



LAURA HIRVI

Identities in Practice

*A Trans-Atlantic Ethnography of Sikh Immigrants
in Finland and in California*

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P.O. Box 259

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Preface

Every person who has crafted a written ethnography based on fieldwork knows that the text, which is presented here, is not a final product but a document that reflects a certain point of saturation in the process of making it. He or she also knows that this is not a written proof of a loner's skills but rather a piece of work that represents collective efforts. If I look in hindsight at this book's entire production process, and equal it mentally with a journey, it becomes clear that I, here in the role of the author and researcher, could not have made the trip without the valuable support of various kinds of companions. This written ethnography, I dare to argue, is in that sense a kind of reflection of what human beings are able to create through collaboration.

Now it appears that often in life we fail to grasp the chance to thank others for the help they have given us; the moment flies by too fast and gets swallowed in the roar of everyday life. Luckily, however, the preface as a ritualistic act offers scholars the valuable opportunity to acknowledge those who have encouraged them to make this journey, and who have supported and accompanied them along the way. In this regard I would like to thank first of all Professor Laura Stark (University of Jyväskylä) and Professor Hanna Snellman (University of Helsinki) who have guided me through the challenges that I encountered in this academic chapter of my life. I am grateful for your continuous willingness to offer me advice and I cherish the fact that both of you always gave me the feeling that you believe in me. This kept me grounded in moments of doubt and encouraged me to continue walking through, no matter what. Thank you so much, Laura and Hanna!

Likewise I would like to use this opportunity to thank University Distinguished Professor Caroline Brettell (Southern Methodist University) and Professor Laura Huttunen (University of Tampere) who were both kind enough to reserve some of their valuable time to give me great constructive feedback concerning this text at hand. In the course of my research I also received immense support from the Department of History and Ethnology (HELA) and the University of Jyväskylä. Not only did they support this research through various kinds of research grants, but also, and more importantly, they offered me an intellectual environment in which I found it highly stimulating to work. The numerous discussions with colleagues and the feedback that I received from them in connection with various seminars

were especially helpful in this regard and contributed significantly to the making and progress of this ethnography.

Further, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the financial support that I received from NOS-HS, which enabled me to craft this study as a member of an international and interdisciplinary research project. With reference to the NOS-HS project, I would like to thank especially project leader Kristina Myrvold (Assistant Professor, Lund University), whom I admire for her vision, her enthusiasm and her efficiency. In particular, I would like to thank Kristina for her continuous striving to support young scholars like myself and to introduce them into the academic world. Likewise, I would like to thank my dear NOS-HS colleagues Knut A. Jacobsen (Professor, University of Bergen) and Ravinder Kaur (Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen) for their thought provoking comments, which I had the privilege to receive over the years. In connection with our annual project meetings I also had the great opportunity to learn from experienced scholars, and it is clear to me that this work has tremendously benefited from the comments I received from Professor Eleanor Nesbitt (University of Warwick), Professor Kim Knott (Lancaster University), Professor Doris Jakobsh (University of Waterloo), Senior Associate Nicola Mooney (University of the Fraser Valley), and Dr. Brian Keith Smith (UC Santa Cruz). In this context, I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Eleanor Nesbitt who was kind enough to do the proof reading of this book. In addition, I want to thank all the members of the 'Sikhs in Europe'-network, which was founded by Kristina Myrvold; the discussions I had with many of you were greatly valuable for this study and had an important impact on my intellectual thinking!

While NOS-HS took me on a tour of the Scandinavian countries, Fulbright and the Ellen and Artturi Nyysönen foundation gave me the unique chance to spend the academic year 2009-2010 at UC Santa Barbara in California. In this period of my studies, I had the great privilege to collaborate with Professor Gurinder Singh Mann (UC Santa Barbara), whom I want to thank for his tremendous support and for putting me in touch with junior and senior Sikh scholars. Thanks to Prof. Mann I had the chance to meet, amongst others, Professor Emeritus Bruce La Brack (University of the Pacific) and Professor Karen Leonard (UC Irvine) who both took the time to talk with me about my research in Yuba City. Thanks to Karen Leonard, I later on also had the honour to meet Professor George Marcus (UC Irvine). The conversations I had with Professor Marcus were extremely inspiring, and his passion for ethnographic fieldwork is not only impressive but also 'contagious'.

In addition, I would like to express special thanks to Professor Tuomas Martikainen (University of Helsinki), who supported my research and my academic career in many, many ways. This ethnography has also greatly benefited from the comments that I received from Senior Lecturer Miikka Pyykkönen (University of Jyväskylä) and Adjunct Professor and University Lecturer Suvi Keskinen (University of Turku). Besides the already mentioned institutions, I am also very thankful for the financial support that I received from the City of Helsinki, the Finnish Concordia Foundation and the

Finnish Cultural Foundation, through which I was able to conduct fieldwork, participate in conferences and work full-time on this research.

At this point, I would also like to express my deepest gratitude for the help and support that I received from my dear family and friends. You were the ones who encouraged me to walk this way and backed me up throughout the journey. I want to thank you all for the many shared and precious moments of joy, sorrow, laughter and talking that helped me to keep my balance. Especially, I want to thank my parents, Dieter and Riitta, for giving me the confidence to pursue my (academic) dreams in life. My husband Jukka I would like to thank for his open-minded attitude and his willingness to support my work as a young female researcher. Our daughters Jade and Leonie I would like to thank for their great travel spirit and for being the sun in my life that shines like the sun during Finnish midsummer. Special thanks go to my brother Karlo for his technical support and to my mother-in-law Ulla and sister-in-law Johanna for their constant childcare support. In addition, I would like to thank Michael Stark, Julie Stark and William 'Dub' McFarland who all three were tremendously helpful during my fieldwork in Yuba City.

I would also like to thank Ashgate for the permission to use in Chapter Two parts that had been already published earlier on in the chapter: 'Sikhs in Finland: migration histories and work in the restaurant sector', in *Sikhs in Europe* ed. Knut A. Jacobsen and Kristina Myrvold (Farnham etc.: Ashgate, 2011). At this point, I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers of this book for the insightful comments that helped to improve the quality of this study.

But where would this study be without the willingness of Sikhs in Helsinki and in Yuba City to participate in this research? What would I write about if they had not taken precious time to talk with me and allowed me to peek into their lives and their experiences by inviting me to their homes and to various social events? I want to thank all Sikhs in Helsinki and Yuba City from the bottom of my heart for your trust, patience, hospitality, and for your kind willingness to support this research. This work is dedicated to you. All I am left to say to my travel companions is: *Bahut dhanyavaad, kiitos, danke*, thank you! And to those of you who now embark to reading this ethnography I wish a *bon voyage!*

Espoo, 28 February 2013,
Laura Hirvi

Identities in Practice draws a nuanced picture of how the experience of migration affects the process through which Sikhs in Finland and California negotiate their identities. What makes this study innovative with regard to the larger context of migration studies is the contrast it provides between experiences at two Sikh migration destinations. By using an ethnographic approach, Hirvi reveals how practices carried out in relation to work, dress, the life-cycle, as well as religious and cultural sites, constitute important moments in which Sikhs engage in the often transnational art of negotiating identities.

Laura Hirvi's rich ethnographic account brings to the fore how the construction of identities is a creative process that is conditioned and infiltrated by questions of power. *Identities in Practice* will appeal to scholars who are interested in the study of cultures, identities, migration, religion, and transnationalism.



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