



# thinkSOCIOLOGY!

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## Q&A feature: “What are we WRITING now?”

With Prof. Renisa Mawani

*Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire*

**Q: Your latest book was published last year. What is it about?**

My most recent book, *Across Oceans of Law*, retells the well-known voyage of the *Komagata Maru*, a British built and Japanese owned steamship that was chartered by Gurdit Singh in March 1914 and which transported 376 Punjabi migrants from Hong Kong to Vancouver. Moving away from land, sovereignty, and immigration law, the book asks what we can learn by centering the ship and the sea as legal forms and placing histories of Indian migration within maritime worlds.

**What would you want each reader to take away from reading your book?**

The main takeaway, I hope is a methodological one. Throughout the book, I approach oceans not as watery surfaces of the planet but as spaces to *think with*. Drawing on what I term “oceans as method,” I trace historical connections between the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans, and the Mediterranean Sea through the movements of a single ship. Throughout, I use currents as both metaphor and materiality, as a way to join distinct ocean arenas and their respective histories of indigenous dispossession, transatlantic slavery, Chinese/ Indian indentured labour, and so-called free migration.

One of the things that amazed me as I did research for the book is the awareness that

Indians in India and the diaspora expressed of British colonial pursuits in other times and places. Some were familiar with transatlantic slavery while others were attentive to ongoing efforts to deterritorialize Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, and South Africa. Still others were able to draw important connections between these forms of racial and colonial violence, and in ways that remain difficult for us today.

**This is not your first book. Does writing a book get easier with experience?**

I’m not sure that the writing gets easier with time, but over time, I have definitely developed a different relationship with my writing and with myself. Each book has given me a new level of confidence to take risks with ideas and with forms of writing.

**Do you have tips on writing that you could share?**

For the past several years, writing has become an everyday practise. I wake up at the crack of dawn (literally) and spend 2-3 hours writing before I do anything else. This momentum has helped me to develop and refine arguments and with the process of writing.

**What books are you reading now?**

I am reading in three different areas at the moment. The first includes philosophical, historical and literary texts on piracy, which is the focus of my next monograph. The second is on the history of weather at sea. And the

third centers on Marx’s earlier writings on Epicurus, matter, and atoms.

**What book would you recommend that all sociologists read?**

The advice I give my students is to read widely and beyond their respective areas and interests. My own preference is a return to classical thinkers within the canon and beyond: Marx, Engels, Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and others. Whether one is interested in theory or not, these thinkers offer a set of reflections and diagnoses on social life that remain resonant today. One of my best experiences was teaching in Arts One. The breadth and scope of what we were reading - history, literature, and philosophy – was incredible. In most weeks, I was reading not only outside my area, but also outside my comfort zone. I learned so much!

## THOUGHTS FROM THE HEAD

Greetings! We’ve now finished another very full and productive academic year. We have had lots of hiring with three new research stream faculty joining us along with two new lecturers. We got to wish our best to Ralph Matthews who is retiring and becoming an emeritus professor and Wendy Roth who is taking up a position at the University of Pennsylvania. Wish all our faculty, staff, students and alumni a fantastic summer.

- Guy Stecklov (Department Head)

## NEWS & NOTEWORTHY ITEMS



### BIG DATA AND COMPUTATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH CLUSTER

Professor David Tindall & Professor Qiang Fu

Profs. David Tindall & Qiang Fu’s Big Data and Computational Social Science Research Cluster successfully funded for 2019 — December 2018



The Department hosted *Meet the White Helmets: Hear from the Heroes of the Syrian Conflict* event at UBC — April 2019



The Department celebrated the significant amount of publications and book releases our Faculty produced this past year - April 2019



UBC Sociology - 11th year in the Vancouver SunRun - April 2019

## Q&A feature: “What are we STUDYING now?”

With Hazel Hollingdale (PhD student)

*Gender, Risk, and Women’s Experiences in Finance Firms*

**Q: What are you studying now?**

My dissertation looks at gender, risk, and women’s experiences in finance firms. I set out to test what has been called “The Lehman Sisters’ Hypothesis”. It suggests that if more women were employed in the still very male-dominated finance sector, more responsible risks would be taken, and this could potentially result in more stable economic markets.

**What type of data are you using?**

I use both qualitative and quantitative data. I use sex composition data and financial violation data from the population of securities firms in the United States to test whether companies that employ more women within key risk-management roles have fewer violations. Because the cultural context of an organization affects how people behave within them, I felt it was necessary to also interview professionals in the finance sector. I have interviewed over 60 men and women who work in finance to get a better understanding of the cultural context of finance firms.

**What are some of your most important findings so far?**

I have found a good news/bad news story! Through my statistical analysis, I found support for the Lehman Sisters’ Hypothesis - for every percentage increase of women working in professional roles at a firm, their expected number of violations decreases. Although there is a social justice argument to be made for hiring more women into finance firms, empirical evidence like this provides further justification for the call for greater gender equity. However, it became clear from the interviews I conducted that women leave and lose their jobs in finance because they still deal with a lot of gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Maybe not a surprise for anyone that has seen the *Wolf of Wall Street*, but 30 years later, it appears these problems still plague the industry. Hiring more women into finance isn’t a silver bullet solution to creating more stable economic markets. To retain women in these roles, it seems finance firms still have work to do to change the culture.

**“sociologists have incredibly valuable insights and should be drawn in on more often to inform debates and policy issues.”**

**What has been the best part of doing this study?**

Because finance is quite an insular world, the interviews I’ve done and firms I’ve worked with have provided a very rich contextual understanding that allows me to have deeper insights. I moved to the east coast of the US and steeped myself in the finance world of two of the largest economic centres in North America - Boston and New York. I’ve interviewed some really fascinating and amazing people and I have learned a lot. It’s also just really gratifying to put together a research project from scratch and see it come together after so many years of work.

**What have been some of the challenges?**

Data - generating it, wrangling it, grappling with it! It took a lot of perseverance, phone calls, letters, and work to get the interviews and organization participants to trust and work with me. For the quantitative part of my work, I used two different sources of data that I merged and then analyzed. The sex composition data already existed and I had access to it from my supervisors’ contract with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the US. However, for the financial violation data, I had to build a database using public reports from finance companies. It was a very long and tedious process, but 100% worth the effort. I’ve learned a lot.

**What are your next steps?**

I am finishing up my dissertation very soon and graduate this year! I’ve spent this past year at a policy-intensive training fellowship at Yale, and I’m very keen to find a path forward that allows me to directly inform and develop diversity policies based on empirical work. We often see public policy informed by economists or political scientists, but sociologists have incredibly valuable insights and should be drawn in on more often to inform public debates and policy issues. I am trying to figure out the best fit for that - whether it is in academia or in industry, I’m not sure yet.



**Q&A feature:**  
**“What are we *TEACHING* now?”**

**With Prof. Gerry Veenstra**

*Sociology of Soccer*

**You are teaching a course on the sociology of soccer. How is soccer sociological?**

Soccer (and sports in general) is part of the social world and accordingly all sorts of sociological issues can be investigated in the world of soccer: power and corruption, racism, gender inequality, the interplay between agency and structure, violence, order and spontaneity, and so forth. Pick any sociological concept and I’ll bet it can be applied to soccer.

**You are a fan of soccer and play yourself. Do you ever apply sociology when you are playing or watching the game?**

I absolutely love soccer! I watch every match featuring Manchester United or Vancouver Whitecaps FC that I possibly can, and I play league or pickup soccer every weekend. Most of the time I am consumed by the game and leave my sociological self behind, but every now and then, I find myself being a sociologist again. For example, I cannot help but note the racialized language occasionally applied by television commentators (by way of terms like ‘athleticism’ or ‘pace and power’ applied to certain players), or the various masculinities portrayed by my teammates and I in pickup soccer.

**What reading(s) on the sociology of soccer would you recommend?**

I love Richard Giulianotti’s 2002 article on spectator identities; it categorizes me as a *fan* of Manchester United (I support the club from a distance but have a strong emotional attachment to the team) and a *supporter* of the Whitecaps (my emotional attachment to the team is strong and I am embedded in local fan culture), and also identifies the qualities of postmodern affiliations with clubs by way of the notion of *flâneur*. I also quite like Grant Farred’s 2002 autobiographical article about his lifelong love affair with Liverpool FC that began when he was a 7 year-old kid living in South Africa.

**What other courses do you teach?**

I regularly teach undergraduate and graduate courses in social statistics and an undergraduate course on the social determinants of health.



**WHO IS VISITING?**

**Jeronimo Muniz**

Jeronimo Muniz is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. He obtained this PhD from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and he serves as the Director of the Center of Quantitative Research in Social Sciences (CPEQS) and also as coordinator of the oldest Program in Quantitative Training (similar to Michigan’s ICSPR Summer Course) in Brazil, MQ.

He came to UBC to collaborate with sociology faculty member Wendy Roth. His main research employs quantitative methods and empirical simulations to understand the construction of racial “realities” from predefined analytical categories. He has shown that geographic, taxonomic, sampling and temporal uncertainties may affect our understanding of racial inequality and stratification through variations in the measurement of race and skin color. Jeronimo describes his visit to UBC so far as, “Sheer poetry. The UBC campus provides the perfect milieu to do research and enjoy life. I came here to develop one project and started five new ones.”

**Martin Fuller**

Martin Fuller is a sociologist at the Technische Universität Berlin (Berlin Institute of Technology). Martin chose to be a visiting scholar at UBC because UBC is his alma mater: He graduated with a BA in Sociology in 2006. From here, he went on to get his PhD in Sociology at the University of Cambridge. He reconnected with sociology faculty member Tom Kemple when Tom was a visiting scholar at the Berlin Institute of Technology.

About visiting UBC, Martin says that “after working in central Berlin for the past years, I appreciate being able to walk in the Nitobe Gardens or visit the ocean in the middle of a workday.” His main research interests are in cultural and urban sociology, looking at the intersections of the two in case studies of contemporary art, housing and urban design. His recent research looks at a case study of the participatory planning of a residential building in Berlin, with a broader interest in housing, architecture, space and home.

**LIFE ON CAMPUS**

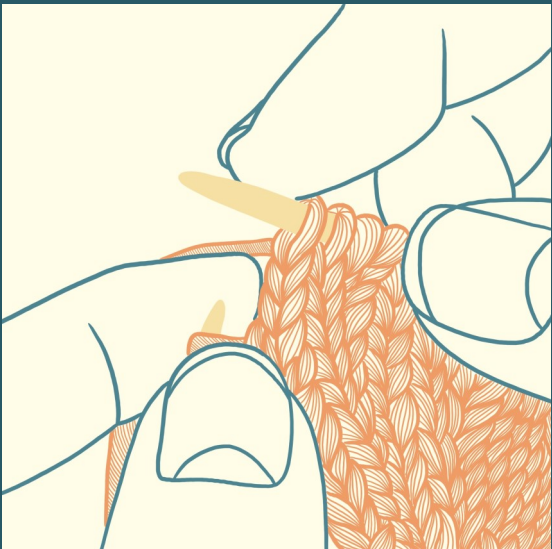
**By Neil Armitage (Lecturer)**

Knitting with Neil materialized literally in the winter of 2016 when Lecturer Neil Armitage offered a drop-in learn-to-knit session as part of UBC’s Student Wellness mental health awareness week - Thrive. Neil had just relearned to knit himself after taking classes at Urban Yarns in Point Grey. After getting the basics down, he was amazed at how he found knitting both relaxing and energizing, quickly forgetting all the dropped stitches on the way.

When he informed the knitting store of his plans to help students learn to knit, they kindly gifted him yarn to get

started, and Knitting with Neil was born. This has now become a regular monthly event in the Learning Lounge, an open pavilion on the third floor of the Irving K Barber Learning Centre, where Neil along with other faculty regularly conducts office hours. It is after his regular office hours that Knitting with Neil often occurs. Here he is joined by students, staff and faculty, with regular appearances by staff from the Equity and Inclusion Office, Arts-ISIT, and the UBC Knitting and Sewing Club.

Neil has found it great rest-bite in the hectic schedule of term and has witnessed how it provides students, staff and faculty a chance to connect beyond the everyday of life on campus at UBC.



**Plastic Bags: A Sociological Perspective**

**By Emily Huddart Kennedy (Assistant Professor)**



At this point, we’ve likely all seen images of floating “islands” of garbage in our oceans. National Geographic states that each year, roughly 18 billion pounds (over 8 million tons) of plastic enters the ocean. But isn’t this a problem for engineers to solve? What could a sociologist tell us about plastic bags?

When it comes to understanding any environmental problem, from plastic pollution to greenhouse gas emissions, I find the concepts of “disproportionality” and “the individualization of environmental responsibility” to be insightful. In environmental sociology, the idea of disproportionality was developed by William Freudenburg (2005). It explains that typically, the majority of pollution is created by a

small number of actors. So, while it’s a worthwhile step to say no to plastic bags at the grocery store, it’s important to remember you are a relatively small part of the problem. This reflection can help us to avoid thinking that plastic pollution is an individual problem that demands individual solutions, what Michael Maniates’ terms, individualization of environmental responsibility. An example of individualization that I find particularly compelling is Braun and Traore’s (2015) research demonstrating how female shoppers in markets in Mali are blamed for plastic waste. The authors show us that the individualization of responsibility for plastic bag pollution is the result of policies and programs that call attention to

how globalization is negatively impacting the local environment while simultaneously winning the scope of services provided to deal with these socio-ecological impacts.

What does all of this mean in the domain of plastic bags? Well, it is positive that so many people are trying to avoid plastic and that there are engineers designing alternatives to plastic. But with a sociological gaze, we are better equipped to notice that the greater responsibility to address this environmental problem should be placed on the companies that profit from disposable plastics and on our elected representatives who have the power to demand more sustainable solutions to the seemingly simple task of getting consumer goods from one place to another.

**Interesting reading on the topic:**

Braun, Yvonne A., and Assitan Sylla Traore. 2015. "Plastic bags, pollution, and identity: Women and the gendering of globalization and environmental responsibility in Mali." *Gender & Society* 29(6): 863-887.

Freudenburg, William R. 2005. "Privileged access, privileged accounts: toward a socially structured theory of resources and discourses." *Social Forces* 84(1): 89-114.

Maniates, Michael F. 2001. "Individualization: Plant a tree, buy a bike, save the World?" *Global Environmental Politics* 1(3): 31-52.

**Undergraduate Students**

**Vahid Rashidi** publishes an article in The International Journal of Sport and Society.

**Kennedy Wong** receives the Pacific Sociological Association Undergraduate Student Paper Award, as well as the Faces of Today Award at the Student Leadership Conference in UBC.

**Veronica Cho** selected as a Wesbrook Scholar and is the recipient of the HSBC Emerging Leader Scholarship.

**Alex Chow** receives the Katherine Brearley Arts Scholarship

**RECENT AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS - at a glance**

**Faculty**

**Prof. Becki Ross** receives the 2018 BC Studies Prize, and also receives the Angus Reid Practitioners/Applied Sociology Award.

**Prof. Amin Ghaziani** curates a special symposium on “Queer Urbanisms,” and also receives the UBC Killam Research Prize

**Prof. Anne Martin-Matthews** appointed as UBC’s new Associate Vice-President, Health

**Prof. Wendy Roth** receives the Martha Foschi Award for Excellence in Research and Teaching.

**Graduate Students**

**PhD. Student D. Kyle Sutherland** receives the Arts Graduate Research Award, as well as the Amanda Araba Ocran Memorial Award,

**PhD. Student Kaitlyn Jaffe** receives the Arts Graduate Research Award,

**PhD. Student Jennifer Adkins** receives the Public Scholar’s Initiative (PSI) Award.

**PhD. Student Hazel Hollingdale** receives the Yale Fox International Fellowship.

**Incoming M.A. Student, Siqi Xiao**, is a finalist in the SSHRC’s 2019 Storytellers Challenge

**Editors:** Guy Stecklov, Carrie Yodanis, and Kristin Sopotiuik. **Illustrator & Graphic Designer:** Arsebel Gancena

**Full online version of this newsletter available on our Website:** [sociology.ubc.ca](https://sociology.ubc.ca)

**SOCIFLIX**

**Can't find anything on Netflix? Why not watch one of our Distinguished Speaker Series; a set of seminars featuring various scholars from around the world who have come to UBC to present their research.**

**View our latest releases:**

- **Richard York (University of Oregon)** - *A Critical Perspective on Energy Transitions (April 2019)*
- **Arne Kalleberg (UNC Chapel Hill)** - *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies (March 2019)*
- **Guillermina Jasso (New York University)** - *From Fairness & Status to Parental Love & Toy Sales, Proportion Disadvantaged & Polarization, Ethnic Percent Split & Segregation, Outsiders/Insiders & Theft, Military Theater Location & PTSD, and Wage Inequality & Divorce Rates: The Case for Basic Research (Martha Foschi Honorary Lecture—February 2019)*

View all of our Distinguished Speaker Series lecture on our website:

<https://sociology.ubc.ca/news-events/speaker-series/>