

Power of Enumeration and Classification in 'Making up People': A social Analysis of a 'Quantitative Object'

Quantitative
Object

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Abstract

In this paper we weave a social analysis around a 'quantitative object' i.e. *The Report on an Inquiry into the Relation between the Wages and the Cost of Living of Estate Labourers, April-May, 1923*. This is a report written by R. Jones-Bateman, an Assistant Director of Statistics of the government of 'Ceylon', on instructions received from then 'Colonial Secretary' to the Island. Our analysis of this 'quantitative object' is focused towards explicating its role in an organizing process and is inspired by the approaches and concepts of the philosophy of quantification. Through this analysis, we hope to discern the power exerted by the various forms of 'enumerations and classifications' as articulated in the report, on the colonial endeavour of 'making up people'- people whom the report classifies as 'coolies'. Further, we explore the manner in which numbers and categories are presented in the report to portray the 'habits of people' it makes known as 'coolies'. Finally, we argue that the colonial state, through enumerating, tabulating and making public such social phenomenon, sought to control a deviant subpopulation of people – the estate labourers of Indian origin – or the so called 'coolies' of the early twentieth century 'Ceylonese' tea plantations.

Keywords; Archive research; History of quantification; 'Cooly' labour; Colonialism; Sri Lanka.



Why Read Archives? Past of the Present

In the third chapter of her celebrated book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Gayatri Spivak follows a nineteenth century Indian queen through the archives to explore the rite of ‘widow burning’ as prevailed in colonial India. In this work Spivak attempts a ‘reading’ of a handful of archival material - “examples from the collections of ‘Proceedings’- dispatches, letters, consultations moving at the slow pace of horse, foot, ships laboriously rounding the cape, and the quill pens of writers and copyists - surrounding the half-forgotten manoeuvres of the ‘Settlement’ of many states of the Shimla hills in the first two decades of the nineteenth century” (Spivak, 1999: 209-210). This is an attempt to set the stage for Rani of Sirmur, the hill queen and Spivak’s chosen informant in history before her story is actually narrated through the text. Spivak’s reading of archival material in this work, both informed and inspired us to search for and read archival data relating to our own study – Sessional Papers, Administrative Reports, and Dispatches kept at the SLNAs. As proposed by Spivak, here we are attempting a ‘reading’ of “a handful of archival material, bits of ‘the unprocessed historical record ’” (1999: 201). However, Spivak also voices her concern about the criticism against archive reading when she states that “at that stage, the point was to reconcile such a reading with the fact that, within the discipline of history, influential figures like Dominick La Capra and Hyden White were questioning a privileging of the archives” (1999: 202)

Spivak quotes Hyden White’s argument as:

That language... is the instrument of mediation between the consciousness and the world that consciousness inhabits [White writes with some derision]...will not be news to literary theorists, but it has not yet reached the historians buried in the archives hoping, by what they call a “shifting of the facts” or the “manipulation of the data”, to find the form of the reality that will serve as the object of representation in the account that they will write “when all the facts are known” and they have finally “got the story straight.(White,1987 cited in Spivak,1999:202-203).

But develops a powerful counter argument in favour of archive reading where she says “in that a hegemonic nineteenth-century European historiography had designated the archives as a repository of ‘facts’, and I proposed that they should be ‘read’, my position could be consonant with White’s. The records I read showed the soldiers and administrators of the East India Company constructing the objects of representations that becomes a reality of India. This is ‘literature’ in the general sense – the archives selectively preserving the changeover of the episteme – as its condition; with ‘literature’ in the narrower sense-all the genres-as its effect. (Spivak, 1999: 203). Spivak gives greater credit to the work of La Capra stating that “perhaps because he profited from White’s path breaking work and a more benign exposure to Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, Dominick La Capra’s position seems at once more bolder and more tempered. Yet La Capra also cautions against enthusiastic and uncritical ‘archivism’ and states:

...the archive is more than the repository of traces of the past which may be used in its inferential reconstruction. It is a standing for the past that brings the mystified

experience of the thing itself-an experience that is always open to question when one deals with writing or other inscriptions (La Capra, 1985 cited in Spivak, 1999: 204).

Spivak considers her essay to be not guilty of this error. She further argues that “to me literature and the archives seem complicit in that they are both a crosshatching of condensations, traffic in telescoped symbols that can only too easily be read as each other’s repetition-with-a-displacement. The authority of the author is matched by the control of the archon, the official custodian of truth....It is archivization that interests us...” (Spivak, 1999: 205).

Margaret Buss (2001) a feminist researcher who explored women’s lives through archive reading explains the specific problems of reading ‘women’s archives’ as “ ... the problematic nature of archive searching increases when we are dealing with the activities of marginalized people ... our methods will be dictated... by the problems of locating ... the often hidden, poorly documented and incomplete records...” (1). However, it is her second concern or warning that ‘the archive is not a neutral site’ that warrants more serious consideration by feminist researchers adopting this approach. Here Buss reflects on the possibility of researcher’s subject position, biases and desires influencing the construction of female subject in the archives. Finally, she acknowledges the ability she herself as a feminist academic had to distort the female subject she sought to create (Buss, 2001: 2). Such reflections by feminist scholars, specifically the realization that ‘archive is not a neutral site’ informed and guided our efforts at employing archive reading as a method in uncovering historical insights. Our ‘search’ at the Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNAs), the details of which are stated below, while being cautioned by concerns of historians and feminist archivists’ (i.e. White, 1987; Buss, 2001) on one hand, was also inspired by explications of the power of archive reading as a way of gaining historical insights, as made by other theorists (i.e. Spivak, 1999), on the other.

The following discussion on ‘searching archives’ starts with an introduction of the National Archives of Sri Lanka (SLNAs) and its holdings, areas of search, time frame and access. The Sri Lankan National Archives was set up with the primary objective of ensuring official custody and physical safety for the archives of all public offices and to make them available for reference and study. Its main functions include; serving as the country's legal depository, taking care of the administration of the Presidential Archives and providing reference service, taking care of record surveys in public institutions and administering printing presses, printers and publishers, and newspaper ordinances. The holdings of the National Archives include the following:

- public records, consisting of Dutch period records (1640-1796), British period records (1796-1947) and records since the independence (from 1948 onwards);
- legal deposits, consisting of newspapers in Sri Lanka (from 1832 onwards) and publications printed in Sri Lanka (from 1885 onward);
- donated, purchased and collected records, consisting of private manuscripts and books of individuals and institutions, historical manuscripts from temples and private individuals, and the Times collection of paper cuttings and photographs;
- maps of the Portuguese, Dutch and British periods (1505-1947) and maps produced since independence (Surveyor General's maps);

- microfilms and microfiches of Portuguese records (1505-1656), Dutch records (18th century), British records (19th century), temple manuscripts and newspapers;
- governmental publications, consisting of Government Gazettes (from 1802 onwards), Blue Books (1821-1837), Sessional Papers (from 1862 onward), Administration Reports (from 1867 onwards) and Hansards (from 1870 onwards);
- books on Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka history, archival science, record management and conservation;
- audio-visual material, consisting of colour slides of temple paintings, cassettes and tapes of folk music and videos containing speeches of Executive Presidents and cultural subjects (National Archive Website)

From among this wide array of holdings we intended to search for historical material dating from 1830s to 1947 that would enable us to comprehend the origin of female plantation labourers. The original visits to the SLNAs took place during the time period from 1st March 2007 to 1st June 2007. However, we were compelled to make a second and more recent visit to the SLNAs during the period from 1st March to 5th June 2022 to gather some additional material needed to complete this particular paper.

As stated in the National Archive website, generally archival records were open to the public after a period of thirty years from their origin. Classified records were exempt from this rule and access to them was restricted unless written permission was obtained. The documents we intended to search fell within the non-classified category, and therefore were accessible without special permission. Armed with this information the next task was to visit the premises and actually conduct the search.

The 'Search': *for archival memories*

Any visitors to the Sri Lankan National Archives are first and foremost closely interviewed by the security officers who guard the gates of this vast government institution. Once security clearance is obtained, instructions are issued about what they are allowed to take inside the building. Allowable things amount to only a few pieces of blank paper, a pencil (not a pen) and a purse. Everything else, including the national identity card has to be left in the security room, in exchange for a token and a visitors pass. Having successfully gone through this protocol we were finally able to enter through the doors of an old and badly maintained building – the Sri Lankan National Archives. Even though we had drafted a tentative proposal outlining our search, when we first visited the SLNAs we were not aware of the layout of the institute, location of various types of documents and documents that would actually be available for reference. Thus, we were happy to see the name board Public Information Officer (POI) on a door nearby and even happier to find a very friendly and helpful lady inside the room. The POI or *Saroja* as she introduced herself, readily informed us about the various types of documents available for reference which were relevant to our study, the type of service provided, the lay out of the institution, location of documents, access to documents and so on. At the end of this informal discussion which lasted for about one hour we were able to map out a plan on how to effectively search the vast array of historical documents covering a period of over two hundred years in order to gather the data we needed. It was this second or contingency plan which came about as a

result of our informal discussion with *Saroja*, and not the original proposal, that actually helped in conducting the search. Whenever we faced a problem *Saroja* and later even other staff members helped us out, some of them even going to the extent of telephoning to inform us of selected documents been ready for collection. Today, we see these positive 'relationships' formed with staff at SLNA's as being crucial to the success of our efforts at searching archives.

On the second day of the visit, we were directed to the search room' which served as the centre from where all archives' searching work was carried out. The 'Search Room' contained all the indexes and some of the documents available for reference. *Champika*, the research assistant in charge of the 'search room' again proved to be extremely pleasant and helpful. As a qualified and trained staff member she was also very knowledgeable about the art of 'archive searching'. *Champika* deftly explained where the indexes relevant to our search were kept, how to refer them quickly and accurately, how to track down the titles and make records of the specific documents we required, how to place an order so that any documents that were stored in other parts of the building would be brought to the search room for reference, how to flag the sections we needed to copy and how to order copies to be made and so on. We were also told that handwritten documents were not permitted to be scanned copied and were only available for reference. However, what *Champika* didn't tell us was that once we had selected and flagged the documents to be copied, they were liable to be misplaced by the 'peon' who was in charge of taking them to the scan room and that there were unexplained delays taking place in the scan room itself. Also no one ever explained to us why this same 'peon' when requested to bring down some documents from a nearby room, sometimes took two or three hours to do so. All these we learned through experience and found ourselves searching not once but twice and sometimes even three times for the same document which the 'peon' kept on misplacing. However, years of experiences we had gained dealing with lethargic and inefficient office staff at government institutions in Sri Lanka, helped us to view these incidents in perspective and to accomplish our task with patience.

With *Champika's* assistance we were able to identify five major types of documents that were likely to contain the kinds of historical data we were searching for. They were *Correspondence*, *Sessional Papers*, *Administrative Reports*, *Pending Files* and *Kachcheri Reports*. Thus, we scheduled the search work to refer to all these five types of documents systematically during the time available. Firstly, we reviewed *Correspondence* between the Governors of Sri Lanka and the British Monarch on various issues related to *Cooley Labour*; the term used in these documents to refer to migrant workers of South Indian origin who were employed in the colonial tea plantations of Sri Lanka and who form the main focus group of our study. Secondly, we went through *Sessional Papers* presented to the colonial legislation during the British rule relating to various legal enactments governing *Immigrant Labour*. Thirdly, we focused our attention on *Administrative Reports* written by the Commissioners of labour, specifically the sections on Indian Immigrant Labour and from these reports we were able to gather in-depth statistical data about the working and living conditions of estate labourers. The fourth type of documents we searched were called *Pending Files* and these contained letters, mostly handwritten, that laid down decisions taken by the Governors about migrant workers in Sri Lankan Estates. Fifthly we reviewed '*Kachcheri*' Reports where we found records of facilities provided to Immigrant workers such as building *line rooms* (small houses) and crèches.

As described above, archive searching at the SLNAs led us to reflect on the socio-political context within which they had been prepared and preserved through time. All of them were remnants of colonial rule; nearly all were compiled by officers with state authority and had a clear administrative purpose attached to them. For instance, Jones-Bateman, an Assistant Director of Statistics in colonial Ceylon explaining the purpose of preparing a report about the relation between the wages and the cost of living of estate labourers states “on April 17, 1923, I received verbal instructions from the Hon. Colonial Secretary to hold an inquiry into the question of the wages and the cost of living of estate labourers” (Sessional Paper XXXI, 1923: 3). As such these reports reflected the views and ‘only’ the views of nonnative colonial administrators. Jones-Bateman further explains the ‘methods’ used by him to generate data for his report as “acting upon these instructions I send out a circular, to the superintendents of 2,367 estates with a form to be filled in and returned to me...(Sessional Paper XXXI, 1923: 3). He also makes a note of excluding the estates with non-English speaking superintendents from the survey, attributing such exclusions to the superintendents’ inability to fill the returns in English.

Moreover, these reports ‘spoke’ of native people and most notably of immigrant workers of Indian origin merely as ‘quantifiable objects. Information about them were mostly in numbers; numbers of immigrant workers brought to the Island, number of women, men and children among them, numbers who died on the way, number of births and deaths in the estates, mortality rates of mothers and infants, number of houses, crèches, apothecaries and midwives, wage rates, number of strikes and so on. *Indian Cooly Labour Bill of 1817*, *Cooly Mortality Bill of 1862*, *Immigration Commission Report of 1878*, *Indian Immigrant Labour Estimates of 1923* among others contained evidence of such ‘quantification of people’. This strategy of quantification could be read as adopted deliberately for the ease of management and control of estate workers. There was little mention of ‘workers side of the story’ in any of these documents. Thoughts, views and concerns of workers who lived and worked in the early colonial plantations were not printed on these neatly bound up volumes. Preservation of ‘workers archives’ was obviously not the purpose of this state sponsored system of recording. Yet, written beneath the lines of these fated and aged papers a story could be glimpsed which spoke of exploitation and manipulation of a group of marginalized workers, the uncovering of which is the prime objective of this paper. An uncovering which, nevertheless, has to be done with a clear perceptive of what was ‘said’ and ‘not said’ through these documents and most importantly of the historical and political context within which they had been written; because as identified by historians and feminist archivists alike ‘archive is not a neutral site’.

As drawn from the discussion above, our analysis of the ‘chosen quantitative object’ is focused towards explicating its role in an organizing process and is inspired by the approaches and concepts of the philosophy of quantification. The objectives of our analysis as attempted through this paper are firstly, to discern the power exerted by the various forms of ‘enumerations and classifications’ as articulated in the report, on the colonial endeavour of ‘making up people’- people whom the report classifies as ‘coolies’. Secondly, we explore the manner in which numbers and categories are presented in the report to portray the ‘habits of people’ it makes known as ‘coolies’. Thirdly, we argue that the colonial state, through enumerating, tabulating and making public such social phenomenon, sought to control a deviant subpopulation of people – the estate

labourers of Indian origin – or the so called ‘coolies’ of the early twentieth century ‘Ceylonese’ tea plantations.

Choosing the ‘Object’ of Analysis

Reflecting upon our experiences at the SLNAs as discussed above, we see this entire system of preserving historical data as a classic example of ‘classification and its consequences’. However, since such a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, we will limit our discussion to one single ‘object’ chosen from among these sets of historical data – the *Report on an Inquiry into the Relation between the Wages and the Cost of Living of Estate Labourers, April- May 1923* which is categorized as *Sessional Paper XXXI of 1923*.

Enumeration of ‘People and their Habits’: Making up People

Enumeration in some form have been with us always, if only for the government purposes such as taxation and military matters. The enthusiasm for numeric data is reflected by the United States census. The first American census asked four questions of each household. The tenth decennial census posed 13,010 questions on various schedules addressed to people, firms, farms, hospitals, churches and so forth. Before the Napoleonic era most official counting had been kept privy to administrators. After it, a vast amount was printed and published (Hacking, 1990). As Hacking argues:

.....the printing of numbers was a surface effect. Behind it lay new technologies for classifying and enumerating, and new bureaucracies with the authority and continuity to develop the technology. ...Categories had to be invented into which people could conveniently fall in order to be counted. The systematic collection of data about people has affected not only the ways in which we conceive of a society..... It has profoundly transformed what we chose to do, who we try to be, and what we think of ourselves (1990:3).

Hacking (1990:3) further clarifies his argument saying ‘Marx read the minutiae of official statistics, the reports from the factory inspectorate and the like. One can ask: who had more effect on class consciousness, Marx or the authors of the official reports which created the classifications into which people came to recognize themselves?’ Hacking cites these as examples of questions about what he calls ‘*making up people*’. Referring to the role of the avalanche of printed numbers at the start of the nineteenth century, Hacking remarks ‘statistical laws that look like brute, irreducible facts were first found in human affairs, but they could be noticed only after social phenomenon had been enumerated, tabulated and made public (1990:3). And behind this avalanche lies the notion that one can improve - control- a deviant subpopulation by enumeration and classification.

We apply Hacking’s argument to a scenario which lies outside the gaze of Western philosophers and philosophies: to a statistical survey involving labourers of Indian origin (classified as ‘coolies’) who worked in the plantations of Ceylon from the colonial period onwards. Hacking had probably never heard of these *people* nor of this South Asian county, which nevertheless provides a vivid backdrop for applying his argument- about the power of

enumeration and classification in *'making up people'* - away from its ethnocentric origin. Before moving on to our analysis however, we will introduce these people through a 'social' review of literature compiled by numerous writers over the years. Later on in this paper, we will again draw upon some of this literature to discern how the 'quantitative object' under study 'makes up these people and their habits' through 'enumeration and classification'.

The Origin: Why and how these 'People' were brought to 'Ceylon'

“At the time British colonial rule took roots in 'Ceylon', industrial capitalism was spreading its wings across the countries of Western Europe, creating a demand for primary and cheap consumption products – primary goods serving as inputs for the growing industries and the consumption goods meeting the demands of the growing working class - in these countries. Colonies were seen as a cheap source of supply (of these goods) and colonial policy actively promoted enterprises engaged in their production (de Silva, 1982; Perera, 1998; Kurian, 1985, 2000). Plantation production, which from the 1830's onwards dominated the sphere of economic activity of the Island, was introduced in line with these policies of colonial governance. As Jayawardena (2000: 68 -70) argues, “The early 1830s is an important turning point in Sri Lankan economic and political history.with the viability of a plantation economy gaining importance it was imperative to replace outmoded mercantilist policies”. During this period economic expansion called for major reforms in the administration, political institutions and the judiciary of the country. In 1829, a commission of inquiry headed by W. M G. Colebrooke and C.H. Camaron was appointed to look into all aspects of colonial rule in Sri Lanka. Recommendations made by Cameron and Colebrook were innovative and controversial in nature and included the closure of many feudal and mercantilist institutions, abolition of *rajakariya* (compulsory labour), the cinnamon monopoly and so on (Wesumperuma, 1986; Perera, 1998; Jayawardena, 2000). Jayawardena explains the growth of the plantation economy in Sri Lanka as “in the 1830s, the British continued the Dutch practice of promoting a non-industrial type of capitalism in the form of the plantation system. As in many colonial territories, merchant capital found this particular form of economic and social organization the most suitable for exploiting the country's resources and maximizing profits” (2000:72).

However, one of the major concerns of British planters was non availability of a steady supply of labour to service the plantation economy. During the early years of 1830's the Sinhalese Kandyan peasants did not respond to the demand for regular work on estates (Wesumperuma, 1986) as they were involved with their own cultivation practices and piece work in the fields (Kurian, 2000). According to de Silva “...the Sinhalese villager was not willing to work as a hired labourer...Despite the dispossession of a large extent of the lands enjoyed by him the Sinhalese villager was a small peasant proprietor and, therefore, he was somewhat independent minded (1964:16). Wesumperuma further substantiates this view as “Indigenous people did not come forward to work on plantations... they had no need to labour for wage, as they lived within virtually self-sufficient, traditional economic frameworks” (1986:8). The British planters inability to get Sinhalese villages to accept regular wage work in the estates is reflected in P.E. Wodehouse's (planter and one time Assistant Colonial Secretary) statement when he says “you cannot very often depend upon the native labour; they will at certain seasons go to work

upon their rice fields, whatever you may offer them” (Perera, 1998: 66). The underlying reason for this situation is summarized by Jayawardena as:

The reluctance of the Sinhalese to become a part of the resident labour force was due neither to the indolence of the Sinhalese nor to their pride and distaste for plantation work, as is sometime believed, but was connected with their possession of land. There was no large landless proletariat from which the planters could draw their labour supply... (1972:16).

Faced with an acute shortage of labour British planters had to look for alternative sources and the overpopulated regions of the Madras Presidency, South India where landlessness was widespread, and famine occurred frequently (Wenzlhuemer, 2005) offered an ideal solution. The ever-increasing landlessness of the Tamil districts of the Madras Presidency (particularly Tanjavur) is attributed to the “disintegration of the Indian village handicraft industries consequent to the flooding of the Indian market with cheap British manufactured articles” (Wesumparuma, 1986:16). Village artisans could not compete with the British producers, and this resulted in a state of “chronic indebtedness of all ordinary villagers to the land magnates to the city usurers” (Kurian, 2000:3). These regions also suffered from famine during the period which most affected the lowest castes and classes. Wesumperuma (1986:19-20) views the interplay of factors affecting the Madras Presidency at the time as:

...the growth of population, especially the landless agricultural labour castes, the relative decline of agricultural productivity, frequent famines, the downward trend in wages and high food grain prices, contributed to reduce a considerable population in South India to the level of chronic poverty, debt bondage, and even conditions of nearing semi- starvation.

The ever-increasing economic peril and distress contributed to the creation of a pool of extremely destitute persons (Kurian, 2000) who were forced to look elsewhere for a living. The planters sized this opportunity, and *kangany*'s – whose assigned task was to search for and recruit workers – were given advances of money (known as *pensa kassi* or payment in pence) to be paid to the men and women and were sent to these regions. Recruitment was done within villages and among kin groups, and the majority of workers were from the lower caste peasants (Wesumperuma, 1986). Once enlisted these men and women had to cross the Indian ocean and journey a long way inland to reach the ‘Kandyian’ highlands of ‘Ceylon’ where local forestlands were being cleared away to make room for the emerging plantations. This journey was by no means an easy one and was a journey that nearly a quarter of these workers could not complete. This was mainly due to the mode of travel arranged by their colonial employers as pointed out in many pieces of literature, both historical and contemporary. Jayawardena compares the saga of misery associated with the plantation system in 19th – century Sri Lanka to the horrors of slavery. And describes the perils the immigrants had to face during their long journey as “...the immigrants had to walk long distances to the Indian coast and about 150 miles from ‘Ceylon’ ports to the hill country. In the malaria-ridden areas, the sick were left to die on the roadside and many of the survivors who reached the hill succumbed to the unaccustomed cool weather” (1972:17). The plight of immigrants during this journey is further detailed as “... the journey was on foot to the Indian coast, and many perished by the wayside during the long trek to the hill

country from the northern part of Sri Lanka. Even on the estates, the neglect of sick workers became a public scandal, and reference was made to the ‘roads chocked up with the sick, the dying and the dead’” (de Silva, 1965: 240).

In 1869, W.C. Twynam, then Government Agent of Jaffna, describing the plight of ‘coolies’ during the early stages of resettlement says:

....miserable gangs of *coolies* of 1843 and 1845, with one or two women to 50 or 100 men, strangers in a strange land, ill-fed, ill-clothed, eating any garbage they come across (more however from necessity than choice), traveling over jungle paths, sometimes with scarcely a drop of water to be found anywhere near them for miles, and others knee deep the greater part of the way in water, with the country all around a swamp; working on estates just reclaimed from jungles, or on jungles about to be converted into estates (SLNA/CO, 1869:16)

The issues of why immigrants of Indian origin were brought to ‘Ceylon’ to work in British plantations as labourers, the manner in which this feminized labour force made the journey from their homeland to a strange country and their way of life in the estates during the early state of the plantation economy, looked at through a review of different types of literature reveals a story of poverty, starvation, misery, neglect, misuse, exploitation, disease and death of a group of men and women some one and a half centuries ago. These workers, even to this day, make a living by selling their labour to the same capitalist estate set-up to which their lives seem to be tied down by an undying bondage. It is against this review of sociological literature that we analyze our chosen ‘object’ - the ‘statistical’ report of Jones-Bateman where he attempts to make this same ‘category’ of people-the so-called *coolies* of the British Empire- appear in a rather different light. Finally, we argue that such ‘making up of people’ through official reporting of enumerations, classifications and tabulations, had been employed by the colonial state for keeping a deviant subpopulation of people under rigid state control, thereby causing the continuous sufferings of a group of ‘real people’- immigrant workers of Indian origin – who even today are struggling to make a living in Sri Lankan tea estates under inconceivably harsh conditions. In this way we attempt to establish the power of ‘enumerations and classifications’ in ‘making up people’ as done by Jones-Bateman in his historical statistical report.

Thus, begins our journey through the sections of this Report, herein after referred to as Sessional Paper XXXI of 1923. Jones-Bateman, explains the context of writing the Report as “on April 17, 1923, I received verbal instructions from the Hon. Colonial Secretary to hold an inquiry into the question of the wages and the cost of living of estate labourers” (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 3). Acting upon this instruction he had send out a circular, to the superintendents of 2,367 estates, with a form to be filled in and returned to him. The above Report compiled by him is based on the data gathered through this survey.

Classifying the Labour Force According to Ethnic Origin; a case of ‘*divide and rule*’?

Writes Jones-Bateman: “....by the early 1920s the estate work force was clearly divided along ethnic lines. At the 1921 Census the estate population comprised 493,944 immigrant Tamils and 54,579 Sinhalese, and many of the latter belonging to the supervising and clerical staff

and would not therefore be included in the labour force these figures do not include non-resident Sinhalese labourers, about the numbers and economic condition of whom it would be almost impossible to obtain information of any value” (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923:3).

In these opening paragraphs of his writing Jones-Bateman uses or proposes a number of interesting ‘categorizations’ of people who live in the same estate community. First, he divides the labor force along ethnic lines: ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Immigrant Tamils’. The category of ‘Sinhalese’ is then again divided into subcategories according to occupations as ‘supervisory’ and ‘clerical’ and ‘nonresident Sinhalese labor force’. Of course, some of these categories were not invented by Bateman; he is merely using them to make his report statistically accurate. What we read in and want to highlight about this ‘categorization’ or division of people into different compartments are the pervasive, far reaching, and horrendous socio – political consequences that these divisions have caused in our countries – the former colonies of the Western world. And as we perceive, these efforts at ‘categorization’ were not innocent statistical endeavors, devoid of any political implications, but were part of a well thought out colonial strategy of ‘divide and rule’ which divided people in the colonies along every possible ethnic, religious and cultural divide and which caused and is still causing unimaginable human suffering for people of these countries.

Of course, Jones-Bateman’s Report is only a very minor example of how categorizing (dividing) people according to ‘race’, with its atrocious and often irreversible socio-political implications, came into being. Our history, and more importantly our present, is full of examples of the consequences of ‘categorizing’ people. Indeed, categorizations of various forms have more or less drafted and determined the historical and socio-political contours of the world we live in today. Categorizing people is only one- but as we perceive the most important and perhaps the most dangerous - form of categorization which can cause the most enduring and widespread implications as we will attempt to illustrate through our analysis of the above Report.

Who is a Cooly?

Through-out his Report Jones-Bateman refers to the plantation workers of Indian origin as ‘coolies’. This is not a unique feature of this particular Report, but is the wefficial, legalized terminology during this period of time as we found out by going through various historical documents kept at the SLNAs, where I came across, *The Indian Cooly Labour Bill (1817) and Cooly Mortality Bill (1862)* to name a few. Thus, we are left with the question, Why *Coolies*? And more importantly who is a Cooly? We view the use of this particular term, to refer to this specific category of workers as a case of ‘identity politics’ which is echoed in many areas of life. For example, in James Davis’ classic study *Who Is Black?* where the question of the one-drop rule in the United States, and the rejection of mixed- race peoples as a legitimate category is an old and cruel story (Source: Anonymous, “Is It Still a Harley”, cited in Hacking, 1990).

As we argue, categorizing these estate laborers of Indian origin as ‘coolies’ is not a historical accident. It is a conscious act, aimed at devaluing and dehumanizing this community of people – who as history relieves were brought to Ceylon by the colonial rulers to work in the plantations. An act carried out deliberately, to marginalize and exploit them as cheap labor for the capitalist enterprise. It is a cruel attempt at robbing them of their dignity as human beings. Indeed, any story about these estate workers is a story of how they were/are exploited, first by the colonial

rulers and then by their neo-colonial successors. And we argue that their inferior ‘identity’ originally created through these historical classification systems, is a major factor that has caused and aided this vicious process of exploitation for over nearly two centuries.

Thus as Bowker and Star (1999:4-7) point out: ‘...few see classification systems as artifacts embodying moral and aesthetic choices that in turn craft people’s identities, aspirations, and dignity. Philosophers and statisticians have produced highly formal discussions of classification theory, but few talk about their use and impact on human life. ...For any individual, group or situation, classification and standards give advantage, or they give suffering. Jobs are made and lost; some regions benefit at the expense of others. How these choices are made is concerned with the morals and ethics of classification’

Calculating the ‘correct’ *Cooly* Wage?

The main purpose of Jones- Bateman’s Report is to establish the relationship between the wages and the cost of living of estate labourers. As such, at the very beginning of his Report Jones- Bateman launches extensive research to ascertain a ‘correct’ figure -a sum of money- that can be considered as the wages paid to a *cooly*. He goes about his search in a precise and meticulous manner. First, he explains the *coolies* pay system as “the usual system of payment on estates is that *coolies* for their ordinary tasks are paid at a fixed rate per day, the rates being of course different for men, women, and children; or they may be paid as for piecework” (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 3). Even though he mentions that rates of pay (of course) differ for men, women and children, he does not attempt to bring out these differences in his Report. Rather he is trying to ascertain a hypothetical wage for a hypothetical ‘adult male *cooly*’.

We quote from the Report where an interesting and insightful description is given about the *coolies* pay and the numerous deductions made from it:

Coolies are usually paid monthly, and an issue of rice is made to them for which they pay by deduction from their pay. A deduction of about 25 cents is also usually made from the pay of each *cooly* for the *dobby*, and although by no means in all estates, a deduction of 10 cents for the barber from the pay of each man. The usual issue of rice is a bushel for a man, three-quarters of a bushel for a woman, and half or three-quarters of a bushel for a child. Rice is almost invariably issued to *coolies* at well below cost price, they being generally charged about Rs.6 per bushel, when the cost to the estate is probably about Rs.7. Thus, if a *cooly*’s gross earnings in a month amount to Rs.15, when he comes to be paid he will have Rs.6 deducted from his pay for his bushel of rice, and perhaps 10 cents for the barber and 25 cents for the *dobby*. He will receive the balance in cash.” (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 4).

However, it seems that the estate superintendents were still not satisfied with this rather elaborate computation of the *coolies* pay which is derived from the information given in their returns. Jones – Bateman echoes their concern in his writing saying, “many estate superintendents wrote to me to urge that the loss of rice born by the estate should be considered as a part of the *cooly*’s wages, which means that in their opinion the wage of the *cooly* in the above instance should be reckoned as being Rs.16” (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923:4). So, according to the

opinion of the superintendents the hypothetical pay of the hypothetical *coolby* should be Rs. 16 rather than Rs. 15.

Jones-Bateman, while agreeing with the superintendents, goes even further in his attempt to arrive at an 'accurate' wage for the *coolies*. According to him "the market price of the bushel of rice the *coolby* in the above instance receives is probably Rs. 7.50 or more, say Rs.7.50, and one should reckon as part of his wages not merely the difference between the price paid by the estate and the price charged to the *coolby*, namely Rs. 1, but the difference between the market price and the price charged to the *coolby*, that is Rs.1.50. I would therefore maintain that the wages of this hypothetical *coolby* should be reckoned as being Rs. 16.50" (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 4). Thus, the *coolies* wage is raised by another (hypothetical) 50 cents.

Thus, Bateman, after an extensive numerical analysis of the '*coolby*' pay system arrives at an 'accurate' (?) figure or sum of money as the wage of a *coolby* which is then published by no less than the government printer himself. These data sets are in turn presented to those arms of the bureaucracy that formulate legislation governing issues such as salaries as wages of labourers. But are these 'statistics' fully reflective of every facet of the 'story of *coolby*' wages, or are they merely what the bureaucracy wants to know and be known?

Jayawardena (2000:99), in a critical sociological analysis of plantation labourers reviews their pay system as "the exploitative features of the system were accepted as an essential part of plantation life....payments were often delayed and deductions were made from wages for advances of rice and for debts (real and imaginary) to the *kangani* (recruiter/foreman)". *Coolies* had little option but to accept whatever payment they were given as complaints about wages were often silenced by blows and personal restraint (de Silva, 1965) or settled with cuff and a kick (Millie, 1878). This obviously, is a side of the same story that is hidden behind the 'figures' of Bateman's Report.

The Report of Jones –Bateman continues, and its next objective is apparently to determine whether the *coolies* should be made to pay a rent for the line rooms in which they reside, given the many facilities they are provided free of charge at present.

Calculating a Rent for *Coolie's* 'Line Rooms'

The Report gives a vivid illustration of the many additional benefits the *coolies* are provided 'free of charge'. As stated in the Report:

...in addition to their pay the *coolies* enjoy many other advantages. They are housed free, and a reasonably high standard of sanitation and comfort is ensured by the provisions of Ordinance Nos. 9 and 10 of 1912..... Education is free, although the provisions of Ordinance No 8 of 1907, which makes it compulsory for estates to provide free education to children, are not universally enforced. On almost all estates, and certainly on all the larger ones, *coolies* receive free medicine and medical attendance. On many estates crèches are provided, with nurses in attendance, for *coolies'* children, and one or two free meals a day are usually given to non-working children' (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 4).

Puvanarajan, a contemporary Sri Lankan researcher expresses her opinion about the reported 'reasonably high standards of sanitation and comfort' of the *coolie* lines as: "above all, the estate population were housed under the most uncongenial living conditions. The housing type provided being 'line rooms', a long row of dwellings subdivided into smaller units of living space of around 3 by 3.75 meters, ill-ventilated, cramped and skirted by drains often containing stagnating water (2002: 28). Free education, free medicine ect. given to *coolies* as Jones - Bateman describes in the Report, if looked at closely enough, can be analyzed in a similar manner. As Puvanarajan argues, Indian Tamils who form the estate labour population of Sri Lanka were drawn from a poverty-stricken region in South India. Socially they belonged to a lower stratum of society in the prevalent caste system. Hence management of the plantations was able to pacify them by providing only the basic amenities of life in respect of health, housing, and education. Consequently, their socio-economic conditions are lowest when compared with other sectors of the country Their health facilities were minimal. Most estates had a maternity ward with limited bed capacity and deliveries handled by a midwife... (2002).

It is in this context that we look at estate superintendents' communications with Jones-Bateman regarding the rental value of *coolie* lines. Cites Bateman, "several estate superintendents expressed the opinion to me that the rental value of the *coolies'* lines, or at any rate the cost of maintaining them, should be reckoned as part of the *coolies'* income, and either or both of these figures was inserted by a number of superintendents in the returns which they send in" (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 4). However, Jones-Bateman does not agree with the superintendents in this regard. In his view "one should only include in it the rental value of such a house as he would occupy if not housed free, plus such extra sum if any, as with his present means, he would willingly pay for the "additional comfort" which he gets in the estate lines" (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 4).

Jones-Bateman further states in his Report that "some estates make a free issue of clothing and cumbles, or blankets, once or twice a year, and the gift of money made to the labour force is quite considerable. Rs. 20 is often given to *coolies* on the occasion of a marriage or a birth..." (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 4).

At this juncture of his Report Bateman is playing the role of Gottingen statistician with a strong positivist bend as identified by Hacking (1990:24):

Strictly speaking, one wants only facts from statisticians; he is not responsible for explaining causes and effect. However, he must often size upon effects in order to show that his fact is statistically important-and moreover his work will be entirely dry, if he does not give it some life and interest by introducing, at suitable points, a mixture of history, cause and effect.

How do '*Coolies*' spend their Money? Classifications and Tabulations

The Commissioner describes the method used by him to obtain information for the above mission as "I have consulted many planters ...and I have had many interviews with *coolies*, caddy keepers, and others to ascertain the articles on which the *coolie* spends his money" (SLNA/AP XXXI, 1923: 5).The typical consumption of food for a month of the 'average adult

male *coolly*' appears to be more or less as shown in the following statement, excluding rice which is usually supplied by the estates:-

Table 01. Correlation Statistics of Information Quality

Item	Quantity	Cost
Salt	1¼ measure	.22
Maldives Fish	1/2 lb	.40
Dry Fish	1 lb	.36
Dhal	1 measure	.28
Green Peas	1 measure	.28
Dry Chillies	¾ lb	.30
Tamarind	1 ¼ lb	.16
Red Onions	1 lb	.12
Coriander	1 1/4 measure	.6
Mustard, Pepper ect.10
	Total Rs.	2.28

Source: SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923:5

Coolies and Jail Diets

In the appendix of the Report the Commissioner compares the monthly food consumption of an average adult male *coolly* with that of the Ceylon jail diet. And the jail diet consists of Bread, Rice Fish, Plantains, Vegetables, Dhall, Jaggery, Coconuts, Limes, Onions, Garlic, Chillies, Maldives Fish, Turmeric, Coriander seed, Pepper, Salt, Mustered and Cummin (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: Appendix). According to this comparison, the Ceylon jail diet appears to be higher in nutritional value than the average diet of coolies as it contains items such as Bread, Fish, Vegetables Plantains, Juggery, Coconuts, Limes ect which do not form part of the *coolly* diet. However, what we see as most significant in this section, is the Commissioners choice of comparison, where he readily compares '*coolies*' to another marginalized category of people- 'people in jail'. And in his view apparently, *coolies* should be contented as long as their salary enables them to maintain the living standards of people in jail.

The Report vibrantly reveals the *coolie's* consumption patterns as:

... meat and fish very rarely figure in their diets, and they consume very little milk... *coolies* very rarely seem to take plantains, they eat jack fruit when they receive it free from the estate, but they rarely if ever seem to buy any. On coconut estates, where a certain number of nuts often forms part of their monthly pay, they may take a few coconuts...some *coolies*, especially near towns, have squired the habit of drinking tea, with which they probably take a little sugar. ...the average *coolly* does consume a lot of

salt which he liberally puts in to his ‘cunjee’ or rice water...’ (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 5).

As further stated in the Commissioners Report, Lusk’s co-efficient used by the Inter-Allied Scientific Food Commission to determine the food requirements of persons of different sexes at different ages is as follows:

Male over 14 :1.00

Female over 14:0 .83

Source: SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923: 6

According to the above scale if the bushel of rice which is the ordinary man’s ration is not more than sufficient, the three quarters of a bushel which is the ordinary woman’s ration is insufficient (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923). Thus, even according to the Report itself, which attempts to paint a somewhat rosy picture of obviously dire conditions, the female workers are given a ration of rice (the price of which is deducted from their wages), that is not sufficient for their sustenance.

To add to this insufficiency, it is reported that *coolies* often sell part of their issue, although they do not generally admit it. And more often than not they do not make a good bargain (SLNA/SP XXXI, 1923). If, according to the Report, the ration of rice a *coolie* household gets is insufficient to maintain an adequate nutritional level, and a part of that insufficient ration is sold to obtain cash for other purposes, clearly the *coolies* do not get the minimum requirement of nutrients.

Sufficient in Every Respect

However, after stating all these ‘quantifications and facts and figures, the Commissioner makes a somewhat contradictory conclusion at the end of his Report, which does not match with some of his own ‘quantified data’. He states that “the sufficiency or insufficiency of this diet from a medical point of view cannot unfortunately be properly determined. The diet contains an abundant quantity of vitamins and minerals, but it may be deficient in proteins, which is essential to keep a man in health. Medical scientists do not appear to be agreed as to the amount required: old authorities put it at 118 grams per day for a man weighting 11 stone. The average *coolie* certainly weighs considerably less than that, and his requirements would therefore be less...there can be very little doubt that the *coolie*’s diet as given above is ‘amply sufficient in every respect’ (SLNA/SPXXXI, 1923: 6 emphases added).

Even though the Report concludes that *coolies* diet is ‘sufficient every respect’ later studies have ascertained the female workers of the plantations to be suffering from chronic malnutrition, and resultant high infant and maternal mortality rates. A recent study of nutrition and health status of Indian Tamil tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka reported that pregnant women actually consumed less food than any other sub-group of femalesand that they suffered high levels of anaemia (Samarasinghe, et al, cited in Leslie, 1991: 3). Their nutritional levels are the lowest being

adjudged by the fact that chronic under nutrition in the estate sector was as high as 60 per cent... (Puvanarajan, 2000).

Concluding Comments

Of course, one may argue that Batsman's Report refers to conditions as far back as 1930's and should not be analysed against the present socio- economic conditions pertaining to the plantations. The conditions are indeed different, but different in the sense that the living conditions of plantation workers in the 1930's was far worse than what it is today. And as such, Bateman's elaborate Report with all its statistical dressings can at best be 'categorized' as a fantasy. Unfortunately, this type of fantasy, which carries the bureaucratic seal and has tremendous policy making power, causes nightmarish consequences for the people it 'makes'.

After going through a tedious effort at enumerating, tabulating and making public of social phenomenon Jones-Bateman in his official capacity as the Assistant director of Statistics of the Colonial Government of Ceylon in 1923 -'makes up people and their habits' or narrates a story about a specific subpopulation of people, the concealed purpose of which - as we argue through our analysis - is to control and manipulate these people into being a submissive, politically inactive, trouble free work force selling their labour power for a minimal wage for the benefit of the colonial/postcolonial capitalist enterprise. The irony of this whole scenario is history tells us that this aim has been successfully achieved as after independence and into the new millennium, the plantation labour force in Sri Lankan continues to be a marginalized and exploited subpopulation or a community. Uncovering a microscopic segment of the historical context that has resulted in this continuous marginalization of a particular community of workers then, is a major contribution of this paper.

Inspired by the work of postcolonial theorists who argue for "the rewriting of history based on the specific locations and histories of struggle of people of colour and post-colonial peoples, and on the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by such peoples" (Mohanty, 1991a: 10) and Sivanandan who accentuates both the significance and the difficulty of rewriting counter hegemonic histories saying "... they must be grounded in and informed by the material politics of everyday life, especially the daily life struggles for survival of poor people - those written out of history" (1990:295) this paper attempts to 'rewrites what has so far been written out of history'.

Perhaps Jones -Bateman's statistical Report of 1923 is a later version of 'Leibniz's arguments in 1700 with an Eastern flavour, (Hacking, 1990:19) where Leibniz presented the case of Prince Frederick of Prussia and showed, after a fascinating set of calculations, that Brandenburg-Prussia had 1,962,000 inhabitants or roughly two million, when even England, rich in people, could claim only five and a half million inhabitants. Leibniz wrote this advice in 1700 and the kingdom of Brandenburg-Prussia was created next year'!

Such is the power of enumeration and classification in 'making up people'.

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