Discussant's comment II: For and against an 'Indian' Sociology: A response to Marilyn Strathern's 'What's in an argument?'

For and Against an 'Indian' Sociology

A Response to Marilyn Strathern's 'What's in an Argument: Reflections on Knowledge Exchanges'

It is a pleasure to respond to Prof. Strathern's observations on the limits and possibilities knowledge-exchange. Her instructive lecture reminds us of two questions that are staked in any meaningful analysis of knowledge flows. The first: what counts as 'knowledge' and what are the processes through which we come to an agreement on its forms and practices? The second: on what terms can knowledge be exchanged (what kind of gift is it), and what relationships (between giver and recipient) does it presume and shape? The materials with which she answers these questions are taken from ethnographies of Melanesia and from debates within US academia. In my response here, I am curious about her questions play out when we take up another context of knowledge-exchange I am more familiar with: South Asian sociology and anthropology. More specifically, I take this journal's own history as a starting point in thinking about the politics and processes of knowledge-exchange. I do this because I find that one of Strathern's insights (the generativity of academic debate as a model for knowledge-exchange) dramatized in an early moment in the history of *Contributions to Indian Sociology* in a way that both complicates and furthers Strathern's argument.

To elaborate, Strathern describes how 'knowledge-transfers' have become ubiquitous in policy discussions, driven by misguided calls to transact a one-way exchange from those who have expertise to those who need it. Against such a seamless and smooth imagination of its movement, Strathern praises habits of knowledge production that encourage disagreements, divergence and controversy. For instances of such habits, Strathern looks to two places: Melanesian anthropology and disciplinary anthropology. The first set of examples show how for certain communities, knowledge is understood not as transferable expertise, but as a set of social relations, as expressions of kinship, as determined by the relational positions of giver and recipient. What is transacted here is not the content of knowledge, but a set of social obligations and positions. Its aim is not to fill 'lacks' and 'gaps', but to open the social world for contestation and criticism. In looking in this way to Melanesian anthropology, Strathern continues a disciplinary tradition to take ethnographies conducted outside the metropole to trouble metropolitan assumptions: here Melanesian practices undercut Euro-American institutional

pretensions of knowing what 'knowledge' means.

At the same time, such self-critical moves run a dangerous risk: they reify so-called peripheries as sites of ethnographic examination, whose practices only become legible as knowledge when completed by metropolitan scholarly authority. What then of anthropologists native to their region, needing no transnational distance to complete the circle of practice and theory? Of course, Strathern understands this problem and offers solutions. First, she acknowledges the presence of First Nations activist and scholarly voices, focusing on their conflict with an UN Working Group on Human Remains. She describes how the painfully well-intentioned Working Group aimed to redress past colonial wrongs by bringing a diverse range of academic voices to the table, only to be met with opposition by academics and activists who did not want to see their position reduced to just another 'point-of-view'. Much like the informants in Melanesian ethnographies, they too emphasized the relationality of knowledge. They objected to the Working Group's desire to extract knowledge from the human remains, arguing instead that as indigenous kin, they were related to the remains in a way the non-native scientists were not. Strathern also begins and ends her lecture with brief references to a conference of the European Society for Oceanists, in which a roundtable of Pacific Island academics urged their colleagues to acknowledge anthropology's obligations to Oceanic people. In fact, the concluding thought of her lecture is to take this invitation seriously, and to care for our discipline by acknowledging its deeper responsibilities and obligations. In these ways, Strathern acknowledges a global distribution of knowledge that is not reducible to metropolitan-periphery distinctions.

However, while she touches on instances of contestation within academia in PNG, her lecture focuses more substantially on Euro-American academia as a model for generating disagreements vital to knowledge practices. The lessons she learns here complement those she finds in Melanesian ethnographies: that knowledge is not about content that can be easily transferred, but rather is constituted by deep disagreements (irreducible to points of view) that refract equally deep differences in social relations. This then is Strathern's powerful intervention: to refuse an imagination of knowledge as something that can be transacted without friction and without an accounting of its relational debts. Rather, she finds knowledge at its liveliest and most vital when it is constituted by lines of divergence and controversies that resist such stabilizations. Flows of knowledge refract the social positions out of which they are grown. Its movements are gift-like in that they trace social relations, while reflecting upon existing obligations and forming

and anticipating new ties.

Here, taking a detour through the history of *CIS*, I want to push one aspect of Strathern's argument here further: that academic debate can be a model practice of knowledge-exchange because it is capable of bearing the weight of dissent and contestation over its basic terms. To specify, Strathern finds in Euro-American scholarly controversies a counterpart to Melanesian practices of knowledge-exchange: both forms model how flows of knowledge are always embedded in social relations and are capable of sustaining deep disagreements over their most basic vocabularies. For Strathern, these two features are precisely what gives knowledge vitality and life. (And it is precisely this life that is sapped by contemporary policy discussions of knowledge-exchange, where knowledge is packaged into neat products that can be transferred without friction.) Here, I am curious about what happens to this generous understanding of academic practices when we further blur the distinction between 'Euro-American' academia and academics that occupy their traditional sites of investigation. Strathern gestures to these fault-lines, but my effort here is to center them, further pushing against metropolitan-periphery distinctions in academic knowledge production.[1] Tracing this fault-line joins her effort to describe the generativity of disagreement in academic controversies. In what follows, tracking the transfer of ownership of *Contributions of Indian Sociology* from European to Indian hands, I describe a controversy about the fundamental terms of anthropological knowledge about India, precisely around the question of the very nature of sociological knowledge. In part, this debate is helps demonstrate Strathern's case for the capacity of academic debate to bear the weight of deep disagreements about its most fundamental concepts. However, I also find that one side with an initially asymmetrical power over the journal *did* seek to monopolize its basic terms and concepts, with the explicit aim of defining Sociology in a way that rendered different visions for the discipline (especially those with different geographic origins) illegitimate. Further, in some of the responses this debate generated, I find Indian sociologists at the time equally preoccupied with the Strathern's contemporary concerns: 'false cosmopolitanisms' that presumed a globally frictionless field of knowledge flows. Taking my cue from this debate, my argument departs from Strathern's in that I find in this controversy across an historically asymmetric geopolitical

[1] In an interview Strathern clarifies that she uses the categories 'Euro-American' and 'Melanesian' as provisional constructs and that she takes the community of Indian academics at the Delhi School of Economics as part of Euro-American academia. (Abraham and Arif 2013)

field, academic debate came to closely resemble what Strathern takes as its antagonist: forms of knowledge-exchange where one side sought to bound the terms of disagreement in a way that blinded itself from its relational debts.

For a Sociology of India

Captured as a prisoner of war in World War II, Marcel Mauss' young student Louis Dumont found himself with the time to realize a growing to learn Sanskrit. After exhausting the books his wife could send him, he asked for permission to use the municipal library, only to be taken by the prison guard for weekly lessons to the Indologist and Nazi-apologist Walther Schubring (Galey 1981). Upon his return home, he trained further under Georges Dumezil, who dissuaded him from a comparative study of dragons, persuading him instead to write his first book on French folklore. He began his sustained ethnographic work in India in 1949, publishing two monographs from these materials by 1957. It was that same year that, along with David Pocock, he published the inaugural issue of *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (henceforth *CIS*). The opening sentence of the journal laid out its central ambition; a proper sociology of India could only be achieved by turning to Indology and a study of classical texts. In other words, Dumont and Pocock were dissatisfied with the approach of most ethnographers of India at the time, who they described as overly-concerned with tribes at the 'peripheries' of Indian civilization (Dumont and Pocock 1957, 8). Instead, they suggested Indology as a corrective that would show India to be a civilizational unity, and the primitive tribes to be outliers out of contact with the central civilizational project.[2] *CIS* was founded to explore this deep unity, not only 'cultural' (such as those they postulated might exist amongst neighboring African tribes), but in civilizational ideas and values (Dumont and Pocock 1957, 10). This recourse to Indology would finally banish "nightmare of perpetual diversity which haunts the naïve observer" (Dumont and Pocock 1957, 13)

CIS' unfolding under Dumont and Pocock's editorship reflected this project. Take for example the reprint of Bougle's Essais in the second volume of the journal (Dumont and Pocock

[2] Of course, such a totalizing approach led them to problems, chief amongst them the diversity of marriage patterns in the region. This required the editors to suggest overlaps between different forms of kinship arrangements: for example, the alliance of cross-cousin marriage in Dravidian kinship was perhaps being fulfilled by patterns of hypergamy in the north.

1958). Rather than gave that place of pre-eminence to G. S. Ghurye or J. H. Hutton (who they alleged were unable to generate a comprehensive theory of a pan-Indian caste system) Dumont and Pocock explicitly chose Bougle for his belief that the proper subject of anthropology should be not for 'that which passes, but that which survives' (Dumont and Pocock 1958, 32). If writers like Ghurye were prone to make comparisons with other geographical regions (for example of caste with race), Bougle dismissed comparison in favor of a study of the fundamental principles of Hindu society. Or take for example their objection to M. N. Srinivas' work on the Coorgs (Dumont and Pocock 1959, 41). While Srinivas found that Coorg practices had much in common with those of other Hindus, he was wary about extrapolating that the present Coorg social order was a microcosm of a broader whole. Dumont and Pocock wanted him to make exactly that more ambitious claim: they argued that similarities of practice between Coorgs and other Hindu groups clearly showed that they were all bound together '*whether they know it or not*' (Dumont and Pocock 1959, 42). In other words, the point of view of the Coorgs was 'subjective', while that of the ethnographer, standing outside and with recourse to history, was 'objective'. Srinivas' problem, the editors went on to claim, reflected the basic methodological problem of Indian sociology: how to write a monograph about a few, while it was evident that its deeper values were shared across India? The answer to this problem could only be to study the Coorgs as part of a Hindu whole, and by comparing different Hindu groups, find elements truly fundamental to a pan-Hindu social system. Further, this system could be further boiled down to a lack of an individual ethos, in direct contrast to their own European social mode.

As Dumont recollected decades later, the first three issues of *CIS* were not well received, so much so that they abandoned their earlier policy to not sign the articles in the spirit of a collective scholarly project (Galey 1981, 19). The objections to *CIS'* project came from a range of sources, and were not at all unified in their complaint.[3] For a first example, in keeping with their expressed openness to criticism, the editors published F. G. Bailey's (then a lecturer in SOAS) strong objections to *CIS* in 1959. Bailey was unequivocal: by instituting the journal, Dumont and Pocock threatened to define sociology out of existence (Bailey 1959, 88). His objects were twofold. First, that the editors' obsession with values rather than behaviors

[3] Take for example when Madan became familiar with Bailey's criticism, he took privately preferred Dumont's position, holding his own different reservations. (Madan 1999, 483)

dangerously narrowed the scope of sociological inquiry. Second, that their postulate that 'India was one' was presented as so self-evident that any evidence to the contrary could only appear as an error. What then, Bailey asked, about the differences between a range of beliefs and practices in the region – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Utilitarianism, Marxism, Socialism and so on? Acerbically, Bailey added that if the editors' ability to find order in chaos would perhaps allow them to find a way to unify even that range of difference (Bailey 1959, 91).

One of Bailey's more specific concerns was the writing out of village social organization in the overwhelming emphasis on caste as one unifying Hindu system. Bailey presented the editors' argument in the following way: there was no such thing as village solidarity because villages were held together by the concentration of force in the dominant caste - therefore the best way to understand the village was through caste-relations. In such a scheme, it was impossible to understand inter-caste relations *within* a village, because the referent could only be outwards, the village as a microcosm of a pan-Indian caste system. Such an approach, Bailey argued, made it impossible to explore the particular economic and political relationships within a village. For example, reducing caste dominance to a pan-Indian caste system erased any analysis of relationships between caste elites and politicians and bureaucrats. Finally, Bailey highlighted an essential conflict between Indology and a comparative sociology: the editors' insistence on Indology — that led to their preoccupation with Indian exceptionality — made cross-cultural work impossible (Bailey 1959, 97).

Dumont and Pocock's response made clear that the point of *CIS* was not meant to be a forum of separate intellectual projects, each with their own theories, but rather a collective articulation of fundamentals (Dumont and Pocock 1960, 82). Explicitly, their hope for CIS was to found the basic vocabulary for Indian sociology. Therefore, despite publishing Dr. Bailey, they found his combative response contrary to the purpose and orientation of *CIS*. Further, they argued, the primacy of caste in India and the relegation of political and economic considerations to a secondary position was not their fancy but based on observable fact. As for the matters of comparison, they countered that their ambitions for comparative work was even greater than Bailey's. In fact, the difference between their approaches was that Bailey sought similarities while they sought radical difference. The search for similarities could only lead to conclusions such as 'Indians or Hindus are men *although* they have some religious ideas' (Dumont and Pocock 1960, 87). Their (the editors) search for comparison went deeper, taking consciousness

itself as a part of social life, thereby getting to a more radical difference than one that could not relegate 'religion' as mere epiphenomena.

Reflecting the divergent objections to *CIS*, A. K. Saran's 1962 critique came from an opposite orientation to Bailey's. His problem with the *CIS* editors was not that they did not acknowledge the uniqueness and wholeness of Indian civilization (as Hindu), but rather that they did not go *far enough* in apprehending this difference. Saran made a claim for a deeper divergence between the East and West, one that could not be transcended even through the kind of sociology espoused by Dumont and Pocock, whom he castigated as heirs to a foreign Enlightenment tradition. For example, Saran rejected what he characterized as the European sociological method: establish three levels: people's self-apprehension, the link between these apprehensions, and the concepts supplied by the anthropologist so that these apprehensions may be systematized (Saran 1962, 54). At this fundamental level, he found Bailey to share Dumont and Pocock's assumptions. In contrast, Saran proposed that in monistic Hindu thought, these levels were not separate, but simultaneous emanations of an 'Ineffable Absolute' (Saran 1962, 56). Following, if the tendency of European sociology was to find relations between 'ideas' and 'things', in the unitary consciousness of Hindu society the inner and outer could not be so dichotomized. For Saran, this methodological flaw was fatal because it went to the heart of Dumont's project: to find in India a choice to reject Western 'individualism.' Saran rejected the conceptualization of the absence of individualism as a *choice*; rather, he understood the idea of choice itself as alien to Hinduism's first principles. Saran's objections thus suggested an ontological difference: Dumont's individual was humanistic, while Hindu worldviews only made sense in terms of a complete submission to the Eternal and Divine. For Saran, Dumont's project then failed at the very moment he placed the concept of individualism (even in its rejection) at the heart of his analysis of Indian society (Saran 1962, 68).

While Saran's call for radical difference opened him up to an understandable critique of cultural solipsism (a point I will return to), T. N. Madan proposed a more modest critique. This critique began a new era in the journal's history, as Madan took over its editorship from Dumont and Pocock. After some back and forth over whether this would constitute a continuation of the old journal, the prior and new editors reach a compromise in which issues of the new journal would be followed by the qualifier - 'New Series.' This first issue began with Dumont and Pocock's 'Farewell.' They complained that few Indian sociologists had offered contributions to

the old series. With a considerable degree of self-reflection, they agreed that what they had understood as the journal's aim – to establish the basic facts and vocabularies of an Indian sociology — had appeared neither basic nor fundamental to many of their colleagues (Dumont and Pocock 1966). In the final issue of the old series, Madan acknowledged this divergence, pointing out that however negative, Saran's had been one of the few responses to *CIS* by an Indian sociologist (Madan 1966, 9). Madan's diagnosis of this absence of Indian sociologists from *CIS* was that they tended to simply 'import' theory from the West. This was a direct result of long years of colonial policies that had deracinated Indian thought. One of these un-self-conscious imports was the positivist tradition. His task as editor then was implicitly laid out: to lead the charge of Indian sociologists producing not only fieldwork materials for European theorization, but to produce the conditions of a theoretically self-conscious Indian sociology.

In the same issue, Dumont responded strongly to something that was only implicit in Madan's measured introduction. It was on the question of how one reconciles the 'external' and 'internal' view-point divide when a scholar examines their 'own' culture. His position on this problem was clear: "sociological understanding is more advanced by the social anthropologist looking to a foreign society than by a sociologist looking at his own" (Dumont 1966, 23). Dumont substantiated this position with the claim that native sociologists could not occupy the distance required to think of social facts as things. Following this trajectory led Dumont to further distress; without the duality between observer and observed, would not sociology degenerate into many 'sociologies', as numerous as there were different civilizations? Dumont disagreed with Madan then that Indian sociologists had been imitative of Western conceptual traditions; he asked with incredulity whether Madan imagined that 'they' should have a sociology of their own, different from Western sociology? Conveniently, Saran's critique provided ample material for Dumont's warning against a flourishing of an infinite 'sociologies.' Rejecting Saran's accusations of an Enlightenment positivism, he returned an accusation of 'cultural solipsism' (Dumont 1966, 26). In this accusation, he went as far as to take Saran's claims as the same as that of Hitler's: both believed that cultures were impenetrable and so distinctly different from one and other that they shared no unifying ground. Saran, he argued then, was a 'neo-Hindu', the end-point of whose sinister and backward tendencies could only result in violence (Dumont 1966, 26-27). Sociology, Dumont stated instead, could by principle, only be of one kind (Dumont 1966, 24). The proper role for (the future) Indian sociologist would

then be to contribute to this tradition, while in the meantime Indian society continue to provide 'datum'. Finally, expressing regret that India remained a sociological backwater, Dumont hoped that at least his early efforts with *CIS* had contributed to providing data, even as it had failed to attract contributions from Indian sociology. In a short conciliatory conclusion to this inaugural volume, Madan left Dumont's critiques of Saran to a side. At the same time, he could not resist responding to Dumont' claim about the inferiority of the perspective of a sociologist looking at their 'own' society, asking synoptically: "What in that case happens to Max Weber?" (Madan 1967, 91).

In the early issues of the new series, a fourth line of critique emerged from J. P. S. Uberoi that diverged from Saran, Bailey and Madan (Uberoi 1968). In their inaugural issue, Dumont and Pocock had pre-emptively guarded against a likely future criticism of their project: how appropriate was a turn to classical Indology at a time of decolonization? Should sociologists not further the cause of social reform in the present, rather than focus on an abstract past? Rejecting this idea, they argued that reformers were often "desperately superficial," and that it would be best to keep any reformist intentions outside the bounds of disciplinary sociology (Dumont and Pocock 1957, 22). Uberoi's critique attacked the failures of this vision in its first line: "The aim and method of science are no doubt uniform throughout the world but the problem of science in relation to society is not" (Uberoi 1968, 119). In a subtle move, Uberoi went on to distinguish 'scientism' from 'science.' Scientism assumed that the aims and methods of science were separable; science understood that the problems of research in a new postcolony were not the same as those in the metropole. It was imperative then that any sociology of knowledge link its aims to those of a recently decolonized society. Most crucially for my argument here, he took to task 'false cosmopolitanisms' that emphasized a widely and uniformly 'shared point-of-view' between the colonizer and colonized. While they appeared anti-colonial, these imaginations of a shared unified science carried on colonial harms by suppressing the need of a sociology conceptually responsive to Indian conditions. That is, the dependence created by a 'scientific internationalism' and global aid institutions cloaked the deepening dependence of Indian scholars on foreign ideas. Uberoi's essay comprehensively dismissed the possibility that there could be a reciprocity of scholarly perspectives across a vast geopolitical divide. Much like Strathern's diagnosis of the UN working group, Uberoi took to task jargon familiar to him at the time: 'international anthropology', 'international exchanges' and 'two-way cross-cultural

research' (Uberoi 1968, 121). Rejecting such an 'international anthropology', Uberoi proposed a national approach.[4]

Uberoi's radical critique was precisely the nightmare of fundamentally divergent sociologies that Dumont and Pocock had feared. At the same time, Uberoi's position was immune to their challenge that such a flourishing of many sociologies would inevitably turn ethnocentric (such as Saran's). In a characteristic maneuver, Uberoi embraced theories and methods that were not 'home-grown' in a strictly ethnic or geographical sense (Uberoi 1974, 136). Uberoi's project for an Indian sociology claimed for itself an independence of mind and spirit that was not dominated by dominant foreign theories. Such an independence could certainly lead to theories and concepts that originated in different geographies: the crucial thing was not the ethnic origins of a theory, but the freedom of will for Indian sociologists to draw upon those that suited the purposes of a sociology of and for India. He did not seek to claim an independent or unique method for Indian sociology, but sought instead a 'swarajist attitude' to theories and methods. Such an independence of intellectual attitude would famously draw him both to Goethe and to structuralist theory as two lifelong interlocutors. It was the same independence of will that deepened the grounds of structuralist thought, as he joined Veena Das in domesticating it through Sanskrit grammar. In fact, this approach of taking up structuralism as simultaneously 'indigenous' and 'international' helped Das and Uberoi formulate a critique of Dumont's famous *Homo Hierarchicus* in 1971. In making a claim for a distinctive Indian theory of social life, Dumont had continued to take caste as a sacred, all-encompassing phenomenon driven by a fundamental division of all Indian life along the axis of purity and impurity. While persuasively faulting him for misreading both ethnographic data and Sanskrit literature (for example relying on European concepts of comparative religion which blinded him to the importance of sin and salvation in caste analysis), Das and Uberoi recommended to him a return to the Sanskrit grammarian Panini as a more convincing model of a structural thought (Das and Uberoi 1971, 43).

[4] While I have emphasized the national stakes as they appeared in the early issues of *CIS*, Uberoi's claim does not predetermine the 'nation-state' as a determinant locus for different conceptual viewpoints. Indeed, in the present, one might argue that the continued marginality of Dalit scholarship in Indian sociology constitutes an ongoing manifestation of a problem that still demands a response.

Towards Conceptual Independence

By no means is this a comprehensive account of the debates around *CIS* in the 1960s.[5] Rather, I have extracted one transitional moment that reveals deep divergences about what a sociology of India was and could become. I revive these debates and questions here to point to a longer history of the critique of seamless 'knowledge-exchanges' that Strathern persuasively enacts in the present. *CIS* proves a generative site to think about knowledge exchange particularly because of its contentious history, as it transitioned from Anglo-French to Indian editorship. Staked in this exchange of ideas and ownership was the fundamental nature of sociological inquiry, as well as the question of who its legitimate producers could be. With some hubris, Dumont and Pocock had sought to set the agenda for 'A Sociology of India,' not only by providing a new forum, but explicitly hoping to prescriptively define its basic 'concepts' and 'facts' (in their words). They had done so at the same time as they attacked the very possibility of an anthropologists 'native' to the region they studied. Under the unmarked guise of a collective, unsigned project, they aimed to define Indian sociology in Indological terms as the only legitimate and possible Sociology. Their disappointment that Indian sociologists did not flock to this project led them to abandon the journal. But even before it transitioned into Indian hands, critiques had flourished. Bailey attacked them for their over-emphasis on Hindu categories and for their insistence on a pan-Indian civilizational project. Saran attacked them from the other side – for not taking Hindu ontological difference seriously enough. One might think of these deep divergences in the sense Strathern proposes: as revealing forms of disagreement in academic debate that should model to policy-makers an understanding of the fissiparous nature of knowledge, thereby warning against fictions of seamless 'knowledge-exchange.'[6]

At the same time, I hope to have developed Strathern's critique further. Uberoi's early and prescient polemic against such exchanges describes them as a ruse for a continued *scholarly* colonialism. Uberoi's critique is a historical precursor to Strathern's present critique of projects such as the UN Working Group on Human Exchanges. It reminds us of the long history of the

[5] See for examples of discussions of this period of the journal: (Madan and Mayer 2018, Thapan 1988, Madan 2011)
[6] Madan's own recounting comes close to this position. In a later essay, he defends Dumont and his work in founding *CIS* against charges of 'methodological exclusivism' (Madan 2011, 224). In a brief analysis of this debate, Peirano understands Madan's role as a necessary, pragmatic orientation that helped make more radical challenges and more equal international dialogue possible (Peirano 1991, 324-325).

problems implicit in institutional, policy and academic visions of an international exchange of ideas. In doing so, it makes explicit what is only implicit in Strathern's talk: that scholarly debates within disciplinary communities are also structured by geopolitical constraints. Even as they productively reveal the contingency of knowledge, they also reproduce its globally asymmetric structures. A sociology of scholarly knowledge then demands an accounting for who seeks to define and bound its basic conceptual vocabularies. Uberoi's deep disagreement with the founding editors of *CIS* opens the possibilities of many sociologies, differentiated not by their ethnic origins, but by the freedom of spirit to domesticate theories and agendas not already predetermined by the concerns of Euro-American academia. Such a borrowing, exemplified in Uberoi's career, quickly unravels the stability of the categories of 'Euro-American' and 'Indian' sociology, *while at the same time* resisting the asymmetric power certain academic communities to monopolize disciplinary vocabularies. Uberoi's prescient critique reminds us then that to care for our discipline demands an investigation of who falls within the bounds of the category of 'our.' And anticipating the charge of theoretical ethnocentrism, his demand for an independence of concepts and thoughts is not a call for an Indian sociology that draws only upon Indian concepts. Rather, it productively problematizes the 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective, insisting on an independence of concepts from regional ownership.

To return to Strathern then, academic controversies can indeed be privileged sites for a multi-dimensional knowledge of the world, where conceptual differences are irreducible to differences in points-of-view, where knowledge is not utilitarian, and where there can often be disagreement on basic terms. The early debates in *CIS* are exemplary of precisely such a disagreement on fundamentals. At the same time, an analysis of academic debate as a model of knowledge exchange also reveal attempts to monopolize its conceptual frames. Strathern implicitly recognizes this danger and urges us to practice academic controversy in a way that does not allow a single apparatus to govern the grounds of comparison. Early debates in the *CIS* teach us that such a vigilance requires a view of the geopolitics of sociological scholarship, such that geopolitical divides do not determine distributions of ethnographers and informants, scholars and practitioners, theory and practice. To learn from Strathern then, if knowledge-exchanges are gift-like processes that form and reflect upon social relations, in the same gesture, they are also potent sites of critique, revealing deep fissures that cannot be unified under a single disciplinary framework. Here, Uberoi's injunction towards a freedom of will and spirit in using and

developing concepts decoupled from ethnic origins but not from geopolitics, continues to remind us of what gives knowledge its vital life and force.

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