore different colours of pottu on the forehead and wore rings, necklaces and bangles.

I also observed young girls buying fancy rings, necklaces, and anklets from the nearby shop. The shopkeeper said that he took extra effort to see what is in fashion and to bring them to his shop to sell. This again provides evidence of how the macro discourses are subject to change over time due to the influences of fashion. Collaboratively, sellers and consumers bring new market trends. These collective actions construct a new macro discourse of 'what is in fashion' and give new meaning to symbolic aspects of what workers wear. This also shows how competing macro discourses emerge as an ongoing process and how they begin to challenge the historically established religious and cultural ideologies. The micro interactions and enactments, which are more powerful than the older macro discourses, in turn influence the younger generation to see things differently and to behave differently.

7.3.3. The Woman's Devotion to Spouse

The 'pathi bakkthi', a macro discourse, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, is a powerful concept in the Tamil society. This establishes a woman's sexual devotion to her spouse. The excerpts given here show how the parents enact this macro discourse by restricting the behaviour of girls:

(37). *Normally neighbours, brothers or the father find the partner for the girl... Until such time parents have to keep the girl at home safely and clean ((to ensure that the girl is pure or she has never had sex before marriage)). It is not nice to get friendly with the next-door boy... My daughter does not want to find anybody... She does not do anything that will bring disgrace to us... She is just like me when I was small...I stayed like a very good girl, did not get friendly with anybody. I got married well and came here. She also follows the same. She does not talk to men. She stays like a good girl...if you like please go and ask her (DW 0001W).*

(38). *My uncle lived here. He proposed my children's father ((refers to her husband)). I never got friendly with a man. My brothers would have killed me if I did. All the time they expected me to be a decent girl, a clean one. Then my uncle proposed the 'children's father'. I agreed as did not know anybody else (DWA 0005W).*

A female child is seen as a burden on the family, whereas a male child is an asset to the family. One justification is that it is the parent's responsibility to see that a girl is protected until she gets married, as it is the 'virginity test' that upholds or downgrades the status of the woman and her whole family. As stated earlier, I came to understand

that female children were sent out of the plantation to work not only to get economic benefit but also to avoid the social insecurity of being alone in the house while parents are at work. Marriage organized by the parents, uncles or older brothers is also a way of securing women's purity. In the case of males, none of these applies.

Also, excerpt (38) gives us insight into how gender superiority and interiority are brought to discussion in workers' way of talking. On the plantation, for women to refer to their husbands as "the children's father" seems to be common. A woman does not refer to her spouse as "my husband" or "my spouse". This shows the woman's respect for the spouse and attachment and devotion to the family unit. In the Sri Lankan context, a child establishes and strengthens the family bond. After marriage and having given birth to children, a woman starts devoting her life to the wellbeing of the family. She begins to see the family as her whole world. This bond leads her to identify and define herself and her spouse in relation to the children.

It was evident that most women boil the water and bathe their husbands⁴⁰. This has become a routine on the plantation to confirm the woman's devotion to her spouse. This claim is confirmed in excerpt (20) above and (46) below.

Inability to prove a woman's purity and chastity with socially accepted qualities can have adverse results socially. Inability to prove a woman's marital status by chastity or becoming unchaste through premarital sex or adultery can lead her being expelled from the family ceremonial and religious practices as 'inauspicious woman', This is evident in the following excerpt:

(39). *Hindu religion is such that we need to wear 'Thalie' when we marry. If not our people do not accept her. Parents seek a partner for their son by visiting and seeing the girl first. Only women who wear Thalie are allowed to join this trip. Normally, Hindus wear Thalie if they get married in the proper way in the Kovil. The ones who get friendly and marry ((normally when they fell in love, parents do not agree, which results in the couple eloping or marrying without the parents' consent)), then they do not wear Thalie (DWA 0043W).*

Women's adherence to religious cultural and social norms and maintenance of their purity and chastity is strictly monitored by society. A female worker expressed her feelings as she discussed what her family members went through for not conforming

⁴⁰ There are no bathrooms or space allocated for bathing. A barrel of water is heated in front of the line house, which is shared with a few neighbours, for the bathing to take place. Usually men and children are bathed first.

these norms and social expectations. She became pregnant by a man who is related to her, but left her behind, as he was already married. Her life story is full of chaos and sadness:

(40). *When he came to my house, I told him my situation. He told me that he couldn't marry me, as he is already married. I could not have a child, as I was not married too. He told me to abort the child ...I came home and kept my pregnancy a secret, but not for long...My mother asked what had happened. I told her everything ((She pauses)). My mother hit me; my father hit me too... when my elder brother came home that night he chased me out of the house. I went into the road with my clothes. Then my mother and brother came again and asked me to come home. I was sent to my aunt's place to have the child, as I could not stay here... I was so sad. When my brother went to work, he did not come home the way he used to. My mother and father both stopped working. They said that they couldn't go to work anymore as they are ashamed to face others. My father began to drink more...and he died...Nobody helped me when my child was small. Nobody gave a biscuit even. Even now, my mother scolds me for destroying my life. Others do not like me. If my elder sister sees me sitting here she will spit at me for bringing disgrace to the family...Those days all my neighbours have left me behind. My brother never looked at my child. When my child fell and when he started crying, my brother used to act as if he didn't see the child... I do not talk to anybody in the line. They tell me that I have a child without a father...Now I consider my husband as dead. I went and paid respect to my elder sister and others and asked them to take me into the family again... finally they did (0006 W).*

From the above account, we can see how and why she was considered as an unacceptable woman. Her actions did not conform to the accepted way of behaviour and she became a disgrace to the neighbourhood. Her whole family was subjected to humiliation. When she wanted to get her job on the plantation, she was rejected by one of the Talawars for not being able to produce a marriage certificate⁴¹, when she wanted to nominate her child to receive her retirement benefits.

As a summary, it is evident that micro interactions that younger generation enact with their own self agency begin to make changes to the historically, culturally and socially-anchored macro discourses over time. Self-agency or collective agency brings new realities that change the self-identity of the younger generation, as they question their parents and their age-old practices. It is also evident that religious, cultural and social

⁴¹ Often workers do not register their marriage, as they do not see the importance of legalizing it. This becomes a problem to the organization when settling a pension or any other allowance in the case of death of a worker. In order to avoid this problem the present practice is that government officers periodically visit the plantation to register the workers' marriages and thereafter issue the marriage certificate.

ideologies as discussed above bring inferiority to women in complex ways but no such status is bestowed on male. These instances provide evidence of how the religious macro discourses intertwined with each other bring gender differences to form women's subordination in both the public and private space. These religious, cultural and social ideological inequalities associated with gender and their power to undermine a woman who goes against these ideological taboos do not prevail in the community in themselves as 'moral conduct'. Instead, they are, by and large, reproductions of community practices.

7.4. Body as Manifestation of Gender Identity

The religious discourses associated with the 'body' became a subject matter of discussion as workers related their life-world experiences. It is the practice on the plantation that females cannot enter the Kovil, as they are considered as polluted due to their bodily discharge. Moreover, in the case of childbirth or a girl's attaining puberty, the whole house becomes a polluted place. Under this circumstance, the mobility of the people living in the house, irrespective of gender, is restricted. The following is an account from a female worker of an instance where the religious macro discourse of 'purity' and 'pollution' enacted along with the religious and cultural practices bring biological gender difference to females:

(41). When a girl attains puberty, we do not let the girl meet any male. On the first day of this happening, after inviting all the female relations, she is bathed outside the house at night. Then we take the girl inside the house and keep her separated from other males. Since there is no place to keep the girl isolated, she stays in the kitchen, normally situated in front of the house. Only the mother and the girl can stay in that kitchen... Throughout the girl is given raw eggs to drink and 'Ulundu piti roti'⁴² for nourishment... After three months the girl is given a bath early in the morning and then the whole family get together and celebrate the occasion. Only then the others can see the girl.

If there is a girl in the family, say when the girl is about to attain the age, somehow parents build a kitchen separately or another space attached to the house and keep it clean for this purpose...Another thing is they can take an occasion for the girl only after 3 months, after the 'Pujawa'. If they want to bring the girl out before 3 months, they need to invite neighbours and others to the occasion. When they invite the people to the occasion, nobody will eat

⁴² In this case, in order to give additional nourishment to the girl, flour called 'Ulundu' made of Cassava is added to normal roti.

anything that is offered as the place is polluted...They say it is 'killi' ((not clean)). They believe that only after 3 months the place becomes clean and only then others can have meals from that house...If somebody from that house goes to another house, once that person leaves, they wash the floor or spray saffron water all over the house to avoid pollution (DWA 0052/55/56 M-Religious leader).

The above discussion sheds light to suggest that when the body complies with social practices and expectations, they in turn establish gendered meaning to body. Social and religious ideologies bestow superior status on the male body, whereas woman due to their biological difference are subordinated and considered as polluted and should therefore be separated from males. These ideologies that are enacted through discursive practices give meaning to the body of male and female differently, and males are placed as superior and privileged people over females in society.

It is also evident that through discursive practices, meaning gets attached to physical spaces. Meanings such as 'space attached to the kitchen to keep the girl separated from others as she is not clean' and the 'Kovil as a sacred place that woman should not enter and pollute' in turn bring female self-identity as different from that of men.

This is how the historical, religious and cultural discourses are practised and so taken-for-granted social realities are transmitted from one generation to another through daily conversation and social practice. All these constitute the set of 'rules to be obeyed', 'ways of behaviour', 'ways of expressing relationships' that needs to be followed by the community members. They become a community 'set of standards to follow' in terms of values, beliefs and norms that members need to conform to in order to claim their belongingness to the group. These become the driving forces of family institutions and plantation society. These in turn invoke a well-established, stable collective gender identity with superiority and inferiority, into the self-identity of plantation workers.

7.4.1. Polluted but Accepted

It was also found that these religious and cultural ideologies and taken-for-granted realities do not have complete power as they are being questioned, challenged and reinterpreted by the members. An instance where these are challenged by the younger generation is provided in our earlier discussion under 7.3.2. The following two instances also confirm how the religious and cultural ideologies mentioned above have been questioned by workers:

(42). *The elder girl was at school in those days. When she attained puberty, she did not go to school for three months. In school, she was not promoted to the next grade, as she could not attend the class for three months. Then she had to repeat grade 9. Other children laughed and made fun of her for repeating the same grade. Then she refused to go to school. Now she has found work in a good place (DWA 0048/49W).*

Having the experience of what her daughter had to go through, the female worker emphasized that she would not practise the same with her second daughter, but would send the girl to school after just a month. Another female worker who had experienced this problem said that she too had no intention of practising the same. This opens up new space for us to see the integrity and authenticity in this account:

(43). *'Kotahalu unahama', ((When a girl attains puberty)) we keep her inside the house for 30 days or sometimes 3 months... I do not like to keep my girl for that long. She misses school also. Other religions do not practise the same. We only do that in our religion. Our religion says that it is not good to send the child out but to keep her inside the house...These things are done by the 'loku kattiya'⁴³... What they say is what is accepted here and we just need to follow as they are still living (DWA 0043W).*

Another male worker (the postman of the estate) said that he had to resign his work on the day I had this discussion due to his indebtedness and he regretted that he had listened to others:

(44). *When my daughter attained puberty, I pawned all our jewellery. All our relations said that I have only one daughter and I cannot just take an occasion, but should invite everybody in the estate to eat and drink nicely by having a grand occasion. Then I pawned my wife's and others' jewellery. Finally, I fell into trouble. Now I have to return the jewellery back to the relations... Today I resigned from the estate work. I received my dues from Sir ((refers to the Deputy Manager)). I went and paid the pawn charges, got all the jewellery released...I feel as if I am half dead for losing my job (DWA 0067M)*

What is evident from these personal experiences is that historical macro religious practices that established a stable gender identity that is reinforced by elders are now subject to question by the younger generation. As and when people experience difficulties in practising these, they compare these practices with other communities' practices. They see these practices as no longer practical and in need of change as they bring tension to their daily life. They begin to see what happened to others who followed them. All these give evidence that with self-reflexivity and agency, individual

⁴³ 'Loku Kattiya' refers to elders. The opposite of this is 'Podi Kattiya', which refers to the younger ones. It is the cultural practice that one should always listen to and obey elders.

actions can change the practices that hold them back. In this way, societies will move forward so that people can shape their self-identity accordingly.

7.5. Males as Inferior

Conversations and language are significant in shaping and reshaping social realities and gender-identity. We have discussed how the ways of communication and daily practices bring meanings to gender behaviour, physical spaces and so on throughout this chapter. Discussed below is how the language brings meaning and also tension to a male in establishing his self-identity as a man when performing work usually carried out by a female. A discussion with a male worker who had been a domestic helper in his childhood, due to poverty, expressed his experiences in tears:

(45). *I was fed up of working in houses. I did not like it. When others were playing cricket and all, I wanted to play with them, but I was not allowed to...I was a grown up boy but I had to wash others' clothes. I felt shy. When other boys saw me hanging out clothes, they hooted at me...From the age of 8 to 19, I was brought up in houses nearby but outside the plantation... I had to go through all these for the wellbeing of my elder brothers. I suffered because of them. When I saw other children playing, I felt very sad. I was like a prisoner... I used to sweep the garden. When somebody came, I left the 'ekel broom' and ran inside the house in shame. When I saw others dressed nicely and going to school, I used to hide myself. Now I feel very sad about that period... Later I came to work in the estate...Now I want to move out again (DWA 0086M).*

The above excerpt provides insight into how macro discourses of societal beliefs and expectations about gender comes into enactment in daily life. When men engage in female work, their sexuality is questioned. A male encounters tension within himself as others respond to him differently (e.g. when other children hooted at him). This is a situation where gender identity clashes takes place and tension arises out of such situations.

A man engaging in activities normally considered as 'women's work' brings disgrace and humiliation to his manliness. This is well expressed in the following account from a female:

(46). *Normally I do not leave my clothes to be washed by my husband. We should not do that. Others will laugh at him saying that he is a 'ponnaya'⁴⁴. It will bring shame to the family if a man washes a woman's clothes. They are*

⁴⁴ The word 'ponnaya' refers to someone who is male in appearance but is impotent or useless sexually or otherwise. This term is used as a slang language to insult a man.

woman's work. Normally we boil water for the men to bath. Sometimes I have to bath him also (0004 W).

The female workers admitted that washing clothes is lower grade work that needs to be performed by women. Within this context, I found most women washing clothes and running to fetch firewood after finishing their work at 4.30 p.m. They return to their homes late in the evening panting, with a load of firewood on their heads. These common ways of conversations and language use (e.g. *ponnaya*) not only show the taken-for-granted perceptions that Tamil males should not wash clothes on the plantation, these ways of conversations and language use establish the inferiority of females as they perform these chores. Over a period the bias that people have acquired through their ways of communication and daily practices, become significant in giving historical, religious, social and cultural meaning to their social realities.

7.6. Summary and Conclusion

The above discussion unveils how gender identity is constantly embedded in self-identity and emerges from social and discursive practices. An important way of understanding the self-identity of plantation workers is by considering the ways in which different activities and practices, interactions, common ways of talking, and the interplay of macro discourses both in the workplace and domestic front bring meaning to males' and females' way of behaviour. All these discursive practices in turn shape and reshape gender identities. Thus, it is evident that production of gender binaries is a social practice. The gender identities involve creation, negotiation and maintenance of differences in a social and institutional context. This is a collaborative enactment as workers interact with others in the community.

As far as the workplace is concerned, it seems that historical, religious, social-cultural, and political macro discourses interwoven with the micro level management practices and social practices of workers construct significant gender related issues of superiority and subordination in the organization. All these have significant impact in bringing stable gender identities that construct the self-identity of workers collectively as 'women and men' belonging to the plantation.

Also discussed is how experiencing differences in work allocation at the institutional level extend their meanings into private space that legitimize gender superiority and inferiority across public and private life. This again suggests that both public and

private lives are intertwined with each other, and influence each other. Here it is evident that language and ways of talk become significant and treated as representing already existing objects and reality. Moreover, value-laden social practices are treated as neutral and value-free.

However, some of these macro discourses, along with the stable gender differences, are subject to change with the interventions of management practices and conversation. These practices cause self-identity confusion and status-related problems among male workers. The counter-reactions to management powers are enforced by males in collective ways to secure their masculine identity status in the jobs they perform in a responsive way.

As far as private life is concerned, daily practices and taken-for-granted common meanings that infuse gender difference in complex way are imparted during early childhood. There is also evidence to show that patriarchal ideologies legitimized by the Hindu religion, social and cultural values and biological differences bring significant taken-for-granted realities into the plantation society as superior and subordinate, pure and impure, clean and dirty. These status differences in turn shape the self-identity as an ongoing process.

Although what is discussed above largely account for how religious, social and cultural macro discourse play out in producing gender identity in the social context, it is also evident that already established realities are not in perfect harmony. When they create confusions and complexities in daily life they are being challenged. The individual plays an active part in constituting and making sense of the social realities, which she/he is not comfortable with. Although this is a process that causes tension, in a self-reflexive manner people make sense of what they experience and try to make a difference or try to re-interpret the situation. In doing so new ways of practising and ways of talk begin to shape existing reality. What is also evident is that gender identity can be reinforced through doing and undoing gender.

Thus, gender identity becomes not an individual creation, not a biological creation, nor it is created by stable structural components such as historical forms, religious and cultural ideologies or political rules and regulations. It is created by how meanings, actions and experiences are worked out individually and among people. It also emerges with the nature of one's relationship with others and the circumstances that individual

encounters. Thus, it is evident that individuals' continuous connections, interactions with others and experiences constantly produce and reproduce meanings of social realities and self-identities. They are by and large social constructions.

Chapter 8

Caste Identity

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how workers experience caste, and how caste is enacted in their daily interactions in terms of social practices and conversations. Incorporating caste interplay in public and private spaces into a single analysis is important in order to gain a holistic view of the construction of self-identity. In doing so, I try to understand how caste is played out in workers' self-identity on an ongoing basis.

I found that workers were not comfortable in discussing the impact of caste on their daily life. Therefore, unlike gender, exploring the interplay of the caste dimension on self-identity became somewhat complicated. The workers who considered themselves to be high caste liked to talk about their caste superiority and expressed their willingness to retain it. Nevertheless, they worried about the unnecessary confrontations they face from workers whom they considered as lower caste. On the other hand, the workers who considered themselves as lower caste did not like to talk about their status on the plantation, as it was oppressive. However, as I talked to them privately, finding out how caste is enacted and its impact on daily life became possible without asking specifically about caste. Once they got acquainted with me, they made a point of bringing it to light as they talked about their organizational practices, marriage, family and social problems associated with their daily life. Through workers' conversations, it is evident that issues of caste are embedded in their everyday lives in a complex way, bringing both order and tension to workers and managers.

8.1. Enactment of Caste Contradictions in the Public Space

8.1.1. Superiority and Inferiority in Job Allocation

When exploring the significance of caste interplay, it was found that the historical discourse of colonial feudalistic practices, largely accountable for establishing and promoting the caste system on the plantations, continues to be pervasive even today. Power in society, ownership of land and status in the organization are significant in

claiming caste superiority on the plantation. Such caste superiority is concentrated into four major groups, named Agamudhi, Kurumba, Kudianam, and Vellalan. From the outset, although the land belongs to the plantation, those who claimed high caste were able to acquire the right to land for vegetable cultivation, as they were close to the colonial masters. As far as jobs are concerned, the colonial rulers offered titles and significant positions to those of 'high caste'. Even today, job positions on the plantation are assigned to people based on their place in the caste hierarchy. Due to these power relations, some have a better voice on the plantation than others. On the other hand, the workers who are considered as lower castes belong to three groups, called Parayall, Pallal, and Sakkili. They do not possess land for cultivation and also lack power and voice in organizational matters.

The Deputy Manager explained (he spoke in English) the significance of caste interplay in the organization and how it causes conflicts among organizational members as follows:

(1). They call the line sweepers 'wasakutti': who clean the toilet. When we assign the work, they do not like it. From the beginning, from their caste they are like that...Their fathers had been like that. They are also like that. Now we give them some respect and call them as 'line sweepers'. Actually, their work is to clean the toilets in line and bungalows and keep them clean.

You cannot assign a better job to a low caste. It is very difficult. You are asking problems from good caste. Especially as my personal 'appu'⁴⁵ if I employ a low caste person, it will have a big impact on me. I will get some sort of pressure from the workers...Low caste people promoting as Kangany won't work. Nobody will listen to him or obey his rules...Nobody will like to work under a field supervisor from a low caste. Then it is a problem for us. So slowly, we have to see to his background also before offering work. Especially, they do not elect a Talawar from low caste people (DWA 0038/40/59M-DM).

The above discussion shows the significance of caste and its impact on to the organization as managers undergo tension when taking organizational decisions (e.g. influence from the high caste workers when assigning tasks).

The Deputy Manager seems to view caste as something taken-for-granted in the organizational setting, 'coming from the beginning' and something he has to be mindful

⁴⁵ British planters employed a personal cook, a male, and he was referred to as 'Appu'. This is practised even today among high class families.

of when assigning tasks. Nevertheless, reading through the above excerpt, we can see that it is the collaborative practices of managers and workers that invoke and formalize the caste difference in the organization. Tasks such as cleaning toilets, drains and gullies, and sweeping line corridors, need to be assigned to somebody in order to maintain the common facilities shared by workers. It is ultimately the responsibility of the managers to ensure the proper health and sanitation of the plantation community. The managers cannot decide how the jobs should be allocated on their own. There are workers who act as 'gate keepers', who try to protect their own caste superiority by opposing these decisions. Managers, in order to avoid conflicts and to maintain the harmony among the workforce, assign these tasks to workers based on kinship. In other words, the tasks that are considered as lower grades are assigned to relatives or to the younger generation of the retiring workers.

This results in individual struggle to resolve self-identity issues in the following way. The future generations of the workers who are considered as lower caste have experienced from their elders that their ability to hold a 'good' job position or opportunity for career advancement are restricted by higher caste workers in the organization. They begin to feel the oppressiveness of a caste identity that holds them back. They have no option but to accept what their elders practised unless they find employment elsewhere, which has some risks. Despite the tension, the younger generations view the jobs held by their elders as their own destiny on the plantation. They also become resilient and begin to respond in the way their elders did. Therefore, what can be suggested is that through self agency workers resolve their self-identity struggle, not by changing jobs but by enacting and legitimizing their caste inferiority on the plantation. This confirms the fact that symbolic meanings associated with the jobs come into workers' experience as reality is historically, socially and politically constructed through management practices. These in turn establish and maintain workers' caste identity in the workplace.

However, unlike in the past, there are instances where managers face resistance from workers as the meanings attached to the jobs bring caste inferiority to workers. They feel oppressed and resist work. Managers, in order to avoid workers' resistance to accepting these tasks, manipulate the symbolic meaning associated with the job title. For example, the managers change the job title, instead of addressing the workers with the oppressive job title 'Wasakutti' in Tamil language. The new job title is 'Line

Sweepers', a replacement of Tamil language by English language so that it will carry a different symbolic meaning or give a better status to the job. Unlike the past, now the workers engaged in these jobs are paid a daily wage in order to avoid the feeling of marginalization. Along with the change of symbolic meaning associated with job, the higher wages too become an inducement, so that the caste differentiation becomes less significant.

What can be suggested is that macro discourses associated with job titles and their meanings are subject to change, when discourses that are more powerful are used to suppress or to change the existing ones. This causes the components of self-identity also to change.

Another instance where caste plays in the workplace is when assigning significant job positions in the organization (e.g. personal cook, Kangany, field supervisor, etc.). That these jobs will be assigned to workers of high caste is taken-for-granted. The Deputy Manager's account above helps to explain why this is so. Managers' decisions are again subject to the influence of workers who are considered as high caste. Through these practices one group is privileged over the other, and one's superiority over the other is acknowledged and formalized within the workplace on the basis of caste.

Therefore, it is evident that binary divisions of caste as 'sameness and difference and superiority and inferiority' are enacted and formalized in the organization through collaborative practices of managers and workers. Ways of communicating and the meanings associated with tasks, and justifications associated with such communication, also become significant in reinforcing caste identity in the organization. These job practices and meanings associated with jobs invoke self-identity struggle within individuals. However, it is resolved in a responsive way. The extent to which these caste identities can be co-constructed by changing the meanings and ways of communication associated with macro discourses also provide insight enabling us to see how these are largely social constructions.

8.1.2. Superiority and Inferiority in the 'Field'

Caste difference is also enacted in the field by the supervisors, which results in clashes among workers themselves and also with supervisors:

- (2). *This happens in the field. The Kangany should supervise everybody equally. Sometimes the Kangany favours his people; he doesn't let others to say anything to high caste people. Therefore, we scold them. Then this leads to*

fights. Sometimes he supports us when he is upset with his own people. We tell him to supervise everybody's work equally without favouring his own people (DWA 0060 W).

The above quotation from a female worker provides evidence to show that the Kangany, who is considered as high caste, favours his own groups as he wishes when supervising the work, while discriminating against the ones who he considers as lower caste. At times, when he is not in agreement with his own people, he favours the lower caste. Workers having to work in such a working environment experience the bias of supervisors by way of favouritism or discrimination due to their caste differences. This brings considerable tension to workers in the field, as they want to be treated equally. In order to maintain workplace harmony, they request the supervisor to be fair to all. Having seen no fairness in supervision, the workers in turn show their resistance by scolding the supervisor and his people. This often leads to conflict among workers and also between workers and superior in the field.

What can be suggested from the above discussion is that workers experience the tension of caste difference in the work place as 'high and low' or 'privileged or marginalized'. They do so through their experience of working with others. This again shows that organizational formal rules (e.g. supervision) are subject to political enactments of individuals (e.g. Kangany) as they impose power on the workers. In this case, it is also evident that workers who are subject to discrimination do not resolve their self-identity conflict within themselves, but show their resistance by counter-attacking the supervisor. This is how the idea that 'work in the field becomes a difficult task to manage' comes into workers' and managers' rhetoric.

It seems that there are instances where the sense of inferiority/superiority of workers' self-identity as high and low caste is enacted by workers themselves, especially when female workers form into groups in the field. These in turn become significant manifestations of caste identity differences. The following excerpts extracted from the discussion with a female worker and from the Deputy Manager give evidences to show the interplay of caste in the field:

(3). *In the 'malay'((field)) we are all alike. We all do the same thing, plucking leaves from morning to evening, in the rain or in the sun. I do not see any difference in the way we treat each other. The only thing I see is we do not associate with some workers when having our meals. There are some differences in the people like "caste". These things cannot be helped (DWA 0043 W).*

(4). *The good people and those who are low caste do not sit together and eat in the field...There are groups who sit together and eat every day, but some low caste people go to a corner and eat on their own. They do not share it. Especially, among themselves even they do not share (DWA 0038/40/59DM).*

Even though the workers experience sameness, with no difference among themselves based on their work, it is evident that caste differences are enacted in the field through their daily practices (e.g. when females have meals). This practice confirms the macro discourse of purity and pollution in the organization.

When visiting the fields with the SFO, I was able to observe this. Having worked the morning shift from 7.30-9.30, the workers have their breakfast (usually roti with a paste of chillies ground with onions and salt, and plain tea with jaggery) in groups. I observed groups of female workers sitting together in open spaces along the roadside or in an open space.



High caste female workers having breakfast by the roadside

They share meals among themselves and chat with each other while eating. By sitting along the roadside, they establish their caste superiority in the vicinity. Moreover, they legitimize their cast superiority by not associating with others who are of low caste.



Low caste female workers having breakfast under a tree

The workers who usually sit away from the high caste group are low caste workers. They are few in numbers, and normally have their meals within a limited space away from the roadside in a covered place.

The above discussion revealed that workers bring caste difference as ‘same and different’ and ‘superior and inferior’ into their self-identity through these collective practices when forming into informal groups in the work place and these are divisions take-for-granted.

8.2. Enactment of Caste Contradictions in Private Space

8.2.1. Enactment of Caste in Daily Practices and in Social Events

Symbolic aspects such as clothing or dress seem to be no longer significant in reflecting ones caste position on the plantation today. However, it is evident that food habits still bring opportunities to workers to assert their position both in the work place and in social space as a ‘rank to be upheld’ or a ‘distance to be kept’.

Some workers who recalled their past revealed that their parents and grandparents who came from South India were prohibited from covering the upper part of their bodies, as they were considered to be low caste. Although this was the practice in South India and continued in Ceylon during the colonial period, the workers with whom I conversed expressed their relief that it is no longer practised today. This again shows us that caste identity manifestations are social constructions that can be upheld only as long as they are enforced in practice.

Nevertheless, a male and a female worker explained how food habits and their associated macro discourses bring significant caste difference into the plantation society as follows:

- (5). *People from different castes eat different food. I do not know how they came to exist. I think they come from the past. The ones who 'lift the Gods'⁴⁶ eat only vegetables...We 'lift God', therefore we do not eat beef (DWA 0067M).*
- (6). *Our religion has three categories of people. We are the best category out of the three. We are 'Kudianakkal'...The bad people are 'Sakkili'...and 'Parayi'⁴⁷. They drink 'arrack'⁴⁸, and eat beef. They are not good people. If you eat beef⁴⁹, you commit a sin. The ones who beat drums are 'Parayi'...but our people cannot do any of these as we 'lift Gods' (DWA 0070 M).*

Social ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, a girl's attaining puberty, house warming and their associated ritualistic practices are very significant in the workers' life as these signify workers' caste 'superiority' and 'inferiority'. These are celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion. In most instances, the workers who are considered high caste are privileged. They enjoy the benefits of society, such as entering the Kovil before everybody. They are allowed to lift the carriage of the Gods, touch the God's statue and parade in the front line. They are usually considered as 'pure' as they refrain from consuming certain food and drinks (e.g. beef and alcohol). They avoid physical connection by marriage with people whom they consider as lower caste, as this would 'pollute' their 'purity'.

On the other hand, the workers who are considered as low caste are not allowed to enter the religious place, although they can stay outside and worship the God. They can beat the drums in the religious parade, but are not allowed to lift the carriage or touch the God's statue. They are allowed to walk behind the parade. There are no restrictions in the meals they consume. Since they consume beef and drink alcohol, they are considered as polluted people.

⁴⁶ 'God lifting' is a religious ritualistic practice that takes place in the month of October for three consecutive days. Statues which symbolize the Gods who bring blessings are paraded through the streets and brought to the work place to invoke blessings. Finally, they will be replaced in the Kovil until the next year.

⁴⁷ In colloquial form, 'Sakkili and Parayi' are also used to disgrace a person, even though the person does not belong to that caste.

⁴⁸ An alcoholic beverage, which is consumed by working class people.

⁴⁹ The cow is sacred in the Tamil society; eating beef amounts to committing a sin.

Reading through these excerpts, it is suggested that caste differences are enacted through consumption habits, engaging in ceremonies and religious practices. Symbolic meanings get attached to these practices as they become part of conversation or talk (e.g. as ‘eating beef’ and those who ‘eat vegetables’) to strengthen people’s religious and caste identity. These symbolic meanings in turn bring macro religious, cultural discourses as ‘high-low’ and ‘purity-pollution’ that shape each other’s case identity on collective basis.

The following excerpts from two women also bring to our understanding how caste is interplayed in the workers’ daily interactions. These bring tension associated with superiority and inferiority to the self-identity in a number of ways, as discussed below:

(7). *If there is a festival, a wedding or a girl attaining puberty, everybody goes. However, the high caste people do not eat at lower caste people’s houses. If there is an occasion at high caste peoples’ houses, then the lower caste people should eat (DWA 0060 W).*

(8). *There are many caste problems in the estate. Here there are four major castes and they are dominating. We cannot do anything with them. Still older people let us down, as we are not in the good caste. They do not take bad caste people to their houses. We have to stay outside. They used to give us coconut shells to drink water, but now things have changed somewhat. We go to their houses and drink; they come to our houses and drink. Only the older people still have these ideas. It is not very serious now as different caste people get friendly and have inter-caste marriage (DWA 0043 W).*

It is evident that the origin of caste difference as ‘superior and inferior’ in self-identity is social and relational. The high castes enact their caste superiority by imposing restrictions on their own people from visiting the houses of others whom they consider as lower caste. The elders, by imposing behavioural rules with which to conform, advise young members in the family not to consume anything offered by the lower caste, as this will cause impurity to the self. By conforming to these behavioural rules, the younger generation also establishes the continuity of caste differences.

On the other hand, the workers who consider themselves as lower caste confirm their inferiority by limiting their social interactions with those whom they consider as high caste. Especially, when people considered as lower caste visit high caste people’s houses, they should take whatever food and drink are offered by higher caste people, but they are not supposed to do the same in return. They cannot invite the high caste to come inside their houses. Moreover, they need to do whatever work is demanded by high caste people. By ratifying these socially constructed practices in a responsive way,

the workers confirm the existence and continuation of caste difference as 'superior and inferior' within the plantation society. By these practices, they enact historical, religious and cultural macro discourses of caste 'purity and pollution' in daily life and set boundaries of interactions to live within.

The above data also unveils how macro discourses associated with 'purity-pollution' are changing through self agency. When the younger generation breaks these norms (e.g. by inter-caste marriage) these macro discourses lose their power. As a result, the solidly established caste practices (e.g. giving coconut shells to drink water, not taking 'bad' people inside the houses but requiring them to stay outside) begin to change over time, as and when the people enact them differently. By doing so people change the context within which the meanings get attached, new contexts begin to form and societies evolve over time.

8.2.2. The Change of Attachment and Caste Tension

A worker while accompanying me on a tour around avoided a beautiful waterfall, which I wanted to visit to have a closer look. When I inquired, he said that once that spot used to be a bathing place. Now it was considered as a haunted place and abandoned due to an incident that took place a few years previously. He said that a mother and daughter who were considered high caste had committed suicide by jumping into the waterfall. The daughter had got pregnant by a youth, considered to be of low caste. This again shows that when workers understand caste as an objective structure, it begins to control the whole plantation community, causing tension to those who do not see it that way.

These excerpts below also provide evidences of practical problems and tension related to self-identity of workers as they undergo significant turning points in life. These experiences are due to the decisive interplay of caste, which workers themselves enact in their daily life. In the case of marriage, 'affairs and love marriages' are restricted by the elders on the plantation. Starting an affair with a person who is considered as an outsider from one's caste brings shame and disgrace to the whole family, as it is considered as becoming polluted⁵⁰. Therefore, from a young age children are advised not to fall in love, and told that their marriage will be decided by parents or elders. The

⁵⁰ A high caste male marrying a woman from low caste brings high caste status to the female; conversely, marriage of a low caste man to a high caste woman bring inferior status to the woman.

tensions associated with violating such advice are also expressed in the following accounts from workers:

- (9). *Our people are from a good caste. We are from the religious peoples' caste. My children's father is not like that. That is the problem we have in our house. My father comes to visit us but my mother does not...If it is a man who gets a woman from a low caste, it does not matter. In my case, it is the other way. I married a lower caste person (DWA 0072 W).*
- (10). *I came to the estate thinking that I could live the way I want... Then I had to face many problems when I got friendly with her ((refers to the wife)) because of the caste. My relations... are from a good caste..., look for many things before marriage. They scolded my mother, telling her not to allow my marriage...I earned and gave my younger brother the money to buy the necklace. We have to give the necklace to the bride... Before going to the Kovil to get married...I wanted to go and pay my respect to my mother... When I went to her place, she wanted to come to the wedding but she was afraid that others would scold her...Therefore, she did not come. I held my mother and cried. I said, "I have four brothers, but I am going to get married like an 'orphan child' without anybody".*

When getting married at the Kovil, the 'Pusari' called the parents to come forward to bless the couple. I was looking here and there thinking that my parents would come...The 'Pusari' told me to make up my mind and not to worry (DWA 0086 M).

- (11). *After I stopped schooling, I was staying at home. Then "I got friendly" with the children's' father. Nobody liked it...Our people consider caste. That was the reason. We are somewhat higher caste and he was from a lower one. Therefore, my father did not like our marriage. Then we eloped (DWA 0060 W).*

Statements such as "*Our people are from good caste, we are from the religious people's caste*"; "*my relations are from good caste*" reinstate the ways of talk in which people are divided into binaries as stable constructs.

These are rarely challenged, as workers see what could happen to those who challenge or violate these 'caste binaries'. The incidents that take place on the plantation (e.g. committing suicide; stopping associating or having relationships with family members who do not conform to the already accepted caste norms or youth eloping) become important for workers to apprehend the significance of caste, as these bring tension to the lives of whole community. In order to avoid any unpleasant happenings, the elders tell their young ones the importance of adhering to these norms, and what repercussions they will have to face if they break them. Listening to elders, and seeing what happens in the surroundings that disturbs the normal daily life of the community, the younger

generation also begin to understand the significance of caste norms and follow the same. By doing so, they confirm the bedrock of caste differences and incorporate the same into their self-identity either as ‘we are superior’ or ‘we are inferior’ and so on.

It is also evident that meanings attached to caste manifestations and solidly established caste practices can change over time as and when they are assigned different meanings by individuals. This can take place by placing an alternative discourse that changes the description, explanation and interpretation attached to a particular event or place. The symbolic meaning associated with material aspects change over time as a result of change in interactions with these material aspects. Over time, through workers’ conversation and social practices, they begin to invoke new meanings (e.g. a waterfall that was once a bathing place became abandoned as a haunted place).

8.3. Changing Caste Overtime

What has been discussed above largely addresses how the bedrock of caste is interplayed on the plantation community and the associated tension that workers encounter in their daily life. Discussed briefly were a few instances in which this caste bedrock was shaken up as workers enacted and interpreted them in different ways. As a result, the macro discourse ‘untouchable’ has begun to fade away to a certain extent. As in excerpts (8), (9), (10), (11) and in the excerpts below from workers, it is evident that inter-caste marriages are possible and taking place, albeit with the objection of the elders. The new generation are beginning to experience caste as insignificant and associate with others on an equal basis in their daily interactions. This results in negating the strength of caste identity.

The workers who recalled their experiences and the difficulties they underwent as a result of going against the established norms did not want their children to undergo the same. Also, most elderly workers had experienced what happened when they decided on the partner for their child. The adults had to intervene in the children’s marital matters and often they were blamed for finding the wrong partner and ruining the child’s life. The workers expressed their willingness to change these practices in order to avoid such blame.

The woman whose account was given below had got married after an affair, and had recently converted from Hinduism to Christianity⁵¹.

(12). *I would prefer it if my children would find their own partners, rather than we finding them. When they are educated, they can decide their partners with jobs. If we find someone, we do not know what will happen or whether they will be happy or not. When they find the partner and if they face problems, they will not blame us. When I have a problem or have an argument, I always think that this is my choice. I have to live with him and I have to solve my problems. My parents cannot be held responsible. If we find partners for our children, they will scold us for finding that person (DW A0044/ DWA 0050/ DWA 0064 W).*

The male worker whose account was given below had married a woman from a higher caste. He expressed his concerns:

(13). *Normally the woman's side gives a dowry, but when we got married, they did not give us anything, as they did not like the marriage. I did not say anything to my wife. I worked with my wife for ten years... Suddenly my in-laws had financial problems. They came and asked for money. I did not say, "I do not have money". I wanted to become friendly with them. So, I helped them... Now all are happy, we associate with each other. We go and eat there; they too come to our house (DWA 0003M).*

Although he had experienced caste related problems when he got married, working hard, earning money and helping his in-laws in their time of hardship had brought considerable change to his life. Therefore, what is evident from the above discussion is that caste hierarchy with rigid boundaries and related issues in the society are social constructions. They are becoming blurred as workers enact them differently.

8.4. Summary and Conclusion

Having talked to workers and managers and also observing the daily practices in the work place, it is understood that both private and public life of workers on the plantation is subject to decisive interplay of caste in a number of ways.

What is manifested from the above findings is that the origin of caste difference as 'superior-inferior' 'high-low' and 'purity-pollution' to self-identity is social and relational. It is evident that organizational discursive practices and conversation that

⁵¹ Sri Lankan plantations are subject to the intervention of the NGO's. There are a number of NGO's both local and foreign operating in the plantation, usually funded by foreign agencies. They are involved in raising the living standards of plantation workers. Some of these NGO's in this process achieve their own political agendas by converting Hindu people to Christianity. This conversation of religion also causes instability in society and identity issues for workers in the plantation.

take place between managers and workers, and among workers themselves bring considerable caste related issues and binary divisions to self-identity of workers. They bring superiority to a certain group of people who get privileged and powerful, whereas certain groups become inferior, marginalized and powerless. Continuation of these will ensure the stability of the bedrock of caste differences with rigid boundaries. There is also evidence to see how the macro discourses associated with organizational practices are enacted in the organizational micro interactions and how the meanings attached to these change over time with the intervention of the management.

As far as private life is concerned, the historical, social-cultural and religious macro discourses discussed in Chapter 6 come into play through workers' daily interactions. Through ways of communication with each other and patterns of their daily lifestyles (such as food consumption habits, social practices in ceremonies and religious rituals on the plantation), they impose social sanctions, barriers, and also restrict themselves from free interaction and associations on the plantation. By placing each worker within a particular caste hierarchy, they formalize the social order of the plantation community. In doing so, individuals who live with others in society develop CI as to who they are. 'We are good caste' or 'we are low caste' become taken-for-granted common sense in the community because of continuous collective social and linguistic practices. The data also show how discursive practices change the already established symbolic meanings attached to physical spaces, so that they become objective realities in the minds of workers.

It is also important to understand the fluidity and blurredness of these already established caste differences on the plantation (e.g. inter marriage from different casts and up-ward economic mobility). Workers who encounter these different situations understand that caste, gender and ethnicity are social constructs that are imposed on them by society and are immaterial for them to be concerned with, as they cause much tension and oppressiveness in their lives.

Chapter 9

Ethnic and Class Identity

Introduction

The interplay of religious, cultural, social and political macro discourses of ethnicity and class, and how these become objective realities in workers' day-today understanding is explored in this chapter. Also explored is the symbolic manifestation of ethnicity. Considering these becomes relevant when the scope of the study is extended beyond the organization setting to a private setting. This is one aspect in which this research is different from others, as ethnicity and class in public and private spaces are incorporated into a single analysis in order to gain a holistic view of the construction of self-identity.

Discussions with the workers, manager, trade union leaders, and policy makers at the Ministerial level, along with observations of the macro discourses discussed in Chapter 6, give rich data to develop the following broad themes in understanding the impact of ethnicity and class on self-identity.

Finally, data are presented to show how ethnicity and class become an interactional accomplishment played out and enacted in the daily practices and conversations of tea plantation workers.

9.1. Ethnic Contradictions as Relational

Based on residency, occupancy and ethnicity, these workers are officially categorized as 'Indian Tamils', 'Plantation Tamils' or 'Estate Tamils'. From the discussions with the workers, it is evident that workers often experience their own ethnicity in relation to significant Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils whom they consider as 'others'. Workers rarely used the terms 'Estate Tamils'/ 'Plantation Tamils' but the common term 'Tamil' in distinguishing their ethnicity from others. In doing so, they show their resistance to being categorized based on their occupation. They want to ascribe to themselves a superior ethnicity as 'Tamils', which is largely represented by non-Dravidian Tamils, who live especially in the Northern and other parts of the country and are called 'Jaffna Tamils/ Sri Lankan Tamils'. However, when they want to establish their class identity

for political reasons (e.g. to highlight their poverty or marginalization), they always distinguish themselves as 'Estate Tamils' or as 'Plantation Tamils'.

It was found that social relations and the experiences of interacting with Sinhalese in the work place become significant in constructing commonality as 'we' and difference as 'others', which are important aspects of ethnic identity manifestations. These excerpts from male and female workers give evidence to show that Tamil workers understand their ethnic identity in relation to the Sinhalese with whom they interact:

- (1). *Sinhalese can think better than us. A worker who was born here waits in the same place until death without any change. There is a one called Ganeshan...he is in the 3rd house in this line. He is just staying in the same old way as his father did. No change or anything being done differently... but Sinhalese try their best to change and uplift even very little at a time. There is Nimal 'Bass'⁵² here. He is a Sinhalese. Now see his family. They also suffered like us. That 'Mahattaya'⁵³ and 'Nona'⁵⁴ used to pluck tea leaves in the field just like us. They worked hard and built their own quarters. The Tamils are not like that. The reason is Tamil people do not think that they want to improve and change themselves (DWA 0003 M).*
- (2). *Sinhala people have good traits. Not like Tamils. They love their children, keep them clean, look after them well, call them 'duwa' ((refers to daughter in Sinhalese)) and 'puttha' ((refers to son in Sinhalese)) in a loving way. I have noticed that they do not trouble children. They give them good food and all. Tamils are not like that. True, they give food and drink, but they send small children to bring firewood. Sinhalese people don't do that...I know Sinhalese people in other estates. I have lived with them before I came here. They stay nicely and live better than us. Even if the parents work on the estate, their children are better off. Tamils are not like that. Only a few Tamils think of their children and their children's happiness, but not everybody. Our people send children to school for about five years and parents here get frightened when they think that they have to spend on their children. Then they send the children to estate work. Sinhalese are not like that. They try to live with some respect (DWA 0044 W).*

The account below is from a female worker who had been a domestic worker in a Sinhalese house in Colombo and also expressed her experiences and her feelings about

⁵² The respondent refers to a person named Nimal, ethnically Sinhalese who is a mason in the plantation. In Sinhala colloquial terms those who engaged in mason work are called 'mason Bass'. People in the estate refer to Nimal by associating his name with the job he does.

⁵³ The respondent refers to Nimal Bass as 'Mahattaya'-(a gentleman).

⁵⁴ The respondent refers to Nimal's wife as 'Nona' with respect, as 'Madam'.

living with Sinhalese. Her account also shows how she understands ethnic difference in the ways the Tamils and Sinhalese live and behave:

(3). *Although I am Tamil they treated me well, never showed any difference. The children loved me. I miss them now...I think that I learnt lot from Sinhala people. I tell my children how to behave like them. I tell my husband how to use money wisely, not to take liquor and all. The Sinhalese people I stayed with were very good. I think that girls who stay with people like them can become more forward and independent to face problems (DWA 0005W).*

From the above excerpts, it is evident that Tamil workers on the plantation bring their ethnic differences and normalize them by comparing their life styles and behaviour, in relation to their neighbours and also to the Sinhalese for whom they work. They see considerable differences in what it means to be a Tamil on the plantation compared with the Sinhalese.

The workers, as they integrate with the Sinhalese, begin to experience their ethnic difference and bring it as binary divisions in way of talk (e.g. *Sinhalese changing, good, thinking better, neat, loving and caring, and Tamils as not changing, not good, not loving, caring, etc.*). From these interactions, workers understand their way of life, their own behaviour and the way of bringing up their children on the plantation as different that from those of the Sinhalese. All these resulted in creating images of who they are and their own behaviour in relation to Sinhala people. All these excerpts clearly show that from this comparison, the Tamil workers become frustrated about themselves. They consider that Sinhalese people address their issues in more mature ways and are more advanced than Tamils. They show their desire for change and try to imitate the Sinhala people. From these comparisons, they affirm certain characteristics of their identity and of the identity of others via the presentation and evaluation of behaviour. What is clear from these personal experiences is that the connection between ethnicity and behaviour affecting one's actions is socially constructed. It becomes significant in shaping one's self-identity as 'ethnically superior/ better off' or vice-versa.

9.2. Ethnicity and Language

It is evident that language becomes significant in constructing ethnic identity and related issues within the plantation. The workers speak their Tamil language within their community. Tamil being the main language of education on the plantation schools strengthens the ethnic identity of 'Tamilness'. A shortage of trained Sinhala and English teachers on plantation schools means children lack opportunity to learn Sinhala and

English languages in schools. This becomes a barrier that restricts youth from integrating into the wider community and reduces their opportunity to pursue higher education.

Other than the educational policy decisions to teach children in Tamil on plantation schools, community practices also strengthen the use of the Tamil language within the plantation. From the excerpts below, it is evident that 'plantation Tamilness' is legitimized in conversation and actions. In doing so, ethnic identity as part of CI is constructed and legitimized by the shared language used among the workers on the plantation as an essential way of social organization. Below we see examples of reactions to what is seen as an unacceptable use of language:

(4). *When we speak Sinhala in the estate, others get angry...they scold us (DWA 0069 W).*

(5). *It is good that we know Sinhala. We know if somebody scolds us. Do you know if somebody scolds you in Tamil? Yesterday...there was a clash in the line. A person had scolded the neighbour in Sinhala language. The neighbour had made a complaint to the police. Today the police came and asked the party who made the complaint "Why did they scold you in Sinhala, what did they say"? ((Worker laughs as she says this)). It is foolish to make a complaint like that. If the one who scolded says "We spoke in Sinhala and did not scold anybody", what will happen to the complainant? (DWA 0005W).*

What is evident is that language is a social reproduction, and through cultural practices it brings a sense of ethnicity into the CI of the community. It is evident that the community's imposition of restrictions on use of Sinhala language in their daily conversations reinforces and formalizes their 'Tamilness' in language use. Conformity brings stability and continuity to self-identity based on ethnicity. This becomes the basis of forming the collective ethnic identity of being 'Tamil'. It seems that violating the established norms (e.g. using the Sinhala language) can cause community unrest as these threaten their already established self-identity as 'Tamil'. From the above it is evident that community standards along with policy decisions establish the continuity of the ethnicity. Inability to communicate in Sinhala or in English causes youth to be marginalized when trying to integrate with the larger society. Same applies when seeking opportunities.

The excerpt from a woman, who had been a domestic helper in Sinhalese houses, shows how she experienced language and ethnicity in understanding her own self-identity:

(6). *Those days I knew Sinhala very well. I thought I belonged to a Sinhalese family. My mother used to tease me saying that I was from a Sinhala father.*

Then I used to say that I would like to be born to a Sinhala father so that I wouldn't have to suffer like this. Now also I feel the same. Now what to do? If I see some Sinhala people, I like to speak to them (DWA 0047 W).

This worker sees that her language constructs her ethnicity, which she considers as ascribed by birth. She also normalizes her ethnicity as the cause of her suffering. This personal experience shows how identity oppressiveness is normally expressed by way of communication. By and large, it represents the collective way of expressing the class identity of workers.

In other words, the above way of experiencing herself as a person born to a 'Tamil plantation family' not only expresses this woman's experience of being part of the Tamil plantation community, it also brings macro political discourses. These largely confirm workers way of comprehending class identity and come into their daily conversation as 'poor plantation Tamils who suffer'. For them, poverty is not an outcome of their individual and collective actions. By identifying and comparing themselves in relation to the characteristics of specific 'others', workers objectify 'poverty' as something that they were all born with. It is interesting to note that this excerpt also shows how the worker sees an 'imagined' or 'desired' self-identity as having a Sinhalese ethnicity, and its associated characteristic of being born to a Sinhala family. This experience and way of expression becomes personal or collective not as a pure cognitive process but what individuals experience as they interact and being with the Sinhalese families.

9.3. Mass Media as Ethnic Contradictions

Intermingling of the mass media with the workers' daily lives bring considerable changes to the historically, socially and culturally established values and beliefs. They have a profound impact in constructing, reconstructing and changing self-identity of plantation workers. With the opening up of the Sri Lankan economy, the advancement in new technology thereafter brought considerable social, cultural, political and economic changes to the life styles and living conditions of Sri Lankan community. As children from a very young age start watching and listening to television, video films, radio, etc, they are exposed to externalities, either good or bad. They experience what is happening outside, and acquire new life styles and languages. In subtle ways, these experiences create new and sometimes unrealistic expectations within the younger generation.

The following account from a female worker provides evidence that Tamil workers understand ethnic differences through the mass media:

(7). *I watch Sinhala TV shows. I like the way they show how to bring up children, how to behave and all. The Sinhala programmes are very educational. Tamil programmes hide things. If they want to discuss any family problem or issue, they discuss it behind the people who are involved and they do not say certain things on TV. The same thing I experience in the real life in the line too. Sinhalese programmes are more touching; they deal with family problems or issues more openly with the people involved...The Sinhala people discuss problems with the related parties... It is a good example for us. I wish I could bring up my child with Sinhala people. I tell him ((refers to her son)) all the time to grow up like them. I want him to learn Sinhala, so that he can talk with everybody and also he can understand what is on the TV (0006 W).*

This female worker identifies her ethnicity, what is good/bad about being a Tamil or being a Sinhalese, in terms of what is seen in the mass media. For example, she contrasts the issues that Tamil and Sinhalese programmes address. This gives her a sense of the 'other' in terms of different ways of encountering family problems, ways of behaviour and ways of bringing up children in the society. Therefore, it is evident that understanding one's ethnicity and wanting to make a difference to the existing pattern of behaviour is an outward-inward reflexive process. What is influential in understanding self-identity is what people encounter (what is seen in the mass media) and how they make sense of it. Tamils try to change and adapt their own behaviour to be like the Sinhalese, whom they see as better off than them. They reinforce this by telling their children to follow the Sinhalese in order to integrate with the main stream:

(8). *I teach my children that we are in a Sinhalese country and we need small, small things to be learnt including Sinhalese (DWA 0043 W).*

What is evident from the above is that children from their parents understand their language paradoxes, their sense of community difference and their belongingness to a different nation. These become the basis of normalizing their ethnic difference and national distinction.

However, that ethnic difference based on language appears to becoming less significant on the plantation. Most youths can communicate well in Sinhala, either through their interactions with the Sinhalese, by working in houses and shops belonging to Sinhalese, going abroad as domestic helpers or listening to radio and television. The following excerpt from a female along with excerpt (8) confirms this fact.

(9). *Although we are Tamils, the children here listen to Sinhalese songs and know Sinhalese...Next door to us, there is a boy of age 21. He always listens to the radio and talks Sinhalese (DWA 0043 W).*

Although they lacked ability to read and write, all the workers I spoke to were able to converse in Sinhalese fluently, and a number of workers could read and write too. In fact, a few said that they could converse in English.

From the above discussion, it is evident that educational reforms, parental advice, and encountering what is going on in the media are significant in creating and also bridging ethnic identity differences as Tamils and Sinhalese on a collective basis. The children not only apprehend their community difference based on language within the plantation society, but they also try to negotiate their ethnicity by acquiring the language skills required to integrate with the wider society. In doing so, they establish their CI as 'Tamils' within the plantation, while trying to change language-based ethnic difference by acquiring new languages so that they can integrate with others in the larger society.

9.4. National Politics as Ethnic Contradictions

9.4.1. Political Construction of Ethnic Identity

Throughout history, workers experience that their destiny on the plantation, with no progress. The national politics are very active in up-country plantations and parliamentary members represent the 'up-country estate workers' as the ethnic Tamil minority. Although vast improvements have been taking place in general welfare and infrastructure facilities to improve the living conditions (e.g. housing, health, sanitation, water, electricity, schooling, transport, etc.) much needs to be done for the fulfilment of the younger generation's aspirations, especially in opening up opportunity for their integration with the wider economy (in terms of primary, secondary education, vocational training, gender development, etc.).

A trade union leader with whom I had a lengthy discussion (he spoke in English) said that politicians do not address Tamils' real problems but leave them behind by giving false promises:

(10). *Collective agreement has been signed...without consulting the workers. The workers alliance CWC⁵⁵, Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union and Joint*

⁵⁵ The Ceylon Workers Congress.

Plantation Trade Union Committee have been involved in signing...They have decided the wage for the workers...The workers were standing against but due to the competition of the Trade Unions, their struggle has been paralyzed. The workers who are working for the betterment for the country...have to decide their wage increment. I ((am)) who is in Colombo, is it possible to decide? I am having a luxurious life. I do not know the difficulties of the ordinary workers. The collective agreement says that for 2 years no wage increment.

During the election, the leaders who are representing the plantation workers... give promise...“we will see that the plantation workers’ living conditions are supplemented”. Once they are elected, we do not know what is happening to the...decentralized budget... If they allocate 10 lakhs⁵⁶, they will spend only 2 or 3 lakhs.

What is the right we have to question? ... Before starting any of the projects in the plantation for the betterment of the workers, the MP who is allocating the funds should allow a discussion with the estate leaders or estate workers ... They are not having any discussion.

The representative members are coming on the ethnic basis... For example they will say: “We are the guardians of the plantation workers, you must cast vote to our community”. These people do not have any alternative but to give the vote.

Our people are not recognizing us and helping us to come up to certain extent. Though they know that we are qualified enough... no recognition. They know very well that we are economically in stake...Whatever the payment they make we will depend on that... Economically if we are alright, they will think that we will run the show. There are...many educated boys on the plantation...Though they are competent enough they are not given any opportunity (DWA 0057/58/59 M Union Leader).

The above account, which is complex and lengthy, articulates a range of trajectories, explanations and experiences of workers to show how national party politics bring ethnic and class identities into the plantation community.

The political parties actively bring macro discourses such as ‘economically poor plantation Tamils’, ‘poor living conditions of estate workers’, etc, to reinforce the workers ethnic and class differences, in order to secure their vote on an ethnic basis. On the other hand, during the election times, workers actively participate in politics to elect their political representative in order to see some uplifting of their class identity. To what extent the politicians serve the workers in return is a question. The misuse of power when taking policy decisions and allocating resources to the community they represent is evident. Although politicians claim that they work for betterment, it is not

⁵⁶ 100,000 Rupees.

materialized in real terms. We can see how workers feel dissatisfied and frustrated as they experience that the politicians had misled them to secure their vote, without helping them in return to raise their living standards. As long as the political macro discourse of ‘Tamil estate workers’ can be retained on the plantation, the politicians can secure their political positions through workers’ votes.

The politicians with the support of the TU representatives⁵⁷ take advantage of workers’ ethnicity by claiming that they are the ‘guardians’ or ‘patrons of the workers’ who will secure their ethnic, religious, cultural, economic and political entitlements. In this political process not only do the Ministers, policy makers, and trade union representatives (at the top level) secure their political power, but also it provides opportunities to shape the bottom level trade union representatives’ self-identity as powerful ‘Talawars’.

During the elections, clashes between different political party supporters are common, as each party tries to enforce its power over the others. The workers try to establish their political affiliation by pasting posters, holding political meetings and going from house to house campaigning for their political patron.

During the field work on the plantation, a nationwide strike took place on the 10th July 2008, backed by the opposition United National Party (UNP), demanding a pay raise to all workers in Sri Lanka. In conversation, management informed me that there was no work as 80% of workers were absent. Next day, the newspapers reported that the highest participation in the strike was from the plantation sector, which made the strike possible. The Talawars played an active role in organizing the strike on the plantation level. By these means the workers try to get closer to the ‘Talawars’, trade union representatives and politicians to gain political benefits (e.g. a separate house, good schools for children, a job for their son or daughter, electricity and roofing sheets for a line house, etc.). Workers and trade unions, by integrating and interacting with the macro society, bring national party politics to the grass root level on the plantation. In doing so, they reinforce their collective ethnic identity.

⁵⁷ At the national level there are politicians who represent plantation workers with their own TU backing at the election. The TU appoint their local representatives who will work at district level. The district level representatives appoint the regional level representatives. The regional level appoints the plantation level members who are of several levels. At the estate level, which is the bottom level, there are three to four TU representatives who are called ‘Talawar’. The workers at each estate elect their own ‘Talawar’, who will represent the workers at the estate level.

CI construction as *Ministers as guardians of the workers, who enjoy the luxurious life with power; and workers as poor who suffer* are a macro discourse that is often expressed in their way of talking. This collective way of understanding is a political construction. What is evident from their talk (e.g. *what is the right we are having to question?*) is that workers do not question why they are not being looked after. This confirms their powerlessness and lack of self-agency either individually or collectively to stand against what they experience. This results in continuation of workers' oppression, without much change.

9.5. Self as Different within Community

Individuals by interacting with others in a particular community gain experiences to form their self-identity in a collective way. It is very likely that a person will identify the self with others if the individual can meet her/his expectations by being in a particular society. The experience one gains from being in the community, therefore, becomes significant in interpreting how one makes sense of the community and how these experiences in turn affect one's self-identity construction. How and why workers experience their society in a particular way is clearly shown in the following accounts provided by the workers, both male and females:

- (11). *If I tell the others not to drink, they think that I am telling these things as I am living better than they are. I don't want to give them that impression. I don't talk to many people here. If I give the impression that I live nicely, they will be jealous of us... I just keep quiet. I work, go home and do my work. Don't you know, since we have girls, we have to be very careful when associating with others (DWA 0002 M).*
- (12). *The people are not like the way you think... The people here are very jealous of others. If they see that their neighbour is living better than them, they envy. They talk very nicely to our face but they are jealous...They are different from Sinhala people. You do not understand how difficult it is to live here. My mother told me not to talk to others. They want to know what we eat, what we do and all. That is the way when living in a line. I wish we had houses not in the line but in some other place (DWA 0004W).*
- (13). *I do not ask my children to follow anybody. The neighbours and sometimes relations are also waiting until we fall down. They do not help us (DWA 0005W).*

From the above accounts, we can see how workers differentiate themselves from the Sinhalese, and in turn how they form their own community identity from what they experience of being in the community. From the data findings chapters, we can see how

the historically established Hindu and Tamil ideologies relating to gender, ethnicity, religion and caste become significant in bringing order to the plantation society. Although this is the case, their common bond and their daily interactions seem to be very loose. Often this resulted in community clashes over trivial matters, a fact that was observed during the field work on the plantation. The parents advise their children not to associate with or follow anybody on the plantation, as they are not helpful, not trustworthy or jealous. The children begin to see their own community negatively from what they encounter within their community and also from the advice of their parents. This results in creating social-cultural macro discourses such as “*our community is jealous*”, “*we need to be careful*”, “*they envy*”, and “*they do not help*”, often heard when workers recounted their experiences of living on the plantation. Workers by interweaving ‘I’ and ‘we’ in their way of talk separate themselves from their own community and construct their own self-identity distinct from the rest of the community (e.g. “*I work, go home and do my work*”. “*Since we have girls don’t you know, we have to be very careful when associating with others*”, “*They do not help us*”).

Although studies show community identity as an outcome of being sameness, in my data, the findings show that a strong sense of difference is the most notable aspect found in the discussion in relation to ‘belongingness’. This is an outcome of what the workers experience in their daily interactions.

9.6. Education as End of Class Struggle, Upward Mobility and Imaginary ‘Other’

The workers who undergo insecurity within their own community and also difficulties in the workplace do not want their children to work on the plantation to fall into the same plight. They try to educate their children, believing that educating their children will lead to their emancipation. They advise their children not to suffer as they do, but to find their own emancipation outside the plantation. By doing so, they believe that their children will be free to acquire a better class and self-identity, an identity ‘not as an estate worker’. The following excerpts from two female workers represent the common view they hold about their children’s future:

(14). *I do not like my children working here. We work in the rain or in the sun. We go through a lot of hardships to bring them up. There’s no point if they also work here (=). We do everything for them... We try to educate them. We did not have education. If they too start working here our suffering has no result (DWA 0043 W).*

(15). *No, my children should not work in the field as we do. They should not go through the trouble as we do. I have told my elder son to learn tailoring. His 'Loku Taththa'⁵⁸ is a tailor. He works in Colombo. I tell my son to follow him so he can go out of the plantation. We only stay here and suffer. We should not let them also suffer here (DWA 0072 W).*

Workers see education as a means of emancipation, an enhancement of the material world through monetary rewards. Parents on the plantation have certain ideal occupations that their children should enter depending on their level of education, the life style and family income. Although workers see educating their children as a means of changing their self-identity as plantation workers, they have never experienced throughout the history of the plantations, one of their children becoming a manager in the plantation. To have a child become a manager is an unachievable superior status or a fantasy. This is evident in the following accounts from two female workers:

(16). *We are all poor. Our children cannot be superintendents. It is alright if they can become a teacher or a shopkeeper. Tailoring too is alright (DWA 0005W).*

(17). *We cannot be like 'Punchi mahattaya'... How can we? I cannot expect my son to be like that. The time has to come. If my son becomes a shopkeeper it is possible and that is what I want him to be (DWA 0073 W).*

When I visited the estate school, the female students admitted that they would like to become teachers, midwives and nurses. Very few mentioned that they would like to become doctors. Male children said they would like to join the forces, to become teachers, drivers, tailors, bus conductors, masons, to run a shop, while very few mentioned engineers and doctors. The workers whom I spoke to prayed that their children would not become estate workers, but would achieve a position that had been achieved by another in their own community. Among the plantation community, positions such as teacher, driver, bus conductor, tailor and shop owner are possible attainments, which give higher status than being an estate worker. In order to achieve this aspiration, the workers, once they get their pension, invest the gratuity and EPF money in children (e.g. to start a micro venture by putting up a boutique in front of the line or buying a small van or a three-wheeler). I also came across a family with a son teaching in a school. The family is highly regarded in the estate due to the education of the son. I also had the opportunity of meeting a scholar and a head of department of a university whose parents had been plantation workers.

⁵⁸ Refers to father's elder brother.

From the data above, it is also evident that workers do not distinguish between their private and public life in expressing their life-world situations such as their insecurity, problems in the community, poverty, dissatisfaction, etc. They attribute these to their present state of poverty and suffering, which is common to all workers, in belonging to a particular occupation within a particular space. These experiences become a common way of talking over time and give them the sense of CI as ‘we who suffer’. This feeling and way of expression are essentially social, economic and political constructions.

In the above discussion, it is evident that self-identity and CI are intertwined with each other in workers’ conversation. These are socially constructed from what they experience from being on the plantation. By seeing the ways in which managers live, the common understanding is created and expressed in common ways of talk (e.g. *we are all poor workers...Our children cannot be superintendents...How can we?*). These common ways of talk or vocabulary, which differentiate ‘what one can be’ from ‘what one cannot be’, become forms of descriptions and explanations of one’s state in the community. In other words, language gains its meaning through use and once meanings are ratified as granted, they become objectified realities. Such language in turn establishes relationships and self-identity differences, the ways in which people deal with questions of who they are and who they might become in society.

9.7. Symbolic Manifestation of Ethnicity

There is also evidence of how symbolic meanings associated with material aspects shape ethnic identity. A female worker whom I have referred to earlier recalled her memories with happiness: how her dress and the ‘pottu’ she wears on her forehead, manifestations of her Hindu religion and ethnic Tamilness, signified ethnic identity that allowed her to find her future husband:

(18). The children’s father used to work in a restaurant in Negambo. I keep a ‘pottu’ on my forehead and from the way I dressed he knew that I am Tamil and started associating with me (DW A0044/ DWA 0050/ DWA 0064 W).

This also provides evidence of how people make meanings out of such symbolic aspects. Individuals by encountering these symbolic aspects (e.g. dress, pottu, etc.) create meanings within a context. As these get taken-for-granted, they become commonly accepted meanings that speak for themselves. Individuals who encounter these symbolic aspects, even in a different context, make sense of them by attaching meanings from their previous experiences.

9.8. Summary and Conclusion

The enactment of macro religious, socio-cultural and political macro discourse in the micro interactions by ways of talk and social practices and also symbolic meaning attached with material objects bring ethnic differences to the lives of the plantation community. The negative feeling of ethnicity and community depends largely on comparison with others (e.g. Sinhalese, managers or their own community). Therefore, they are largely relational experiences rather than cognitive. While a strong normative component of sameness is found, contradiction and ambiguity are central elements of all excerpts. Self-identity is also subject to what workers encounter in the mass media. The language used within the community, and the government policy decision to teach plantation children in Tamil also legitimize ethnicity on the plantation society. Moreover, the party politics and involvement of TU bring macro political discourses into enactment. They bring a sense of collectiveness and class identity into the plantation workers lives. The workers reaffirm their ethnicity and class as they interact within the plantation but they experience their marginalization as they integrate with the wider society. From all these means, they make sense of the space in which they live. They do not put themselves in competition with ‘others’ but co-exist with them.

Chapter 10

Discussion of the Findings and the Research Conclusion

Introduction

In this study, by drawing on a social constructionist perspective, it is argued that the social world which we take for granted, including our self-identity, is not given but constructed, contested and negotiated as an ongoing process.

Even though self-identities might appear as real to individuals, it is evident that individuals have the capacity to construct them through discursive practices, which they establish through interactive relationships with their surroundings. Thus, the social reality cannot be separated from the individual but they are interwoven with each other and construct and shape each other through discursive practices. In this chapter, six themes are drawn from the data and each will be discussed in terms of how they bring insights for us to understand self-identity as an ongoing process. First, this study proposes the interactive, discursive construction of the ways of everyday social practices and conversation and then how these two, intertwined with each other. Both conversation and daily practice bring perceptions, values and beliefs to workers in up-country plantations in Sri Lanka in making sense of their social realities, which become significant in understanding their self-identity. The second theme suggests that one's self-identity and CI cannot be understood independently but they are intertwined with each other in talk and social practices. Thirdly, it reveals that self-identity cannot be viewed as single and autonomous but is multiple. The fourth theme suggests that formation of self-identity or CI is not a smooth process of construction but a process of conformity and resistance. The intertwined nature of public and private spaces that bring multiple differences to workers' self-identity on the plantation is suggested in the fifth theme. Finally, the study also suggests that symbolic meanings associated with material aspects manifest self-identity.

Following this discussion of the findings, the research conclusion is provided. The contribution of this research, especially to identity scholarship, its methodological contribution to organizational research and the practical implications of this research for

organizations are also discussed thereafter. Finally, the limitations of the research are addressed.

10.1. Self-identity as Interactional Accomplishment of Workers' Daily Practices and Conversations

As discussed in Chapter 2, it is evident that often self-identity is studied as an individual's conscious or unconscious process or as an individual's cognitive process. I have already discussed the limitations associated with such understandings. Below I provide theoretical insights as an alternative to overcome such drawbacks associated with understanding self-identity as a neutral process. Moreover, having gone through the literature that acknowledges subjectivism and the significance of discursive practices in understanding reality including self-identity, it is evident that very little emphasis is being placed on exploring how individual's daily practices and conversations intertwined with each other construct self-identity. In this research, by taking an interpretive approach of incorporating significant elements of socially constructed discourses into the understanding of self-identity, I provide insights below into how workers construct their own self-identities and also self-identities of others as an interactional accomplishment in their daily conversation and social practice.

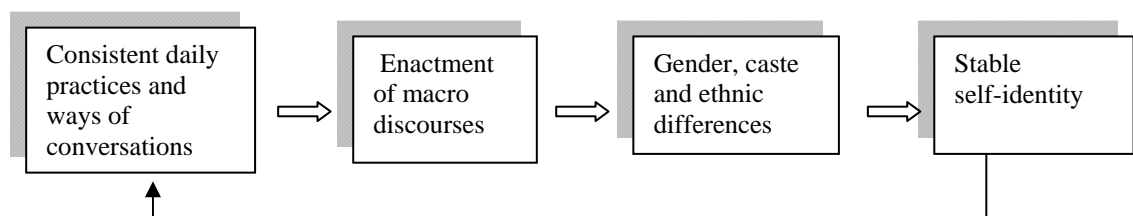
From the data findings, insights can be drawn to see how gender differences in terms of skills and behavioural qualities as outcomes of daily practices. Children acquire these qualities by following adults (e.g. data in Chapter 7 reveal that females by engaging in domestic chores and males by not engaging in such chores but engaging in outside work bring gender differences). These differences become the basis for women to be unequal and subordinate to men. Over time, these practices become bodily experiences that claim gender qualities in establishing self-identity (Collins, 1989). Insights also can be drawn to see how taken-for-granted caste ideologies such as 'who should be associated with or avoided' and 'rights and privileges' of each caste in society are manifested through daily practices (e.g. when visiting each other's houses and when consuming food, as discussed in Chapter 8). What can be suggested is that certain everyday practices become macro discursive practices over time, and construct stable gender and caste differences into the self-identity of plantation workers.

Conversation can also be seen as significant in bringing gender differences into self-identity. Ways of conversation bring gender differences (e.g. how purity/impurity get

associated with womanhood, for a girl to stay clean and nice without a bad reputation and to understand her bodily differences from that of a male; how a male becomes impotent by engaging in woman's work, as discussed in Chapter 7). Conversation also bring ethnic and class differences (e.g. how poverty brings class identity as poor plantation workers who suffer; how language use within the community establishes ethnic Tamilness, how differences in language manifest ethnic differences and belongingness to the state, as discussed in Chapter 9). All these suggest that language and daily conversation bring stable gender, ethnic and class differences into the self-identity of workers on the plantation. Here I provide evidence to suggest that language does not possess power on its own, as suggested by post-structuralists but derives its power from shared conceptions and then establishes the self as to 'who we are', 'how we are constituted', 'how we should perform' and so on (Gergen, 1991). This discussion brings insights in understanding that these are not separate or single context-specific speeches. These are, rather, a complex array of speeches which give a network of meanings as they are used (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). As a result of their usage, they establish ideas, rules and norms about the 'proper' language use of the plantation Tamil community. They become directives (e.g. orders, requests, offers, demands, policies, etc.) and the basis of taken-for-granted reality constructions (Ford, 1999).

Rather than emphasizing individual, language and social practices as independent of each other, as favoured by post-structuralists and symbolic interactionists, now I provide convincing evidences to argue that individuals, by intertwining their daily practices and conversation, bring stable gender, caste, ethnic and class differences to their self-identities in multidimensional ways. As an outcome of this process, stable self-identity arises within a particular context. This is shown as an ongoing process in Figure 10.1.

Figure 10.1: *Self-identity as an Ongoing Process of Interactional Accomplishment in Conversation and Practice*



The data findings in Chapter 7 suggest that macro discursive enactments which are reflected in the respondents' expressions (e.g. that explain married women's qualities as

kind, loving, painstaking, helping, not complaining, sacrificing the self for the wellbeing of the family, etc, and women as responsible for managing the house, child rearing and caring, establishing and maintaining relationships with neighbours and relations, etc.) are not purely internalized processes. They are fabricated through conversation and daily practices. These data suggest that both conversation and daily practices are intertwined with each other to bring stable gender differences into self-identity. The data in Chapter 8 also reveal how the manifestations of caste over time bring caste inferiority and superiority to one's self and become taken-for-granted caste ideologies through daily practices and ways of conversations (e.g. good people, bad people, God lifting people, people who cannot enter the Kovil, etc.). The data in Chapter 9 reveal how workers experience their ethnic identity as 'plantation Tamils' (e.g. as they compare their lifestyles and behaviour with those of the Sinhalese with whom they interact, how Tamil workers are treated when integrating with the wider society, etc.). These negative experiences in terms of marginalization, inferiority, stagnation, etc, can be seen as relationally established manifestations. They are articulated in multidimensional ways in both social practice and conversation as reasons for being 'poor Tamil plantation workers'.

What can be suggested from the data in Chapter 7 is that meanings associated with gender differences are also subject to the expectations of others and they in turn construct individuals' responsibilities (Weick, 1995). What can be seen is that self-identity can be strengthened when particular emotions and beliefs that are constructed and practised in a particular cultural context are expressed in conversation as one's responsibility (e.g. a mother to be loving, painstaking, sacrificing the self for the wellbeing of the family, father to be responsible for the betterment of the family, God lifting people can enter the Kovil, good caste people do not eat meat, bad people cannot enter the Kovil, etc.). Over time, these get effectively tied to the individual's self-identity performances. The individual, by detaching the self from the performance, normalizes that no other could or should perform these activities, which in turn become deciding factors of power relations (Gergen, 1991).

There has been little empirical analysis that threads both the ways of conversation and daily practices into our understanding of self-identity construction. Insights can be drawn from the above discussion that shared meanings and understating as to what to do, what not to do, how to behave, what are bodily differences, etc, are developed or

negotiated between people over a period of time as a result of an ongoing conversation and social practices (Samra-Fredericks, 2005; Shotter, 1993a). This process is known as externalization. Through continuous discursive enactment they become broader cultural shared knowledge. They invoke moral obligations and attachment patterns, which establish and facilitate harmonious relationships within the family and the society. By objectifying these discursive practices, an individual also conforms to societal expectations and enacts the same in an ongoing process. This solidifies standards and requirements of behaviour. Thus, diminishes the possibility of new alternative ways of behaviour (Gergen, 1999). As and when the individual internalizes these daily practices and expressions, she/he begins to reflectively confirm what the significant others have imposed on her/him as objective structures (as my responsibility) that has to be complied in a relational responsive way (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Although available research discussions describe this as a socialization process of self normalization, they do not go further to explain how this takes place as an ongoing process as one interacts with others. This research discussion provides an opportunity to see that self-identity is not a conscious or unconscious process; it is through continuous discursive enactment that one understands her/his self-identity. It is not a cognitive process per se, but an interactional accomplishment. Self-identity in and around the workers is not only embedded in the demands of the present, but is constructed concurrently with the past and the future as an ongoing process (Boje, 1991; Ford, 1999; Pullen and Linstead, 2005).

As a summary, the theoretical gaps identified in the existing literature (e.g. how different social realities emerge and what impact do they have on self-identity, what impact do workers daily interactions have on their self-identity, what is the process or how do individuals understand their self-identity as real, etc.) have been addressed in this research by arguing that constructing self-identity is not a matter of thinking conceptually or simply an activity within an individual's cognition. It is rather a complex process where social practices along with conversation get intertwined with workers' surrounding circumstances constructing their social realities, including their self-identities. The above discussion not only provides a novel way of theorizing self-identity but also illustrates how a stable self-identity is constructed and maintained as an interactional accomplishment. The stability of self-identity is secured by individuals through maintaining the coherence of meaning and reality by participating in various discursive practices that constitute them as subject (Pullen and Simpson, 2009; Doolin,

2002). The implication of this in the long run is that the individual, by detaching the 'self' from the reality construction process, begins to objectify reality as existing "out there", constructed by outside forces. As a result, subjectively constructed language and social practices become objectified and members simultaneously orient themselves to share meanings with each other. These become historical, social, cultural and political macro discourses, which bring stability to self-identity.

10.2. Self-identity and Collective Identities are Entwined in Talk and Social Practices as One

The existing organizational literature discussions around SI/CI give the notion that the stability and coherence of identity of individuals are the same for all members of a particular group. This is a conscious or unconscious process where one incorporates 'other' as an identity maker into her/ his self-identity through self-categorization. While considering reality as constructed by social structures that exists independent of the individual, these research discussions undermine the self agency. In particular, what is proposed here is different from current theoretical discussions on identity scholarship that take conventional approaches in studying self-identity as an internal or cognitive process and differentiate SI/CI: as a cognitive affiliation process in SI theory and as a process of self-categorization in CI theory. In this second theme I unveil how the emerging nature of self-identity and CI becomes an outcome of an outward-inward process of self-reflexivity rather than a normative process of self-categorization. Rather than seeking to establish truth and generalizability, there is a need to enrich our understanding about how individuals and groups interact with each other on an ongoing basis constructing multiple collective identities.

In the data findings chapters, by linking specific events and particular examples of self-identity to a broader CI work, I discussed how self-identity and CI are intertwined with each other. They are outcomes of workers' experiences of persistent conversation and social practices and become manifested in their daily interactions. Thus, self-identity and CI cannot be separated as workers experience both simultaneously through collective practices. They come into talk as 'I', 'we' and 'they'/ 'other' (De Bruin, 2009). The data reveal how shared understandings of workers' daily practices and conversation shape and reshape the self-identity on a collective basis. For example: collective understanding of gender differences and the responsibilities of married women and men on the plantation, how girls should behave, what are the qualities of an

ideal wife and how women should safeguard their purity as discussed in Chapter 7; the enactment of caste superiority/ inferiority, purity/ polluted, privileged/ marginalized through consumption habits, engaging in ceremonies, restrictions on interactions as revealed in Chapter 8; the ethnic differences experienced when interacting with the Sinhalese, the Tamil linguistic practices in the plantation, education reform and workers involvement with party politics, and class difference as economically poor plantation workers with no right to question their political rights, the politicians who act as guardians of estate workers but do not act for the benefit of the poor workers, plantation children cannot be superintendents, etc, as discussed in Chapter 9.

All these lead workers to experience that they are distinctive sets of community living in terms of material reality. When unable to express any effective resistance against dominant discursive practices, the workers construct their CI as the 'ones who are marginalized or subordinated' and see the 'other' as 'privileged or superior'. In this way, the subordinated group not only experiences a different reality than the dominant group, but may also interpret that reality differently than the dominant group (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Collins, 1989).

What is discussed here is different from existing literature that discusses CI more or less as an individual cognitive process: something that one acquires through the socialization process or as a cognitive process of self categorization as one interacts with different social systems. The findings of this research suggest that by enacting the same daily practices and conversations within everyday life, workers bring macro discourses in terms of religious ideologies, social and cultural patterns of behaviour associated with social order and moral grounds, which they must continuously and collectively reproduce in their mundane activities. This is a process where an individual by focusing on outward circumstances incorporates elements of 'others' into self-reflexivity and follows or confirms the same discursive practices (Watson, 2008). By doing so, an individual transforms self into collective agency in a relational responsive way (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). These collective actions establish orderly ways of doing things, how to behave, what is wrong and right and so on, in the community. By learning and acting upon such accepted rules and forming appropriate behaviour, a collective sense of 'who we are' is shaped. These provide a shared understanding whereby reality is negotiated over time (Blain, 1994). This is the basis for me to suggest that individuals incorporate 'other' into one's self not

as a normative process of self categorization as proposed by SI/CI or RI researchers, but it is through inward-outward process of self-reflexivity one begins to conform to collective behaviour.

The common understanding begins when consistent conversation and practices continue to serve in maintaining an objectified reality for individuals and groups (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). By doing so, workers confirm their 'place', 'position', and 'status', and legitimize them as social realities. In doing so, workers collectively perceive the flow of activity around them as 'visible-rational': structures that determine their behaviour and internalize them as cognitive mechanisms. It is unlikely that workers see these as social realities which they, themselves, bring into existence (Beech, 2008). This discussion brings new insights in understanding how an individual with self- reflexivity forms CI coherently and consistently, a fact that has been ignored by most researchers who discuss this as a conscious or unconscious process.

If CI is to be maintained in a rapidly changing context, the meanings and shared understandings associated with behaviour need to be maintained as stable objectified reality. This is an outcome of joint action facilitated by shared meaning developed through 'historical' interactions and relationships. These are rationalized and established by continuous discursive enactment across a range of conversations (e.g. text books the plantation children read in school, films and television programmes shown in Sri Lankan media and everyday conversation within the plantation) and also through social practices (e.g. ways of doing mundane activities and what is practised in social, cultural and religious rituals and ceremonies).

What is evident from the data findings is that taken-for-granted practices become legitimized and normalized not by the process of socialization process. It is legitimized by the echoing voices of the previous generations (Gergen, 1999) (e.g. workers' expressions: "*in those days customs were practised as they are*", "*still older people let us down... only the older people have these ideas*" and "*what they ((elders)) say is what is accepted here and we just need to follow as they are still living*" etc.). Traditions and cultural patterns are justified and maintained as sensible when individuals objectify these conversations and practices as taken-for-granted. In other words gender, caste, ethnic, class and community differences are legitimized and normalized so that they become taken-for-granted realities that should be followed by everybody. For this to happen, the daily practices and communication must be sustained in our relationships.

Within this context, it is evident that acquisition of culture or religion is transferred from an external to an internal state of individuals not through a normalizing process as ‘socialization’, which is often the notion of research in social-psychology, including post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives. Nor are they stable structures that are transformed through macro discourses per se. It is individuals’ set of ‘ordered’ form of daily practices and communication or speech genres that facilitate the continuation of the culture and religion in a distinctly socio-ethical way (Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 1993a). The coherent CI as a ‘plantation woman/man’, ‘low /high caste’ or ‘plantation Tamilness’ or ‘otherwise’ can be maintained as long as these experiences are consistently maintained through use of language and practices in which they are embodied (Thomas and Linstead, 2002). Thus, one’s actions or talk will represent others’ action (De Bruin, 2009; Gergen, 1999). The work they perform, the community practices they collectively enact, the kind of relationships they establish with members of their own community all suggest that Tamil plantation workers are a group who experience a different world from those who do not belong to Tamil plantation workers. This is a collective coordination of linguistic practices and actions that provide meaning-making resources to each other to interact with the plantation community in a socially determined way (Samra-Fredericks, 2005; Humphreys and Brown, 2002).

As discussed above, literature from Western contexts largely focuses on CI or SI and differentiates the same from the self-identity as a cognitive process or largely as an accomplishment of individual interaction with stable structural macro discourses. The significant departure of this research from the above research is that this research suggests that the consequences of language and daily practices are far-reaching. They bring self-identity and CI as an interwoven, socially-constructed process (Bjurström, 1997). As people acquire particular vocabulary and social practices collectively, which are different from others, they come to see ‘self’ and ‘others’ in terms of ‘sameness’ and ‘differences’. As these are taken-for-granted, they become cultural communication patterns and forms of practices as broadly-shared understandings and convictions. This is the basis to suggest that self-identity, whether individually or collectively, is sustained not by ignoring differences or sameness but by making them an object of conversation and social practices (Taylor and Robichaud, 2004; Samra-Fredericks, 2005).

10.3. Self-identity is Not Stable, but a Changing Process

It is evident from the literature that structured or functionalist explanations do not provide insights in understanding the ways in which workers construct their differences in self-identity as an ongoing social process. Also researches that promote the notion that self-identities become subjectivities constructed by external forces and power relations or through differences embedded in macro discursive structures are questionable. These research discussions ignore the multiplicity, complexity and contradictory nature of the moment-to-moment changing nature of self-identity and CI as a whole. Nor do these discussions provide evidence as to how macro discourses become powerful structures. Therefore, rather than seeking to establish truth and generalizability, there is a need to enrich our understanding about the complexities associated with self-identity, and how the self-identity construction process changes from moment-to-moment as an ongoing process, which is the main concern of this theme. These understandings should be part of our academic knowledge as there is a dearth of research that brings complex issues associated with theoretical underpinnings into discussion.

Theoretically moving away from a linear conception of stable identity construction, here I try to bring to our discussion how the individual self-identity works in terms of an ‘inward process’ of self-reflexivity which separates the self from the outer world as one experience social realities differently. In doing so, I provide convincing evidence to suggest that ‘identity work’ becomes something relative and something one passively comes to terms with in different contexts. It is not predetermined, stable or directly observable but spontaneous, multiple and contradictory.

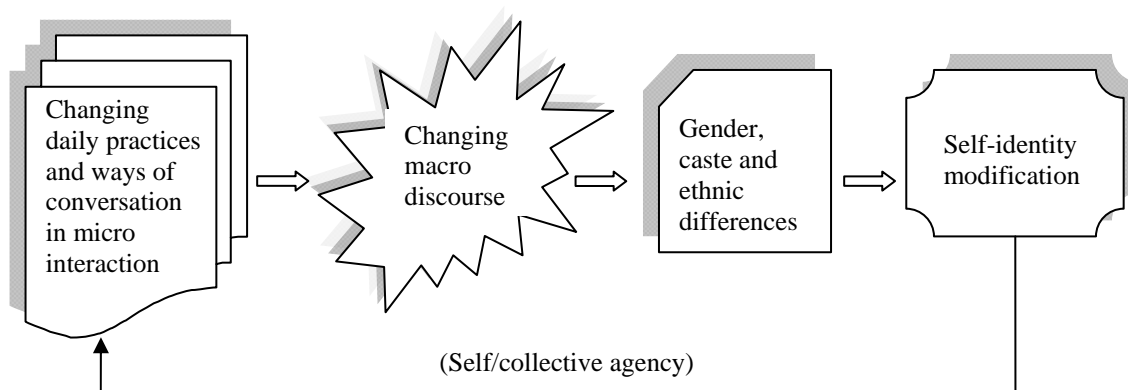
The data findings in Chapter 7 suggest how circumstances change the view of a male youth who does not take family responsibility but engages in community services (When he is single, his community services are regarded positively. However, once married, they become construed as over-indulgence). I also explored how the meaning of a “family man” is reinforced to a married man through interaction with the spouse, children and elders of the family and also why a man has to change his previous habits when he has daughters. These are again subject to the expectations of significant others. Moreover, there is evidence of how females find their voices in the patriarchal society (e.g. how a woman became more independent when her husband went abroad, how a woman took a dominant position once she returned from abroad, how a woman looked

to the future on the advice of her father as revealed in Chapter 7). Further, I discussed how workers begin to re-interpret social, religious and cultural macro discourses that laid the foundation for solid social practices, as they encounter problems with the historical practices (e.g. what parents experienced when the daughter who had stayed at home for three months refused to go to school after her puberty ceremony, children abandon certain customs adhered to by their parents as they question their practicality). The data findings in Chapter 8 reveal how caste inferiority gets negated (e.g. through inter-caste marriage and economic uplifting) and also in Chapter 9, I discussed how ethnic difference as Tamils who speak Sinhala is manifested in micro practices and ways of conversation (e.g. children who listen to Sinhalese music and who learn to speak Sinhalese).

From the data we can suggest that changing well-anchored religious and social-cultural macro discourses is possible through the self-reflexivity and self-agency of the individual. They are not stable structures that construct stable self-identities. These data also provide interesting clues for the understanding of social reality including ideas, beliefs, values and self-identity as uncertain 'subjectivities' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). These historical circumstances are not given but socially constructed over time.

It seems that little empirical attempt is being made by organizational researchers to discuss issues such as how meanings come into existence and change over time, what impact these different meanings have on self-identity at different times and how people bring their self-identity, as a reflexive process. Addressing these issues will provide holistic understandings of the interplay of historical, socio-cultural, and political macro discursive practices in the construction, reconstruction and change of self-identity as an ongoing process. This research discussion allows us to understand how social forms get embedded in social realities through plantation worker's public and private life interactions and how these diverse and complex interactions bring changes to the abstract level of reality construction, and what is their impact on change in self-identity over time. Figure: 10.2. shows how this changing process takes place.

Figure 10. 2: *Self-identity as a Changing Process*



As shown in the above figure 10.2, modification or change in self-identity is possible with the individual's adjustment to her/his lifestyle and pattern of behaviour. This is not an individual internal thought process as suggested by psychological and social-psychological researchers. It is an outward-inward self-reflexive process of identity work. This involves negotiating or forgoing enactment of certain macro discursive practices in micro interactions, so that alternative self-identity construction becomes possible within the individual.

When certain ways of doing things do not always fit the requirements of modern life, they are questioned. Individuals through reflexivity understand that what they practiced before do not work right for them, then they change their ways of doing things. This is an inward process of self-reflexivity where an individual enacts these discursive practices differently from others in the community (Watson, 2008). In other words, this happens when we encounter different circumstances and experience change as a result of our subjective relationships. This resulted in workers enacting their daily practices and ways of conversations differently to suit the situation. This is the basis for me to argue that macro discourses are not stable structures, as suggested by post-structuralists and symbolic interactionists, but social constructions.

According to social constructionism, changes to CI can take place only when macro discursive practices are enacted differently, which requires individual as well as collective agency. This is a fact that is overlooked by SI/CI as well as post-structuralists and symbolic interactionists. Changing discursive practices contribute to change in knowledge in terms of beliefs and commonsense social relations, including CI over time (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, self-identity or CI become discursively constituted and they are continuously in the process of being constructed (Doolin, 2002). It is multiple,

contradictory and changing depending on performances in a specific situation (Pullen and Simpson, 2009; Thomas and Linstead, 2002). This is the basis for me to argue that self-identity-either individual or collective-is never complete, a fact that has been overlooked by most researchers on identity scholarships.

As a summary, literature exploring and incorporating into a research discussion the precarious nature of a continuous rise and fall of macro discourses and their impact on changing self-identity is scarce. This research, by exploring the fluidity and changing nature of macro discourses and bringing them to the forefront, enriches the theoretical understandings of complexity associated with self-identity and CI. The above discussion brings to the fore the messy and inconsistent nature of the self-identity of workers and their impact on their behaviour in the plantation. In other words, the meaning associated with understanding gender, caste, ethnicity and class differences as multiple dimensions to self-identity cannot be located in one way or as an outcome of an individual's coherent actions with others. Although these are joint enactments, I discuss how they become contextual and temporal. This is a fact that is overlooked by most organizational research, which addresses gender, caste, ethnicity, etc, as given or objectified phenomena that locate individuals in a particular social context. From this research it is evident that history is not given but crafted collectively through discursive practices and thereby subject to reconstruction. Therefore social practices and linguistic practices are not static. They provide enormous possibilities for novel coincidences. Thus, 'meanings' which people construct are in flux. As a result, the self-identity is also subject to continuous refashioning (Gergen, 1999).

10.4. Self-identity or Collective Identity is a Process of Conformity and Resistance

The organizational research discussions on issues of managing employee's multiple identities seem to be few. Furthermore, they do not provide insights as to how workers conform to particular ways of behaviour with self-agency, or the impact of daily interactions in constructing worker's moment-to-moment self-identity on a collective and individual basis, which can be stable and consistent at times, and chaotic and conflicting at other times. Also, the available literature does not provide insights into how 'identity politics', a powerful attempt of both managers and employees, become significant in 'identity work'. In other words, they leave a knowledge gap in research

with lack of insights into how the self-identities of workers are contested and negotiated by managers and workers as an ongoing process.

In this research, I try to fill the above research gap by arguing that self-identity is an ongoing achievement, which may never be completed. It is an emergent and messy process of understanding self. As far as the organizational context is concerned, it is a process in which both managers and workers jointly construct through collaborative interactions. Thus, this process involves conformity and resistance to certain actions and also an individual struggle to balance the coherence of the self with the complexities associated with a given situation (Grandy, 2008).

From data presented in previous chapters, we can draw insights to see how organizational members, through language and routine work, negotiate patterns of behaviour that are required in accomplishing tasks (e.g. sorting, sifting and packing tea in the factory are women's work, sundry work is men's work, collective understanding of gender differences and responsibilities of males and female workers in the field and factory, the enactment of caste superiority/inferiority, purity/polluted, privileged/marginalized through job allocation and group formation, etc.). These in turn provide meanings to what people do, how they do things and why they do things in organizations. Through continuous discursive practices, these become historical, cultural and valued macro discursive practices in organizations. They establish taken-for-granted realities and secure stable self-identities and CI of workers. This is a collaborative process where managers and workers construct each other's self-identities and legitimize them in such a manner that benefits the smooth functioning of the organization. This is a fact that has already been discussed in relation to private space under the first two themes. What can be seen in the plantation context is that workers' self-identity, constructed in this way over a century, is now subjected to change.

Although plantations were historically viewed as total institutions, today we cannot see them as static entities, a fact that was established in the literature review. They change and evolve over time as an ongoing process of organizational conversation and social practices, which takes place between managers, workers and the wider society. Hence, there is no single language system or social practice, but multiple interplays of various discourses. In the data findings chapters, I discussed how issues of self-identity of workers become matters of concern for managerial decision making and what happens when managers face ambiguities in terms of organization survival in the future.

There is evidence of how the self-identity struggle in the workplace takes place around a number of identity intensive issues (e.g. feminization of male work due to lack of female workers to work in the field in plucking tea leaves in Chapter 7; assigning lower grade work to low caste workers and how workers resist caste favours in the field in Chapter 8).

Let us see what happens to workers' well-anchored self-identity as and when managers try to replace female with male workers for plucking tea leaves in the field. This discussion will provide understanding as to the subjectivities associated with macro discourses, how macro discourses get stabilized or changed over time through ongoing discursive practices, a process often not explained in discourse analytic research. The male workers are not simply prepared to change their work practices by becoming subject to new rules of management. This is because the new practices change the historically, socially, culturally and politically established meanings associated with such practices. The new practice of 'men plucking tea leaves' affects males' sense of 'who they are' in the workplace, as this practice gives different meanings to them. The new practice is not in harmony with the existing meanings. The male workers consider that accepting management's new practices and 'engaging in plucking tea leaves in the field' undermines their already-established masculinity identity as 'sundry workers who engage in hard work'.

As far as 'identity work' is concerned the power dynamic can be regarded as "*the ability to mobilize discursive resources marshal discourse or counter-discourses, and the ability to get others to acknowledge or take seriously a position that is being proposed*" (Beech, 2008: 69). If the person who is subjected to this power feels that it is imposed against her/him, there can be resistance.

Let us see how managers and workers, both harmoniously or in a contested manner, construct and confirm each other's self-identities. Male workers' reaction to this changing practice that brings an alternative construction (femininity) to their male identity can be expressed as 'resistance'. Resistance occurs when workers perceive that changes in practice challenge their existing historical, cultural and valued practices, threatening the already established sense of self-identity and behavioural patterns (Doolin, 2002; Grandy, 2008; Mumby, 2005). The workers challenge the firmly anchored masculinity by not adhering to the work standards. However, they comply

with the organizational practices. In doing so they resist work but also reify it; they legitimize their subjective position or claim the status that is denied them by arguing and doing haphazard work (Ashcraft, 2005; Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Pullen and Simpson, 2009). Thus, what can be seen here is that self-identity is an outcome of the prevailing interpretation of history and such historically-established self-identities can change over time in relation to prevailing circumstances (Pullen and Linstead, 2005).

Now, let us discuss how issues of self-identity of workers become matters of concern to managers when assigning work considered as lower grade jobs (e.g. toilet cleaning and line sweeping to lower caste people). The identity struggle takes place when workers who claim to be from a high caste influence managers' decisions to assign these lower grade tasks to workers of lower caste. On the other hand, lower caste workers resist these tasks, since engaging in them brings inferiority to the self.

What can be seen here is that through communication and routine practices, managers strategically try to shift the meanings associated with work and job positions and try to legitimize them as just (Ford and Ford, 1995). Managers try to convince and persuade workers legitimately by promoting stories, justifications, etc. By doing so managers try to establish a normative acceptance of the practice, its rightness, and recognize that it is reasonable, just, desirable, and appropriate (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). However, in order to avoid male workers' resistance, they are given inducements (e.g. fewer hours of work, reduce the time of work, being assigned to fields that do not require precision in plucking). Through the intervention of NGOs, awareness is created to narrow the gender difference in the plantation society; the job title 'wasakutti' is changed to 'line sweepers' and lower cast workers who perform lower grade jobs are placed on a higher salary scale. In this way, managers deal with dilemmas of work and persuade workers to talk or act in different ways, which in turn bring new realities over time. This is how the societies driven by industrial capitalist political economy function. Employers treat employees as an exploitable resource on the one hand and on the other try to maintain relationships with them as human beings so that their attachment to the organization can be retained (Watson, 2008).

Here I discuss how managers and workers, both harmoniously or in a contested manner, construct and confirm each other's self-identities (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Storey et al., 2005). This discussion provides convincing grounds to understand how managers use language and work practices in a paradoxical way to bring inclusion and exclusion

from work to change the workers' behaviour in the organization. In this situation, we can see how managers become co-authors or co-constructors or co-producers of organizational discourses (Cunliffe, 2001; Shotter, 1993b).

Although the process of collective sense-making about the work and also self-identity of workers largely depends on the social and material context of action in which meanings are collectively negotiated and knowledge claims are validated (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004), what is evident from the data is that this does not take place spontaneously or as a smooth process as suggested by researchers who promote realist notion.

The data from the previous chapters reveal that the process becomes problematic, as new discursive resources that are brought up by powerful managers become principal discursive resources on which workers draw to accomplish their 'identity work' (Kornberger and Brown, 2007). It is through speech acts and actions, knowledge claims are made and power relationships are sustained or challenged. When the traditional and historical forms of masculinity are challenged, the workers collectively reconstruct their job in a way that will minimize its feminine associations and engage in compensatory gendered practices. This will assist workers in restoring their dominant position. In doing so, they negotiate their masculine CI (e.g. workers engage in their new task carelessly; claiming that they are sick or do not know how to pluck tea leaves, they argue with the managers). This shows the explicit manifestation of resistance and power and how the negotiation of meanings takes place. This gives evidence that in organizations, managers' strategies and actions can shape the existing knowledge, but employees also have a decisive influence on the extent to which current practices are maintained or new practices established and legitimized, a fact overlooked by post-structuralists and symbolic interactionists.

Thus, what is evident in this process is that management is not omnipotent in defining employees' self-identity, but workers become part of this ambivalent process of reality construction (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Prasad and Prasad, 2000). This is the basis to argue that managers and workers collectively act and negotiate a sense of who they/others are through contested and responsive conversations and practices. This discussion can be considered as an extension to contemporary organizational research that ignores individual/ collective agency but suggests that self is controlled by power associated with organizational rules, regulations and structures in organizations.

Another example is the understanding of ethnic differences. It is possible to claim that one's 'belongingness' is an essential element of understanding CI in terms of ethnicity (Anthias, 2002). However, in this research, it is argued that a worker identifies her/himself in terms of belongingness to his/her own community at times but also differentiates 'self' from the community as 'others', at other times (Kondo, 1986). In doing so, the individual establishes her/his relationship with the community as an ongoing process of inward-outward reflexivity.

This is evident especially in workers' social interactions, where they reject their community bond by distancing themselves from their own community. This negative sense of feeling toward the community is justified on the ground of some negative experiences of the constraints imposed by the community (e.g. jealous, wait until we fall, not helping, etc, as revealed in Chapter 9). Overall, a strong sense of difference of 'we' from 'them' can be seen in relation to plantation Tamils from Sinhalese, from Sri Lankan/ Jaffna Tamils and also from and among their own Tamil community.

Insights can be drawn from the above discussion to suggest that workers, by conforming to certain behavioural practices and conversations, legitimize their CI as 'plantation/estate Tamils'. This can be seen as an outward process of reflexivity where one establishes one's relationships with the community on the basis of sameness, which results in formation of CI. On the other hand, by experiencing the difficulties of living with the rest of the community and by focusing on self-reflexivity towards the self, they resist certain common behavioural patterns of society. In other words, by having their own patterns of behaviour, they reflexively construct their own self-identity and detach 'self' from the 'other'.

From the data presented in the previous chapters, we also discussed how religious and cultural ideologies impose gender, caste and ethnic restrictions on individuals as social constructions (e.g. how a female who gave birth to a illegitimate child became unacceptable, how elders imposed certain restrictions in keeping a female child in the house on her puberty, in Chapter 7; why a female had to forgo her relationship with her mother for marrying a low caste male, why a male was let down on his wedding ceremony and why a couple had to elope, in Chapter 8).

All these resulted in identity politics between different voices. Thus, self-identity is an outcome of power relations, a complex and dynamic process of subjugation and

resistance that is contingent and perpetually shifting. Thus, control or imposition of power over the other is never complete or absolute (Kornberger and Brown, 2007).

As a summary, it is evident that the dialectic process where individuals/ groups strive to shape their daily practices in a routine or unorganized manner is often underemphasised in organizational research. Here I have provided convincing evidences to suggest that individuals/groups through their self/collective agency enact different practices to bring conflicting identities with power inequalities. Exploring research phenomena in this manner and bringing them into our empirical knowledge is important as this is a perspective that is often overlooked or underemphasized in organizational literature in identity scholarship.

Also these findings differ from current theoretical ways of seeing and discussing gender, caste, ethnicity or self-identity as independent constructs resulting from outside forces. From post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives, the individual's/ group's struggle and resistance for self-identity or CI maintenance or change is under emphasised, as the prominence is placed on relatively powerful discourses that exist independent of the individual/group. These discussions lack insights as to how social structures come into existence and how these structures derive power. In this research, by taking individual and collective agency and the social construction of reality into account, it is suggested that workers maintain secure stable self-identities or CI in terms of gender, caste, ethnic and class differences, yet they are pluralistic, fragmented, contradictory and often changing. It is constructed not in a smooth process, but through an ongoing struggle (Thomas and Linstead, 2002). Thus, self-identity is subjective and context-specific. Self-identity is also the product of performances in specific situations. When workers experience difficulties within their own community, they detach themselves from the common bond and see 'self' as 'different' from 'others'. Thus, what can be suggested is that performances involve the 'doing' and 'undoing' of identity work, so that sameness and difference is established (Pullen and Simpson, 2009). This is referred to as 'identity politics' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

The above discussion also provides insights in understanding how social structures derive power from individuals' conformity to continuous social practices and conversations, how do they change, how one discourse gets privileged over another and how power becomes subjective constructions of individual and collective agency and so on, which are important in understanding the complexities associated with self-identity.

10.5. Public and Private Life are Intertwined, bringing Gender, Caste, Ethnic and Class Contradictions into Self-identity

Organizational research on identity scholarship within a Western context often leave us with a gap of knowledge as they ignore the complexities associated with work-life interactions and their impact on self-identity. Most organizational researchers discuss the manager's identity, leader's identity, organizational change and impact of the same on worker's/ manager's identity and so on but often do not address the complex issues relating to self-identity struggle or conflicts that individuals often come across as they interact with public and private spaces. Studies threading both macro-micro interactions into single analysis and incorporating private and public spaces into organizational research in understanding how workers create their everyday knowledge realities including their self-identity are few. Here I try to fill the above gap in knowledge by arguing that there is more to express that will enrich our understanding about the subject matter if we explore the ways in which self-identity is constructed and maintained as an ongoing process in a context where individuals cannot be separated from their private and public lives. They are the two sides of the same coin; thus, self-identity cannot be understood objectively by isolating the self from the rest of society. Self-identity comes into existence as we interact with society and it is dispersed everywhere. It is evident that, for the majority of people, their occupational identification is just one part of their life and their notion of self. Therefore, the holistic nature of self-identity can be explored by fully appreciating the dialectical interplay between public and private identities (Collinson, 2003; Murray, 1993; Watson, 2008).

By rejecting the understanding of macro and micro discourses and also public and private spaces that exist independently of each other, the above discussion provides insights to suggest that macro and micro discourses intermesh with individuals' activities and conversation within the workplaces and on the domestic front. Out of these discursive practices, individuals construct and negotiate their social world, including self-identity.

Insights can be drawn from the data to see how daily interactions that manifest gender superiority and inferiority in the organization setting influence or extend their meanings to establish and strengthen gender differences in the private space and vice versa in number of ways (e.g. women working in the field and factory are seen as those who

engage in easy work and therefore, they should look after the household work too, whereas men working in the field and factory are hard workers and therefore, the home becomes their place of leisure, as revealed in Chapter 7). On the other hand patriarchal gender ideological practices in the private space also extend their meanings to organizational practices (e.g. when taking managerial decisions in promoting only male workers, payment of a woman's wages to her spouse or father, as revealed in Chapter 7). Various religious ritualistic practices also bring shared meanings to gender differences, discipline, control and moral obligations to each member of the organization (e.g. women offering pujas to invoke blessings and men offering sacrifices to deities for blessings for those who work in the factory and to punish wrong doers as shown in Chapter 7). These practices in turn provide understanding of what it means to be a 'female' or a 'male' and how each should behave in public and private space.

Data findings in this research also reveal that micro interactions that bring caste differences into self-identity in the private space extend their meanings to public space. This results in establishing the same pattern of behaviour in organizational interactions and group formation (e.g. when assigning jobs, when the Kangany supervises field workers, when females form groups for lunch break, as shown in Chapter 8).

In the same manner, the study provided evidence to suggest that ethnic and class differences in terms of being a 'Tamil' and being a 'Sinhalese' on the plantation articulated in the organizational context, give meanings to establish ethnic and class differences in the wider society (e.g. Sinhalese try to raise their living standards whereas Tamils stay the same, intervention of party politics in trade union activities that overlook the wellbeing of the workers, workers' expectations that their children should not become plantation workers but go for outside work, as discussed in Chapter 9).

Insights can be drawn from the data to suggest that both private and public spaces are intertwined with each other through common discursive practices. They interact with each other and influence each other to form consistent behavioural patterns within and across private and public spaces. Within this context, it is evident that gender, caste, ethnic and class differences associated with self-identity is produced both in public and private discursive practices and negotiated in social interactions by both workers and managers. Thus, individuals' experiences of 'sameness' and 'differences' are interactional accomplishments between managers and workers and among workers themselves, rather than cognitive. Over time, they become historical, religious, socio-

cultural, political and organizational macro discourses. These macro discourses bring shared understanding to establish gender, caste, ethnic, class and community differences and legitimize them as taken-for-granted across public and private spaces.

This discussion provides evidence of how certain discursive practices are privileged over others in the public space and how they in turn shape CI among the workers in the private space and vice versa as mostly socially constructed experiential outcomes (Taylor and Robichaud, 2004). Thereby, certain behavioural patterns associated with practices are downgraded and others are upheld, a fact already established in the previous themes. Thus, smooth operation of the public and private life is established and maintained (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This is the basis to suggest that the social positions and relative values of different groups and individuals within public and private spaces are carved out and legitimized by repeated daily practices and ways of conversation, rather than as an individual cognitive process. All these practices and ways of talk have their origin in people's interactions and relationships. Thus, jointly constructed meanings are outcomes of relational responsiveness (De Gialdino, 2006).

As a summary, here I provide evidence to suggest that work-family are not independent of each other, but they interact and are interdependent on each other to bring harmony and also tension into self-identity. Although discourse based studies in organizational research often consider macro-micro discourses as two independent variables that situate individuals in different positions, this research provides critical distinctiveness to organizational research by allowing us to understand how social forms in terms of meaning get embedded in work and in turn how work practices and conversations extend their meanings to society more widely (Halford and Strangleman, 2009).

10.6. Symbolic Meanings

Although the significance of images, representations (physical, symbolic, verbal and behavioural) and symbolic meanings associated with artifacts and their impact on self-identity has captured attention in organizational research, the subject matter is debated from different perspectives. According to post-structuralists, these existing structures and meanings get embedded through discursive practices and construct myriad self-identities. On the other hand, symbolic interactionists view that meanings embedded in cultural symbols, roles, artifacts give stable meaning to self-identity. Both these perspectives leave us with a number of questions: how do outside forces such as images,

representations and artifacts get power to control individuals, what is the agency of the individual who interacts with these, how do meanings get embedded into these as real and so on. In this research, by taking a social constructionist view, I argue that symbolic meanings manifested in a particular culture, images, representations, space or material aspects including the body acquire their symbolic meaning through individuals' continuous interaction with daily practices.

The data findings in Chapter 7, provided evidence to see how images and representations become imbued with meaning and are taken as part of one's self-identity (e.g. how men working in the factory become superior to men working in the field as they work with machines; how women working in the factory become inferior to males working with the machinery; how spaces in the house become gendered).

Also, an integral link can be assumed between one's appearance and self-identity, whereby material things become socially constructed manifestations of self-identity (e.g. clothes, pottu, ring, necklace, long trousers, etc.). Thus, the body becomes a cultural representation constructed through continuous discursive practice (Budgeon, 2003). Data also provide insights into how symbolic meanings get attached to different places (e.g. factory and field, kitchen, pavements by the roadside and in front of the line) and also how meanings attached to spaces change (e.g. bathing place to haunted place). From the data in Chapter 8, it is evident that the symbolic meaning associated with food (eating beef is a sin, consuming alcohol, God lifting people eat vegetables only, sacrificing meat to fierce Gods, offering pujawa with fruits to Gods who bless) bring superiority and inferiority to self-identity. What is evident is that all these material aspects get their symbolic meanings through communication and daily practice. Thus, meanings and their associated power are not embedded in already constructed phenomena. As long as workers take these images, artifacts and representations as taken-for-granted, they will be seen as objectified structures with power to control not only individuals but the masses. They acquire their power through continuous practices.

Also, the way of talking, in distinguishing managers as 'those whom the workers can never reach' is not a cognitive outcome but based on how workers attach symbolic meanings to what they experience in terms of living standards, education, wealth, dress, language use (e.g. English speaking managers vs not English speaking worker) etc. Regarding each other in this way brings fixed meaning to what it means to be 'a

manager’, ‘a Hindu’ or ‘a worker’ on the plantation. This is likely to have an impact on how workers come to understand and differentiate themselves from ‘others’.

The above discussion provides convincing ground to show how continuous social practices and ways of communication become significant in constructing meanings that get embedded in society as objective realities over time (e.g. culture, meanings associated with food, clothing, ornaments individuals wear, etc.). As these discursive practices become accepted as shared understandings, they become part of taken-for-granted realities, making people believe and behave in particular ways. Over time these practices acquire and symbolize power so that individuals, by detaching themselves from what they constructed, try to objectify these as given realities. These in turn bring bodily differences, ethnic and caste differences into self-identity construction. Those who conform to these discursive practices are privileged and considered as ‘belonging to one’s group or community’, while those who do not conform or act differently are excluded as ‘other’ (Beech, 2008; Clifford, 1997). As a result, these symbolic meanings become political, because individuals, through their bodily manifestations, confirm the accepted ways of behaviour. Here, subjectivities associated with realities are acknowledged as I discuss the process of how individuals with self-agency/collective agency negotiate and renegotiate meanings through discursive practices.

10.7. Research Conclusion

The main research issue was to analyse theoretical insights into how workers practise a variety of ways of life discursively, in constructing, maintaining and changing their self-identities as they interact with public and private spaces in up-country tea plantations in Sri Lanka.

Rather than making a commitment towards discovering one objective truth of the social world of constructing self-identity, this study provides understanding the interplay of macro historical, socio-cultural, and political discourses in the formation of workers’ stable self-identity and then how their myriad micro interactions result in formation of multiple self-identities. Supporting the data findings from the previous chapters, here I discuss competing claims that determine the construction, continuation and contested nature of self-identity of workers, with special reference to up-country tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka.

In this research, I take the stance that self-identity is how we identify who we are in relation to others in our daily interactions, which is manifested in our daily practices and conversations. In this research, a combination of discourse approach and ethnography are deployed as the research methodology. This study reveals that our knowledge of the world and reality construction is a process in which we develop, maintain and change over time as we establish relationships.

According to the essentialist view, personal/individual self-identity is by no means treated as a social matter. The data in this research provides evidence that the concept of self-identity is not only about an individual's 'internal thought process', but an 'external state' of being. Thus, our knowledge of the social world including the understanding of our self-identity is embedded not as an individual internal 'mind process' but within interpretive or communal traditions, as proposed by social constructionists. Thus, this is an outward and inward process of identity work. The individual, by linking her/himself with others, work and so on, defines the self and gives meaning to her/his self-identity. Evidence is provided to suggest that adhering to daily practices and conversation within a particular context gives significant meaning to self-identity of workers on the plantation. These daily practices and ways of talk or vocabulary seem to spring from and among people, and become forms of description and explanation as to how to behave, and what one's position in society, including one's understanding of self-identity. In other words, daily practices and language gain their meaning through their use. As long as these interactions are continued and activities are practised, they are accepted and become part of common sense. Over time, these discursive practices give meanings to community or organizational practices. In other words, they become objective realities and taken-for-granted. Once they become taken-for-granted, they begin to set meanings and rules of work, and establish relationships and self-identity differences in terms of gender, caste, class, ethnicity, etc, among individuals. In this way, stable self-identities in terms of gender, caste, class and ethnicity are legitimized in a relational way.

This study reveals that relatively sophisticated daily practices and ways of conversation that emerged historically are significant in formation of a society stratified by gender, caste, class and ethnicity, each sharing their communal practices and taken-for-granted CI. These multiple identities are transmitted from one generation to another through shared daily practices and continuous linguistic practices. In other words, through

collective practices, shared understanding is sought to see things as common understanding which becomes the basis for emergence of CI into self-identity. On the other hand, individuals and groups begin to interpret the differences when consistent and collective discursive practices cannot be experienced with the rest of the members in the society. This becomes the basis for individuals to come into talk as 'I', 'we' and 'they'/'other'. However, they are contextual, multiple, fragmented, emerging and constantly changing.

By eliminating the unitary notion of self-identity as proposed by essentialism, in this research, we draw insights to suggest that gender, caste, ethnicity and class differences are not stable elements of self-identity. They are interactional accomplishments where self-identity is contextually embedded and its meaning unfolds through different daily performances and conversations. This happens when individuals and groups experience that what had worked well in particular situations in answering particular problems in society does not work well all the time. As they experience the difference, they enact these daily practices and linguistic practices differently. Either through self-agency or through collective agency, lifelong practices are subject to change. Old discursive practices are replaced with new discursive practices. As these become taken-for-granted, they establish new realities and meanings to self-identity. This is the basis for me to argue that stable self-identity established over the years is not in autonomy. When individuals or groups enact these daily practices and ways of conversations differently, they establish, promote or try to relinquish their distinctiveness in lifestyle, possession of various qualities, privileges and also their self-identity to suit the situation. Thus, the construction of workers' self-identity and the construction of hierarchical social position and order are produced, reproduced and change in the daily experiences of workers.

Rather than indicative of the physical or psychological properties of fixed identity positions, the data in this research suggest that self-identity is contested and managed through collaborative efforts. It is by and largely an outcome of negotiation of power relations between workers, managers, and the wider society in which workers are integrated. To analyse the subtle power relationships within which people construct their self-identity, we need to be sensitive to the power effect of the parties involved in discursive practices.

Within organizations, dominant groups try to produce shared meanings and understanding by way of new conversation and daily practices. In this research, there is evidence of managerial effort to reduce conformity to the historically-constituted macro discourses and micro interaction of the same, in order to overcome the labour shortage. By doing so managers try to increase the likelihood of the acceptance of the legitimacy of a particular set of meanings, so that both managers' and workers' collective responses can be facilitated.

What can be seen is that emergence of new practices is not a smooth process of transformation. In other words, changing these discursive practices is not an easy process as they are historically situated and give meaning to the jobs and to those who are performing the jobs. The identity struggle begins with the process of managers' and workers' interactions and work enactment. Workers show their resistance in multiple ways, through individual and collective agency. This resistance contains elements of consent and consent also incorporates aspects of resistance. Over time, new discourses are brought into being through the enforcement of the rules of the work by the powerful management, and the enactment of the work by the powerless workers, but with a certain amount of resistance. What can be seen is that some are happy with their self-identity and some are not. At times, it gives a sense of superiority and at other times it brings a sense of inferiority. It is complex, chaotic and messy as individuals engage in identity struggle as they try to protect their sense of 'who I am' in relation to 'others'.

By taking a discourse approach, the study illustrates the ways in which macro and micro discourses play through everyday interactions, constructing, maintaining and changing self-identity as an ongoing process. Micro interactions within the public and private spaces largely confirm the macro social-cultural, political and economic discourses. These are historically constructed and became objective realities through continuous enactment. Thus, exploring daily practices, interactions and experiences of both private and public spaces provides understanding of how self-identity is contextually produced and reproduced through discursive practices. Studying macro discourses enables the researcher to understand the ways in which the respondent, at a specific point in time and space, makes sense of and articulates her/his place in society. This also means the recognition of the macro discourse as an interaction and also as a performance that brings past experience to present enactment. This specific acknowledgement arises not out of an internal thought process but as an outcome of one's experience in the past and

enactment of the same in the present and in future. People move in their daily lives from one situation to another. They evaluate and negotiate these situations according to their relevance. They do this from a basis of what they already experience as 'knowledge'. This knowledge, in terms of how they perceive and interpret the social world, is embedded in historical, social and political interactions over a period of time and overtly expressed through macro discourses.

This study also reveals that such discourses are not static or given structures. Macro discourse is not singular or powerful. It emerges and is legitimized by workers interactions. Through continuous practice it becomes taken-for-granted, acquires power to control and confirm future behaviour. While creating a local and intersubjective space, individuals in their micro interactions construct historical, cultural and political experiences that are used selectively to construct, maintain and change their self-identity.

10.8. Contributions of the Research

Despite the array of research in identity scholarship, there has been relatively little prior research within this domain which explores the complex macro and micro historical, socio-cultural and political processes by which individuals interact within private and public spaces, and their significance in forming and shaping their self-identity. When we perpetuate our assumptions of self-identity as an individual mind process rather than an involvement and shared process of many, we severely limit our ability to understand and to develop self-identity both theoretically and empirically. According to Watson (2008; 2009b), duality and complexity can be lost if researchers focus primarily on the 'internal' or 'external' aspects of identity or limit their investigation and analysis only to the organizational context.

Within this context, this research can be considered as a theoretical development of an alternative way of looking at the important subject of self-identity. In this research, it is proposed that historical, social-cultural and political macrocosms are outcomes of individuals' creations. Individuals are not mere actors but they create and interpret the macrocosms they bring into being as objects. As people encounter myriad social-cultural and political interactions they bring subjective meanings as macro discourses including their own self-identities. This becomes an ongoing process. This research builds on the perspective of social constructionism as a foundation that provides

convincing reasonableness to understand subjectivity involved in human nature, practices and self-identity construction, continuation and contestation as an ongoing process.

The studies undertaken in identity scholarship produce a significant body of knowledge to understand gender, caste, class, ethnicity and CI as independent entities of self. In this single study, first, gender, caste, ethnicity, class differences and CI are threaded into our understanding of self-identity. The empirical data provides evidence to discuss how gender, caste, ethnic, class and community differences and CI as binaries. They are constructed, maintained and contested and negotiated through workers' daily practices and ways of communication. What can be suggested within this context is that instabilities of differences, multiplicity and intersectionality of gender, caste, ethnic, class and community bring 'sameness' and 'differences' into one's self-identity.

The attention that self-identity and its related issues have captured in organizational studies and social sciences in recent years shows that it has yet to be explored or exploited by integrating micro and macro level analysis (Brown, 2001). By bringing macro and micro discourses into one context, this study reveals how dominant historical, religious, socio-cultural and political macro discourses form the basis for 'doing' and 'undoing' gender, caste, ethnicity and class in public and private life and how they are being challenged. Insights can be drawn to discuss how individuals recognize and create their own knowledge and understandings of the way they live their daily life along with their organizational lives, and that of others. I also discuss how union and party politics, recruitment, allocation of jobs, supervision, ritualistic practices, group formation, etc, become identity manifestations in organizations. These understandings should be part of the broader theoretical knowledge so that holistic understanding can be developed across disciplines (e.g. sociological studies and organizational studies). By focusing on the processes through which self-identity is constructed, maintained and changed, this research deepens theoretical knowledge, on the one hand, in understanding of the different processes and how they are integrated in creating new self-identities whilst on the other, we come to appreciate the fragile nature of such self-identity claims.

The findings of this research will also have a significant bearing on theoretical frameworks on identity scholarship, which is mostly based on Western conceptualizations. This study reveals that organizations cannot be separated from other

social entities or collectivities but are influenced by and influence religious, socio-cultural, political and behavioural processes. Moreover, although Western researches advance in more or less the same direction, surfacing 'I', 'me', 'we' or 'other' independently in fabricating self-identity, this research suggests that in the Asian developing context, especially with reference to Sri Lankan up-country tea plantations, individuals do not fabricate their self-identities in specific ways as discussed by Western conceptualization. Rather, individuals use the terms 'I', 'me' 'we' and 'other' interchangeably as they construct their own cultural way of language in constructing their self-identity. Therefore, this gives insight to those who study identity work to see how both self-identity and CI are intertwined with macro discourses and micro enactments. Therefore, what can be proposed here is that most current conceptual and empirical studies address self-identity from a Eurocentric perspective, which may not necessarily be applicable in a developing Asian context.

The quality of a research can be evaluated by the implications drawn from the research, as well as how those implications can be applied across contexts (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009). Although this study provides descriptive and explanatory constructions of the findings which are only applicable to the up-country tea plantations in Sri Lankan context, this research carves out an important place for empirical research in contemporary organizational studies. Although we cannot precisely use these socio-cultural and political interpretations in all situations to understand the self-identity of workers in organizations, we can abstract from these daily practices and conversations, ways of envisioning how we might proceed in another context.

While there is a growing body of literature on identity scholarship that explores symbolic meanings associated with the CI of ethnicity within the Sri Lankan context (e.g. Arasaratnam, 1998; Micheal and Bruce, 2005; Roberts, 2004) and gender, caste, ethnicity and class identity specific to the up-country plantation in Sri Lanka (e.g. Alawattage, 2005; Bass, 2004; Kurian, 1982/1998), there is a dearth of research that looks at the construction, continuation and contestation of the plantation workforce self-identities and their impact on plantations in a holistic way. Hitherto, the emphasis was focused on gender, ethnicity, class, labour control social welfare, health and sanitation, social exclusion, poverty and marginalization. The present study adds new insights to the existing body of knowledge in tea plantations in Sri Lanka, by exploring new

theoretical grounds to discuss the impact of historical, socio-political influences on the self-identity formation, issues, and tensions of plantation workers.

Along with the above comes the practical implication of this research for organizations. This research provides evidence to suggest that organizations should not rely on the historical establishment of knowledge. Paying attention to the importance of creation, transmission of knowledge is vital for organizations for survival and also to face competition (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004). This means that individual or group feelings of marginalization, subordination and oppression in organizations or in societies can be changed by changing our social practices and ways of conversation. This requires organizations to do things differently, and the process becomes easier when the change is brought with collective agency of workers to comply with the change. Thus, organizations have a responsibility to uplift workers' self-identity so that the survival and continuity of organizations can be strengthened with the collaborative effort of workers.

In terms of methodology, by adopting discourse analysis this research suggests the subjective nature of discourses in understanding self-identity as an interactional accomplishment. Within this context, how macro and micro discourses can be woven into a single analysis to better account for how macro discourses get established over time acquire their power to become stable structures and social realities are discussed. Also discussed is how they in turn set rules and guidelines for individual and group behaviour. Despite the existence of many contributions, both conceptually and empirically, to identity scholarship, there are relatively few empirical studies in organizational research which specifically address the macro and micro processes of identity construction at a personal level in depth (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). The rigor of the research is established by incorporating macro-micro into the same analysis (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000).

Incorporating a social science ethnography foundation into organizational research methodology can be considered as another contribution of this research, both theoretically and empirically. By examining essentially open, fluid, lived experiences and cultural meanings, this research provides 'thick descriptions' to discuss how particular values, beliefs and ways of interpreting the social world are imbued in discursive practices to realize an objective reality. Through this research, we are able to examine, critique, and question taken-for-granted social, political and ideological

organizational contexts, which positivist researchers often objectify as facts that establish true or false. By ethnography, the researcher gains personal experiences, which are important from a qualitative standpoint. The researcher's personal experiences and what is encountered in the data collection process inevitably have an impact on the data through her/his interpretive process of meaning-making (Dotson-Blake, 2010). As an ethnographic researcher, by interacting with the workers in terms of talking, listening, taking field notes and participatory observations, I brought the voices of the marginalized working class poor to our understanding of the concept of self-identity. In addition to respondents' voices, in a self-reflexive way I contribute my own feelings, doubts, mistakes and success by revealing my personal experiences in the data collection process in this research. This also shows how the social world becomes multiply constructed between the researcher and the respondents.

10.9. Limitations of the Research

Every research project varies depending on the philosophical and methodological stances adopted in designing the research process. Whatever the stance, each has its limitations. Thus, it is important to explicitly address the limitations of the research for the reader to understand where the research is located in comparison with other research carried out within the chosen area.

According to my research stance as a social constructionist, circumstances that people see as realities or taken-for-granted, are created, established and sustained by interactions. The concept of truth favoured by objectivism or positivism or utilizing quantitative techniques within the realm of organizational studies is rejected. This can be considered as a drawback and rejected outright by a researcher who takes a different stance as this research limits itself to the research approaches adopted by social constructivist perspectives. The question is whether positivist approaches or quantitative data analysis techniques are able to explore and aid our understanding of the complexities associated with the social world or the reality construction process. I appreciate the positivist theoretical and methodological contribution to social science and organizational research but believe such explorations are limited in explaining the infinite complex individual interactions and interconnection of social experiences of reality and self-identity construction process. This is what leads me to pursue social constructionism as my research approach.

A study of this nature required longitudinal information. The primary data for this study was collected over a period of three months and can be considered as short. This could have had some limitations in my accessing respondents and experiencing their daily life in the plantation. Further, from my reflexive account of experiencing the plantation as a research site, it is evident that data collection is a lengthy and complex process. The data collection process began to transform over time as I interacted with the workers, managers and rest of the community members on the plantation. In this time-consuming process, certain information or data became inaccessible from my side, or may have been taken-for-granted, forgotten, missed or perhaps dismissed as irrelevant. Researchers always contend with the limitation that even the most detailed data still often can be incomplete and messy (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009). The data transcription and translation is also not without limitations. In qualitative research data analysis, especially when adopting techniques such as discourse analysis can be a time consuming process. The cross-cultural issues in translating data into English have been addressed in Chapter 4.

The inevitable prejudice that can exist between the respondents and the researcher can have a bearing on my data collection and how I interpret data. It is also important to note that the researcher's education, background, status, ethnicity, gender, etc, can impose limitations in the data collection process in the developing country context. There could have been reactivity bias in respondents caused by my presence as a researcher and also my background, education status, ethnicity and gender identity as a female, a fact that was admitted in the Chapter 5. My gender identity gave me privilege in accessing both males and females but caused some restrictions. The power distance in gender, patriarchal ideological influences caused some restrictions in accessing the research site and respondents. Residing in an unknown place, walking and talking to unknown people, depending on a male to accompany me when visiting the site, and accessing respondents during the day time are some of such issues that affected the data collection process. Although these may not be issues for a male researcher, Alawattage (2005) discusses the implication of his gender in accessing female respondents in the plantation.

In this research, maintaining validity and reliability is not possible as it is evident that people constantly create, recreate and change their interpretations of historical, political

and social-cultural circumstances. Although this can be seen as a limitation, this is not an issue in interpretive research as the subjectivity of the data is accepted.

Another point to emphasise is that this research site is idiosyncratic, especially when compared with organizational settings in Western contexts. Also an individual's historical, religious, social, cultural and political interactions with the public and private spaces in a developing Asian context are quite different from those in the Western context. Although the study reveals the complex nature of how historical, social-cultural and political realities are articulated within the organization and how they are intertwined with the private space in workers' daily life, the applicability of the research findings in the Western social and organizational context needs to be further explored.

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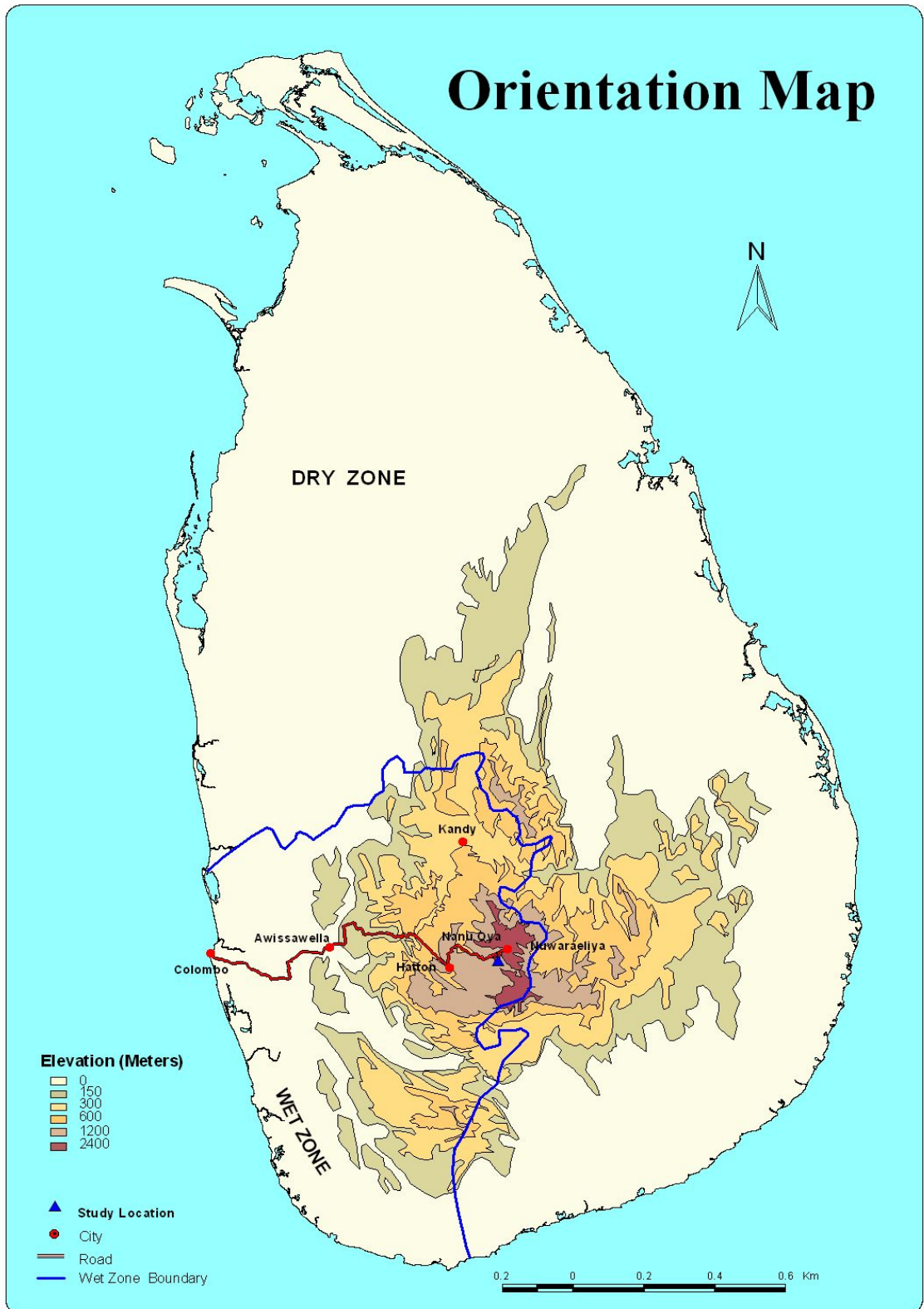
Appendix I

Interview Framework for Tracing Discourses on the Plantation

Aspects to be concerned with	Rationale	Sources/methods
Institutional framework: -Private sector, public sector, and other interested parties.	To understand the background and the present context: different stake holders and their interests.	Secondary data, archival information, interviews: Plantation Ministry officials, managers etc.
Plantation History.	To understand the historical evolution to its present context. To understand the historical, social, cultural, and political macro discourse and how they have changed over time.	Secondary data, archival information.
Routine activities – (a) Of workers in the workplace: factory; field (b) Of managers in the: factory; field	To understand the extent to which their daily practices in work place construct gender, ethnic, caste identity which shape and reshape workers’ self-identity.	Observations. Interviews, discussions with workers, and managers.
Routine activities of workers in their private space.	To understand the extent to which their daily practices in the home front construct gender, ethnic, caste, and community identity which shape and reshape workers’ self-identity.	Observations. Interviews, discussions with workers.
The ways in which ethnicity comes into play in workers’ discursive practices.	To understand how the ethnic identity is enacted, and how it is intertwined with gender and caste identity shape and reshape workers’ self-identity.	Secondary data. Observations. Interviews and discussions with workers, managers, local politicians etc.
How and why workers resist management: Conflict and conflict resolution?	To understand how workers form self-identity as ‘self’ and ‘other’ when there is a conflict of interest between workers and management.	Secondary data. Observations. Interviews, discussions with workers.

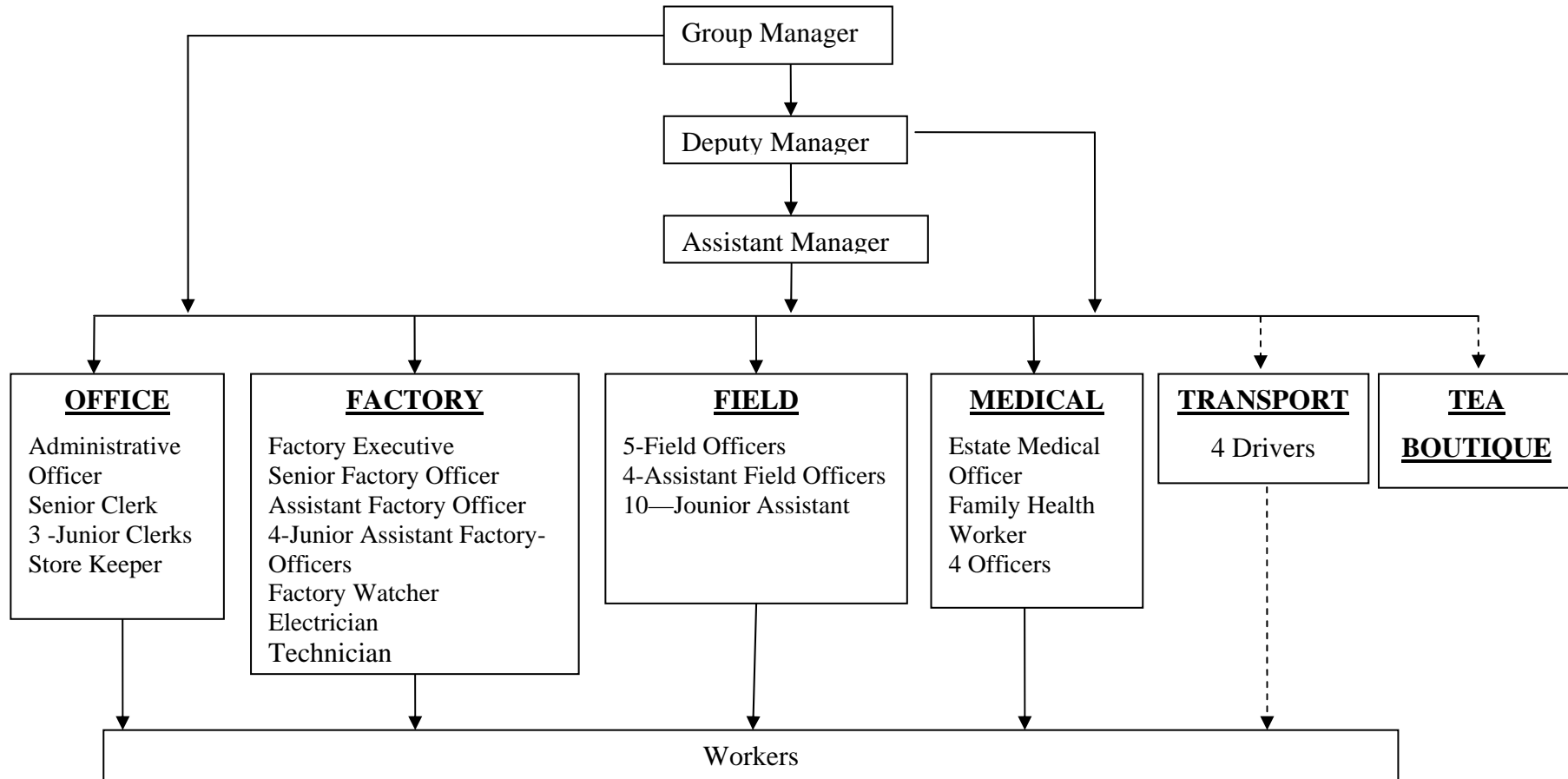
How management resists workers: Conflict and conflict resolution?	To understand how managers form self-identities as ‘self’ and ‘other’ when there is a conflict of interest between management and workers.	Secondary data. Observations, interviews, discussions with managers.
The ways in which workers discursive practices bring socio-cultural, religious values and beliefs.	To understand to what extent the socio-cultural, religious values, beliefs and ideological practices construct gender, caste, ethnic identity etc, which shape and reshape workers’ self-identity.	Secondary data. Observations, interviews, discussions with workers, religious leaders and other members in the community.
The ways in which discursive practices bring politics (national and local).	To understand how workers’ interactions in political activities bring ethnic identity which shape and reshape their self-identity?	Secondary data. Observations. Discussions, interviews with workers, Trade union (TU) officials, local politicians, superintendent, religious leaders etc.
How do workers’ interactions in union matters bring ethnicity into the plantation?	To understand the TU history and its impact. To understand to what extent they are significant in formation and change of ethnic identity which in turn shape and reshape workers’ self-identity.	Secondary data. Observations. Discussions, interviews with Trade union officials, workers, local politicians, superintendent, religious leaders etc.
How do workers construct their gender and caste differences on the plantation?	To understand how workers interactions bring caste and gender identity which shape and reshape their self-identity?	Secondary data. Observations. Discussions, interviews with religious leaders, workers etc.
The impact of education in daily life.	To understand the significance of education in developing skills, knowledge and attitudes of children.	Secondary data. Observations. Discussions, interviews with school principal, religious leaders, workers etc.

Appendix II



Appendix III

Organization Structure of the Plantation



Appendix IV

Table A: Number of Families on the Estate (As at 31st December 2007)

<i>Division code</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Workers families</i>	<i>Staff families</i>	<i>Total</i>
SA	Tamil	169	12	184
	Sinhala	0	02	
	Other	0	01	
LA	Tamil	235	03	243
	Sinhala	03	01	
	Other	01	0	
DA	Tamil	109	03	112
	Sinhala	0	0	
	Other	0	0	
CA	Tamil	221	12	242
	Sinhala	02	05	
	Other	0	01	
EA	Tamil	122	02	131
	Sinhala	0	0	
	Other	07	0	
Total	Tamil	856	32	911
	Sinhala	05	08	
	Other	08	02	

Note: Family is defined as one or both parents with their dependents (children or parents/relations) who share the same living unit. CA –Division selected for study.

**Table B: Ethnic Composition of Total Resident Population on the Estate
(As at 31st December 2007)**

<i>Division code</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Workers population</i>	<i>Staff population</i>	<i>Total</i>
SA	Tamil	656	43	713
	Sinhala	02	09	
	Other	0	03	
LA	Tamil	935	16	973
	Sinhala	16	02	
	Other	04	0	
DA	Tamil	380	14	395
	Sinhala	01	0	
	Other	0	0	
CA	Tamil	835	43	908
	Sinhala	12	14	
	Other	0	04	
EA	Tamil	487	11	543
	Sinhala	0	0	
	Other	45	0	
Total	Tamil	3293	127	3532
	Sinhala	31	25	
	Other	49	07	

Note: Population figures include all family members (resident on the estate, temporary absent for less than 1 year for work, studies or other reasons). CA –Division selected for study.

Table C: Employment Status of Workers on the Estate by Age/Sex/Types of Work (As at 31st December 2007)

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Permanent</i>	<i>Casual</i>
60 and over	Male	0	0
	Female	0	0
24-under 60	Male	359	05
	Female	494	07
16-under 24	Male	15	45
	Female	16	35
14-under 16	Male	0	0
	Female	0	0
Total		884	92

Permanent: workers permanently registered in the labour register.

Casual: workers on the estate on casual basis, may do casual work outside the estate as well.

Table D: Age Composition of Workers in the Selected Division- CA

<i>Age</i>	<i>No. of workers</i>
18-20	08
21-30	63
31-40	66
41-50	76
51-60	29
TOTAL	242

Table E: Health Statistics of the Estate Population

Description	Total for 2006	Total for 2007	2008 (First Quarter)
Resident Population	3505	3532	3551
Live Births	71	62	08
Abortions	-	-	01
Eligible Couple	573		571
Teenage Pregnancies: -Below 18 Years	-	-	-
-18 to 20 Years	03	-	-
Number of Low Birth weights	14	10	03
Line Room Deliveries	02	01	-
Infant Deaths[ID]	01	-	-
Child Deaths[CD]	01	-	-
Maternal Death[MD]	-	-	-
Total Deaths including [ID, CD, MD]	26	22	02

Sources: Extracted from the official records.