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Editorial

Sephis completes the first decade of its existence this year. The programme introduced a template for academic and intellectual exchange among the regions of the 'South' at a time when the terms 'North' and 'South' began to gain currency replacing the earlier classification of First, Second and Third Worlds. The idea of the 'South' signals geography but is not coeval with its textbook understanding. The term 'North' overlaps with the self-designation of the 'West' in modern history. Indeed, the division of the 'North' and the 'South' has acquired multiple resonance: between the richer countries of Europe, North America and Australia and the poorer ones of Asia, Africa, South America, the Pacific and the Caribbean; between formerly imperial countries and those with experiences of formal or informal colonization; and between those who control the production of knowledge and those who remain at its margins.

The ascendancy of the 'North' over the production of knowledge is, at a crucial level, institutional. Increasingly from the nineteenth century, western universities drew into their ambit the social and intellectual elite of 'South' countries. From within these centres emerged not only influential global theorists, but also regional 'specialists'. Additionally, there are networks of influential southern scholars, based in the North and the South, whose relations are mediated within academies of the North. Political assertion by the South, it is now felt, has to be accompanied by an independent academic and intellectual agenda, and freedom from institutional dependence on the North. It was here, that Sephis articulated its primary commitment, namely to facilitate southern exchanges, both individual and institutional, and to help build independent networks.

Over the last ten years, Sephis has succeeded in encouraging young scholars to undertake comparative research within southern contexts and has attempted to provide them inspiration and training. The first is provided by exposure to original research and theoretical work in other southern regions through publications and lecture tours by prominent intellectuals based in the South. To this is added a range of workshops suited to different stages of research, starting from preliminary

exercises for beginners to international conferences for presenting results of doctoral and post-doctoral research. The various contributions in the section, **Across the South**, testifies to the diversity of such initiatives.

This electronic Magazine is a further step in the same direction. It aims at providing scholars, researchers and students based in the countries of the South, a platform for the exchange of ideas and information and to share their visions of development and history. The primary thrust, therefore, will be towards setting up an independent intellectual agenda for the South.

There has been some thinking about such an agenda in the last few years. We, historians and social scientists of the South, have been battling with the possibility of histories that are not constituted in terms framed by long-standing Northern discourses. The crucial question, one addressed by **Partha Chatterjee** in his interview in this issue of the e-Magazine, is the universalist claims of Euro-American theories. How do these claims fare when viewed through our own particular historical experiences? Most grand theories sustain themselves by pleading large exceptions round much of the globe. Yet we continue to seek to explain the exception rather than question the theory that underpins such descriptions. Systematic questioning is, however, the sine qua non of meaningful ways of writing 'Southern' histories. And to do so we must go against the grain of dominant intellectual traditions, working through, and with, our deep and diverse histories.

Till fairly recently, we have explained our historical experiences and situations in terms of absences in relation to the West or the North. There is a persistent tendency in our social sciences to look at when and where we were, or are, on the brink of becoming like the North. Some of the absences customarily referred to include, in various parts of the South, the lack of a writing system, relative absence of intensive agriculture, of proto-industrialization, of even leisure and so on. This kind of historicist vision animates conservatives (for instance, colonial administrator-historians), liberals (for instance, supporters of the liberal nation-state ideal), and radicals (for

instance, Marxists with a stage-ist history of the world) in varying ways. In the present era of globalization, there is continuity, in new forms, of these kinds of readings of history.

We may neither be able nor even wish to completely escape these traditions. We cannot just forget the North. We, in the south countries, have been and continue to be affected by interactions with the 'North' to varying degrees. Furthermore, we have not always been victims of European and global historical processes. The burden, therefore, is on us to look at our histories beyond the looking-glass of the North. So, while we can make well-founded statements about how our histories have been represented, there is the imperative to actually work at changing this.

We cannot forget Europe, but we must remove Europe as the centre of history, as the mirror for all historical processes beyond it. To do this is to 'provincialize' Europe, argues Dipesh Chakrabarty. De-centering the North, however, does not imply a proliferation of 'provinces'. Yes, we must attempt to write our own histories in the light of our experiences, but also we need to underline how these histories we write inflect, nuance and, indeed, transform categories emanating from Europe. In his interview, **Partha Chatterjee** discusses the possibilities of altogether re-thinking theories of democracy and categories like the community in the light of non-western historical experiences. Further, there is the need to re-examine not only the role played by the North but also inter-regional dynamics in global processes. **Claudio Costa Pinheiro's** contribution in this issue, for instance, sketches the significance of translation projects in Europe's imperial enterprise and its critical link with the development of modern European languages.

There is still a further challenge before us. We aspire to be cosmopolitan and 'global', without being Euro-centric. This requires us to be sensitive to intellectual traditions across the globe—in Africa, China, India, Iran and Mexico. It is Sephis' agenda to support students and scholars working in these intellectual traditions and to foster a new kind of interaction and cosmopolitanism through



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new South-based networks.

New histories of the South is at the core of the e-Magazine project. Our intention, however, is to encourage a *historical* understanding, not to confine ourselves to studying the past. The segment on **Contemporary South** is intended as a forum for discussion and dialogue over current and immediate issues in different regions of the South. Moreover, in the contribution on Nigerian politics by **Moses Ebe Ochonu** and in the 'gloomy history' by **Maria Laura Guembe and Gonzalo Conte**, the authors have historicised significant contemporary political trends.

So the professional historian is to have no special claim on this space. It is not our intention to publish an e-journal of strictly 'academic' articles. This will be a

magazine, as we have come to understand that term, having a variety of articles of varying length, news, reports, and all sorts of information. We do also want to acknowledge that we do use a network of 'referees' or 'outside readers' to cast their eyes over most of our submissions.

Apart from conventional features like **book reviews**, we have included a section reviewing a **Southern journal**, which we hope will be a regular feature. We have also devoted a section to the **experience of research**, and from the next issue we hope to include more features on pedagogy in the South, particularly the experience of teaching/studying regional and comparative studies across Southern

countries.

This first issue is, of necessity, a bit of an experiment. We have tried to include a variety of themes and regions. We have included features which we hope will be of use and interest to teachers and students in humanities and social sciences. The disadvantage of having two historians as editors is evident in our inability to discard the footnote, but we have from the beginning intended to reach beyond the confines of the academy. We are hoping to be inundated by responses and suggestions, so that we can develop this e-Magazine into a useful and productive platform in the enterprises of the South.



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Interview

Partha Chatterjee



Partha Chatterjee is Director and Professor of Political Science at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, India, and simultaneously Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, U.S.A. He was educated in Calcutta at Presidency College and obtained his Ph.D. from Rochester University, U.S.A. He is a leading member of the Subaltern Studies collective which began as a group of historians of India in the early 1980s. He has contributed to and edited Subaltern Studies volumes. His *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* was a major landmark in Indian historiography. He currently writes on Indian history and politics.

Chatterjee is a well-known figure in Bengali theatre. He has been involved with the Group Theatre movement in Calcutta as an actor, a dramatist, a composer and in overall production. He has written *Ramnidhi* (on music in early colonial Calcutta), *Kacher Putul* (an adaptation of Tennessee Williams *The Glass Menagerie*), and *Swapnalabdha* (based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). He has participated in over a dozen productions, including the Bengali adaptations of Brecht's *The Trial of St. Joan*, Piscator's *War and Peace*, and Alexei Arbuzov's *Once Upon a Time*.

After all this, he still tries to catch his favourite teams at play. If he can't visit the fields, the small screen bails him out.

talks to Rudrangshu Mukherjee.

A close friend of Partha Chatterjee's, Rudrangshu Mukherjee was educated at Presidency College, Calcutta, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He obtained a D.Phil in Modern History from Oxford University for his much-acclaimed dissertation on the Revolt of 1857. Subsequently he taught history at the University of Calcutta for several years and held a number of fellowships at Universities of Princeton, Manchester and California (Santa Cruz).

He was also a fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. Since 1993, he is the Editor of the Editorial pages of the Calcutta-based daily, *The Telegraph*. Besides the excitement he brought into the classroom, his students remember him for his approachable and friendly style and his love for words, food and cricket.



RM I want to begin with your last but one book, the *Princely Impostor*. Why the return to narrative history, if it is a return at all?

PC (Laughs) Yes, because I was never a narrative historian before. From the time I was introduced to recent historical scholarship, I was never trained to write narrative history. Given my background in the social sciences, I was introduced to history as an area where theories and questions of social sciences could be assessed on their empirical ground. So in a sense, history was an empirical testing ground for Social Science theory. I would say that history, indeed the dominant strands of history-writing in the twentieth century in particular- whether you think of the Annales School or whether you think of British Social History- were all very strongly marked by their adherence to certain larger social science theoretical frameworks. Many of the questions that were addressed by historians and which were found to be interesting for historians

were questions that arose in terms of debates within Social Science theory. Until the 1980s, most history-writing was not narrative. It was much more analytical history, where the evidence was processed according to ways in which certain questions arising from Social Science theories might be answered. I think narrative history-writing reemerged out of the critique of the grand theories of social sciences carried out in the 1970s and 1980s. The received ideas about the direction of social change, or you might say, the larger frameworks of social analysis, were challenged on the ground that they did not have the analytical or explanatory power they were supposed to have had. I think it is largely in the process of that churning that many people felt that a return to narrative history might actually open up new areas.

I have said earlier that arguments emerging out of the new concern with discourse, leading to the concept of the textual embeddedness of theoretical ideas, were a major contribution. The

kind of critique that, for instance, the post-structuralists offered of earlier structurally based social theories led to a new concern with texts, the multiple meanings of texts and the ways in which larger discursive formations tended to affect the production of meanings. Such analyses opened up a completely different kind of question. What is it that makes a particular explanation persuasive? There was a new awareness that even the so-called analytical historians persuaded, not so much by the purely scientific analytical relationships, but more by a rhetorical appeal or you might even say the persuasiveness of a storyline. This could make, let us say, British Social History more persuasive than nineteenth-century Positivism.

Now, to some extent, this is the kind of argument that critics like Hayden White have tried to make. The overall effect of that intervention was to make people far more aware that what makes a particular historical work persuasive in terms of making it seem like a truthful explanation,



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even when it was explicitly not set out in the narrative mode but was supposed to be more a rigorous analytical answer to certain theoretical questions, -even in such cases, people became aware that the persuasiveness of the argument was dependent on a certain narrative construction, a certain kind of plotting. One of the things I was particularly keen to try and do was to address some of the new methodological questions in terms of the narrative form, to explore arguments about the indeterminacy of many of the social scientific explanations, to examine the claim that a tight analytical framework actually was dependent on certain quite artificial and arbitrary closing of boundaries to make it seem persuasive. And those were the kinds of possibilities opened up through the 1980s by many of the critiques of the older ways of doing social sciences as well as history. And one of the things I wanted to do was to follow all the standard rules of history writing, construct what seemed to be the most logical narrative form and still end up with a conclusion which is completely indeterminate.

RM I am glad you raised a point about the textual turn and how that has influenced the changes in the writing of history, bringing narrative back into focus. Would I be wrong if I suggest that on the one hand the textual turn has taught all of us to question something like teleology in a very profound and fundamental way, but, on the other, when we go back to writing narratives, especially narrative history, a teleology has to come in somewhere into the construction of the narrative?

PC That is one of the points I was trying to suggest. If I actually follow the rules of standard positivist history-writing and say that I will not consciously fill in the gaps by fictional construction, suppose there is a very important part of the narrative that needs to be filled in and I do not have the evidence to do it, well, I will simply leave it blank. But if I actually follow those positivist rules correctly, in a very large number of cases we will end up with a story, which actually does not give us a complete account of what supposedly happened. And that is one of the things I was trying to show, that I am using the pretence of positivist history-writing, I am not filling in anything, I am only writing what is given to me as

evidence and still I get an indeterminate conclusion.

RM Based on the feasible, I think.

PC Exactly. And yet a lot of so-called post-structuralist critics have shown that in terms of the plotting, many of those gaps are inevitably closed in positivist history. The areas of vagueness and areas of even complete lack of evidence are covered over and hidden in order to produce a well-rounded narrative. And that is what I was trying to show in this particular narrative plot, that in the end, even for certain basic questions about what happened, you actually do not have an answer. Even though this is one of the fairly well documented cases.

RM Of course, you had a fantastic story to tell, but one thing struck a lot of people, even me, though I was not completely convinced by this. The really marvellous chapter on identity was placed, strategically I think, in the middle of the book. The chapter, on the question of identity, shows how impossible it is to grasp, philosophically, the concept of identity. Were you trying in historical or empirical terms to demonstrate this philosophical position?

PC No.

RM Was identity formation, which has in so many ways come into your work, one problematic you had in mind when you took up the Bhawal case?

PC Of course. I would be untruthful if I pretended that I did not have any analytical questions. I did. This is why I specifically put it in a completely separate chapter, as though I was suspending the narrative and introducing this chapter and then resuming the narrative once again. I was completely willing to allow the reader to simply skip that chapter. If he or she did not feel inclined to go into those questions, the narrative would not be interrupted. That is why I have used the technique of actually just suspending the narrative, introducing the analytical questions and then going back to the narrative again. But there was a reason why I brought in specifically those questions about identity (identity questions could be approached from

many other directions as well). Many of the legal questions involved in this particular case were about establishing the identity of a person in law, as a legally recognizable entity. This is about an identity that the state can recognize for the purposes of the law. I think these become the important philosophical questions. And these are derived very directly from the foundations of British empirical philosophy: Locke is almost the founding moment in posing the problem, "What is the identity of a person?" This is why I followed the argument as I did, though of course, one could have taken other routes to the question of identity. I did not because this body of philosophical material, I thought, was in a sense the most pertinent to the legal discursive formation I was addressing.

RM This is the body of literature to which the judges would have been exposed?

PC Yes, absolutely.

RM You once wrote in a short essay that even when you were working strictly as a political scientist on arms and alliances and things like that and then later on, when you became more involved in the study of Marxism and Hegel and so on, it dawned on you that your engagement with western theoretical and philosophical writing would be at a tangent. Would you like to elaborate a bit on that?

PC This is true, and over time I have become far more aware of this. I think there was a time early in my career when I would not have recognized this. I probably would have said that it made no difference: if one was approaching political theory, one should approach it irrespective of one's cultural or geographical location. Now I do not think this is true. I am far more aware now of the ways in which my location in India influences the questions about politics and society that seem more urgent, demanding more attention. This is not simply due to the fact of location; they arise out of my experience of living in India. This is not to say that questions that concern western theorists are not important, but I am often persuaded by the immediacy of certain concerns that energize one's intellect. There are many questions that concern western theorists



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today, which seem to me relatively remote from my immediate concerns. So that is probably the easiest answer that I have: in terms of selection of priorities, certain kinds of issues and certain kinds of questions have a greater urgency for me. In trying to approach those concerns, I often find myself in a position of relative remoteness from the body of western social theories. It is not simply that these issues are not given enough importance. Even when western theory approaches these issues, it actually misrepresents, often misidentifies, the problem. This is why I feel I come to western social theory at a tangent. The body of western social theory is, quite understandably, formed out of experiences and concerns that are far more the concerns of western society.

RM. This leads directly to another question. On the one hand, you have the immediate reality out of which your intellectual concerns grow and, on the other, there is this body of literature of western theory. Do you feel then that there is an absence of an Indian social theory?

PC Yes, but I would not say Indian social theory. Let me give you the example of something that I have been increasingly concerned with in terms of a general body of theory. For instance, the theory of Democracy. It is of course informed by the experiences through which today's western democracies have emerged in the last two or three hundred years, with all their classical antecedents. The theories of democracy available to us are from western political theory. Yet, the theories emerging from the experiences of western democracies are extremely impoverished in terms of explaining the Indian experience of democracy—even what democracy actually means in these contexts and the chief concerns of democratic practice. The western theory of democracy is thus extremely poor in terms of what it can address, let alone explain. I feel that the field of democracy today should actually be peopled by Indian theorists. Indians probably have the most valuable and the richest empirical experience of democracy and its potential, which completely bypasses the actual body of western theories of democracy. Thus I have come to address that body of western Democratic theory, say Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, from a tangent.

Actually what increasingly seems to be the task is to develop theoretical work in the non-western world. In the case of several of these concepts, which are not Indian concepts, like the concept of Democracy, the universal application of these concepts has opened up the field for theoretical reflection from non-western experiences. Since democracy is now part of the experience of people all over the world, its understanding must also move beyond the western experience. In fact, these are places where people have actually made the most innovative use of these ideas, like democracy, in actual social processes. These experiences find very little reflection in the current body of western theory. This is really the field for theoretical work in the non-western world and I think this is really where we should actually involve ourselves. And as I said, the method of doing it is to approach the concept from a tangent. But I think what it really requires in the end is substantial theoretical reformulation of the received western theories.

RM But this has been a perennial problem, since Indian Social Science or Indian history-writing came of age in the last 30-40 years. We tend to have certain western models in mind. If you look at the great debates in Indian Social Science and Indian history-writing, take the Renaissance debate, we have a model of the European Renaissance in mind and then we look at how Bengal or India fitted into that model. The emphasis as a result has been on a lack. The ideas of development or modernization are also based on western models. Similarly with democracy, it is a western model that we have in mind and then we see how India does or does not fit into it. We focus on the inadequacies. Is this not a perennial kind of problem?

PC I think there is now enough in our experience in the last fifty years, enough accumulated experience in the non-western world today to say that such grand concepts of social theory like Capitalism and Democracy must produce theories general enough so that the western case becomes a particular case. This is not to say that we produce an Indian theory which is different from western theory. It is actually to make the claim that we have a more general theory

of Democracy from our own experience, because our experience carries over the historical experience of western theory and adds to it. From our experience, we are actually in a much better position to formulate theories more general in scope, of which the western experience simply becomes a particular case.

RM So what you are suggesting is that up to now, to borrow your own phrase, the critique of the west or western theory is actually a derived discourse? And that it need not be so?

PC There is no need to make that argument any more, because it is now well recognized that for many of the central activities or practices of modernity, there is enough that has happened outside the western world in the last fifty years and is continuing to happen today. You simply cannot say that all this is merely a replication of the western experience - replicated in an inferior or in a derivative way. Nor can you say that this is something that is completely different which has no bearing with the western experience. What is happening in these parts of the world is an enrichment, it is an elaboration of the western experience at a much more general level, a more universal level. And the theory that will explain Indian democracy or the theory that will explain China's capitalism today will actually be a far more general theory of which western theory will just be a particular case. I think that is the kind of move that requires to be made now—a call for a social theory in the non-western world ought to be far more ambitious than it has been so far.

RM Why do you think that this has happened? Is it a sort of in-built sense of inferiority that we have? That we cannot do theory and they can do theory?

PC There is even today a belief in the western world that what we are doing is modernizing and modernizing means becoming like the West. This tendency is still very strong. Whereas that is so in terms of both the ideas as well as the languages in which we describe our experiences, in terms of actual practices, it is very clear that people are not simply aping the West anymore. Some of the arguments we have been making are



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that people were not really just aping even when they were claiming to be aping the West. What they were actually doing was something quite different; they were actually innovating, creating altogether new practices, new institutions and new processes. Those processes have a certain family resemblance to recognizable institutions of modernity in the West. The resemblance is strong enough for you not to say that what is happening in India or China is not capitalism. It is capitalism. But it is clearly of a different kind. There are new things that have been happening, these are innovations in terms of the practices. Moreover, they are actually guided by ideas for which we still do not have an adequate conceptual language. These ideas are quite new on the ground. This is really what we need to address. What are better concepts? Not just Indian concepts. We need to think of more universal social concepts. The method probably is to try and elaborate and critique existing concepts in order to make them more adequate to describe these new experiences. In doing this, what one would be doing is inevitably redefining many of these concepts.

RM You were trying to do this when you introduced the idea of a political society.

PC Exactly. That is one of the ways. One could do many of these kinds of things even with regard to certain basic economic concepts like capitalism and the market. I think there are various types of new things that have been happening in our parts of the world. And they should not simply be seen as being corrupt or deviant forms.

RM Let me ask a different kind of question, more to do with your personal experience as a scholar. I take three instances from your work. The first is a footnote tucked away in your book on Nationalism, saying that you were influenced by a lot of post-Modernist writings of Rorty, Derrida and Foucault. You are of course aware that your exposure to this kind of theoretical literature distanced you from the people about whom you were trying to write. The second example is taken from something you never published. In a conference on nationalism somewhere, probably some very fancy Mediterranean resort,

you actually made a written intervention at the valedictory address where you mentioned the disjunction of speaking about nationalism in India and doing it in a place which could not be more remote from the concerns of Indian nationalist politics. And third, in your book of essays on India, you cite the famous parenthesis from Salman Rushdie, where he feels he is being lassoed and pulled in two different directions. So you are in many ways a scholar who is experientially being pulled in one direction, the theory that you read and often use and apply in your work and even try to reformulate completely, pulls you in another direction. What do you say to that?

PC I am sure that this is a problem that many scholars from the so-called third world face. This is not uniquely my problem. I do not have a general answer to this question. I have no formula to offer to third world scholars. The way I have tried to tackle the problem is by adjusting my mode of address to the intended readership. I think I have become, over the years, much more conscious of which specific group of readers I wish to address in one particular text. This is true both in the written form as well as in the spoken form. Suppose, for instance, I was writing for a purely scholarly and professional journal or a purely scholarly professional book. Earlier on, I would have probably thought of this in a kind of abstract way, I would imagine addressing a sort of republic of letters where, irrespective of where you came from, you shared the same language. But I am far more aware today than I was a few years ago that this is not actually true. So, I actually have to adjust my writing according to who I am writing for, where I intend to publish. So if I was writing for largely, let us say, an academic Social Science audience, a very large part of it would be either western scholars in western academies or people familiar with the language of western social science. That is one kind of address. But if I were writing for something like, say, the *Economic and Political Weekly* or an Op. Ed. column in a newspaper, I would change my address completely. I would not assume that this is a readership familiar with western Social Science concepts. I think this is a special challenge that the third world scholar must face. They have to reformulate the problem and then

reformulate the answer in a very different language, which does not use the heavy baggage of social science. I think in many ways it actually forces people to think afresh. It forces you to think a second time in another language for a different audience and therefore often forces you to rethink your positions and your arguments. And in my case, because I also sometimes write in Bengali, and that is another different readership altogether, I am forced to rethink. I find that now when I teach in two very different places, in New York and Kolkata, my language and sometimes even my accent changes. And therefore I have to sometimes think through things twice over. If I were teaching Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, I cannot teach it the same way in class at Columbia as in Kolkata. I think if somebody taped those two lectures, they would turn out to be very different. This is harder work because you are doing the same thing in so many different ways, but it is enormously enriching. It also forces one to be far more aware of the limitations of specific modes of presentation and representation. I am far more aware today than earlier of the limits of even thinking in formal Social Science terms. Because I know if I were to address this in a Bengali "Little Magazine" article, I would write it differently. And I would be forced to use a body of concepts and a rhetoric, which may have nothing to do with a Social Science repertoire.

RM We come back to the whole point of how the immediacy of our situation determines even the way we write and think. Since you raised Foucault, this is one writer I think who keeps coming back in your writings all the time, more than any other thinker or any other "post-structuralist". Why is this? Why do you feel Foucault has become so important to you?

PC In my earlier work and thinking, Marx was the most important theorist. Foucault's writings enable me to retain the basic insights into modern western or capitalist society that I earlier derived from Marx and then take me much further than Marx could have, perhaps simply because he died in the 1880s. For me, Foucault is the most important theorist of human history in the twentieth century. He addressed all of the major developments in society in the twentieth century. The crucial term, precisely, is



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the "post", not just post-capitalism or post-industrial revolution, but the emergence of mass democracy and of the governmental systems which actually regulate the lives of individuals within a framework which claims to be liberal and free. There are, of course, many variations. One of his really chilling messages, if you actually read Foucault in terms of his central argument, is how little difference there is between liberal societies and so-called totalitarian societies, which also develop in exactly the same field in the twentieth century.

RM The notion of surveillance?

PC Societies are controlled. But Foucault's real argument is that as far as regimes of control are concerned liberal society is far more efficient and productive than Nazism or Soviet Socialism. Foucault enables me to understand the twentieth century, all the techniques of social control that have emerged through the century and to see how this is part of the political history of Capital and/or Modernity. Which is why I think Foucault will remain productive for at least another fifty years.

RM Foucault brings me back to one of your books which I think is very badly neglected and these days hardly ever talked about. This is your book on the *Land Question* written in the early 1980s. It came out as Volume One. In a very long introduction, you said that the book was an attempt at an intervention in the mode of history-writing and there was the promise in that book that you would actually write a second volume on culture, which you said would actually be about power. Have you given up the project or you think you have come back to it in different ways in other books?

PC Yes, that was conceived in a very Althusserian structuralist way at the time. The plan was to write three volumes, one would be on the economy, the other would be on politics and the third would be on culture. And of course, almost as soon as that book was written, I was already into writing the book on *Nationalist Thought*. The latter book allowed me to rethink the whole format of history-writing and to raise analytical questions whereby that kind of interlinking of three relatively autonomous domains like economy, politics and culture seemed much less sustainable as a project. Now, as you

know, I have returned to the question of culture in many ways, both in the book on *Nationalist Thought* as well in the book on *Fragments*. Many of the questions that I have raised there in terms of analyzing Ramakrishna and religion or discussing the whole question of women and the family, are questions I would have talked about in the culture volume. I have addressed many of these questions in other ways, but not, as you know, as one of three volumes that would provide a comprehensive structural history of Bengal in the twentieth century. I do not think I can go back to that project, but what remains unused is the quite large amount of research I did in the 1970s on the various political movements and political events in Bengal in the twentieth century, which I never wrote about. I sometimes think that I might write other things using those notes. Many people have written on those subjects since, but there may be new ways of returning to that material. I have recently written something on the early history of revolutionary terrorism in twentieth century Bengal. Maybe there will be an occasion to return to those kinds of questions. But yes, I think the project as it was announced then has been abandoned.

RM You introduced the idea of community into Marxist discourse. Do you think that this notion of community needs further theorization on your part?

PC That is true and I think I have gone back to this question of community in my new book *The Politics of the Governed* where I have tried to look more specifically at the localized context of community-formation. Some of these ideas were already included in my more theoretical writings on community, where I emphasized the contextual nature of that construct. The idea that people can often claim to belong to different kinds of communities in different contexts is one of the things that I have tried to show in the new book. For instance, how communities get formed under conditions of modern politics, where ideas about primordial ties like caste or religion have no bearing. I have encountered these questions in some of the empirical field-work results that I have dealt with. For example, in squatter settlements in modern Indian cities, people often come from completely different areas and

simply find their way into particular slums, and yet there is a community that is constructed. I have actually looked at the possibilities and conditions of the formation of such communities. What are the limits of such constructions? What goes into sustaining these communities? Equally, I have found situations, where people live and work together, yet these communities do not form. So I have tried to look at what might be the conditions of the formation of such communities and what are the limits to such formations. I think this is extremely important. It is also important in terms of trying to understand modern economic formations in countries like India in what is generally described as the so-called informal sector or the unorganized sector, which is the really large part of that which is neither rural villages nor modern industrial factories. This is the growing sector, and one of the things that people often do not realize is that in another twenty years, a majority of the Indian population will be urban, and the majority of that urban population will not be the industrial working class of the old type. So what is this population? One of the things Indian sociologists often did suggest was that these social formations in the cities were actually adopted forms, which are forms of the villages. I do not think that is true. These are completely new forms that have emerged in the cities and this is where community-formation is important, not simply in terms of the ways in which the victims or the oppressed resist the state or figures of authority. Actually, some of these are forms often encouraged by governments, and even by institutions of capitalist production. The way, for instance, 'self-employment', 'self-help' and the whole institution of micro-credit is being promoted today indicate how official agents are spending resources in order to create formations of what could be called 'community'. This involves a dependence on a certain kind of self-management, a kind of self-governance of these populations. Because the state or the corporate world actually cannot take up what was originally supposed to be the form of industrial production, where the workers are paid sufficient wages to reproduce their social form. In fact, social reproduction has to now take place through community forms of different types. We need to see what these community forms are and to distinguish among the different types. This is of



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crucial importance, because in the old debates, the community was reckoned a pre-modern form, one necessarily left behind.

RM The 'community' that is destroyed by capital?

PC Yes, that capital will destroy it, and that it cannot exist in the city. I think this is precisely what I was saying about the peculiarities of modern forms in the non-western world. We cannot apply generalizations emerging from western experiences to such questions. And I think that it is arguable that for the urban worker in the unorganized or the informal sector, this 'community' is not simply a carryover from the village just because there is no other known form of social insurance or of social bonding except certain community forms carried over from the village. I do not think that is true.

There are completely new social formations that are innovated and what I am suggesting is that these communities are actually even encouraged and innovated by the technologies of modern urban governance.

RM Just one last question. You know it is my hypothesis that in the development of Indian historiography after independence, there are certain strands that grow important and become orthodoxies. These are challenged subsequently. The Nationalist Historiography is challenged by Marxist Historiography. In the case of medieval history, Jadunath Sarkar was challenged by the Aligarh School. Then what appeared to be radical interventions themselves become orthodoxies and are challenged. Do you think that Subaltern Studies has reached the position where it is now in danger of becoming an orthodoxy and ready to be challenged?

PC Well, I think the early formulations of Subaltern Studies were challenged by scholars within the collective. The whole emphasis on, for instance, the rebel peasant, was the first target of the challenge. Of course, the idea of the rebel peasant was itself a major challenge to earlier formulations and was an important corrective. The argument was that even when the peasant joined the nationalist struggle,

he did so on his own terms. This was a very important step forward. But the way the rebel peasant was posed drew, as you know, on a certain idea about peasant consciousness. The assumption was that the peasant was a figure of subservience in his normal everyday life, and thus would not yield answers to questions regarding autonomous peasant consciousness. Following from that assumption, we focused on the figure of the rebel peasant. This allowed us to find one kind of answer, but it was clear quite soon that this was a very limited answer. Very large parts of the everyday existence of the so-called subaltern classes were simply being left out because we could not explain its elements, or because we would have to say that these were examples of daily subservience, of the domination of the powerful. But this was clearly very unsatisfying as a method of history. The dissatisfaction led us into all kinds of areas where questions about everyday domination and different forms of domination could be asked. The posing of these questions led to questions about assumptions regarding 'elite' formations. Is it just the one 'elite' formation, which combined the colonial and the collaborative elite? The formulations of the first volume of Subaltern Studies were being undone by the many illustrative cases where it was shown that opposition between the elite and the subaltern was locally defined. It was far more useful to pose the opposition in contextually defined situations rather than as a kind of general theory of Indian history. So the challenge was already there.

What has happened since is that Subaltern Studies was appropriated into what is called post-colonial studies in the western academy, particularly the Anglo-American academy. It allowed for, or at least enabled, a completely new way of reading historical sources—by using the methods of reading of texts as practiced in literary studies. A new way of reading texts was becoming popular in English Literary Studies, which questioned the whole construct of the canonical. These methods opened up questions of race, gender and sexuality. The Subaltern Studies approach began to be used basically in tandem with literary studies for textual readings. And that produced a certain formulaic method so that if you had a text that was written by a woman or written by a colored woman, there was a standard method that you applied.

Almost every graduate student got to learn what one did with a text like this. I think this produced a formula. I would not call it an orthodoxy, since I do not think even in the literature departments of western academies post-colonial studies is quite orthodox. Such studies are still considered marginal, as things that some funny people do. In terms of methodological possibilities, however, such work has exhausted itself.

RM It has run its course, you think?

PC I think very largely that is true. In terms of the Indian material, I do think there are some very new things that have happened. They have happened because of the questions asked by Subaltern Studies.

These questions have also escaped the confines of academics. Many of these questions are now very much part of writings in the actual world of politics. Whenever we have conferences in Madras or Hyderabad or other cities, we have a diverse group engaging with the questions and methods of Subaltern Studies. Also, in the research work for doctoral research that we come across in various Indian Universities, we find the application of Subaltern Studies methods, actually used for the purposes of a Dalit political agenda, or in the Northeast to pose specific questions regarding ethnicity and identity politics.

RM Forms of marginality?

PC Exactly, and those are very new things in the Indian context in terms of both the emergence of a new academic discourse around these questions and the connections between academic writings and social movements. I think that is where Subaltern Studies have now had a completely new lease of life. I have to say that the editorial board of Subaltern Studies has very little to do with that kind of work. It simply comes to us when people acknowledge that they have learned to do such analysis from reading Subaltern Studies. But what they do is completely different and new. Sometimes they raise political questions and often take political positions which none of us would want to take. But that is a different question altogether. What I am suggesting is that Subaltern Studies and even many of the methods introduced by Subaltern



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Studies have now become much more widely available in the domain of public debates in India. I think one of the things that I would like to see is a re-examination of the original idea in Subaltern Studies that the transfer of power from British rule and the erection of the new Indian State was a failure of the bourgeoisie - the idea of the passive revolution for instance. I think there was a sense that this was a case of deviant capitalism.

RM Right. So you still have the western model in mind.

PC Yes, very much. A lot of the early writings, my own writings for instance, were informed by a transition model. I am persuaded that what we need to do, to think about, is no longer the transition model at all. You could say that the transition has happened, but where it has transited is a very different kind of capitalism and a very different

form of the modern state. That is really what needs to be theorized. In this, the perspective of the subaltern would be very crucial. A great deal of the innovativeness of Indian democracy, just to confine myself to what is really different about Indian democracy, was because of the actions and the presence of the subaltern classes. They brought something new to the structure of democracy and the space that it offered. This can be illustrated in hundreds and hundreds of cases. For instance, why was 1977 a turning point in Indian democracy? It was possible, given the Emergency experience, for India to have been like any other third world authoritarian system. It could have easily degenerated into such a system. But it did not happen and 1977 was the historical moment when alternative ways were found. In spite of all the chaos and the anarchy, even a certain level of violence, and the attack on democracy,

a kind of space was available to the subaltern classes not just for their struggle for subsistence, but for a struggle to create new opportunities.

RM Would you call it an assertion?

PC An assertion is not simply claiming rights from the state and the government. The phenomenon of the informal sector, of labour, of certain kinds of enterprise including what we often tend to dismiss as corruption, I think needs to be looked at carefully. These are spaces where completely new energies and what in every good capitalist sense should be called enterprise is present. I think that is the real challenge.

RM Thank you.

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Articles

Translating Worlds, Inventing Empires: Reflections on Colonial Projects, Language and Slavery at Early Modernity Portugal.¹



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Abstract

Along with the colonial expansion of modern European states, there were exchanges around the world – of natural species, goods, commodities and persons. Regarding flow of peoples, an initial dilemma was the understanding of different languages. Translators had previously been used as mediators. During the sixteenth century, however, conquerors started civilising their languages (in South America, Asia and later, in Africa), by a process of both grammaticalisation and dictionarisation. These *books of translation* were used to create comprehension between languages, but also among cultures. This paper examines – through translation books – how *social categories*, related to the exercise of power (forms of domination), current in diverse colonial contexts, may have been perceived, translated and re-signified through European socio-linguistic categories (lexicons).

*"Language is the companion of empire".
Antonio Nebrija, 1492 (Spanish grammar).²*

In 1498, Vasco da Gama's expedition disembarked in Calicut after an eleven month voyage, realizing the Portuguese Empire's long sought after goal of opening up maritime routes to the "Indies" – an obsession throughout the fifteenth century. Among the crew of these modern ships were some extremely capable professionals: cartographers, navigators, pilots, along with seventeen specialists in languages – four Africans skilled in the languages of the West Coast of that continent, three Portuguese speakers of "Bantu" and Arabic, and ten other "degreddados" (convicts), used as interpreters.³ Da Gama's voyage was the culmination of a long-term project of the Portuguese state involving the development of navigational instruments and techniques, the construction of ships, the training of marine professionals and the establishment of a colonial apparatus, which started at the beginning of the fifteenth century with the invasion and conquest of Ceuta in northern Africa (1415). There was also a heavy investment in *communication techniques*, without which no expansionist colonial activity would be possible. Bernard Cohn, with regard to British colonialism in India, remarks that learning local languages was a fundamental condition for a feasible colonial enterprise.⁴



Pero de Magalhães Gandavo:

Portuguese humanist who lived in 16th century. Together with João de Barros and Fernão de Oliveira, wrote one of the first Grammar/Orthographies of Portuguese language.

The conquest of the African fringe – the mapping and circumnavigation of the African coast, around the Cape of Good Hope (nowadays South Africa) to the territories of Mozambique and Zanzibar – presumed the control of lands and the knowledge of coastal populations and their languages. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had already developed a program for systematically dealing with the languages they encountered. Many of the voyages to Africa were not solely to establish

commercial relations or to obtain slaves as labourers, but also to acquire interpreters who would facilitate further colonial expansion. In his third voyage to Cape Bojador, in 1436, Gil Eanes Zurara received this precise order from the Prince *Infante D. Henrique* of Portugal [Henry the Navigator]:

"It is my intent to send thee there again in that same barky... I command thee to go as fast as possible and that thee work towards getting a tongue [in this case a tongue, um língua, or interpreter] of these people, adopting one of them..." (Zurara).⁵

The expansionist policies of the Portuguese in Africa followed a certain *modus operandi* during the fifteenth century: bringing natives back to Portugal from the most extreme points reached, baptizing them, teaching them Portuguese – actually a pidgin form of that tongue – to later return them to their homeland where they would serve as interpreters.⁶ Both native Africans and Portuguese convicts (who were left along the African coast) were employed in this immersion method in the language of the "other". Thus a pidgin Portuguese was consolidated as the *lingua franca* along the western African coast and, most especially, in a vast stretch of the Indian Ocean (African and Asian coasts) and in Southeast Asia.⁷



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Communication with the populations contacted was fundamental for the success of the exploration, commerce and missionary activities, which accompanied the imperial expansion of modern European states. According to Jeanne Hein, the expansionist policies of Prince Henry (1394-1460)⁸ which emphasized obtaining Africans to serve as interpreters, constructed a method (and a project) which resulted in Portuguese being understood all along

the African coast.⁹ Within this structure, *the tongues* (interpreters) were valued operatives in the establishment of commerce since they understood the customs of the people. Hein affirms that these interpreters were more important than canons.¹⁰ Fifteen years before Da Gama's arrival in Calicut, the Portuguese had already established considerable control over the maritime routes and languages of the Indian Ocean, especially following the Arabian routes and

language. The development of an "effective policy" of translatability was used by three generations during the Portuguese expansion towards India. This knowledge and the *modus operandi* was also employed by other European states during the conquest and settling of diverse regions of the globe and was also improved by the Catholic Church for use in missionary work.¹¹

Peoples and Languages: Domination, Civilization and Domestication.

The centuries following the fifteenth saw the consolidation of imperial expansion by European states across the rest of the globe. The Portuguese established colonies, forts, trading posts and religious settlements on almost all the continents and state projects regarding communication with the populations contacted and the learning of their languages gained global dimensions. The employment of natives and *convicts* as interpreters continued to be a usual practice of colonial European states, but other techniques of communication were modified in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by a phenomenon that Sylvain Auroux calls the "revolution of grammaticalisation".¹²

Beginning with the European Renaissance, large-scale transformations occurred in communication techniques. In this period almost all European languages passed through a process of normalization and reduction to "universal" rules and grammatical patterns based upon Latin.¹³ The production of grammars and dictionaries (from a Greco-Latin base) began among European vernaculars (languages), but in a short period of time, spread to almost all the contacted languages of the world. As Auroux affirms, this process deeply and definitively transformed the "ecology of human communication", giving the west means "of knowing/dominating" other cultures.¹⁴

The problem of communication with the colonized and/or natives was redefined. It was no longer possible to exclusively depend upon intermediaries, interpreters

and incomplete listings of words. After all, it was no longer simply a question of comprehending and being comprehended, but of creating apparatuses (institutional, but also *linguistic*) for colonial administration (both lay and religious) and the management of diversity (either of territories or populations). It was necessary to forge a more precise comprehension of languages and forms of communication. A modern spirit, expressed as a normalizing ideal, was associated with this process.¹⁵ Beginning in the sixteenth century, an extensive range of publications attempted to meet the need for classifying and "civilizing" the language of the "other".



Michele RUGGIERI & Matteo RICCI.
"Dicionário Português-Chinês":

Ruggieri (1543-1607) and Ricci (1552-1660) both Jesuits. This manuscript was written, according to specialists, between 1583 and 1588. Recognized as the first bilingual dictionary of an European to a non-European language.

These publications— the so-called *language arts*, *grammars*, *orthographies*, *letters*, *sermons*, *word lists*, *elucidations*, *vocabularies*, *bestiaries*, *dictionaries* and later, *encyclopedias* – were developed in dynamic relationship with similar efforts in European vernaculars. If we consider, for example, that the first grammar for the Portuguese language was edited in 1536— Fernão de Oliveira's "*Grammatica da lingua portuguesa*",¹⁶ followed by João de Barros' famous "*Grammatica da lingua portuguesa*,...", edited in 1539-40¹⁷ – we see that the interval for the subsequent development of grammars for the "exotic languages" was slightly more than ten years. In 1548, the first "*Grammatica*" for the Malabar language was written by Frei Henrique Henriques; in 1554 came the "*Cartilha Tamul impressa em português*" (Tamil); in 1556, there was the "*Grammatica hebrea*" (Hebrew) of Francisco Távora; in 1595, José de Anchieta's "*Arte da língua mais usada na costa do Brasil*" (Brazilian indigenous languages); in 1584-88 the "*Dicionário português-chinês*", by Ricci & Ruggieri;¹⁸ in 1620 the "*Arte da lingua Japoa*...", by João Rodrigues, to mention only a few examples.¹⁹ As João de Barros said:

"Certainly there is no glory that can compare to that when Ethiopian boys, Persians, Hindus beyond the Ganges, in their own lands, in the power of their own temples and pagodas where the Roman name has never been heard, by this our art learn our language, with which they may be indoctrinated in the precepts of our faith, and in which they are written."²⁰



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The colonization undertaken by the modern European imperialist states did not just result in a process of *domination* and *civilization* of contacted social groups, but also in the domination and civilization – *domestication*, would perhaps be a more appropriate term – of the their languages. Empire and linguistics should in truth be seen as two intertwined *démarches*, reminding us of the words of the Spanish grammarian, Antonio Nebrija, with which we opened this article: “Language is the companion of Empire”. Thus the Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch, and later the French, English, Danish, Russians etc, mapped, Romanized (by which we mean recodified the graphic representation of these languages in Roman characters), translated, grammaticised and dictionarised a vast selection of languages.²¹ From this process – the quite intentional fruit of it – came what we now generically call *translation books*.

Given the stylistic idiosyncrasies of such publications, they can be understood as a *literary genre*, a markedly modern one.²² On the one hand, both the lexicographic texts (dictionaries, encyclopedias, vocabularies and the like) and the para-lexicographic ones (grammars, orthographies, letters, arts etc) attempted to serve as references for language. On the other hand, these works were destined to construct and canonize meanings and readings of the unknown world based upon the already known. These books, studied across the *longue durée*, are best seen as a genre that responds to the modalities of imperial projects.²³ As so, they can be understood through their various drives and necessities: a) to categorize experiences; b) to create translations (and the translatability) of meanings; c) to register overseas conquests of the exotic and diverse, whether human, natural (fauna-flora), or of experiences, social relations and etc.; d) to transmit knowledge (through teaching and learning) – in a larger sense, the catechizing endeavor of the Church; and finally, e) to impose meaning upon the cadres of an empire based upon a central administrative policy.

It is important to clearly understand how *translation books* were produced within the framework of European imperialism. When they began to be composed in the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Portuguese dictionaries employed lexical collections taken from Latin models (vocabulary collections, institutions and socio-linguistic reference works). In this way, rules derived from Latin were imposed upon grammatical forms and the order of lexicons. The rules later underpinned the dictionaries’ word collections and ultimately served as references. The impact was to be felt beyond the books of translation, being used also in the production of discourses surrounding colonial practices. It is possible for us to imagine a heavy-handed process of imposition of linguistic rules by which the Portuguese dictionaries were constructed.

Usually the collections of Latin lexicons translated were not, in large measure, equivalent to their Lusophonic pairs, but were made “equal” through the process of translation. The vocabulary lists, which made up the Portuguese dictionaries (and, of course, the majority of the European vernacular dictionaries), came from Roman Latin, implying that categories describing the exercise of power, to take one example, were profoundly linked to traditions and reflections of classical antiquity. Taking the concept of *escravo* [slave], we see that the etymological root, as well as the bibliography used to illustrate, exemplify and justify its existence are Roman (taken from Cicero, Plautus, Plinius, Horace, Ulpian and others).²⁴ In large measure, the European colonial empires of the modern period drew their ideas of *empire* from classical forms, in particular Ancient Rome.²⁵ Anthony Pagden insists that this is no mere detail, but fundamental to an understanding of the bureaucratic forms of colonial administration.²⁶

The books did not just create translatability and approximations (linguistic and/or cultural), but also crystallized concepts, giving them a *universal* and *timeless* appearance. The dictionaries were a means of subsuming diversity through imposing ethnocentric categories of global comprehension onto local meanings. If the movement towards the civilization of languages and their lexicons and the reduction of cultural categories began within Europe, it was immediately and concomitantly extended to the colonies. The flow, dynamics and extent of this process are deeply imprinted upon the Modern Age. Within this



Bento PEREIRA:

Lived between: 1605-1681. Jesuit, Doctor in Theology from Evora University, Censor of books in Rome. His books, as his presence in Evora University during the middle of the seventeenth century contributed towards language domestication in Portuguese colonies. His books were the prime basis for the majority of dictionaries and vocabularies of non-European colonized languages.

démarche, translation dictionaries can be characterized as one of the greatest (and most efficient) means for the imposition of meaning on a global scale among distinct groups and cultural/linguistic traditions.²⁷

Sanjay Subrahmanyam has emphasised that “early modernity”, or the period from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries, was characterised by the appearance of universal and universalistic concepts. These concepts allegedly partook of modern European ethnocentrism, which, in addition to obliterating *regional* and *local* beliefs, concepts and contextualised meanings, ended up facilitating the *control* and *management* of populations.²⁸



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Empires: Colonialism and the Administration of Diversity.

One of the crucial dilemmas which colonial empires (ancient, modern or contemporary) face is precisely this question of how to *administer local diversity*. As Verena Stolke has stressed, Ibero-American colonisation (and this could be extended to colonisation everywhere) confronted the immense task of mastering social, political and cultural "diversities".²⁹ Referring especially to the government of Brazilian indigenous peoples, Souza Lima called attention to the need to observe how "knowledge traditions for the management of inequality", developed by the Portuguese imperial administration in response to the varied experiences of colonisation, were passed on in modified form over the *longue duree*.³⁰

Diversity and Inequality should be understood in a wider perspective. They are perhaps most visible when one looks at "cultures", regions, ethnicity, or populations, but are equally manifest when we consider the interconnections these phenomena maintain with languages (both of the colonizer and the colonized). In other words, one of the key questions in colonial exploration and management is how to understand diverse, poorly known or unknown populations through familiar linguistic categories? How can we translate these "diversities" into western lexicons and categories of thought, which are, ultimately, derived from the ancient Latin world?

Translation, as Cohn reminds us, attempts to convert strange and unknown words into known quantities.³¹ Because of this, all types of analogies and approximations are used to make known that which can scarcely be imagined. Readings of visible colonial "reality" were undertaken via a limited selection of ethnocentric socio-linguistic categories of comprehension (European, of Latin and Indo-European languages origin). Thus we see the move towards creating intelligibility of the "other" based upon *analogies*, a manoeuvre that is quite distinctive of modernity, according to Buescu.³² The use of *analogy* permits the reduction of "uncomfortable asymmetric variation", the elimination of "anomalies", making it possible to establish "similitude" between known facts, situations or phenomena and those that are unknown, reflecting an "opening towards a new concept, the concept of the *universal model*".³³ These analogies are structured in diverse fields, within hierarchical relations and social or linguistic situations, which gives us the phrases so commonly seen in the period's translation books: "which means" or "which in our tongue means".³⁴

In other words, these books are profoundly linked to the crucial dilemmas of contact inherent in the process of colonial and religious expansion. In this sense, it is important to remember that the symbolic categories of language

always deal with real world subjectivities, or, more tellingly, with attempts to imprison and domesticate the subjectivity of experiencing the world.

It is not just the dictionaries which should be seen as mechanisms for the subordination of diversity. The process of subsuming diversity is in itself visible in dictionaryisation. In the play of the adaptation of ideas, lexicons reduce amplitude of meanings. Translation does not simply deal with questions of linguistics, as Buescu reminds us – the simple adaptations of abstract concepts (categories) to symbolic representation (words) – it also deals with the *creation* or *resignification* of words that gradually and inexorably become attached to categories (social, cultural, institutional and others).³⁵

Translation is, in this context, the transformation of "conquests" (territories) into "colonies" (settlements). It is intimately and intrinsically linked to the task of empire building by linking colonies with metropolises in indivisible totalities, as both John Elliott³⁶ and Anthony Pagden³⁷ argue. Colonial expansion confronts territories and cultures, re-dimensioning them through the manipulation of the constitution of alterity. This process remains visibly engraved upon the language and is printed in the dictionaries.

Slaves: categories, lexicons and Words.

The grammarians of the sixteenth century were themselves quite aware of the linkages between linguistics and colonial practices. As Fernão de Oliveira remarked, "new customs bring new vocabulary to the land".³⁸ Many populations began to exist as empirical realities within this modern world through vocabulary, as with the *índio* – designating Native-American people: *Indian*. As Raul Reissner demonstrates, the lexical concept "Indian" springs up in the western semantic universe in the modern era

following the discovery of peoples in the "East Indies" and the "West Indies".³⁹ The word existed in no dictionary prior to 1492. It was employed since the discovery of the Americas to indicate all the inhabitants of those continents. Reissner emphasizes⁴⁰ that the word *Indian* was not merely a *lexical concept*, but also an *ideological* one, which named not so much the space these peoples occupied as the political, economic and ideological functions they served. The term began to designate an "object" by

assigning it a noun that referenced the beliefs and knowledge acquired since the fifteenth century. The knowledge generated beneath this socio-linguistic rubric shaped a discourse that justified the designated object as *Indian* and underlay the practices around it. It is fundamentally a concept based upon concrete conditions of knowledge and reality, one related to the ideological necessities of class and power.

Thus the colonial projects of modern



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imperial states presupposed not just territorial conquest but also the conquest of an "epistemological space", a space opened by the colonial project itself, also associated with and understood within the wider context supplied by the "grammatical revolution" of which we have spoken above.⁴¹

The classification of groups contacted during colonial expansion was quite widespread. Travellers, missionaries and colonial administrators, among many others, inscribed the various modalities of discourse (among them, translation books) accounting for the diversity of the populations encountered. Some of these terms became part of the universal, ideological, western lexicon only through the colonial process, as is the case with the *índios*. Many of the "groups" touched by expansionism (both in the metropolis and in the colonies) were the products of the political imagination of the Imperial states. As part of this process the development of an administrative apparatus also *created communities*. As Anthony Pagden has demonstrated, drawing upon the work of Benedict Anderson,⁴² we are dealing here with the *invention of imagined communities*, "communities that do not exist as perceptual realities, but as part of the cultural or political imagination of individuals".⁴³



Rafael BLUTEAU:

Lived between: 1638-1734. Christian Father. Born in London, lived also in Italy, France and the largest part of his life in Portugal. His vocabulary (photo) is considered the most important Portuguese dictionary and was the basis for many others.

The Portuguese colonial empire was especially skillful in "inventing" other populations as artificial constructs – *degradados* [convicts], *órfãos e órfãs* [orphans], *casados* [wedded], *soldados* [soldiers], *índios* [Indians] and etc.⁴⁴ This drive to *invent populations* is apparent in the legislation, resolutions and communications of the colonial administration and even in the iconographic production. It is also perceptible through the linguistic dimension, as we can observe in the lexicons crystallized within the period's dictionaries. As Johannes Fabian points out, the "delusions of politicians and of grammarians are comparable, and often the two are allies— as... can be demonstrated in the interplay between colonial policies and linguistic description".⁴⁵

Unlike *Indian*, *escravo* (slave) is not a lexicon, nor a social category, developed from the enslavement of black Africans in the fifteenth century. As Emile Benveniste underlines, it is a category and an institution with much more remote origins, associated with Indo-European roots.⁴⁶ The word *escravo* (and that which it designates) possesses a much wider variance than the term *Indian*, given that it occurs as a lexical concept in several idioms and as a social category in many different cultures and times. It is a notion that does not encompass one sole definition, neither within the group of European languages, nor in other groups of dialects.⁴⁷

Slavery's importance in modern imperial contexts is indisputable. "All the empires in history up until the beginning of the nineteenth century were slave-owning societies", as Pagden remarks.⁴⁸ The idea of slavery operated largely as an index, a horizon, from which we can speculate about the social relations and the worlds of labour. From the beginning of the Portuguese colonial expansion, *empire* and *slavery* operated almost as synonyms: "African native became a common figure both in eastern and western societies".⁴⁹ Throughout this long period of early modernity, a universal meaning for, and understanding of, slavery began to take the place of a variety of forms of domination (of compulsory labour and different modalities of the exercise of power) that had previously existed, both within the

European metropolises and in colonial contexts. If we want to restore part of the diversity of experiences and forms of domination, we cannot restrict ourselves to merely looking at the entries for *escravo* or *escravidão* (slave or slavery) in dictionaries. We must also seek out other categories of "subalternity":⁵⁰ *cativo* [captive], *criado* [footman or handmaid], *doméstico* [domestic], *mouro* [moor], *negro* [negro], *preto* [black], *servo* [servant], *trabalhador* [worker], *vadio* [vagrant] and etc. These categories had overlapping meanings in different languages and distinct colonial knowledge traditions. We could just take a few examples of these, looking at a small selection of dictionaries.

In the "*Dictionarium Lusitanico Latinum* ..." (Latin-Portuguese) by Agostinho Barbosa (1611), the word *escravo* (in Portuguese) is linked to three different categories in Latin (*servus*, *mancipium*, *servitium*), which may indicate that the classical Roman world had a wider gradient of experiences of captivity than that which the Lusitanian lexicon could easily recognize.⁵¹ The term *servo* [servant] also presents an interesting entry in the dictionary: "*Servo, escravo* ➔ [Latin] *servus, servulus*". Aside from designating with the same Latin meaning two different words used to translate the modern, occidental concept, "servant" is also presented as a synonym of "slave" in Portuguese. These kinds of reductionisms, if we can classify them as such, successively limit the diversity of forms of the exercise of power.

In the same way, the logic of subsuming local and regional characteristics under universal models, advanced along with the colonies via the translation of lexicons. If we observe the "*Dictionarium Latino-Lusitanicum et Japonicum*..." of 1595 [Latin-Portuguese-Japanese],⁵² we find it divided into three separate columns (Latin, Portuguese and Japanese), and a vastly simplified vocabulary list, assuming that the Latin word "*servus*" is linked to the Portuguese "*escravo*" and the Japanese "*yatcuco*".

In the "*Dicionário Português, Tamul e Cingalês*" [Portuguese-Tamil-Sinhalese]⁵³ (the languages from the west coast of twentieth century India and Sri Lanka), an anonymous manuscript from the eighteenth century, we find three columns



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(Portuguese, Tamil and Singhalese, indexed to the first). The word *escravo* [slave] designates five entries in Tamil and four in Singhalese, while *cativo* [captive] has two and three meanings in each of the other languages. *Servo* [servant] also appears once again as a Portuguese synonym for slave: “*Servo, escravo, servidor...*” [in English: *Servant, slave, attendant*, respectively].

Even without analysing these categories in detail, this variations in classification cannot be seen as anything other than significant. How many different forms

between slavery and liberty were either created or subsumed by the colonial governments? The codifying of languages on a global scale and “dignifying” them through grammaticisation and dictionarisation – that occurred in the religious colleges of the Portuguese colonies in Asia, for example – did not simply seek to spread the Portuguese tongue, but also to transmit and crystallize “normative patterns of behavior”.⁵⁴

In translation dictionaries, as in the later monolingual thesauruses, many of the categories linked to the exercise of

interpersonal power present confusing combinations, idioms fogging lines between the concepts of *cativo*, *criado*, *escravo*, *servo* and other subaltern categories. However, the recognition of different relations of domination in the Portuguese world, even under the apparently homogeneous rubric of “slavery”, demands that we develop more adequate theoretical concepts to address this diversity.

Conclusions

Studying the *translation books* for what they say or do, as well as for what they symbolize is useful. Their “prologues”, “dedications” and “warnings to the reader” are rich in information regarding the plural contexts that characterize this “early modernity”. The *lexicons* chosen for translation to other languages reflect the histories of the multifaceted colonial contexts produced by the modern empires.

These translation books cannot be seen as simply addressing the need for translatability, the need to comprehend new worlds, or the drive to normalize the language of the “other”. These were not their sole goals. As is the case with other modalities of discourse produced together with the colonial process, they aimed to understand and shape the new geo-social contexts encountered. If we remember that many of the grammar and dictionary writers were directly involved in the colonial enterprise and that their work reflects European contact with these new realities, we can consider the translation genre as a form of what some scholars of “colonial studies” have called “investigative modalities” or “western reflexive modalities”⁵⁵. In the same way that, beginning in the eighteenth century, the British Empire started to use censuses, statistics, ethnology, cartography, linguistics etc, to map, classify and reorder life in the colonies, the *translation books* permitted the structuring of the unknown world around known lexicons (words and categories). Moreover, the dictionaries and

vocabularies of the early modern Portuguese Empire contributed to define and crystallize categories of perception and classification.

This is not a claim that the dictionaries in and of themselves created empirical realities visible in colonial practices. As Pierre Bourdieu would say, they are modalities of discourses that produce and are produced by realities.⁵⁶ They describe and prescribe. Within this logic, they are books that can inform us about the “pre-conditions of the exercise of power”. They function, as Johannes Fabian remarks in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century colonial African dictionaries, as “instruments of government” which strive to create apparent order out of the “bewildering multitude of languages”. In this, they collaborate not only to create a “frame for linguistic politics”, but also to instill norms and practices for the colonial management of populations.⁵⁷ They are instruments of dominant colonial action and ideology and, at the same time, they synthesize the discourse about these. As Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out elsewhere, to classify is also to govern.⁵⁸ The development of forms of discrimination and classification constructed particular ways of rationalising political dominance.⁵⁹ Thus, within the world of the Portuguese Empire, comprised of a number of colonies linked by commercial ties and based on slave labour, emerged the *invention of communities*.

As such, these translation books need to be comprehended within the wider framework of *colonial projects of imperial states* that administered a wide and unequal diversity of cultures that were, nevertheless, submitted to the logic of a centralized governing apparatus. These projects should be understood through the fundamental notion of their dispersion and *discontinuity*.⁶⁰ Although they are products of the political imagination of groups, and though this process presumes an accumulation and exchange of discourses (knowledge and practices), these projects are not usually perceivable as linear.



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1 This paper partially explores issues and ideas of my Ph.D. thesis in progress. I am grateful to Dr. Antonio C. Souza Lima (Rio de Janeiro Federal University) and Dr. Johannes Fabian (University of Amsterdam) for their kind observations and remarks. I thank Dr. Souza Lima for the idea for the title, and Thaddeus Blanchette for help and suggestions with the translation.

2 Antonio Nebrija, *Gramatica castellana*, Lion, Impressa Lugduni, 1513 [1492].

3 Used by the Portuguese state for learning languages contacted along the routes to the "Orient" and South America. Jeanne Hein, *Portuguese communication with Africans on the Sea route to India*, *Terae Incognitae*, 25: (41-51), Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1993.

4 Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge. The British India*. Princeton University Press, 1996, p.4.

5 G. E. Da Zurara, *Crônica de Guiné*. Lisboa, Livraria Civilização Editora. [Eng. edition Beazley, C. R. & Prestage, 1896-98. *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*. London, Hakluyt Society, 2 vols. [1452-53] 1994, p. 30-32, 312 (n.49).

6 In Portugal, African natives were put into schools or the *Colégio da Congregação de Santo Elói*, as the grammarian João de Barros (1539-40) noted.

7 David Lopes, *Expansão da língua portuguesa no oriente, nos séculos XVI, XVII e XVIII*. Lisboa: Portucalense, 1936. He shows that, up until the twentieth century, Portuguese was used as a *língua franca* by European states in Asia. Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938*, Berkeley, University Of California Press, 1986, p. 7. He also mentions that British evangelists depended on speakers of Umbundu and Portuguese during catechism activities in western Africa during the 1890s.

8 The Portuguese Kings of this period were D. Duarte (1433-38) and D. Afonso V (1438-81), but Prince Henry "the Navigator" was responsible for the development of expansionist maritime policy and is frequently mistaken as the king.

9 Hein, *Portuguese*, p.42-50.

10 Hein, *Portuguese*, p. 50

11 For similar processes in the French colonies (Canada) and among the Spanish in South America, see Lestringant, *Les débuts de la poésie néo-latine au Brésil: le "De rebus gestis Mendi de Saa" (1563)*. In *De Virgile à Jacob Balde. Hommage à Mme Andrée Thill. Etudes recueillies par Gérard Freyburger*. Publication du Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Rhénanes, Université de Haute-Alsace, 1987, 231-245).

12 Sylvain Auroux, *A revolução tecnológica da gramatização*. Campinas, Ed. Unicamp, 1992. [Original edition: *La revolution technologique de la grammatisation*].

13 To mention only a few, *Eine Teutsche Grammatica*, by V. Ickelsamer (1534), German; the English *Pamphlet for Grammar*, by W. Bullokar (1586); the Danish *Grammatica Danica*, by E. Pontoppidan (1668); the French *Donait François*, by J. Barton (1409), the Spanish *Grammatica de la lengua castellana*, by Antonio Nebrija (1492); the Italian *Regole della lingua fiorentina*, by L.B.Alberti (c.1437). The exceptions are Icelandic, Irish and Provençal, which passed through non-Latin based processes of grammaticization much earlier. Auroux, *A revolução*, p. 37.

14 Auroux, *A revolução*, p. 8.

15 M. L. C. Buescu, *A Galáxia das Línguas na Época da Expansão*. Catálogo da Exposição, Lisboa: CNCDP, 1992, p. 30.

16 Fernão de Oliveira, *Gramática da Linguagem Portuguesa*. Lisboa: INCM, 4a ed. Introdução de Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu, [1536] 1975.

17 João de Barros, *Grammatica da língua portuguesa, cartinha, gramática, diálogo em louvor da nossa linguagem e diálogo da viciosa vergonha*. Reprodução fac-similada, leitura, introdução e anotações de Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu. Lisboa, Imprensa de Coimbra. [1539-40] 1971.

18 Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, *Dicionário Português-Chinês*, Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional de Macau/ Instituto Português do Oriente, 1584-88 (2001).



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19 Curiously enough, according to Buescu, Africa was the first overseas territory to be reached by the Portuguese and the last for systemization of linguistics. Buescu, *A Galáxia*, p. 13.

20 Barros, *Grammatica d língua portuguesa*, p. 171.

21 In the case of Spanish America, 33 languages were known by the end of the 16th century, 96 during the following century and 158 by the 18th century. Auroux, *A revolução*, p. 37.

22 Among the greatest works of the modern period were the multilingual dictionaries in which eight to twelve languages were inscribed. The one compiled by Ambrosio Callepino (1502) passed through 18 editions between 1542 and 1592. New editions often appended additional languages and by 1590 there were eleven.

23 Ancient and medieval European or even Islamic expansion did not have the same global reach. In the case of Islam, Auroux shows that there was no "technical-linguistic phenomenon" as in the western renaissance. Auroux, *A revolução*, p. 37.

24 Many Latin categories linked to the exercise of power during classical times – *captivus*, *famulus*, *mancipium*, *servum*, *servitium* etc – ended up generically and vulgarly translated into *escravo* in Portuguese.

25 There was intensive reading of the Greco-Roman classics on the process of civilization linked to the discussion of agronomy, for example.

26 A. Pagden and N. Canny, *Colonial Identity In The Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989. A. Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995.

27 It is interesting to note that bilingual dictionaries preceded their monolingual cousins in the Modern Era. In other words, it was considered more important to invest in comprehension of the "other" than it was to systematize vocabulary collections of one's own language. The two movements are, however, largely concomitant.

28 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Connected Histories. Notes towards a reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia*. *Modern Asian Studies*, 31(3), 735-762, 1997.

29 Verena Stolcke, *A New World Engendered. The Building of the Transatlantic Hispanic and Luso-American Empires between the XVI and the XIX Centuries*. Unpublished Conference Paper, Federal University of Rio De Janeiro, 3 September, 2001, p.2.

30 A. C. Souza Lima *Tradições de conhecimento para a gestão colonial da desigualdade, reflexões a partir da administração indigenista no Brasil*. Bastos, C.; Almeida, M. V.; Bianco, B. (Coords.). *Trânsitos Coloniais: Diálogos Críticos Luso-Brasileiros*. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2002, 151-172. p. 155.

31 Cohn, *Colonialism*, p.4.

32 M.L.C. Buescu, *A viagem e a fala*. Revista Prelo, 11. Lisboa: INCM, 1991, 7-26 and *A Galáxia*

33 Buescu, *A Galáxia*, p. 15.

34 Translator's Note: In the original Portuguese, the author's point is even stronger as "*o que quer dizer*" glossed as "which means", is literally "which wants to say". See also, Buescu, *A viagem*, p.18.

35 It is important to note that *words* (or *language*) are not *categories* in and of themselves, but represent only part of the subjectivity they refer to. W.H. Goodenough, "Category", in A. Duranti, *Key terms in Language and culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, p.19-22. There are other forms of symbolically representing this subjectivity (iconography, for example). However, much of the cognitive process directly involves language as an essential medium.

36 John H. Elliott, Introduction, "Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World", in Pagden and Canny, *Colonial Identity*, p. 4.

37 Pagden and Canny, *Colonial Identity*.

38 Oliveira, *Gramática da Linguagem Portuguesa*, p. 85.

39 R. A. Reissner, *El Índio en los diccionarios. Exegesis lexica de un estereotipo*, Ciudad de México: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1980.



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40 Ibid., p. 19-24.

41 Cohn, *Colonialism*, p.4.

42 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso. 1983.

43 Pagden and Canny, A. *Colonial Identity*, p. 271.

44 See T. C. Coates, *Convicts and Orphans: Forced and state-Sponsored Colonization in the Portuguese Empire, 1550-1755*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, J. M. Monteiro, "From Indian to slave: forced native labour and colonial society in São Paulo during the seventeenth century". *Slavery & Abolition*, 9 (2): 105-127. London, Frank Cass & co, 1988; L. F. Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor*. Lisboa: Difel, 1994.

45 Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power*, p. 8.

46 É. Benveniste, *O vocabulário das instituições indo-européias*. Campinas, Ed. Unicamp, 1995. [*Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*]

47 Ibid., p. 349.

48 Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires*, New York, The Modern Library, 2003, p. 101.

49 Jeanette, Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1540-1842*. Bombay, Himalaya Publishers, 1992, p. 50.

50 I refer here to the concept of "subalternity" as used by Indian historians in the 1980s, influenced by Gramsci. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Prefacio, in Partha Chatterjee, *Colonialismo, Modernidade e Política*, Salvador, UFBA, 2004, pp 7-14.

51 Agostinho Barbosa (1590-1649). 1611. *Dictionarium Lusitanico-Latinum*. Braccharae Augustae, apud Fructuosum Laurentium de Basto 1611, Lisboa.

52 Anonymous, *Dictionarium Latino-Lusitanicum et Japonicum, ex Ambrosio Calepini*. Amacusa [Amakusa]: Colégio da Companhia, 1595.

53 Anonymous, *Dicionário Português, Tamul e Cingalês*. (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino). Eighteenth century Manuscript.

54 Buescu, *A Galáxia das Língua*, p. 34-5.

55 Cohn, *Colonialism* and, p. 5; and E. Said, *Orientalism*. New York, Vintage, 1978.

56 P. Bourdieu, *Ce qui parler veut dire: L'economie des échanges linguistiques*. Paris, Fayard, 1982.

57 Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power*, p. 2.

58 Pierre, Bourdieu, *La Force Du Droit. Éléments Pour Une Sociologie Duchamp Juridique*. Actes De La Recherche En Sciences Sociales. (Paris): (64): 3-19 September 1986.

59 Stolcke, *A New World*, p. 7.

60 C. Tilly, "How do relations store histories?" *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, p. 721-23, 2000; and Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power*, p. 9.



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Argentina: Topographical Traces of a Gloomy History



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Abstract

During the last Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983) hundreds of urban buildings were converted into clandestine centers of detention. Resistance to the dictatorship and the struggle for truth and justice created, or re-signified, certain spaces that today serve as symbols of the defense of fundamental rights and a rejection of authoritarianism. This article focuses on ten sites related to the history of the period of state terrorism and explores the ways that recent initiatives to recover these spaces seek to elaborate collective identity and to promote the memory of this traumatic past.

Historical Context

Argentina declared independence from Spain in 1816 and formalized its constitution in 1853. From that point on, the nation's history was marked by conflict. In 1930 institutional life was interrupted by a military coup—the first to overthrow a legitimate civilian government. From then on, the history of twentieth century Argentina was defined by a series of democratic governments usurped by military coups.

From 1973 until 1976 Argentina had a democratic government. Nonetheless, it was a time of intense social and political conflict, and the mobilization of urban and rural guerrillas. At the same time, the government emerged as a repressive force that operated beyond the law through paramilitary task forces that sought to annihilate all forms of dissent. As the decade progressed, the armed forces participated more and more in repression, and finally, on 24 March 1976, they took over, establishing the bloodiest dictatorship in Argentine history. All political and cultural activity was suppressed. Thousands of Argentine citizens left the country as exiles, and countless more went into internal exile. The military government set up a sinister and criminal enterprise beyond the law, which included abduction, undercover arrests, interrogation under torture, and the seizure and kidnapping of children. The list of abuses is long, but the term that encapsulates the Argentine tragedy is that of the *desaparecidos* (the

disappeared).

Throughout the country, more than 300 buildings were turned into clandestine detention centers. Thirty thousand men, women and children were erased from the face of the earth in a genocide committed by the armed forces, who acted above the law with complete impunity. No traces of the disappeared remained. No account of what happened in each case. No possible mourning. The wounds are still open.

By 1980, calls for information regarding the *desaparecidos* were increasing and new human rights organizations began to mobilize with existing groups in protest of the dictatorship. At the same time, the military junta was experiencing deep internal conflict and changes of leadership. The economic bonanza that had characterized the regime in its early years was coming to an end, and social agitation was on the rise. Signs of change were visible, as unions and political parties came out of their silence.

In 1982, the social and political situation became too difficult for the regime to control. In an attempt to recover their loss of status, they resorted to a long-forgotten historical land dispute: the possession of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands. The Argentine military invaded the islands and entered into war with Great Britain. The operation was converted into a patriotic public relations

campaign, endorsed by a majority of the nation. Soon, however, Argentine military losses, exposure of government lies, and the lack of concern with which the army regarded the endangerment of its soldiers against powerful Great Britain led to a general outcry against the regime. In 1983, Argentina's swift defeat in the Falklands War signaled the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of a democratic transition.

In December 1983 the new democratically elected government started the trial against the military officers who were accused of crimes against humanity.

At the same time, a National Commission on Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) was created, whose principal task consisted of receiving testimonies and producing evidence on the crimes committed during the military dictatorship to be presented to the judges in charge of the lawsuit. In 1984, the CONADEP published the report known as "*Nunca Más*" (Never Again), which compiled the information acquired during the investigation.

Finally, in December 1985, the responsible officers of the Military Junta were convicted. The trial had complex political consequences. The public knowledge of the horrors led to a call for Justice and Punishment. In this way, under strong pressure from the top military authorities, Congress approved



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in 1987 the *Punto Final* (Full Stop) and *Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience) laws, which put an end to the trials against the military officers involved in the repression. Two years later, the then President Carlos Menem pardoned by decree the convicted military officers.

During the following years, the fight for truth and justice continued. The recuperation of children born in captivity and given out for adoption or illegally appropriated has had important results. The work of forensic anthropologists has permitted the identification of buried bodies in anonymous graves in public or

clandestine cemeteries. The children and family of the *desaparecidos* (those who "disappeared" during the military dictatorship), have not ceased their claims.

The election of President Néstor Kirchner, in May 2003, has foregrounded these issues in the public agenda. In August 2003, following a debate the Congress approved a project to repeal the *Punto Final* (Full Stop) and *Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience) laws. In this same session a Convention on the Non-applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity

was ratified by the Argentine government. Thus the principal trials were reopened.

In continuity of this policy the current national government on 24 March 2004, signed an agreement with the government of Buenos Aires city to transform the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA), which was used by the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) as a clandestine detention center into a space for memory and the promotion of human rights.

Topography of Memory

A nation's past is written not only into the memory of its peoples. It is also engraved in the physical spaces that surround their lives. Throughout Argentina the dictatorship left its mark on countless sites. Hundreds of everyday buildings were converted into centers of detention, torture, death and disappearance. Almost all of those kidnapped and taken to these locations disappeared. Moreover resistance to the dictatorship and the struggle for truth and justice created, or re-signified, urban spaces that today serve as symbols of the defense of fundamental rights and a rejection of authoritarianism.

During the dictatorship, the armed forces converted many of their own properties

into detention centers. Camps were usually constructed within a small part of a building, either a basement, an attic or a mezzanine, without interrupting the daily activities of the rest of the space. Military and police academies, administrative buildings, police stations, private homes and schools are just a few of the locations that were converted into illegal prisons. "Hidden in plain sight", most detention centers, were similar in design under a system known as a "program of necessity." Camps typically consisted of a heavily guarded entrance, a command center, a registration room to identify prisoners, a kitchen, bathroom and infirmary, a storeroom for loot stolen from prisoners' homes, a detention room, cells, and torture chambers. Once a

camp was no longer in operation, it was destroyed.

The armed forces continually remodeled detention centers. To maximize the amount of prisoners that centers could accommodate, the cells would be modified to smaller and smaller dimensions. These structural changes were accompanied by an increase in camp personnel and internal surveillance.

The military regime was able to consolidate its power through the creation of camps throughout the country, augmenting, with each new center, the psychological injury that goes hand in hand with these scenes of terror.

Photographic Testimony

Unlike the Holocaust, the Argentine experience of terror was not photographically documented by its perpetrators. One exception, however, is the case of the ESMA (Navy Mechanics School), where photos were taken for an internal registry of prisoners. These pictures were taken by some prisoners who were part of an internal working program, which consisted of forced cooperation with the military to carry out specific tasks.

The first official images of detention centers were taken in 1984, after the return of democracy, by CONADEP (Commission on the Disappearance of Persons), the body that documented the human rights violations of the military dictatorship.¹

By that time, however, many of the

centers had been demolished. Survivors who accompanied CONADEP on their inspections helped identify the former centers through clues such as pieces of floor tile, trees, barbed wire fences, etc. These testimonies have aided the reconstruction of camps through site plans and drawings. Detention centers remained intact in very few cases. But some survivors have been able to locate inscriptions on cell walls. The buildings that remained after the return of democracy resumed their pre-dictatorship functions. Only some of these spaces permitted CONADEP to photograph. Currently, one of the most detailed site reconstruction is that of *El Atlético* (The Athletic Club).

The photographs of these spaces reveal fragments of our history. The verbal accounts of state terrorism, so populated

with ghosts, require images that clarify and sharpen the history. At the same time, topographic reconstructions place testimonies in time and place. Together, these forms of recovery allow us access to Argentina's most lamentable past.

What follows are examples of the clandestine detention centers in which the state sought to torture, and eventually exterminate, all elements that it deemed "subversive". Also included are sites of memory that figured prominently in the resistance movement—against the dictatorship and against present-day forces who seek to deny the history of what occurred. These spaces, imbued with a traumatic past, are ripe to be converted into places of learning, dialogue and reflection.



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El Atlético (The Athletic Club)

The clandestine center of detention known as *El Atlético* was located in Buenos Aires in the basement of a building under the direction of the Federal Police. It functioned as a clandestine detention center from the beginning of 1977 until 28 December of that same year, when the remaining prisoners were transferred to a different center known as *El Banco* (The Bank). The building, which housed *El Atlético*, was destroyed in 1979 during the construction of the 25 de Mayo (25 May) highway.

El Atlético consisted of a principal torture room separated by two sections of cells, *la leonera* (the lion's cage), the section of the camp where most prisoners were held, a bathroom, an infirmary, three more individual cells and a "consultation" room.

Prisoners arrived at *El Atlético* blindfolded in the back of private vehicles. Upon arrival they were thrown violently down a flight of stairs into the basement of the building, which was damp, devoid of natural light, and virtually unventilated. Stripped of their outside possessions, all prisoners received an identification number. Detainees were then blindfolded in their cells and shackled in ankle chains.

With movement and vision restricted, the prisoners were left in isolation, their open wounds left untreated.

The Lion's Cage, where detainees were held before being moved to their cells or to the torture room, consisted of forty box-shaped cells separated by low walls. *El Atlético* had space for 200 detainees. According to the testimony *El Atlético* housed more than 1,500 people, most of whom have disappeared. This data is corroborated by the letters that preceded each prisoner's identification number, whereby each letter represented another one hundred. Prisoners arrived at *El Atlético* in groups of about six or seven a day, although at times up to twenty were admitted. At regular intervals, groups of twenty prisoners were "transferred", an euphemism for assassination.²

In 2002, the Project for the Recovery of the Clandestine Center, an interdisciplinary team comprised of anthropologists, archeologists, communication specialists, architects and engineers, began an excavation of the remains of *El Atlético* basement. Along with the recovery of testimony and

documentary material, their goal is the creation of a research center, dedicated to transmitting the memory of what occurred during the military dictatorship.

The initiative to recover the site of *El Atlético* arose from a collaboration of survivors, relatives of disappeared persons, community and human rights organizations, and is being supported by the government of the City of Buenos Aires.



Clandestine Detention Center "*El Atlético*" (The Athletic Club)
An important site-recovering program is being now developed.
Memoria Abierta, Verónica Feinmann.

El Olimpo (Olympus)

On 16 August 1978, prisoners being held in the detention center known as *El Banco* (The Bank) were transferred to *El Olimpo* (Olympus), a new center located within the Department of Motor Vehicles of the Buenos Aires Federal Police. *El Olimpo*, which was under the jurisdiction of the First Armed Division, was notorious as a particularly brutal camp run by General Suarez Mason to train members of the Triple A paramilitary forces.³ The camp also functioned as an exchange center for prisoners from other countries, most notably from Uruguay.

Through the use of survivor and neighborhood resident testimonies, historians and human rights activists have recovered a history of the center. Situated within a 10-meter high metal shed, *El Olimpo* was precariously constructed out of the former offices of the department of motor vehicles and consisted primarily of a series of torture chambers, cells and

offices. Prisoners entered through a large stainless steel access door guarded by a soldier. Prisoner transfers were made through a set of double doors, on the left hand side of which hung an image of the Virgin Mary.

The layout of *El Olimpo* mirrored that of other detention centers of the period. The prisoner "isolation wing" had arched windows filled in with bricks, save for a small opening at the very top. Next to the isolation wing were a small torture chamber and a few latrines. A photo lab, typing room, kitchen and two infirmaries, one for the sick and one for internment, were located next to the torture room. Prisoners were held along three rows of cells, each with a bathroom and a curtain for a door. The guards' room overlooked a parking lot.⁴

At the end of the dictatorship, *El Olimpo* was returned to the Federal Police and

resumed its pre-dictatorship activities. At present, the building functions as a motor vehicle registration center; all



Clandestine Detention Center "*El Olimpo*" (Olympus).
Known for its particularly cruel methods.
CONADEP, Enrique Shore.

Buenos Aires residents who own vehicles have to pass through the building to register their cars.

Unlike other clandestine centers of



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detention, *El Olimpo* was located in a residential area of single-family unit homes. This fact has branded it in the collective memory of Argentines as representative of the ways in which that

Alejandro Posadas Hospital

Alejandro Posadas Hospital, located in the province of Buenos Aires under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Public Health, functioned as a clandestine center of detention beginning in 1976. The section of the hospital utilized as a prison was a small, two-storied family home located behind the main building.

Federal police officers from Buenos Aires, and military personnel from the Ministry of Social Welfare made up the "Task Force" that ran the hospital camp. Known as the "SWAT" task force, the group also received administrative support from the Castelar and Moron police departments, two very important municipalities in the province. The abuses committed at the camp occurred in view of the hospital employees, patients and visitors, many of whom also became victims for what they saw.

The hospital began to function as a camp in March 1976 with the arrest of forty prisoners, against the objections of the hospital administration. After the appointment of a military doctor as head of the hospital, prisoner executions

everyday buildings and public spaces were converted into centers of terror. Over the past few years, residents of the neighborhood along with survivors of torture and human rights organizations

accelerated. Hospital personnel who were kidnapped, were usually thrown into cars, blindfolded, and told they were being taken to a detention center very far away. In reality they were taken right back to the hospital for detainment. According to one survivor's testimony, many hospital doctors participated in the repression as torturers.⁵



Clandestine Detention Center "Hospital Alejandro Posadas"

The abuses committed there were witnessed by the employees, patients and visitors.

CONADEP, Enrique Shore.

have joined forces to promote the restoration of the center. On 27 December 2003, they succeeded in having it designated as an official historic site of the city of Buenos Aires.

The Hospital camp relied on the collaboration of several interconnected agencies. For example, when hospital employees were detained, they were taken, blindfolded, to the Castelar Police Station, where they would be tortured by personnel of the Moron Air Force for information about hospital personnel. Other prisoners were taken to the Moron Airbase, where they were subjected to cruel and inhuman punishments. Detainees who were not "transferred", would be moved from police station to police station before becoming a "legal" prisoner, usually without trial.

The case of Alejandro Posadas Hospital was significant in that the entire hospital figured in the system of repression. It also demonstrated the coordination and cooperation of several different sectors of the military and police in the exercise of terror.

As is the case with other centers of detention, survivor groups, family members, neighborhood residents and human rights organizations continue to fight for truth and justice on behalf of the victims of the Alejandro Posadas hospital.

Mansión Seré (Seré Mansion)

The Seré Mansion, clandestine center of detention, located in the province of Buenos Aires, was run by the Seventh Air Brigade of Morón from December 1976 until the beginning of April 1978. Built by the Seré family at the end of the 1920s, the mansion and its surrounding park had several different uses before being converted into an illegal detention center by the Air Force. During the sixteen months of operation, an undetermined number of prisoners passed through the Mansion. The escape of four detainees/disappeared persons on 28 March 1978 led the Air Force to

close the center and to destroy part of the house. The Mansion remained in a state of partial collapse until 1985, when the municipality of Morón completed the demolition and built Gorki Grana Park over the remains.

The case of the Seré Mansion merits attention because of the partnership that restoration efforts have engendered between the local community and municipal government for recovery of the memory of the site.

In 2000 the Municipality of Morón, along

with human rights organizations and a team of anthropologists from the University of Buenos Aires initiated the legal process to excavate the former site of Seré Mansion. That same year, the alliance opened the "House of Memory and Life", in which the offices of the Seré Association for Memory and Life and the Human Rights Office of Morón are located.

In April 2002 the Municipality of Moron, the Seré Association and the Government of the City of Buenos Aires—legal owner of the land—signed an agreement



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initiating the formal archeological and anthropological excavation of the Seré Mansion with the objective to recover the history of the site as part of "community heritage" and to create an "interpretative center" that would operate as a "monument to the conservation and elaboration of identity and memory." The challenge currently lies in designing a space for memory in close proximity to a community park.

The Seré Mansion could hold up to thirty prisoners at a time. The detainees were normally kept for a week to up to five months. Unlike other buildings throughout the nation that were remodeled to accommodate concentration camp-like conditions, the Seré Mansion, or "Atila" as it was known by the military, remained relatively unchanged (the mansion shared a telephone line with a neighboring house; there were at least three escape attempts, etc.).



Clandestine Detention Center "Mansión Seré" (Seré Mansion).

Four prisoners escaped by jumping from one window and running naked through the surrounding park.

Archive of the Association Seré: For Memory and Life.

The paramilitary team in charge of executing and interrogating prisoners was made up of five or six persons. In addition, the mansion was guarded by a rotating group of two or three soldiers. According to testimonies, prisoners at Seré Mansion were either community activists, high school students, or union delegates, many of whom were re-detained after being freed from Seré.

Survivor testimony and other historical data has allowed for an accurate reconstruction of the everyday activities of the center. Survivors have corroborated the topographic reconstruction of the mansion over details such as building materials, hygienic and living conditions, and the frequency of prisoner arrivals and transfers. Through testimonies, researchers have also established that during the period from October 1977 to March 1978 there was a fairly regular flow of prisoners through the camp.

Palacio Policial de la ciudad de Mendoza (Police Hall of the City of Mendoza)

In Police Hall, headquarters of the Mendoza City Police, the clandestine detention center known as Department 2 functioned under the jurisdiction of the Third Armed Division of the Argentine Army.

During the dictatorship, many prisoners were brought through Police Hall, most of whom were subsequently "legalized" and sentenced to terms at the Mendoza Penitentiary. Police Hall was especially remodeled for use as a detention center, with a mezzanine built for holding prisoners and two cellars for torture.

Access to the building led from a parking lot to a reception desk, where prisoners were identified. Next to the reception

area was a staircase to the mezzanine, where Department 2 functioned. A door on the mezzanine level opened up to two rows of cells, at the end of which were showers and a bathroom. Two flights of stairs led to the station switchboard, beside which were two torture chambers.

The second cellar, which was accessible only by elevator, housed the incinerator and another torture chamber. ⁶

In Police Hall, repressors practiced brutal forms of individual and collective torture, including gang rape, forced miscarriages and murder, which had the support of medical and legal practitioners.

In 1984 CONADEP, accompanied by a group of survivors, conducted an

investigation of Police Hall. At that time, more than fifty people testified to having been illegally imprisoned at the site. Since then the figure has tripled.



Clandestine Detention Center Police Hall of Mendoza.

Many detention centers functioned inside the Police buildings. CONADEP, Enrique Shore.



Articles

Base Aérea Mar del Plata (Mar del Plata Air Base)



*Clandestine Detention Center Mar del Plata Air Base.
A subterranean prison built underneath
an old radar tower.
CONADEP, Enrique Shore.*

From 1976 until the end of 1977 a small detention center, under the jurisdiction of the Argentine Air Force in the province of Buenos Aires, operated out of the Mar del Plata Air Base.

Located a few kilometers from the seaside resort town of Mar del Plata off the much-traversed Highway Number 2, the Air Base prison was constructed about 600 meters from the base's main entrance. The subterranean prison was built underneath an old radar tower. After the dictatorship, the center was converted into an auxiliary armory. Above the prison was a mound of earth in the shape of a

trapezoid with a ground level door. Heading through the door, a set of 15 steps led to the boiler room, which was used as a torture chamber, a kitchen and a bathroom. On the left hand side were six different sized rooms that were used as cells, two of which were only accessible through other cells.

Mar del Plata Air Base is emblematic of many other detention centers located within military territories. Unlike camps situated within everyday buildings in urban centers, the cover of military protection allowed for total impunity and savage treatment of prisoners.⁷

El Vesubio (Vesuvius)

The clandestine detention center known as *El Vesubio* was located in military territory off the highway heading toward Ezeiza International Airport, near Buenos Aires. Under the jurisdiction of the National Penal Service, the center operated from 1976 until 1978. Its somewhat remote location, and the fact that it was surrounded by other military and police outposts, made it an ideal location for the function of state repression. In 1978, shortly before the visit of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, the center was demolished.

El Vesubio consisted of three houses. The first house, known as Headquarters, held prisoners in horrendous conditions in the basement and on the first floor. An infirmary on the first floor also housed sick and gravely wounded prisoners. In later years of operations the Headquarters became the residence of the head of the prison.

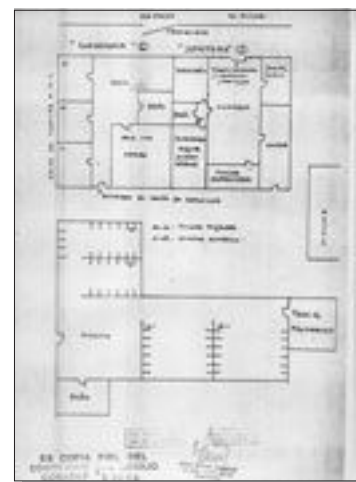
The second house, which was located

closest to the highway, was the first building prisoners entered upon arrival at *El Vesubio*, and contained the main torture chamber. A large living space separated the torture chamber and the other rooms of the house. Prominent in survivor testimonies are descriptions of the red and white tiles that covered the floor of the second house.

The third house held the majority of the prisoners, who were divided between men and women on the left and right side of the house. The main entrance of the house was through the kitchen, which was under guard 24 hours a day. The kitchen had a large counter with a removable cover where every day a prisoner roll call was produced, which included prisoner identification numbers, and information about their arrivals and transfers.⁸

El Vesubio was among the hundreds of centers utilized by the military dictatorship to impose a system of state terror. Like many other centers, upon demolition *El*

Vesubio was incorporated into the urban space of Buenos Aires, where it became part of a culture of denial and silence. Nonetheless, throughout the last 20 years, survivors and families of those disappeared have visited the site and have reconstructed a history through names, dates, and other data that have supported judicial processes, the identification of the victims and a demand for the punishment of those responsible.



*Clandestine Detention Center
"El Vesubio" (Vesubius).
As many others, this center was
demolished before the end of
the dictatorship.
CONADEP.*



Articles

Escuela Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) **Navy Mechanics School**

The Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) remains a symbol of the crimes perpetrated during the period of state terrorism. Within its walls over 5,000 persons disappeared, the majority of whom still remain unaccounted for.

The three-storied Officer Mess Hall at the ESMA complex was utilized as the main detention center. Prisoners were held on the third floor of the building, in the basement and in the large attic. Other rooms included the *Pañol*, the storeroom where the loot from prisoners' homes was kept, *La Pecera* (fishbowl), a group of offices and archives where a small number of prisoners worked, and *Capucha* (hood) and *Capuchita* (little hood), two rooms designated for torture and for isolating certain prisoners.

Though the Mess Hall was the main building used to house prisoners during

the dictatorship, the rest of the ESMA complex functioned as part of the detention center. Survivors have testified that they were periodically assigned to different buildings for work duty and to receive medical attention.⁹

At the end of the military dictatorship in 1983, ESMA resumed its function as a naval academy with seven separate schools and a staff of 3,500.

The Navy Mechanics School was not the most brutal of detention centers that operated during the military dictatorship, nonetheless its name has become synonymous with the terror of the period due to the number of survivors who testified about their experiences at the camp once in exile. ESMA gained further notoriety due to a land dispute between the navy and the government of the City of Buenos Aires. The conversion of ESMA

into a site of memory has been a long-term goal of several human rights organizations and signals the opening of new relations between social justice groups and the current Argentine government.



*Clandestine Detention Center "ESMA" (Navy Mechanics School)
A museum of memory will be placed there soon.
CONADEP, Enrique Shore.*

Plaza de Mayo

Situated between the *Casa Rosada* (the presidential palace) and the Cabildo Building, site of Argentina's formal declaration of independence from Spanish rule, the Plaza de Mayo is emblematic of the history of Argentina. In the center of the Plaza, framed by palm trees and a fountain, stands the May Pyramid, an obelisk commemorating key episodes in the nation's history: the founding of Buenos Aires in 1580 by Juan de Garay; Argentina's independence in 1816; and the ratification of the national constitution.

The Plaza is located at the intersection of the main thoroughfares of Buenos Aires, surrounded by a series of government buildings and seats of power. Through the years, the Plaza has been the gathering place for countless uprisings and rebellions. Though the facades of the buildings that border the Plaza have

changed over time, the Plaza de Mayo remains the center for popular protest of citizens fighting for change.

In 1977, during the early stages of the dictatorship, the mothers of children who had been disappeared began to meet in the historic site in search of information about their loved ones. Coming together and sharing their stories, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo subverted attempts of the ruling junta to impose a system of silence, terror, and forced disappearance. At the time, Argentina was under a "state of emergency"; any form of public meeting was prohibited. In order to continue their protest, the mothers began to march around the obelisk in the center of the Plaza. Every Thursday they would come together on behalf of their children, wearing white scarves around their head as a symbol of protest. The Mothers preferred to describe their weekly

gatherings as a "march", rather than a "circle" around the Plaza obelisk, because, "when you circle you just go round and round, when you march, you are heading somewhere."¹⁰ Every Thursday since then the Mothers march in demand for truth, justice and because, "Our children were taken for dreaming of a freer and more just country. We are vindicating that dream, which was so brutally cut short."¹¹



*Plaza de Mayo: the main site of resistance and demonstration in Buenos Aires.
Archive Photo, Madres de Plaza de Mayo – LF (Mothers of Plaza of Mayo Founding Line).*



Articles

El Parque de la Memoria (The Park of Memory)

The Park of Memory is a public space dedicated to the memory of those who disappeared during the military dictatorship. Located on 14 hectares of land along the coast of the La Plata River, in whose waters the bodies of the victims were thrown, the park functions as a public symbol of the nation's trauma.

The idea for a park arose in 1997 from an alliance of human rights organizations.

When completed, the park will consist of monuments to the victims of state terrorism, the victims of the attack on the AMIA (Israeli Mutual Association), and for the Righteous Among the Nations.

The monument to the victims of the dictatorship will consist of a cut of land running through a barren grass hill. Walls will run alongside the embankment and will be accessible by ramps leading from a main access plaza. Symbolizing an open wound, the walls will contain plaques made from Patagonian stone engraved with the names of the victims



The Park of Memory. An initiative of the government of Buenos Aires. SERPAJ, Juan DW.

of state repression from 1976 to 1983.

Currently, only the access plaza has been completed. Three of twelve sculptures selected in an international competition among 665 artists from 44 nations have been installed. In addition to these 12 works, another six specially commissioned sculptures are planned.

Construction of the structural foundations and river walk that will border the grass hill began in May 2004. Next to the monument will be a cultural center dedicated to keeping alive collective memory.

The Park's design attempts to open the public sphere through a memorialization of the victims of state terrorism, the condemnation of those responsible for the crimes, and the consolidation of democracy. It does not seek to heal wounds, nor to supplant the struggle for truth and justice for which diverse sectors of Argentine society still fight, rather it is a space of reflection for those that have been denied the right to mourn their loved ones. At the same time, the Park will formally inscribe the "disappeared" into the history of our nation by honoring their struggle for the ideals of freedom, solidarity and justice, while reflecting on the seemingly irreparable wound that continues to threaten our society.

Conclusion

Over the past thirty years human rights groups and large sectors of Argentine society have struggled to bring to justice those responsible for the crimes committed during the dictatorship. A large part of the human rights struggle has been to identify and recover the clandestine centers of detention situated throughout the nation. Only a handful of the 360 officially recognized centers have been recovered. Social justice groups have barely begun the arduous process of preservation and restoration of these sites to their "historical owners".

The efforts to preserve the detention centers discussed in this article will aid future groups as they attempt to

systematize the restoration of clandestine detention centers throughout Argentina.

It is worth noting that whether or not each initiative achieves success, a movement with strong societal support has begun that cannot be reversed. The interdisciplinary nature of these restoration teams has created broad-based support across many different social groups and academic fields. This support is enhanced by the public nature of the projects throughout urban spaces.

Most important, however, is the involvement and participation of various sectors of national, provincial and municipal government.

Post dictatorship government support for

restoration projects has been hesitant in part because even these governments did not or could not stand up to the armed forces and their natural allies, and also because of their own resistance to the goals of social justice groups. Land disputes between official owners (the military or the government) have also impeded restoration projects, though such disputes have served to further expose the terror committed at such sites.

The sites discussed in this article, witnesses to the repression and resistance of Argentina's darkest period, testify to the efforts of a society willing to confront its past and to register in its memory episodes painfully lived.



Articles

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1. Commission on the Disappearance of Persons. *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared*. Trans. Writers and Scholars International Ltd, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986. CONADEP was created in 1983 by then president Raul Alfonsín. Its mission was to investigate the extent and forms of illegal repression perpetrated during the military dictatorship.

2. Ibid, 90.

3. The Triple A, or AAA (Anti-Communist Alliance of Argentina), was a paramilitary force organized by Jose Lopez Raga, Minister of Social Welfare during the pre-dictatorship Peronist government. The Triple A death squads were responsible for assassinations and attacks against leftist activists and public figures. Many members of the Triple A forces later joined the task forces of the military regime. From 1973 until the eve of the military coup in 1976, the Triple A was responsible for 1,500 deaths.

4. *Nunca Más*, 70-76.

5. Ibid, 137-139.

6. Ibid, 196-198.

7. Ibid, 171-173.

8. Ibid, 158-160.

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10. Matilde Mellibovsky, *Círculo de amor sobre la muerte* Buenos Aires, Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1990.

11. Ibid.



Articles

Democracy and the Performance of Power: Observations from Nigeria



Moses Ebe Ochonou

Attended Bayero University Kano, Nigeria, from where he graduated with a B.A (History) in 1997. After his mandatory one-year national service, he proceeded to the University of Michigan, USA, for his Masters and Ph.D. in African History. His Ph.D. dissertation is titled **A Colony in Crisis: Northern Nigeria, British Colonialism, and the Great Depression** (2004).

He was appointed Assistant Professor of African History at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA, in March 2004. He has published articles in academic journals as well as in Nigerian newspapers and several websites.

Abstract

Since Nigeria's transition from military to civilian "democratic" rule in 1999, there has been a debate among Nigerian and international commentators about just how democratic (or undemocratic) governance and the exercise of power has become in the country. This essay contributes to this important debate. Relying on observed incidents and on newspaper reports and informal conversations between the author and a cross-section of Nigerians, this essay brings to the front-burner the contradiction between the emphasis on popularity in democratic dispensations and the undemocratic actions and discourses of elected government officials, which are aimed, however dubiously, at portraying the appearances of popularity, ubiquity and acclamation. Using several examples from the last five years of civilian "democratic" rule in Nigeria, I analyze this dilemma, which I advance as a problematic of democratic discourse and advocacy—one which contributes to the neglect of *actual* governance and promotes abuses and excesses of power.

Introduction

In the early 1990s, Cameroonian scholar, Achille Mbembe, wrote a classic essay analyzing the insidious and subtle ways in which political power and its accompanying discourses become so banal as to be appropriated, sometimes unconsciously, by a wide segment of the population of African states. In *Provisional Notes on the Postcolony* (1992), Mbembe argued that power in postcolonial Africa is so pervasive and ubiquitous that it invades even the most sacred domains of life, resulting in what he calls "the intimacy of power."

At such levels of power, even indisputably private and innocuous decisions such as the desire to wear a beard or bear the nickname "president" could bring one into confrontation with the state. In such situations, the limit of state power is occluded, and the state is able to exert influence, direct and indirect, on both mundane and politically consequential matters. In such semi-permanent states of political "excess," the postcolonial *commandement*, as Mbembe calls it, routinizes itself through "daily rituals that ratify [it]." ¹

The most interesting aspect of this banality of power is the way in which citizens, consciously, unconsciously, and sometimes inevitably, appropriate the

terms and linguistic and semiotic devices through which power is disseminated and wielded. The result of this is that no aspect of life escapes the reach of the state and no domain is too mundane to accommodate the performance of power by postcolonial autocrats and pretending democrats. This last contention applies vividly to what has obtained in Nigeria since the current government of Olusegun Obasanjo came into power in 1999. The situation in the Nigerian polity, where new mediums of personalizing power and of creating the appearance of popularity and ubiquity have taken hold, bears an uncanny resemblance to the Cameroon and Africa of Mbembe's eloquent narrative. In this encounter, words, symbolism, and images have become powerful as agents of power.

This brief essay relies on the author's observations while conducting doctoral field research in Nigeria in 2001/2002. I use these observations, newspaper reports, and popular discourses to sketch the contours of a fast-growing phenomenon in Nigeria: elected state officials exercising power through multiple, seemingly contradictory apparatuses, and engaging in clearly autocratic political practices, while seeking, at least rhetorically, to cast the present dispensation of power as a departure

from its military predecessors. This preliminary sketch uses insights from Mbembe's influential essay and from Michel Foucault, whose works vividly capture the subtleties of power by arguing that power in the modern world, unlike in preceding eras, is wielded, not only in crude structural forms in which overt force is implicated but through the deployment of knowledge, discourses, and incentives that are laden with power implications.² In Foucault's episteme, the contests of power tend to move to new registers, which are themselves indexed by regimes of knowledge, discourses, and signs.

One of the insights from Foucault's theorization of power that is relevant to the following analysis is his argument that resisting power or authority must sometimes be understood as an unconscious submission to that which is purportedly being resisted, and a fulfillment of the wishes of the power wielder. For instance, if a Nigerian says "President Obasanjo has no power over me," "I cannot be influenced by President Obasanjo" or "I cannot be controlled by President Obasanjo," he or she is indirectly acknowledging the prevalence and reality of Obasanjo's power. Denying or resisting this power paradoxically confirms Obasanjo's power as something that is potent and dangerous and hence



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something that can/should be resisted or escaped. You have to acknowledge the dangerous reality of a thing before you can seek to escape or resist it. Denial or resistance here works to affirm that which

is being denied or resisted. This think-piece examines novel manifestations of power in “democratic” Nigeria in light of these multiple insights.



The Banality of Power in “Democratic” Nigeria

The way in which power is wielded and performed in the current political dispensation in Nigeria bears out and complicates Foucault's thesis of subtle and stealthy power at the same time; it is at once crudely physical and invisibly subtle. It is so brutally real that one can only speak of a power-knowledge regime with some intellectual trepidation. At the same time, it takes such subtle and discursive forms that it makes contemporary Nigeria some kind of ethnographic present for Foucault's thesis. Nigeria's political leaders, especially state governors, have been employing carrot and stick in a strategic exercise of power. On the one hand, they sponsor projects that seek to engender consent and popularity. They have been gently but steadily planting their persona and their image on the landscape by inscribing their names on any edifice with the remotest connection to their tenure—a seemingly innocuous thing to do, but an act that is packed with power implications. On the other hand, they hire thugs and intimidate opponents and dissenting members of the public. Elected officials have been building little armies of cohesion. And, most recently, they

have resorted to the use of blackmail (employing state resources and state-funded programs) to force obedience and conformity. This recent addition to the behavioral repertoire of Nigerian political leaders has serious implications for how citizens engage with power. In fact it has implications for whether or not they engage with power at all. I will return to this theme later.

The theatrics of power unfolding in Nigeria mirrors a dangerous escalation of a familiar trend—an abuse of power that is so entrenched it renders alternative forms aberrant. It is a form of power that Foucault's thesis could not have captured in all its ramifications. It is dangerous because it employs any method, direct or indirect, brutal or gentle, to insinuate political leaders permanently or semi-permanently into the consciousness of citizens. To be sure, the object includes the maximization of consent. But in contemporary Nigeria the aim is broader. The political behavior of Nigeria's present power elite borders on megalomania, a trait that Foucault consigned to the pre-modern era. Events of the last four years have illustrated this drift towards

megalomaniacal displays eloquently; elected officials have immersed themselves so deeply in the thrills of domination that they are no longer capable of imagining themselves outside governance. Some state governors are clearly committed to the project of making their names interchangeable with those of their states. Increasingly, the state governors have come to see the states they preside over as extensions of their persons. And they have been working insidiously towards concretizing this vision, hoping to make their image coextensive with that of their states, and vice versa.

This process was in full swing in 2001 when I resided in Nigeria to conduct doctoral field work. Elected officials, especially state governors, were in the process of naturalizing their leadership, and of making themselves the staple of popular political discourse. This project succeeded with stealthy brutality. In 2001 it was impossible, for instance, to think of Kogi state without thinking of Abubakar Audu, its governor at the time. The ways in which the governors have been pursuing this project are a bewildering



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mix of discourse-based forays and brutal, predatory politics.

Let me expatiate and clarify. What forms do the discourse and manifestations of power take in contemporary Nigeria? Some of them are so banal, so insignificant in their occurrence that we risk missing their import. Let us start with the federal government. When the phrase "dividend of democracy" came upon the Nigerian political scene in 1999 after the end of military rule, many did not realize its power to affect and infect the possibilities for political perception in Nigeria as well as Nigerians' view of obligations and responsibilities in a democracy. Today, however, the phrase sits atop the hierarchy of politically significant and oft-deployed concepts; it enjoys the acceptance of pro-government propagandists and opposition intellectuals alike. As recently as June 2004, the respected Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie, the Archbishop of Lagos, who is widely regarded as a critic of the current government, was quoted in the national media as having "rated the Federal Government low on democracy dividends."³

The expression has come to abide in the

political lexicon as a reminder of the agenda-setting, self-interested discourse of the ruling elite. As I argued elsewhere (*Thisday* 26/11/02), the phrase soon acquired notoriety, especially after it was used as an ideological anchor for a country-wide media tour organized by the then Information Minister, Mr. Jerry Gana⁴, a tour which was advertised as a showcase of "the dividends of democracy." As I argued further, it soon came to acquire a comical dimension, making a transition into the realm of popular discourse and national humor, a transition which underlined its ubiquity. For example, a woman who delivered a baby was told that that was her own dividend of democracy. A man who got bullied by the Nigerian police in the familiar display of police brutality was said to be reaping his own dividend of democracy. So, in this light, one could say that this phrase, which originated from the power elite, was turned on its head and mobilized in mockery of the state.

This would accord with Mbembe's thesis of popular mockery of state power in the African postcolonial through political humor, linguistic inversion, and vulgar caricature. It is however this obsession

with the strategic and perverted use of the myths and discourses of power that could lead us to miss the salient point in this case. The point is that through the "invention" of this phrase by the powers that be, the idea that there can indeed be a democracy dividend and that democracy can acquire a benevolent character, in which key figures—patrons—dispense favors and benefits to expectant clients, has been permanently and irreversibly introduced into Nigerians' political universe. For a long time to come, it will inform the ways in which key figures in the country's democratic project are perceived and held accountable—or not. This is one example, in which the intimacy of power, achieved through the unwitting popular validation of state rituals and discourses, supplants actual political resistance. The concept of resistance becomes meaningless in contexts like these, for as Mbembe contends, rather than extrapolate the resistance paradigm to contemporary African political encounters, "the emphasis should be upon the logic of 'conviviality,' on the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, which inscribe the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme."⁵

Personalization of Power



The Nigerian federal government did indeed set the precedent in the personalization of power and in the employment of not-so-subtle strategies to perpetuate certain political personalities in the public consciousness. The upsurge in officially backed projects of personal promotions, notably the emergence of the Obasanjo-Atiku Success Movement (OASM) in 2001, brought into sharp focus the gradualism with which the project of naturalizing personal power operates. The movement started quietly, creeping up on Nigerians by stealth. An interview

here, a television news report there, was all there was to it. Within a short time, it came to command national attention, as did all the other organs for popularizing the president.

The seriousness with which Nigerians regarded such organs is not the issue here; I doubt if anyone outside the circle of Obasanjo lackeys paid these organs any mind. The issue, rather, is that for good or ill Nigerians were assaulted daily by such organizations with discourses and publicity paraphernalia (such as the then near-ubiquitous OASM badges and pins) centering on the person of the president and his deputy. Nigerians were sooner or later overwhelmed. Because the propagandists stayed at it long enough, irritation gave way to toleration and ultimately an unconscious assimilation of the Obasanjo persona. How Nigerians eventually chose to interpret the persona being marketed is another matter entirely. The point is that

they had become unwitting participants in the effort to maintain the Obasanjo mystique in the popular imagination. That is how subtle power can be in its unconventional operation.

When power is fully personalized as is gradually becoming the case in Nigeria, the result is that the destiny of the person of the leader and that of the state are conflated. And this is manifest not just in the occasional rhetorical outbursts of self-interested political officials, although that is the domain where it occurs most frequently. In 2001, as officials of **Mr. Obasanjo's** government launched a concerted effort to promote their boss's candidature for the 2003 presidential elections, Nigerians were inundated, for instance, with talk about Obasanjo being the only person who could rule Nigeria without the risk of the union dissolving or self-destructing. He was routinely portrayed as a stabilizer and a unifier. Without analyzing the merit or otherwise



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of these claims, one must realize that these are deliberate, carefully crafted discourses designed to translate the political fortunes or misfortunes of the president into the salvation or ruination of the very soul of the union.

At the peak of the Obasanjo-marketing enterprise, the president himself said publicly that his not continuing in the office of president for another term would throw Nigeria into chaos. This patently demonstrates that he himself was privy to, if not the originator of, this discourse of irrational political continuity that was being foisted on the national political consciousness. Of course, many Nigerians scoffed at the idea that Obasanjo's political destiny had deterministic implications for the health of the nation. But such views had more to do with their perception of Mr. Obasanjo as a person or as a politician than with their discomfort with the idea of intertwined destinies. Most Nigerians, including those who ridiculed the president's narcissistic statement, had unconsciously imbibed the theoretical possibility that, depending on the personality of the president, he/she could indeed determine the survival of the union and serve as the archetypal unifier and stabilizer. The idea of the president being an unifier or stabilizer was itself left unquestioned. Nigerians thus became unconscious victims of the discourse of power that is aimed, in this case, at tying the president's political persona to the fortunes of the nation, and vice versa.

If the federal political leaders have largely exercised power in ways that validate Foucault's formulation on the subtleties of power, the affairs of state governors in this "democratic" dispensation have realized the essences of a much broader theoretical postulate. The state governors have exercised power in brutal and subtle ways, alternating craftily between the two.



In North-central Kwara State for instance, there was in 2001/2002 a new political movement sweeping through the state, which revolved around the person of the then governor, **Alhaji Mohammed Lawal**. It was signposted by the branding of state-owned commercial transport buses with the inscription "up Lawal." My own first encounter with the "up Lawal" phenomenon was during a research trip to Lokoja, when I happened on one of the "up Lawal" buses. The scope of the project was soon expanded. The inscription was soon put on all public works projects that the state government, under Lawal's governorship, had executed or refurbished.

There emerged an even more farcical dimension to this project of personal promotion. Most of the water taps in Ilorin metropolis, the state capital, had run dry and the residents had been forced to rely on state-owned water tankers for their drinking water. To get the attention of the tankers as they drove through neighborhoods one had to shout "up Lawal." The tanker operators bypassed those who were too proud or simply unwilling to say the words—mostly, but not exclusively, supporters of rival politicians and political parties. Were these tanker operators acting on their own whim or doing the bidding of superior authorities, notably the governor? We may never know for sure as the governor is likely to deny that he authorized such brazen displays of political blackmail. But everyone I spoke to believed that the governor was behind it and that it was a way to humiliate his literally thirsty opposition and its equally thirsty supporters.

The "up Lawal" slogan came to dominate the Kwara landscape like a colossus. The name "Lawal" was, for a time, synonymous with "Kwara." Then, as if to

consolidate the gains of this project of personal adulation, a faceless group known as the "up Kwara project" began placing advertisements in major national newspapers extolling the "achievements" of the Governor Lawal administration. If "up Lawal" has an uncanny rhyme with "up Kwara," it is not a rhythmical coincidence, power, once inscribed in texts and visual symbols, works in ways so common as to remove all suspicions of calculated intentions. Those who came up with "up Kwara" were aware of the ubiquity of the "up Lawal" slogan and were merely, it seems, following up on its success. If Alhaji Lawal had not lost his re-election bid in April 2003, the name Lawal and Kwara might have become interchangeable, just like "up Kwara" and "up Lawal" did.

Whether the Kwara people admit it or not, their political imagination was significantly reshaped, and their unconscious coming to terms with the naturalness of Lawal's rule in Kwara stealthily assured. This project was much more successful than the proud Kwara people would admit in retrospect. Nor could one make the argument that Mr. Lawal lost his re-election bid in 2003 because he was punished by the Kwara people for his political excesses. He lost, everyone agrees, because he fell out with his political godfather, Mr. Olusola Saraki, who has been the acknowledged "kingmaker" in Kwara politics for more than two decades and whose son, Dr. Bukola Saraki, is now the Governor.

The profundity and subtlety of this power project was matched by the willingness of Governor Lawal to substitute force and muscle for symbolic appeal and subtle blackmail, especially where the latter failed to extract obedience or conformity from the public or from dissenting rivals. Those who were not cowed or awed by the Lawal mystique were attacked violently in a ruthless battle for political supremacy. The violent clash in February 2002 between Governor Lawal's thugs and those of Olusola Saraki, his estranged mentor, can be explained within this context.



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More Tales of Political Vanity

In Nigeria's North-central Kogi State, Governor **Abubakar Audu**, who was once voted the best-dressed governor by a Nigerian tabloid, relished having his majestic pictures (taken in flowing and glowing *Agbadas*) adorn major junctions in the state capital, Lokoja. This is a small part of a broader project of personal promotion aimed at entrenching the name and image of Abubakar Audu permanently in the popular imagination of the state. Passersby laughed at the billboards, made sarcastic comments on both the aesthetics of the pictures and the vanity of the governor. These were indeed amusing and irritating spectacles. But no amount of scorn poured on this project or on its sponsor, the governor, undermined the message the bill boards were designed to disseminate and to insinuate into the minds of passersby: the image of a majestic, omnipresent, and seemingly omnipotent governor. Another obsession of the governor was the naming of state infrastructures and edifices after himself and members of his family, including his late father. Defying popular outcry, he named the nascent Kogi State University, which was established by his government in 2000, after himself. Every major project in Lokoja was either named after the governor or a member of his family. In Ogbonicha, his hometown, the College of Education, although government-built and government-funded, is named after the former (Abubakar Audu also lost his reelection bid in the April 2003 general elections) governor's late father, Audu Oyidi.



All of these namings happened on the authority of the governor. The ideological linkage between this project of naming and renaming and that of pictorial propaganda should be all too apparent by now. Again, Audu did not lose his reelection bid because the people of Kogi State voted him out, although this is the (former) opposition's rhetoric. He, too, had squandered his goodwill with the political kingmakers in Kogi and had embarrassed the Federal Government through his involvement in several real estate deals that were leaked to the press. Thus, Audu's excesses were not necessarily responsible for his failed reelection bid.

In 2001/2002, Governor Audu enjoyed an additional advantage, being the only civilian governor to have ruled Kogi since its creation in 1991. He could project his political beginning unto the state's own beginning. He could point to a long trajectory of personal presence in the state's political life, a presence that he now sought to make inseparable from the state's landscape. Resistance to and criticism of Audu, of which there was no shortage, might in fact have been a victory for his project of personal promotion. After all, the point of the project was to make him the central political issue in Kogi State; to keep people talking about him (whether positively or negatively); to mystify his political persona and thus enable him to achieve a cult figure status.

Like governor Lawal, Audu was stealthily planting his name indelibly in the soil of Kogi, but he recognized that in Nigeria, leaders' survival and political longevity could not be guaranteed by such subtle forms of power. He therefore did not hesitate to employ coercion and intimidation to cow opponents and non-conformists. He demonstrated this tendency time and again during his tenure as governor.



In South-eastern Abia State, Governor **Orji Uzor Kalu**, who won re-election in April 2003, insists on having his name on signposts of government public works projects. Asked by a newspaper reporter about such a brazen personalization of power, Orji Uzor Kalu argued that his action was necessary to distinguish projects executed under his administration from those of his predecessors. The actual reasons are more profound. They are not different from the reasons adduced above for the personal promotion projects of governors Lawal and Audu. He seeks to suggest himself powerfully into the political consciousness of Abia, and to subsequently dominate the political imagination of the people of the state.

To say that a school was constructed under the administration of Orji Kalu does not possess the same amount of political capital as saying that Orji Kalu constructed the school. The difference, even if a convoluted one, is politically significant and must be stressed. The folks who benefit from state-funded projects must be made to think that the benevolence of Orji Kalu, and not necessarily the financial strength and revenues of Abia state, a separate non-personal entity, facilitated the projects that are affecting their lives positively. This is the crucial difference that underlines the strategic calculation in



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Governor Kalu's seemingly inane act. It is about reshaping the electorate's consciousness and branding the minds of Abians (as they like to call themselves) with his name and image. It is a subtle way to negotiate and routinize power. But Governor Kalu, too, resorts

occasionally to the use of the vigilante thugs known as Bakassi Boys as well as other violence-inclined hirelings to push his agenda and to force his rivals to submit to his authority.

Insights

The ways in which Nigerians have engaged with these new manifestations of power have been interesting and instructive. The public sphere has been so overwhelmed by the appearance of these multi-fangled forms of power that it has largely surrendered its critical vibrancy. For the most part, Nigeria conforms to Mbembe's arguments about the mockery of the power of the state through an inversion and bastardization of the latter's own discourses. The use of political cartoons in newspapers and magazines, popular songs, and crude beer parlor discourses to mock and critique the state continues unabated in Nigeria as in other African countries instanced by Mbembe.

However, one must ask whether in Nigerians' actual confrontations with the might of the state, they can exhibit any significant resistance, launch any sustained criticism, dare the powers that be—or whether in fact resistance is valid as a descriptive category for

engagements with power expected of the politically dominated. The answer, going by the analysis here, must be in the negative. Let us go back to the case of Kwara. Faced with a choice between shouting "up Lawal" and carrying on without potable drinking water, how many will opt for the latter? And how many will remain adamant? These are crucial questions. In real, material situations of everyday life, the elite can and does use state resources to extract consent and stifle dissent.

In the Nigerian presidential palace popularly known as Aso Rock, no one except President Obasanjo and perhaps Adams Oshiomhole, the President of the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC), can be called president. I had read many years ago that in Kenya no one in the entire country except Arap Moi was allowed to bear the title of president, whether of an alumni association, a women's organization, or of a business association. I had thought that this was an

exaggeration. Last year, a Kenyan friend of mine confirmed it. So, the Aso Rock rule is not a novelty. In fact Nigerians are to be grateful that the rule has been restricted to Aso Rock, that the president of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) can still be called president outside the confines of the presidential palace in Abuja. But what would happen if the NUJ president were to visit Aso Rock with his executive members on a courtesy call, which happens fairly frequently? This question brings to fore the practical impossibility of actually engaging with power in Nigeria. The truth is that if the NUJ president must proceed on the courtesy call and get the attention of president Obasanjo, he must abandon a title that is legally (by virtue of the Union's constitution) and democratically (by virtue of the election he contested and won) conferred on him and shop for another title that is alien to his personality and to the integrity of the union.

Conclusion:

The unfolding democratic experience in Nigeria provides a template for examining the ways in which forms of power supposedly alien to democracy and intrinsic to autocracy are being craftily deployed along with other performances of power that bastardize or mimic the democratic concepts of popularity, consent, and public acceptance. This bewildering mix of symbols and force, blackmail and insinuation, ubiquity and discourse, enables an understanding of how democracy as a political act and its

emphasis on image, acceptance and popularity leads elected officials to invent and reinvent ways of performing power that are a depressing throwback to military rule and one-party dictatorships. How can Nigerian democracy be stripped of the emphasis on "performance," popularity, and appearances of acceptance—which have paradoxically been responsible for elected officials' abuse of power—without compromising the need for accountability, popular acclamation, and popular support, which

are key ingredients of a democratic system? This is a contradiction that cannot be easily resolved, a challenge that requires careful handling. If officials do not have to "deliver" the "benefits" of democracy, do not have to be popular to continue to lead, and do not have to seek popular acclamation, democracy will cease to mean anything to Nigerians. On the other hand, an undue emphasis on these elements of the democratic process makes them the primary objectives of elected leaders, while the *actual* business



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of governance languishes in neglect, fostering disillusionment with democratic civilian rule.

The current President of the Nigerian Senate, Mr. Adolphus Wabara, has compounded our analytical quandary by

recently stating that in addition to elected officials preoccupying themselves with forging impressions of popularity, ubiquity, and popular acclamation, their tenure is also spent recouping "investments" made in the course of running for office.⁶ Mr. Wabara raises yet another knotty

question: how can we as scholars and intellectuals justify a system that, in practice (at least in Nigeria), seems to exist only for its own perpetuation and nothing more—in a self-replicating cycle of vertical and horizontal mobility by politicians?

1 Achille Mbembe, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa* 62 (1), 1992, 10.

2 Michel Foucault, *Power*, edited by James D. Faubion; translated by Robert Hurley and others, New York, New Press, 2000; *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*; translated by Alan Sheridan, New York, Vintage Books, 1979.

3 "Okogie Rates FG Low on Democracy Dividends.," *Thisday* (Nigeria), 16 June 2004.

4 The nation-wide media tour lasted for three months and, according to the government's own official proclamation, was designed to showcase the benefits and positive changes which two years of democracy had brought to the country. At the end of the tour, awards were given to states in different categories as reward for their governors' "democratic performance," that is, for delivering "democracy dividends" to the indigenes of their states.

5 Mbembe, "Provisional Notes," 10.

6 See Reuben Abati, "Wabara's Confession", *The Guardian* (Nigeria), 11 June 2004.



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Women's Rituals in Urban Areas: *Karva Chauth*



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Husband's Day in India. In India women fast for many reasons, for special deities, for their children, but mainly for the husband. Young unmarried women undertake fasts in the hope of gaining a good husband. A ritual performed by married women for the long life of their husbands, *Karva Chauth*, earlier a low-key regional festival, has now been gaining popularity. Jaya and Biswamoy explore.

What is the relevance of rituals like *Karva Chauth* in today's 'modern' world, especially in urban India where women are increasingly participating in social, economic and political activities along with men? It is rather surprising to see an 'upswing' in the performance of such rites in urban areas. One of the reasonable explanations is the growing 'consumerism' in our society and the manner in which businesses explode the media with promotion of consumer goods and create euphoria for festivals, be it Diwali, Christmas or *Karva Chauth*. However, to pick on such obviously 'patriarchal' festivals like *Karva Chauth* that revolve around the feeding of the male ego is not easily explained by 'consumerism', even though women are the targets for marketing consumer products that range from cosmetics, household appliances to food products.

There is a need to delve into the deeper issues related to the celebration of *Karva Chauth vrata* by women in urban areas. If one takes a perfunctory look at the manner in which the rite is celebrated one finds some basic features, with local variations. The literal meaning of the

words is misleading: *karva* refers to a vessel in which libations are placed, and *chauth* is the fourth day of the month. Usually, however, a fast is undertaken by married women for the long life of their husbands. It is celebrated on the fourth day of the waning moon fortnight, four days after the beginning of the month of *Kartik*. Preparations for the fast begins on the eve itself when women get henna put on their hands and shop for clothes for themselves and gifts for their mother-in-law. In some households, women get up before dawn to have some food and snacks, fruits or milk that is offered to them by their mothers-in-law. The fast begins at dawn and traditionally women are not meant to take even water till they end their fast in the evening. During the day they gather, passing around platters laden with food and gifts, telling each other stories of virtuous women who have kept this fast and remained '*suhagan*' i.e. women with living husbands. In the evening, after seeing the moon, they offer oblations of water and grain to the moon, give the platter laden with gifts to their mother-in-law and then eat.

The fast seems to highlight the need to

hold on to existing traditions even amongst women who are otherwise career oriented or have plenty of choices in their life. Viewed dispassionately, it caters to patriarchal notions of the superiority of the husband and the subservience of the wife. It also underlines the need for brides as new entrants in the family to conform to the family traditions and to understand the hierarchies in the family, where the mother-in-law is in command and fidelity and loyalty to the husband is imperative. The role of the mother-in-law does not only highlight hierarchies but also shows how the mother of a son acquires stature in the society, a position that the daughter-in-law should aspire towards by begetting sons herself. It is not surprising that the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is taut with tension since in the patriarchal family set up, the former exercises power only at the cost of the new bride. Traditionally in a patriarchal family a woman is supposed to have hardly any role in decision making with regard to her family nor any control over the family property. It is paradoxical that the mother of a son acquires enhanced stature not when the son is



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born, but when the son actually marries. It is not surprising that a woman who came into the family as a coy bride and devoted her whole life to the household gets to enhance her status when her son gets married. In the power structure of the patriarchal household, her only claim to power and control can be over a younger, subordinate woman, the daughter-in-law. Thus, rather than being a festival only for husbands, this festival is also a festival for the mothers-in-law who are themselves victims of patriarchal control and also become perpetrators of it.

While the fast is clearly about demarcating hierarchies in the family, it also underlines the need for 'conforming' wives who will participate in the festival and allow for the smooth perpetuation of tradition and continuity which are supposedly the essence of the family structure. As we all know, the household is an arena for conflict and competition, negotiation and creation of hierarchies. The balance of a household is challenged when women from other families come in through marriage and in a patriarchal social structure, the onus for proving that they belong and have a legitimate right to be part of the family is always on incoming women members who are expected to follow the family traditions. The fast is just one of the many tests that the incoming wife has to pass in order to prove that she is a virtuous and conforming wife. Though the performance of *karva chauth* in no way guarantees her acceptance, her refusal would definitely be interpreted as an unwillingness to compromise with family traditions.

Why do women agree to participate in a system that so evidently subordinates them? The answer is complex. We have already seen how the responsibility for being accepted lies solely on the shoulders of the incoming wife and if she wants to stay clear from controversies, she accepts the fast too, quietly. But we don't exactly see a quiet acceptance of the fast, do we? We see a joyful celebration amongst women who shop, laugh, dress up, socialize while fasting and feasting with a gusto. Does that mean that these women are spineless compromisers who are just making the best of their lot? Not really. If we delve a little deeper one can see that women

have been marginalized from political, economic and social activity since the Vedic times. Over time, they were marginalized from ritual activity too and in Brahmanical rituals women do not have the right to perform Vedic rites or listen to Vedic mantras (some traditionalists will tell you how the Gayatri Mantra is not to be recited by women). Manu (Manu Smriti V.155) says that there is no separate *yajna* for women, nor *vrata*, nor fast, without the consent of the husband. This shows that there was an attempt amongst the orthodox to alienate women from ritual activity. Women, in an effort to create alternative spaces for themselves, and continue with the right to carry out ritual activity, conducted rites that celebrated women's bonding but using all the 'proper' patriarchal reasons like the need to do it for the husband's longevity. If we see the festival from this light then we see how women have managed to keep alive kinship linkages through bonding and interaction in celebratory practices that revolved around them.

However, it isn't as if praying for the husband's long life is not an important component of the fast. There were several reasons for having fasts centered around the husband's longevity. Even in modern societies men are more susceptible to early mortality, if we leave out instances of outright female infanticide and neglect of women's health because of patriarchal reasons. This, coupled with the fact that a widow would face social ostracism and complicate matters related to property and status, made it socially more convenient to project the ideal of the '*sada suhagan*'. Through the rite of *Karva Chauth* women were encouraged to perpetuate this ideal and all women aspired to be part of the community of *suhagan* who could participate in such celebratory rituals rather than be ostracized as widows, as they were after the husband's death. If they had genuine faith, their husbands would lead longer lives, was what was believed. And hence the emphasis on denial of even a drop of water for the whole day.

Fasting is just one aspect of this ritual. It also allows for the creation of channels of communication and linkages between women of different generations as well as emphasizing hierarchies amongst them. Thus, the mother-in-law makes the

younger women of her household eat before dawn, underlining that she is in control of the food resources. The gifts given to her by her daughters-in-law, *bahus*, reinforce her exalted status, but gift-giving also creates channels for bonding and reciprocity, which may allow for intergenerational interaction within families. However, gifting can also create jealousies and one-up(wo)manship or dissatisfaction. The festival also allows for yet another occasion for the groom's family to be recipients of gifts from the bride's household, especially on the first *Karva Chauth*.

The question of carrying out the fast is a complicated one for a modern woman. If she does not perform it, she does not show loyalty to the family into which she is married. She challenges the authority of her mother-in-law, who may secretly be tired of the *vrata* herself, but would never want to risk the life of her precious son for an errant and disbelieving daughter-in-law. The bride then shuts off those spaces in which she would be able to interact with her mother-in-law. Moreover, she misses out on the 'awards' that are meant for the good *bahus*—jewellery, clothes and the revelry. If she does perform the *vrata* she gives in to the patriarchal traditions that perpetuate gender inequalities and hierarchies. She compromises and 'buys' legitimacy for herself. She could also be indulging in waste of time, energy and resources in a world where she has to give endlessly to her job, her family and to herself.

The only silver lining in all this is that the urban woman has a choice. She can choose to compromise or not, to not do the *vrata* at all or to do it on her terms. She can be self-indulgent without having to starve, participate in the festival without going through all the motions. There are husbands who also fast along with their wives, embarrassed at making their women undergo a day of starvation for their long lives. There are wives who use it as a great opportunity to mend fences with their mothers-in-law and give them gifts. There are others who take a day off from life's mundane requirements and enjoy a 'girls' day out'. Life, after all, is a matter of choices. The tragedy is that majority of women in our country do not even know that they can choose.



Contemporary South

Globalisation and its imprints:

Delhi in the 21st Century



Biswamoy Pati

The author teaches history at Sri Venkateswara College, Delhi University.(India).

Have you ever heard of *Husband's Day*? It is the latest invention in the market place. And, if you have not guessed yet, I am talking about *karva chauth*. This is the way *Archies*, the 'famous' card makers, have sought to define it from last year, advertising for a new set of 'designer' cards. However, I will not blame them alone since besides market forces, the pressures from within households have propelled them as well. One has to also bear in mind here that the Hindi films have worked on this as a component of mass culture and today it is accepted as a part of metropolitan culture across Delhi. I would not be surprised if along with all the 'Days' that are celebrated in the West, 'Husband's Day' gets incorporated very soon. This would indeed be a major contribution of India to 'World Civilisation' and Mr. Rajput (formerly Director of India's National Council of Educational Research and Training), would most certainly have been delighted to include this 'vital information' in the next edition of History text books.

I am not opposed to wives who love their husbands. If anything, my quarrel might be with those husbands - or even women - who support a position that implies that wives do not figure within the paradigms of their (husband's) existence other than what is conventionally defined as 'wifely roles'. I have in mind here all the hard labour that goes into keeping everything going at home - from reproductive roles to getting food ready, from keeping everything in order to looking after the minute details of the home. In fact, I would vociferously argue that domestic labour

is also associated with the extraction of surplus value. This problem is of course compounded in case the 'housewife' - a term normally used for women who do not formally do a job outside and to devalue all the hard work done inside domestic boundaries - is also a working woman. Given this context it is unfortunate that the oppressive order of brahminical/Hindu patriarchy itself is being globalised in this century through the invention of the 'Husband's Day'.

Again, I have nothing against religious or cultural festivities or any dance form. As an individual I have learnt to respect difference, unlike the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) our recent 'rulers'. However, it is very interesting to observe the shifts and changes in social mores in the capital over the last few years. How many of us remember Navaratri (a Hindu festival) or the Garba dance (associated with festive community dancing in Gujarat) being a major celebratory feature in Delhi even a decade ago? We see traditions being invented in front of our very eyes and the forces of the market- domestic and foreign - leave no stone unturned to capitalise on it.

The fall-out of this is reaching the old settlements and villages in and around Delhi. Samiksha Sehwari, resident of a Jat (a peasant caste) inhabited village, Nangal Dewat, in the outskirts of Delhi told me, some people in her village have started observing the Navaratri since last year. This means that she and her folks have to reorient themselves as bats or owls as it is not possible to sleep with

the loud speakers blaring all night. The police outpost is indifferent to the celebratory noise and some of the residents of the area were thinking of 'waking' them up to intervene last year. Samiksha is of course not optimistic since the police can hardly be expected to play any positive role in such matters.

What we are actually witnessing is a shift in social and cultural mores that are changing rapidly to accommodate wide and apparently contradictory- though perfectly harmonious - components. These include a co-existence associated with a socialisation that is linked with hinduisation. This implies that the act of celebrating Hindu festivals is more than a social event. The aim is to capture public space on a competitive basis. This is directly structured to the market, feeding into the process of globalisation. What is perhaps not very directly visible is the anti-woman component inherent in and reproduced by these interactions, through which the order of twenty-first century patriarchy is being inscribed on the metropolitan world of Delhi.



Archives and Field Notes: Experiencing Research

Baraka fi-Rasik : Mourning in/with Morocco



Michelle A. Rein

She is completing her Ph.D thesis on "Visual Expressions of *Baraka*: Saints' Shrines and Material Culture in Morocco." at the University of Pennsylvania's History of Art department. In addition to conducting archeological work on the Tunisian Island of Jerba, she teaches a wide variety of courses. Active in the Elderhostel Education program, Michelle is an outreach instructor for several museums in Philadelphia, and a mentor for Fulbright exchange students.

She was invited to a program on "Unity in Diversity" by an Iranian NGO in December 2003. She has received the Charlotte W. Newcombe finishing grant from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and hopes to complete her Ph.D next year.

July 22, 1999, began like most Fridays, in the Moroccan city of Fez. I prepared for the pilgrimage to the medina, and for the *de rigueur* couscous lunch at my adopted family's home located near the top of the Old City off Talaa Saghira. Afterwards, we would descend deeper into the medina to visit my terminally ill aunt, as we did most days. However, at 10:30 in the morning I received a frantic call from my sister urging me to hurry, explaining that my aunt might not live beyond that afternoon. For more than fourteen months my aunt had visited specialists in Morocco's only public cancer hospital located in Rabat. Each time my aunt would return weaker and more frail, but my family continued to say she would be fine and just to "... take the tablets, rest, and no fasting during Ramadan." My aunt often pulled me aside, took my hand and whispered, "I know I am dying but they won't let me say it!"

On Saturday, July 23, 1999, a woman I had known and loved for five years, lost her fight with liver cancer and died. Earlier, in the late afternoon of July 22, King Hassan II, the longest reigning Muslim monarch of the twentieth century, passed away. Moroccans lost their "Commander of the Faithful", their *Paterfamilias*. King Hassan II was, for many Moroccans, the only leader they had ever known.

My introduction to Morocco began five years earlier. Through various grants and scholarships I developed strong relationships with Moroccan communities on a macro-level, which lead to my dissertation. On a micro-level I became a member of the Alami family in the medina of Fez. My aunt, a woman with no children of her own, liked to claim me as her daughter. She and I discussed my



A photograph of my 'mother and aunts' without the aunt that passed away.

research constantly. We would talk for hours about Moroccan saints or *marabouts*, cures, spirit possession, and loci for healing. My aunt knew a great deal about both the potential benefits as well as the dangers of certain animals, colors, fragrances, and intercessions by *awliya* (those saintly members of society considered particularly beloved by Allah). Always maintaining a devout Muslim stance, my aunt considered such devices as tools used by some people, but in no way to be considered substitutes for the power of Qur'anic prayer or orthodox forms of *du'a*.

When I first learned of my aunt's illness, I began procuring remedies from every holy site I visited. I brought water from Sidi Ali Hamdush, I paid holy men to bless bottles of water while visiting Sidi Hamza near Berkane, and I collected packets of dust from a 'healing' boulder near the sacred tree of Ibn Mashish's mountain shrine. I found someone--not a *shuafa* tied to magic, but someone with extensive religious training —to properly construct

a *harz* (an amulet containing Qur'anic quotes bound in deer's skin according to specific religious regulations) for her. The sheikh imbued the object with prayers to keep her impervious from the invader destroying her body, and if not capable of that result, then to at least give her the peace of mind to endure the difficulties she faced. Months passed, the cancer spread and her suffering increased. I repeatedly implored my sister Nufissa, a doctor, to prescribe pain killers. Nufissa explained to me that, "morphine would cause damage to the liver." I was enraged.

Friday I sat with my aunt reading to her from the Qur'an and washing her stomach with water infused with holy verses written with *smakh* (an ink made from burnt goat hairs often used when handwriting sacred texts). I trickled the sanctified water over her bloated stomach. She told me it helped. When I left that afternoon I thought we would speak again soon. Returning to my apartment in the New City, I noticed the streets seemed unusually silent. I asked a friend on the



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Archives and Field Notes: Experiencing Research



This is an image of the 'magic' stone with healing properties located on the mountain where Moulay Adbes-Salaam Ibn Mashish's tree shrine is located. The saint is both related to the monarchy and to the Prophet Muhammed.

road why most shops had closed down so early that evening, and why the streets seemed so deserted. He couldn't believe that I hadn't heard. "Where have you been? How could you not know?" He told me that King Hassan II had died that afternoon. My friend put aside his personal feelings regarding the politics of the monarchy, as did most Moroccans that day, and simply grieved for his country's loss. I uttered, "*baraka fi-rasik*," a colloquial expression wishing a person blessed thoughts in his head, a term used when offering condolences. He thanked me and we parted.

Saturday the call came early around 8:00 in the morning, telling me that my aunt had died around 2:30 am. I left for the medina immediately. Arriving at my aunt's home, I noticed the covered mirrors, the drawn curtains, and the absence of all cosmetics on the women. Behind a section of a room off the courtyard, separated by a curtain, a female undertaker first washed my aunt's body, and then called each of us into the room one by one to kiss my aunt's hand and say "good-bye." Nufissa handed me tubes of water-soluble sedative tablets. She told me to distribute effervescent glasses to anyone displaying any signs of angst. Next, a group of official male mourners entered the house, sat down, and chanted passages from the Qur'an for more than an hour. Aside from my aunt's husband, no men in our family were present. So we were grateful for the community's assistance. As women we are not allowed to accompany the deceased to the mosque, so the professional men, along

with my uncle, instructed us to remain dignified as we watched them carry our aunt, shrouded in white, out the door for the last time and out of our lives.

Grieving women began to wail, shudder, and writhe on the ground. I administered sedative tablets nonstop for three hours, assuring mourners that restrained behavior would help everyone. Older women chastised those who cried, reminding them that such behavior displeases Allah and prevents the angels from accompanying the deceased. For the sake of my family I tried to ignore the hypocrisy of offering grief-stricken people sedatives, but denying pain-relieving medication to a dying woman experiencing horrific levels of pain.

Bodies dropped like flies gathering around the plates of honey and bread that neighbors set out for everyone around the room. We ate in silence and sadness, and then my sisters, mother, and I eventually started the long journey up the medina streets towards their home. While walking I began to question everything, about what I was doing, why I was doing it, and more importantly--who I had become. I felt I was losing a sense of my own identity. I knew I was not literally a member of this family, nor was I a stranger. I was not a tourist, nor was I local. I was no longer a Fulbright scholar so I no longer had American friends, and the new SSRC grantees would not be arriving for several months. I no longer felt connected to my academic institution back in the U.S.A., and the doubts surrounding my ability to complete my thesis became too numerous to list. I chose not to spend the night with my family and took a taxi late at night back to my own apartment to try and digest the thoughts that were running through my head.

I returned to the medina early on Sunday morning to help my family receive guests. Each guest wished us, "*baraka fi-rasik*" and we replied in kind for the loss of King Hassan II. The television stations were airing round-the-clock Qur'anic recitation, and the sounds soothed my family, and brought peace to our grieving space. We were in mourning with the entire country. Not until the *moussem*, or annual festival for Moulay Idriss I, the founder of Islam in Morocco, did

Mohammed VI, the present king, attend any functions of celebration. That one official act called an end to the national period of mourning while simultaneously it also demonstrated King Sidi Muhammed's bond to the family of Moulay Idriss, and by extension--the family of the Prophet. Only then, when I saw King Mohammed VI waving from his car to his subjects (people who pinned so much hope for a better future on their new leader), did I begin to remember my own hopes--my reasons for being in Morocco, my desire to continue with my research, and by extension--to regain a more clear sense of self. I had to go through the same mourning period as everyone else in order to emerge with a stronger feeling of promise for my own future.

Several days after the *moussem* for Moulay Idriss II in Fez, two weeks after the previous *moussem*, I visited a Moroccan friend who I assumed was ill, since I had not heard from her for some time. She opened the door and I saw the drawn curtains, the covered mirrors, and her cosmetic-free face... so I offered all the condolence that I could by saying, "*baraka fi-rasik*." Through her tears she smiled, we hugged, and she asked me how I knew that her father had died. I told her, "I know a house in mourning



The new king, Muhammed VI is in the motorcade waving at his new subjects.

when I enter one, please tell me all about your father." She told me I really had become Moroccan, but I don't think that is true. I think I learned something else that summer. I experienced one of humanity's greatest common denominators. I learned that grief and loss are universal conditions.



On a Southern Journal

Economic and Political Weekly



Shreela Gupta Banerjee

After acquiring a Masters in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University, worked in logistics and shipping for 15 years. Took a sabbatical in 1998 on the birth of her son. Likes experimental cooking, computer games, Golden Retrievers and Bruce Springsteen. Lives in Calcutta

Economic and Political Weekly, despite being a leading Indian journal has, quite frankly, a very uninspiring appearance. Its cover has contents of the issue in black type upon a white background. The title is insert in white in a red box on the top left hand corner. There are no images on the front page or anywhere else in the magazine at all. When one opens the magazine, the text is crowded in three columns in small print, difficult to read. Over the years the cover has not changed, only lately glossy paper has substituted the old newsprint. This has been its only concession to the commercial demands of the times.

And yet, despite its mundane appearance, *EPW* is an Indian journal well known among a wide range of academics, scholars, intellectuals, activists and as well as the curious and interested casual reader. It is internationally recognized and finds place in libraries, in universities, research centers and in local/community libraries all over the world. Given that the space for professional academic journals is overwhelmingly dominated by publications from the North, *EPW* is one of a small band of 'south' publications which has carved its own niche among the better-known international journals.

Internationally and at home *EPW* is acknowledged to best reflect Indian intellectual trends. In that sense *EPW* is a triumph of content over form. Its nondescript looks belie its dynamic contents.

However, the journal as we know it today, did not exist prior to 1966. Its predecessor was the "*Economic Weekly*", founded in 1949. It was funded by a business family, the Seksarias, and had the charismatic Sachin Choudhuri as its first editor. Sachin Choudhuri, whose birth Centenary was celebrated quietly in January 2004 at the Nandan complex, Kolkata, was the

Founder- Editor of the *Weekly*. According to Dr. Ashok Mitra, eminent economist and regular contributor to the magazine since its inception, it was Hiten Choudhuri, Sachin Choudhuri's brother, who arranged for the financing of the magazine and encouraged his elder brother to take up the editorship. Subsequently there was some dispute with the financiers who withdrew and the *Weekly* closed down.

Undaunted and with renewed zeal, friends of Sachin Choudhuri and the *Weekly* established the Sameeksha Trust with a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, P.B. Gajendra Gadkar, as Chairman and some six or eight other members. *Economic and Political Weekly* was born in 1966 with Sachin Choudhuri as Executive trustee and Editor.



Dr. Ashok Mitra

In his book *Apila – Chapila*, Ashok Mitra gives a vivid description of those heady days in the tiny environs of Churchill Chambers, Bombay, - where space was a constraint but not thought and expression. Due to his wide contacts amongst all strata of people there was no dearth of contributors to *EPW*. People worked part of the time, worked with minimum pay or without pay, filled in as proof readers, rewrote for inexperienced contributors and went out in search of advertisements. Those who worked part time often did so without any remuneration and those who were on the payroll of *EPW* were paid irregularly. Despite all this the *EPW* flourished.

Its core group consisted of innumerable young and brilliant economists, researchers at the universities, academics and financial wizards from the Reserve Bank of India. As a benevolent patriarch, Sachin Choudhuri presided over this path-breaking journal of independent India which was to set standards for all academic journals henceforth. His criteria were simple: the need of the hour for the new nation were workable theories, honest and meticulous planning, and an abundant dose of healthy criticism. He laid down the simplest of rules for writing in the journal, the writing had to be of the best standard and it had to adhere to the norms of free speech, political considerations notwithstanding. Writers, scholars and even bureaucrats of later eminence found in the *EPW* the freedom to question various policies of the country through their writings. Innumerable movers and shakers of modern India passed through its precincts. Hiren Mukherjee of the CPI, Amalendu Dasgupta of The Statesman, Ashok Mitra, the economist, historians like Barun De and Ashok Sen, famous economists like Amiya Kumar Dasgupta, D.P. Mukherjee, Amartya Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty.

Sachin Choudhuri inculcated in the gauche writer the invaluable habits of writing concisely, factually, imparting a vein of wit into a very dry piece and being readable. But the writ was perfectly clear; interference from the Editor was only in style and form. But never in the content. At the beginning, the journal was limited to analytical commentaries, a database for social, economic and political development in India and research articles of a very high quality. Later, in the 1980s these expanded to include gender, culture, ecology and the media.

The environs of Churchill Chambers acquired under Choudhuri's elegant



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panache the makings of an intellectual Commune. People came, stayed on and returned at a later date to imbibe once again what came to be known as Sachinda's hospitality. The result was an ever-expanding circle of contributors.

All this came to a tragic end with his death in December 1966. He had been ailing for some time and his brothers and sister-in-law had been fiercely protective about the bachelor Editor during his previous heart attack. Ashok Mitra recalled the poignant picture of a subdued Chaudhuri in his brother's Pali Hill bungalow a couple of days before his demise. His booming laughter was not in evidence and he was unable to participate in his beloved *adda* (a very Bengali form of endless filibustering over more endless cups of tea). Sachin Chaudhuri died as he had lived, with the elegance of a man sure of his place in the universal scheme of things and an acknowledged leader of men of letters.

The Sameeksha Trust was reorganized with Ashok Mitra as the Chairman, and though he was offered the Editorship of the magazine, he ultimately declined. For a while after Sachin Chaudhuri's death, Krishna Raj was the acting editor, then R.K. Hazari, an eminent economist, was made editor. He was editor for 18 months and then he moved to the Reserve Bank of India towards the middle of 1970. Krishna Raj was appointed editor and he remained in this position till he died, in January 2004. For almost four decades, Krishna Raj was the leading light behind *EPW*'s steadily growing reputation and influence as the premier journal reflecting all things Indian, a rich smorgasbord for thinking Indians. It is where one keeps in touch with the work of one's intellectual peers. In its pages, are to be found the best of India's social scientists, encompassing all disciplines and across all political spectrums.

As a young graduate fresh out of the Delhi School of Economics, Krishna Raj was introduced to Sachin Chaudhuri by K. N. Raj, as someone who was very keen on a journalistic career. He was then based in New Delhi and did the rounds of newsgathering in the upper echelons of government corridors and also turned out good journalistic copy for the then *Economic Weekly*. This soft spoken and unassuming man grew on



KRISHNA RAJ
October 18, 1937-January 17, 2004
IMAGE Courtesy
Economic and Political Weekly,
xxxix, 5, 2004.

the job and by 1960 was ensconced in the Bombay office of the weekly then operating out of Apollo Street. The flamboyant editor in Sachin Choudhuri let Krishna Raj do the bulk of the work and towards the end, before Chaudhuri's death, he was virtually holding fort. He chased copy, did the layout, looked after the finances and even took stock of raw materials. This he did with a calm equanimity, maturity and unfailing courtesy far belying his young age. As editor of *EPW* from 1966, Krishna Raj came out of the shadow of Sachin Chaudhuri and evolved as a person who would for nearly four decades be synonymous with the success of *EPW*. Under his stewardship the *EPW* grew from strength to strength as a journal that supplied India and the world ideas, data, theories and knowledge, which reflected the economic, political and historical picture of India.

There have been associate editors with Krishna Raj from time to time, like Rajni Desai and M.S.Prabhakara (a distinguished journalist who later moved to *The Frontline*). M.S.Prabhakara continued to contribute to *EPW*. He recalls with deep affection, in his tribute to Krishna Raj, how all editorial instructions sounded like apologetic requests, not because of any hesitation but because the editor was truly in command and knew each and every aspect of his journal thoroughly.

What makes *EPW*, a nondescript looking journal from the South, a weekly with an international fame? Was it the editor's

charm, which got brilliant copy out of unknown novices? Was it his gentle manner, which was in contrast to his sharp and stirring editorials? Was it his unfailing instinct in recognizing potential? He had an enviable knack of spotting contributors who turned lifelong friends from as diverse fields as the academy, bureaucracy, financial institutions and industry. Professor Amiya Bagchi, Director, Institute of Development Studies, Calcutta, tells how Krishna Raj would energetically solicit matter for his journal sometimes verbally but mostly by mail. These letters from the editor were faultlessly typed, on specially printed pale green inland-letter forms. These pale green inland letters were like exciting trophies for young social scientists and historians. However as an editor he was always ready to adapt to a new idea, a new line of thinking which would give a new insight into an important issue, or a new method of communication. The green inland letters gave way to e-mails much to the regret of the majority of recipients.



Prof. Amiya Bagchi

The creature comforts at Apollo Street and Frere Road (now Bhagat Singh Marg) were minimal. There was barely nudging space between the cubicles. And the financial rewards as always were minimum. Yet in such inhospitable surroundings, on a limited budget and no infrastructure to speak of, week after week, month after month and year after year Krishna Raj and his team produced the much-acclaimed *EPW*. It was the editor's personal touch which helped to build a core of loyal contributors from various parts of the world and also to provide a platform for young and aspiring scholars. He was a superb listener, able to turn every day ordinariness into remarkable journalistic jewels. His



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curiosity, patience, probing mind and his all-encompassing gentle sense of humor are remembered by many friends and admirers. Under his aegis, another generation of scholars debated major shifts in intellectual paradigms. Writers as diverse as Ramachandra Guha, J.V. Deshpande, Dipesh Chakabarty, Shiv Vishwanathan and Mridul Sagar met in the pages of *EPW*, fought, argued,

bonded and remain lifelong friends.

Krishna Raj returned to Bombay from California in January 2004, to attend the World Social Forum. But that was not to be and he breathed his last on 17 January 2004. He leaves behind his supportive wife Maithreyi, legions of family, friends and admirers all of whose lives he has enriched and enlightened both

professionally and personally.

For more details visit *Economic and Political Weekly* website at <http://www.epw.org.in>

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Across the South

Creative English and the art of communication becomes a hallmark of the Codesria/Sephis Extended Workshop on Social History



*Maria Cecilia Gallero,
Lara Mancuso,
Gairoonisa Paleker*

Maria Cecilia Gallero is currently completing a Masters degree in Social Anthropology at the Nacional University of Misiones, and is a Ph.D. candidate in History at the Nacional University of Cuyo, Argentina.

Lara Mancuso has just completed her Ph.D. in History at El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico City, with the submission and acceptance of her dissertation titled "Brotherhoods, mining and social stratification: Zacatecas, Mexico, and Ouro Preto, Brazil, in the 18th century".

Gairoonisa Paleker is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

From April 26 to May 14, 2004, fifteen young scholars at different levels of doctoral studies, came together to participate in what was arguably one of the most interesting and rewarding experiences of our academic career: the "Extended Workshop on Social History", in Dakar, Senegal, promoted by CODESRIA and SEPHIS. Fifteen Ph.D. students from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, led by Dr. Janaki Nair, the convenor of the workshop, met daily to talk about topics related to labour, gender, ethnicity and class.



One of the central concerns of the Workshop was the role played by ethnicity in different times and spaces: Cecilia Gallero told us about the German-Brazilian community in Misiones, Argentina; Fiona Taylor discussed the links between ethnicity and economic prosperity in Trinidad from 1945 to 1981; Mônica Lima and Blandine Wetohossou focused on different aspects of the return to Africa of liberated slaves from Brazil and Cuba in the nineteenth century; Parthiban Thiyagarajan stressed the political strategies of the vanniars in Tamil Nadu, India; Mouhamadou Sow constructed a social picture of the Fuladu region, in Senegal, since the nineteenth century; Zakariyau Sambo explained the

development of the wards system in Ilorin City, Nigeria, in the twentieth century; and Gairoonisa Paleker explored the racist film propaganda sponsored by the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

In addition, we focused on the multiple ways ethnicity and labour are intertwined: in the Catholic Brotherhoods in Latin America during the colonial period, as Lara Mancuso pointed out; in the organization of scavengers' labour force in contemporary Ahmedabad, India, as Paul D'Souza described; in the labour movement in Trinidad from 1897 to 1946, as studied by Jerome Teelucksingh; and in the peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar, India, from 1920 to 1970, as Vekkal Varghese showed.



The complex relationship between ethnicity and gender was also highlighted: Rita Manga studies Beti women in Cameroon since the nineteenth century; Babere Chacha investigates woman-woman marriages in Kuria district, Kenya, from 1890-1980; and Santhosh Abraham examines matrilineal law in British Malabar, India, from 1792 to 1880.

Dr Nair contributed in great measure to the establishment of a friendly and intense working atmosphere, which impacted on

the quality of discussions and interactions which took place within the workshop. As colleagues who studied different parts of the world talked about their topics, sources and methodologies, each of us could come back to our own research project and revise it from a new perspective. It was interesting to see, on the one hand, that similar problems are present in different regions of the world, and on the other hand, how they produced diverse tensions and solutions.



The comparative dimension in Social History was further enriched by lecturers - Nicodemus Awasom, Bridget Brereton, Fernando Ribeiro, Boubacar Barry, Babacar Fall, Penda Mbow and Ndèye Sokhna Guèye. Their presence helped us understand how and to what extent historiography has taken different paths worldwide.

Trips around Dakar, hopping on car *rapides*, eating *yassa poulet*, bargaining in the *Sandaga*, chatting at the *Auberge Marie Lucienne* and Sokhna's charisma were also fundamental to the building of a congenial group identity and relationship, and to the success of the Workshop. This was also aided in great measure by the spirit of scholarship and friendly dialogue which is characteristic of the Codesria office and all staff



Across the South

members. Participants were also generously welcomed to review, read and request from the holdings of Codice, Codesria's library and documentation centre.

But perhaps the most crucial factor in the

success of the workshop was what Dr Nair on several occasions referred to as, the creative use of English. With English as the lingua franca of the workshop, a number of non-English speakers were severely disadvantaged, but all were determined that this "tyranny of language"

should neither detract from nor deter meaningful interaction and engagement.

It was a unique experience, a privilege and a pleasure to have been a participant in the Codesria/Sephis Extended Workshop on Social History.



Across the South

Reflections on the Dakar Workshop



Janaki Nair

Dr. Nair is Senior Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. She did her early research on labour in southern India and has recently been working on the history of the city of Bangalore.

She also sings- jazz and blues mostly.

Dakar as a city had much to teach us as students of Social History from several parts of the world. Here was a city that defied all unexamined stereotypes about the Third World City. There was a surprisingly quiet and polite public culture (marked by motorists who did not use their horns as navigational devices!), everyday evidence of a devotional and intensely private, secularised Islam, streets and public locations where women did not feel needlessly harassed, and where a high degree of trust was evident. Even the persistent middlemen of Sandago Market, which many participants frequented, only succeeded in endearing themselves through instant evocation of each nation's icons (hailing Indians with "Amitabh Bachchan! Hema Malini!" Argentinians with "Maradona!" and South Africans with, of course, cries of "Mandela!") The lack of a common language did little to prevent such easy familiarity.

The visit to the Slave Museum at Goree Island, to which many participants had some introduction since I had asked them to read Saidiya Hartman's "A Time of Slavery", brought an immediacy to many

themes of the workshop -- notably the slave trade and the silences of history about the slave trade. It animated the discussion on slavery in a way that the mere reading of the article might not have done, and brought out the troubling ambiguities of museums and their role in preserving memory.

It was also a chance to look back on the societies from which we came: I certainly learned that India occupied a large and prominent place in the imagination of the Senegalese. It was not just the astonishing and pervasive hold of the Hindi film, or the evidence of Tata trucks that took me by surprise. Perhaps most surprising of all, the term "Dalit" had travelled out of India and been put to purposive use in Senegal, as a new and empowering category! Since the workshop began with the recognition that the categories with which we worked were derived from the European West, this was a fortuitous "unworking."

But perhaps the most refreshing experience was on the very last day at CODESRIA when the participants were awarded their well earned certificates.

They received them, not from the usual round of directors, convenors, senior faculty and so on, but from people who worked at all levels of the organisation. This small but significant gesture towards institutional democracy, even if it was exceptional, was a revelation to those of us, particularly from India, who smugly believed that we were from a region where democracy repeatedly triumphed at the polls.

No wonder many of us were quite eager to return to Dakar!



Across the South

A Calcutta Year for two Nigerians. SEPHIS - CSSSC International Research Training Programme 2004.



Olarinmoye Omobolaji
Ololade

He holds graduate degrees in International Relations, (1999) and D.E.A/M.Phil. (2001, African Politics) from University of Ibadan and I.E.P-Bordeaux IV, France. Specializing in International Relations and Comparative Politics, he is a recipient of awards and fellowships from SEPHIS, Center for Research and Documentation, Kano, Programme for Ethnic and Federal Studies, University of Ibadan & Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique, University of Ibadan. He is presently completing his doctoral thesis titled: *The Politics of Ethnic Mobilization: The Yoruba Experience*, supervised by Prof. Adigun Agbaje of the Dept. of Political Science, University of Ibadan.

This International Research Programme organised by the Sephis and the Center for Studies in Social Sciences (Calcutta, India) offers opportunities to students from South areas to spend a year for research training in Calcutta. It is designed to expose students in the Humanities and Social Sciences, in the early stages of their doctoral thesis, from universities in the South, to cutting edge research and literature produced by leading scholars from Southern universities and research institutes. It aims at developing and strengthening, direct contacts between students and faculty of southern universities, contacts, which normally have been mediated through universities in the North.

Students and academics in the South, as a result of the North-South nature of academic relations, are more in tune with trends in literature and research produced in the North and less aware of those produced in the South. Even when aware, they tend to be skeptical of such research, seeing them as naïve, lacking rigor, polemical and always on the defensive. While the criticisms of research produced in the South are largely true, gems abound. Bringing these gems to the attention of scholars and students in the South is, we believe, the key objective of SEPHIS and as it concerns the five doctoral students from Africa ¹, who make up the first batch of IRTP students, the objective has been achieved through the skillful combination of two factors.

First, the choice of the Programme's coordinating institute, the Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, a government of India and West Bengal funded institute for research and training, coordinated by the Indian Council for



Social Science Research. As the intellectual hub of the Subaltern Studies Group, the center has developed a reputation of being one of the best social science research centers in India and indeed in the world. The center is reputed for a most incisive approach to political and cultural history, a must-know for whoever hopes to produce top-range analysis of government and society in the South and is very similar to the *Politique par le bas* approach associated with French scholars based at the Centre d'études d'Afrique Noire and Institut d'études Politiques, Bordeaux and Paris. Contact with eminent scholars based in the center has been most stimulating and enriching.

Second, the academic programme of the IRTP which is multi-disciplinary, involving collaborations between Political Scientists, Anthropologists, Historians, Sociologists and Linguists and from which a most intensive programme of training young researchers, the *Research Training Programme* has been developed, is based on an understanding that the analyst of the South must be made aware of and respond to the many facets of relations that make up state and society in the South. The academic programme is unique, at a time when most universities

in the South are still mono-disciplinary in training and research. The prestigious annual Cultural Studies Workshop, a well-equipped library with a collection of over 20,000 books, subscription to 178 journals, which include 78 international journals and the ambience of Indian society, one of the most interesting study sites in the South, which acts as a vibrant laboratory providing actual examples of what is learnt in the seminars and lectures of the Programme, further enriches the academic programme of the center.

Through partaking of the above, we have become more enamored of the research community in the South and gained greater understanding of our societies. The view we have gained is basically Southern ², deployed by academics from the South studying their own societies with the insights of people who are born and bred and experience daily the problems of these societies. Through the training received, we have learnt that the traits that dominate Southern society and politics, that have shaped our societies and outside of which they cannot be understood, are not heuristic constructs but living, dynamic phenomena, born out of and in response to pressures, within and outside our societies ³. What comes across from such training is an open, realistic and critical view of southern societies, which is not as negative as those to which we have previously been exposed. The new view is one that demands that we must see our societies for what they are, products of specific trajectories of development, of specific historicities, which does not translate into exoticness but makes sense within the context of worldwide relations and dynamics of modernity.



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In the above lies the uniqueness of SEPHIS South-South International Research Training Programme. It has enabled us, doctoral students from Africa, to study in an environment that has encouraged critical thinking about our societies, within contexts that positively mediate such critical thinking, resulting

in the crafting of methods and solutions for development that have the advantage of being based on personal experience of reality within Southern societies. In conclusion, we consider ourselves privileged to have had the opportunity to access North-South and South-South educational training opportunities. Both

training schemes have structured our knowledge of the South in a complementary manner and we are the better off for it. We thank SEPHIS, the CSSSC, its director, staff and research students for making our stay a great success.

1. Mr. Kehinde Michael Olujimi (Political Science, University of Ibadan), Mr. Omoregie Esosa Peters (Geography, University of Ibadan), Miss. Maris Umoren Ekpo (History, University of Port Harcourt), Mr. Olarinmoye Omobolaji Ololade (Political Science, University of Ibadan), Miss. Zanetta Lyn Jansen (Sociology, South Africa).

2. The Southern view is basically Sociologie Historique in nature, one which finds its originality in its refusal of prefabricated explicative schemes, all in all in nature, abstract and often sterile, in favor of an apprehension of reality that takes into account the specificity of each trajectory of change and the singularity of its content. Meaning that the study of politics in non-western societies cannot afford to ignore the need to reflect on what, within the discourse of the locals makes sense. In order to avoid the trap of cultural exoticism, the approach takes account of what makes sense for the local while having constant recourse, in order to facilitate comprehension, to general analytical categories, making it possible to produce knowledge that is scientific and generalisable. See René Otayek « Une relecture islamique du projet révolutionnaire de Thomas Sankara » in J. F. Bayart (ed.) *Religion et Modernité Politique en Afrique Noire : Dieu pour tous chacun pour soi*. Karthala, Collections Les Afrique.

3. For example Ethnicity and Ethnie. The Ethnie is conceived generally, in Western literature, both academic and general, as corresponding to the Hobbesian state of nature and opposed to the nation which privileges the individual as against the community, functional links to the detriment of vertical solidarities and social contract as substitute to elective affinities. The Southern view on the other hand, affirms that ethnicity is simply one of many modes of collective action native to African societies that can be used to give expression to political demands. That as a matter of fact, far from been the expression of a return to the state of nature, ethnie and ethnicity are modern phenomena that cannot be understood outside of the context of modernity and are actually means of making sense of modernity deployed by societies of the South. The ethnie just like the nation is the product of the interplay of meaning and myth, an Imagined community, a process possible only within the context of modernity. Thus if Western Nationalism is an attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress, then Ethnicity, the political mobilization of ethnic identity, seeks to attain the same ends through the creation of an alternative modernity which is responsive to local context and sensibilities. The focus of analysis on ethnicity should be on why it has become, along with religion, the most important mode of collective action for making sense of and expressing politics and not on whether it is an illusion, false consciousness, legitimate or other wise. For a detailed analysis of the trajectory of the concept of ethnicity and ethnie in academic and general literature see René Otayek's seminal book *Identité et Démocratie dans un Monde Global*. Presse de Science Po, Paris, 2000.



Across the South



Maris Umoren Ekpootu.

Maris Ekpootu, a doctoral student of the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Her research interest is Prostitution and Child Labour in the Informal Economy of the Cross River Basin of Southern Nigeria: A historical Perspective.

She likes everything- including music and theatre.

On 8 January 2004, four students stepped off the plane at the domestic airport in Calcutta, India, to continue the final leg of a 2-day journey from Nigeria expected to culminate at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. I was one of them, and in addition to a South African, we made up the first batch of International students, participants in a one-year Research Training Program (RTP), sponsored by SEPHIS, Netherlands. The program is meant to facilitate South-South exchange, while simultaneously encouraging international research cooperation

Exchange can be acquired in diverse ways - formal, informal and in some ways that are non-quantifiable. In the months so far spent, we have all, through our interactions and experiences, acquired knowledge that frankly is immeasurable. Indeed the adage that 'experience is the best teacher' could not be truer. We have had the opportunity to gain exposure to a crop of academics that give true meaning to the word social scientist in their versatility. Coming as we do from different backgrounds - geography, history, political science and sociology - this interaction, between budding and seasoned scholars has sharpened our skills in critical thinking, and improved our theoretical and methodological conceptualization. Proof of this is evidenced in the changes I have made in my dissertation title. When I began the RTP course my dissertation was entitled, *The Informal Sector and Economic Development*. Three months into the program, and after discussions with some of the Faculty members, I knew I had to take a second look at what had previously seemed a perfectly adequate title. I have since crossed the t and dotted the i, ending up with *Prostitution and Child Labour in the Informal Economy of the Cross River region: A Historical Perspective*. At first glance the reaction

could be a long drawn out, 'Rea-ly!' However a closer examination reveals important changes. The former is a broad study encompassing different concepts—the informal sector, its correlation with economic development; prostitution and child labour vis a vis economic development; as well as its evaluation as informal activities. While there is nothing wrong with a quantitative study, it becomes problematic when it does not synchronize with the research questions. In other words, when the topic is quantitative and the authors mind set and field study is qualitative, as was evident in my case, it is here that the RTP program comes in, by stimulating critical thinking. I saw the need for clarity and precision in my theoretical and methodological framework. The second topic is indicative at a glance of my aim, to analyse prostitution and child labour over time and space. To grasp shifts in the dynamics of prostitution and child labour, there is the need to identify different and even contradictory moments in that historical flow. It is only in a historically anchored discourse that one can problematise the concept of prostitution and child labour. All these restructuring reflect my broadening scope and my emergence as a social scientist.

Questions asked, lessons learnt have not been purely academic, but has extended into socio-cultural realms. In more ways than one, these interactions have not been one-sided. One thing that became obvious is the disgraceful, but unfortunately true, paucity of knowledge exhibited by both the Nigerian foreign students and their Indian counterparts about their respective countries. It is different in the case of South Africa because of the large number of Indian settlers in South Africa. This ignorance is less pronounced among the Nigerian ambassadors. Several factors account for this. One of them is the large presence

of Indian businessmen in the country especially in the textile industries. Another is the role of the media in the dissemination of information, especially the cinema. As college undergraduates, we all had our fair share of watching Indian movies. This trend gradually died off, as we grew older, fueled by the belief that Indian movies were sissy - the dancing and singing was no doubt a reason for this. Obviously information garnered through such a medium could be distorted and exaggerated. Nevertheless, we came to India with some mental picture. Some of these were debunked, some clarified and yet others substantiated. The idea of India as a closed society, for instance, has been substantiated. One sees the struggle, opposed in some quarters, by the state to more or less insulate India from western 'takeover'. In some ways this is admirable, that given her history as one of the longest colonized country, India has largely retained her 'flavour'. This ability to look inwards has contributed to her success as an industrialized nation. Nigeria in this case could use a few lessons as the country's over-reliance on western products has aided her economic downturn. On the other hand, such resistance to change tends to produce intolerance and the rule of extremist forces. More often than not, it is the socially dispossessed strata of society who are most affected. The voice of women despite the political strides made by a few (some of them mere pawns in the political game) remains a whisper, unheard. The disadvantages faced by women range from the practice of female infanticide, refusing her educational rights, adolescent marriage, to the pressures of dowry payments. While the marginalisation of women is not peculiar to India, in Nigeria, the empowering tool of education has ameliorated it. The result is that the average Nigerian girl is more assertive of her rights than her Indian



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counterpart. Coming from such a milieu, I have in my interactions at the Centre left a lot of people reeling, sometimes in amazement and shock. My assertiveness comes as a shock in the face of the traditional female show of submission. Nonetheless, I must say, I have also received thrilling support. Be that as it may, the vibrancy and self-assertion of the African students has injected a high tempo into life at the Centre. We have also come to appreciate that the seeming docility of Indian women is but a façade, which hides an amazing strength of will. The atmosphere at the Centre allows this to blossom and become visible, but ordinarily the will is displayed in more subtle ways, usually behind closed doors.



The South-South exchange has provided a good opportunity for intermixing of ideas, making it possible for the Africans and the local RTP as well as the faculty staff to upgrade their knowledge. This fits in well with the aim of SEPHIS and CSSSC, to create a forum for international research cooperation.

As trailblazers in this program with regards to the involvement of international students, it is expected that there will be teething problems. The unavailability of an orientation program to ease us into a culture that was completely foreign was one of the problems we initially had to grapple with.

In spite of the wealth of knowledge gleaned from studying at the CSSSC, it is but a part of our new world. Nonetheless, it has been the springboard for the exploration and study of this world. Taking the 15 minutes walk from the Centre to my house, which I share with my South African colleague, I am daily reminded of what I had observed on my arrival coming from the airport - the haphazard dispersal of slums within the city. As I learn more about the history of

Calcutta, I realize it is a legacy of a colonial past, the evidence of the disruptive impact of a colonial economy on the city's morphology, exacerbated by lack of a master plan. It produces a sense of familiarity and heightens my awareness of the increasing poverty of countries of the South. In spite of this, one cannot help but admire the tenacity of the people as they grapple with this problem, and their ingenuity, as local resources are adapted to fit their needs. In Nigeria, one of the ways in which this colonial legacy rears its ugly head is in the adoption of macro-economic policies, which keep Nigeria securely tied to the apron strings of western corporate capitalism, to the continued impoverishment of the populace.

One cannot talk about life in Calcutta without mentioning the sights, smells and splashes of colour that is Calcutta. You are immersed in it: walking home from the Centre; shopping in new market; or taking 'cha' at a roadside café. The unique blend of European and Indian culture in the architectural designs provides a befitting backdrop for the colourful parade of people on the streets. A bus ride completes your initiation into a proper Bengali. It is a nerve-wracking but exhilarating experience. More often than not, as the bus tears down the road, and we get bumped up and down on our seats, I will hold onto the bus rails, and pretend albeit unsuccessfully to be calm. I do let out a gasp now and then as I foresee an inescapable crash. However the bus screeches to a stop, and I realize that, though in danger of being afflicted by high blood pressure, not once did these vehicles crash. There is after all order in the chaos!

There is the other side of life in Calcutta, as a foreigner and for me, a female foreigner. The first thing to master are the stares. Unfortunately while no longer harassed by it we still get disconcerted though we understand the novelty we pose. However, what is perplexing is the overt hostility that emanates from the looks. It is an illustration of the negative effect of a society that is too 'closed'. More importantly, it seems to be a problem of the neighborhood as this is not generally felt in the more metropolitan areas of Calcutta. Baghajatin where we all live is a low-income area, and it is

easier for the poor residents to feel resentful of the foreigners perceived to have all the money, dress in western (interpreted here as sophisticated, and so expensive) outfits.

The utter lack of privacy is another aspect of Indian life that has been difficult to adapt to especially for my female colleague and I. An interesting episode occurred barely 6 weeks after our arrival. I opened the door to my landlord and a man whom I had never seen before. My landlord smiles at me and to my utter disbelief and frustration proceeds into my bedroom with the stranger leaving me standing at the patio. I later learn that the stranger is an artisan who needed to measure our mosquito nettings to replicate it for the landlord. As we came to realize, there is no such thing as privacy in the traditional Indian milieu.

As a foreign woman, my difference has tended to elicit diverse reactions. In most cases it has been romanticized, and this in turn has translated into different meanings for different people. In the more positive sense, it translates into the hand of friendship, and genuine curiosity about Nigeria. In others, it is quite negative, where the foreign woman is seen by the opposite sex as an object in which they can realize their sexual fantasies without fear of reprisals from society. To understand the logic of this line of thinking is to appraise the culture of denial in terms of sexual relations in India. In pretending that there are no carnal relationships outside the socially permissible boundaries, and so tackling it, it allows room for the resurrection of sexual violence visible in the rising number of rapes in Calcutta.

Life in Calcutta leaves you gasping whether in disbelief, shock, sheer joy or awe. It all adds up to a worthwhile experience!



Across the South

Report of Workshop on Youth in the Age of Development, in Bahia (Brazil)



Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff

Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff was educated at The Hague and Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and at Delhi and Kolkata (India). She obtained her Ph.D. (cum laude) in 1995. She then moved to Ranchi (India) and is affiliated with the Ranchi branch of Asian Development Research Institute (Patna).

She has learnt dance and music since childhood. She now teaches ballet in Ranchi and sings both Indian and Western classical. She is into trekking, mountaineering and jogging. She has established a youth club in Ranchi to enable her to do things with young people. Her's is a full life and she likes it as it is right now.

Youth and Development

SEPHIS (The South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development) along with the Social Science Research Council (New York, USA) and the CEAO (Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais of the Federal University of Bahia) organised a workshop in Salvador, the state capital of Bahia, on the changing perceptions and roles of 'Youth in the age of development'. 'Youth' was perceived as both a new generation carving out a place in the world for itself as well as a broader societal representation of desired change. It was the dialectics between representations of youth by non-youths on the one hand and on the other hand the self-representations of youth that the workshop wanted to address. This workshop therefore resembled the city of Salvador de Bahia as both were built on two levels.



From 20 to 23 June 2004, researchers from all over the "south" including Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean and Pacific regions, were linked together in Salvador, an old port city with around 2,250,000 inhabitants that used to be the capital of colonial Brazil for almost two centuries. In total 13 paper presenters

reached the venue after plane journeys of up to two days or more to get to this city located at the north-east coast of the huge country called Brazil. Unfortunately, changed visa regulations that now rule that many non-European passport holders need transit visas, prevented the participation of Mahbubur Rahman from Bangladesh and S.M. Faizan Ahmed from India. The remaining 13 participants presented their papers within 15 minutes or a little more if the chair allowed and were provided ample time (45 minutes) to answer questions posed by two discussants and the rest of the audience. Animated but succinct discussions followed the presentations, some of which were accompanied by slides and video film. Apart from the presenters, the discussants namely Sunaina Maira (University of California), Jocelio dos Santos (Centro d'Estudos Afro-Orientais, Bahia), Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (JNU, New Delhi), Ndeye Sokhna Guéye (CODESRIA, Dakar), Luis Nicolau (Federal University of Bahia, UFBA), Shamil Jeppie (University of Cape Town), Mark Carvalho (UFBA), Miriam Rabelo (UFBA), Lakshmi Subramaniam (CSSSC, Kolkata), Samita Sen (Calcutta University, Kolkata) and Cecilia McCallum (UFBA) had all previously studied the papers and were therefore able to provide astute comments. The discussants also made incessant efforts to link papers for comparative purposes. Mamadou Diouf, Michiel Baud, Maris Diokno, Takiwaa Manuh, Shamil Jeppie, Livio Sansone and Ron Kassimir along with yet another member of the SEPHIS Steering Committee, Willem van Schendel, as well as a representative of the Netherlands

Ministry of Development Cooperation besides their roles as chairs, hosts and organizers also actively participated in the academic debates during the three-day workshop and posed critical questions.

From Sunday to Tuesday we all were assembled in Casa de Angola surrounded by its beautiful wall paintings. It is situated in the older historic part of the city influenced by Afro-Brazilian, Amerindian and European impact and at the time plunged in the ceremonies of *condomblé*, which honour both African deities and Catholic June saints such as St. John. The workshop presentations resembled the fireworks, colourful balloons, flags, music and dance in the city and the variety of the papers and their authors was not less than that of the heterogeneous city of Bahia. There were case studies from Indonesia (Bonnie Triyana), India (Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff and S.M. Faizan Ahmed's paper presented in absentia), Nigeria (Onookome Okome, O.A. Adeboye and Muhammad Kabir Isa), Mozambique (Sandra Manuel), South Africa (Priya Narismulu), Uruguay (Isabel Clemente), Costa Rica (Ixel Quesada Vargas), Brazil (Paula Christina da Silva Barreto), Sri Lanka (Neluka Silva), Argentina (Eloísa Martín), Philippines (Anna Christie Villarba-Torres) and Bangladesh (Mahbubur Rahman's paper presented in absentia). Whereas some had equated youth and students or referred to youth as a particular age, class, ethnic or gender category and described, often chronologically, their (shifting) self-representations, others addressed instead



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how youth was perceived and represented by NGOs, governments, political and student leaders, film makers, photographers and other media. Some pointed to the shifting meanings of the category with its membership changing over time and place. A few linked the two levels and highlighted the dialectics between them. During a dynamic discussion following a paper on so-called *pibes* in Argentina, some even seemed to conclude that the construct of youth only exists among those who identify as everything but 'youth'. Most papers were richly illustrated and based on primary and contemporary sources and a few tried to capture the changing composition of the category youth as well its dialectical relation with non-youth in more analytical terms.

Significantly however, youth was only directly linked to development during the discussions of the papers. Nevertheless, all papers though from different disciplinary angles indirectly brought to fore how 'youth' was and indeed is related to the **process of development**. The papers thrashed out extremely diverse global and local economic, socio-cultural and political trends such as the institutionalisation of education, health care, family life, leisure time and religion and processes such as globalisation, state formation, democratisation, market restructuring as well as the formation of nationalist movements, militant and student movements and the introduction of human rights, ethnic or feminist movements and employment schemes. Apart from the active role people played in these processes of development, papers also discussed changing responses to these trends among those who identified or were labelled as youth. The discussions pointed to three different ways in which youth and development could be linked. These models, moreover, were sometimes at work simultaneously as well as in succession and were operational among those who addressed the youth as well as

those identifying as youth.

First of all, a minor section of the authors showed that 'youth' as an unstable category can exist **in spite of development**. Some young people in the South, for instance those who are unemployed, illiterate, female, poor, living in rural areas or constituted as minorities, were excluded from development discourses or its practices. Yet though these people lived their lives oblivious of these societal trends, they could identify as 'youth', with age not necessarily the decisive factor.

Secondly, some papers showed that 'youth' is not only represented as **a result of development** but also as **victims of development** and even as **obstacles to development**. Besides, many young people perceive themselves as such. In these discourses on youth, young people are often victimised, criminalized and held responsible for certain historical trends whereas young people perceive that they **are the result of development**. Believing at times that they were beneficiaries of development, they welcomed certain trends but resisted others when they perceived themselves as losers. Importantly, they did not perceive themselves as initiators of these historical developments.

Thirdly, the majority of the papers showed youth as the **raison d'être of development**. Non-youth categories, particularly that of the so-called adult, could not perceive of development without youth, imagined as initiators of change. Besides, most young people who looked upon themselves as agents of development did indeed identify as youth.

The papers presented during the workshop brought together a mine of new empirical information on how youth is perceived and perceives itself over time and in different settings and how it is linked to development. After a wonderful boat trip organised on the fourth day by our host Livio Sansone and the outstanding staff of the Fábrica de Idéas we reached a comparative analysis of how the two sides of the construct are related, locally as well as globally and how this is associated with development. We are also left wondering whether something like 'youth in the South' exists, either in discourses on youth or in self-perceptions.





Across the South

Youth, Development and the pandemic of HIV/AIDS in Mozambique



Sandra Manuel



Youth is the major population group in Mozambique and the driving force for development. Ironically, the majority of HIV/AIDS infections in Mozambique occur amongst youth. Particularly infected are those under the age of 20 (Instituto

Nacional de Estatísticas 2000). The epidemic not only causes long term illnesses but the stigma attached creates lack of self-esteem, lack of motivation and deaths that altogether reduce the labour force. HIV/AIDS is thus likely to

hinder development. Therefore, the fighting against AIDS must be a priority in the country's development strategies.

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Picture: students at a junior high school course
http://www.wfp.org/intl_projects/IntlProjectsRpt02_EduSchools.html



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Labour Migration in an Earlier Phase of Global Restructuring A Note on the Workshop in Xiamen, April 2004



Michiel Baud
Member, Steering Committee,
Sephis.

Michiel Baud is Director of CEDLA (from April 2000) and Professor in Latin American Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He graduated in Contemporary History at the University of Groningen in 1982 and received his Ph.D. cum laude in Social Sciences at Utrecht University in 1991. From 1995 to 2000 he was Professor of Latin American Studies at the University of Leiden.

After having been delayed for almost a year because of the SARS scare, the workshop on *Labour Migration in an Earlier Phase of Global Restructuring* was held in Xiamen, China, from 18 to 20 April 2004. The workshop was jointly organised by the School of Public Affairs of the University of Xiamen and the Sephis Programme. Prof. Li Minghuan and her team took care of an excellent organisation. Xiamen University provided a very congenial setting. The workshop entailed not only the presentation and discussion of papers but also public activities in the evenings.

The workshop produced interesting comparative discussions on different aspects of the relation between international migration and changing labour relations in past and present. Both Chinese and 'foreign' participants were enthusiastic about the workshop because it opened up new ways of thinking about their own work on labour migration. There were lively discussions during the sessions and afterwards, and the usual 'Sephis effect' clearly occurred: a multidirectional comparative exchange of views, historiographical perspectives and references. What follows is a slightly reworked version of the concluding remarks presented in the last session of the Conference. They were meant to draw some general conclusions on the basis of the wide array of papers presented during the Conference. The conference touched upon two themes: (1) the historical context of labour migration and (2) the lives of migrants and the ways they form (cultural) networks to facilitate migration and articulate new visions of the world and themselves. At the same time the workshop generated interesting discussions on the specific problems and challenges of migration research and the future of global migration and new international identities.

1. The historical context of migration

In relation to the first point, it became clear how diversified is the historical experience that is hidden under the simple concept of migration. It concerns the movement of people on local, national and international scale. It refers to permanent migration which causes the settlement of populations, but also looks at temporary migration in which (sometimes large) groups of migrants are attracted to places with temporary demand for wage labour, such as the early twentieth century *golondrinas* (swallows) who every year left Italy and Spain to work in the Argentine agriculture.

While in Latin America international migration is often understood as the movement of people from the South to the North (mainly the United States and to a lesser extent Europe), in Asia much of the international migration seems to have occurred *within* the South, around the South Asian and Indian seas. Most of this migration finds its origin in opportunities of wage labour, which explains the theme of the workshop.



An important question is why people migrate. The papers presented in Xiamen gave examples of both push and pull factors. Poverty and the absence of opportunities have been the principal cause for pushing away people. Pull factors, luring people away from their homeland, were the 'bright lights' of the cities, the promise of better education

and in general a better future for children.

The migration experience also had its own logic and dynamism. Once migration became an accepted part of life, we can see the emergence of migrant societies (in Chinese: *Qiaoxiang*) which were organized around the prospects of migration and the links with members of the village or the clan living in far-away places.

The papers also pointed to the different forms in which migration has been organized. Traditionally, a major part of the migration experience depended on the forced transference of people. The Atlantic (and to a lesser extent: Asian) slave trade is the most infamous example of such a process of 'forced migration', but more contemporary migration experiences may also be linked to coercion. This is often connected to what we can call 'recruited' migration in which employers try to entice labourers to their enterprises. Today the most common form of migration is what could be called 'spontaneous' migration in which networks of migrants shape themselves according to the demands of the international labour market. The Chinese experience presents a peculiar example in which the state is able to strictly control the movement of labour.

The term 'migration' refers to legal and illegal (or 'irregular') migration. This shows the importance of its political context. Migration can only be understood in relation to the nation state (and today sometimes: international agencies) which by their legislation determine the borders between what is considered legal and illegal. This draws attention to the importance of the historical context in which migration takes place. It is not difficult to distinguish different historical moments which shaped the extent and form of migration. These could be called historical stages, but then we should always take care not to understand



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them in a mechanistic way. The modern period of the late nineteenth and twentieth century which was the focus of the conference may be divided in three periods. The period of the development of export-agriculture and mining between 1850 and 1930, the period between roughly 1920 and 1970 which was characterized by rapid urbanization and industrialization, and, thirdly, the late twentieth century, extending into the twenty-first, of an increasingly open world economy and a more or less global labour market.

One of the interesting points that came up during the conference was the question at which point the – 'normal' - movement of wage labourers came to be labeled as 'migration'. Many papers suggested that (labour) movement was only labeled as 'migration' when it became a political issue. In other words: research



on labour migration does not only mean that we have to study the historical process of migration itself, but also the discursive fields surrounding the concept.

These discourses influence what societies think about the movement of labour, but also influence analytical categories and the terms in which social sciences view this historical process. This points at the importance of a historical approach, also in the analysis of contemporary migration.

2. Migrant identities

The second theme that was central to many papers during the conference was the identity of the migrants. Who were these men, women and children who in one stage of their life cycle moved away from the places where they had been raised and to which they belonged, to the unknown? How were they seen by the outside world? And how did they see themselves?

One of the dangers in migration studies is the tendency to present a homogenizing picture of the migrant population. It is enticing to talk about Turkish, Chinese or Ecuadorian migrants, as if they were one undifferentiated group.

Policy makers and bureaucrats tend to see migrants only as that: migrants. They ignore the multiple religious, cultural, social and political networks in which individual migrants participate. Their tendency to put labels on these groups makes it difficult to understand the concrete migrant reality. In addition, these labels coincide with metaphors of the self within the migrant communities, both at home and in the diaspora. These labels and identities change over time and influence each other, and in that way lead to all kinds of fragmented, hybrid, new and reformulated identities among migrants.

It became clear in Xiamen how great the differences can be within groups that are colloquially presented as a unity. Differences in class and/or education may be the most important because they determine power, status and opportunities. Another important, 'historical' difference originates in the temporal difference in 'migrant flows'. Second and third generation migrants sometimes pose a threat to earlier migrant groups who have been able to integrate easily and without much opposition in a new society. These first generation migrants help their kin and friends, but they also feel threatened by the large numbers of compatriots following them, and the antagonistic reaction they provoked in the receiving society.

Another difference consists in racial or ethnic characteristics. Sometimes the migration experience can wipe out of differences that existed in the sending society, but they may sharpen and cause rivalry and even antagonism among migrants. The outcome of these factors depend very much on attitudes and values in the receiving society.

Most migrants began their adventure as members of networks. These were most notably family networks, but could also be ethnic or communal. These networks led to more or less intricate migration networks which extended over the globe in multiple chains. These chains which

were designated as *chaxu geju* in Chinese, were based on bonds of family or ethnic loyalty and linked people together even in far away places. These networks provided support and loyalty, but they were often based on patriarchal authority of the father, parents or the elders. As such they often functioned as networks of support and exploitation. Migration was not always a spontaneous decision or the result of elite or state oppression; it was also often part of family strategies in which family elders 'sent away' certain members, oftentimes children or adolescent boys or girls. In both cases, however, migration might turn into some sort of *rite de passage* which accentuated and confirmed the transition into adulthood for young people. This happened above all in the just-mentioned 'migration societies' in which migration became an integrated part of community life affecting all its members.

These changing identities also shows in the ways migrants tend to present and understand their past. Migrant narratives offer one of the most interesting, but at the same time complex and difficult sources for the historical understanding of migration. These narratives provide the historian with factual information on the migration experience, but at the same time – and often inextricably intertwined – it presents the images and metaphors by which migrants process and understand their individual and /or collective pasts of themselves and their fellow men and women. In other words, they also present the historian with a subjective interpretation of the particular migration history. This leads to different and often contrasting 'migration narratives'. First, there is the *romantization* of the migration experience, often linked to an emphasis on the personal success and (personal) agency. Secondly, there is the narrative of *responsibility* for others. Here we find an emphasis on collective feeling and solidarity, which often leads to a personal narrative that centers around morality. There is a positive remembering of migration but the success is not personal and economic, but more collective and moral. A third way of looking at migration is that of *injustice and inequality*. The emphasis in these cases may either be on victimhood or on the struggle for justice and respect.



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There is also the narrative of *nostalgia*, or what the Brazilians call 'saudade'. Migration means loss of security and the revaluation of emotional ties and symbols. Children and grandchildren may already have difficulty understanding this deep feeling of connectedness with another place, for the migrants and their loved ones it is more than real and a portent of great significance. It may also lead to new identities, which, however, are presented as old ones, deeply grounded in traditional society.

The Xiamen discussions also referred to the consequences of migration for individuals and societies. New forms of wage labour, remittances, new cross-cultural liaisons, contact with new ideas and norms are all part and parcel of the migration process. To give just an

example, migration brings concrete change in patterns of consumption, means of communication and infrastructural development, but also new ideas and perspectives on modernity. In the same vein, it changes the daily reality of gender and family relations but also the ideas on what gender and family relations should be. Migration will stay an important topic for historical and social science research precisely because of its complex and contradictory consequences.

The papers in the conference also indicated which directions (future) research should take. There is no doubt about the need for long-term historical research and empirical research into local contexts both in sending and receiving societies. It is also necessary to go beyond 'official' sources and look for new

ways of understanding the migration experience. In this respect, interviews will be indispensable, both with migrants themselves and with brokers and employers. In all cases, it is necessary to understand the historical experiences and the narratives that are built around them. Research into different 'migrant ideologies' will shed light on the different perspectives, but also draw attention to the ways they influence (historical) interpretations. It may be superfluous to say, but they finally demonstrated the importance of comparative perspectives which allow for the confrontation of specific local research results with experiences elsewhere in the world.



Reviews

Chatterjee, Partha, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. Delhi. Permanent Black. 2004. ISBN 81-7824-097-1, pp. 173, Rs 495.



Dwaipayan Bhattacharya

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How does one understand democracy in the South? Most scholars in the field of social and political sciences tend to borrow ideas and categories that evolved in Europe or North-America and apply them rather uncritically to assess situations on the ground in the postcolonial world: in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Their work tends to underline what more is needed to make democracy work in the South: modernization, institutionalization, industrialization or the development of civil society, civic community, social capital and so on. In short, they study the situation in the South after the images of the North, and consequently show the persisting gaps and lacunae that the former must overcome to finally reach the promised land of development and democracy, of social peace and economic prosperity.

Partha Chatterjee in this book tells us that such perceptions are wrong and proceeds to explain why. Moreover, he hints that such perspectives are not innocent; they are integral to a world order where globalization of services, commodities and ideas take place under the control of a new empire. It is, therefore, not only incorrect but also supercilious to claim that some ideas need to be treated as universally worthy and that their spread across the world purely positive. This book illustrates several strategic moments where particular interests of popular politics, mobilized as community interests, expose the limits of political universals that liberal theories had posed as sacred.

Indeed, this book is by far the most elaborate exposition of the author's decade-long engagement with politics in postcolonial democracies. His arguments are presented in seven essays written over two years as public lectures as well

as pieces for journals and newspapers. The first three essays set the pace of the book; the first takes on the liberal claim that the nation-state as the most legitimate form of political community has been instrumental in creating some positive values – such as citizenship and equality of rights – and making them acceptable and applicable across cultural and historical boundaries. The second and the third essays, citing a host of ethnographic case studies, establish the central arguments of what Chatterjee calls 'the political society' and 'the politics of the governed'. The remaining four essays investigate the conceptual map that emerges with various global and local contexts.

While the modern state recognizes the nation as the only legitimate and homogeneous form of community, actual politics across the world gives rise to various heterogeneous collectivities that do not necessarily conform to the sovereign demands of the nation-state. In most cases such communities are products of the classificatory schemes of government, of census and other such policy-oriented techniques, displaying no special bonds of prior cultural or biological affinities. Benedict Anderson held the former communities, of civic nationalism, as signifying unbound seriality and the latter varieties, of ethnic solidarity, as a consequence of bound governmentality. Anderson also held civic nationalism in high esteem for "aligning" national identities with "this world of mankind" both synchronically – on the newspaper page – and diachronically – up and down the homogeneous, empty time. Communities forged as ethnic identities, by contrast, were seen as contingent, disruptive and local. Chatterjee disagrees.

Even in the domain of civic nationalism, Chatterjee argues, the fundamental tension between universal rights of the citizen and special considerations for the minorities and groups who have historically perceived themselves as disadvantaged could not be resolved. Especially in the context of postcolonial democracies this has produced all sorts of ambivalence, most dramatically expressed in the idea of nationhood as both historically given and pedagogically constructed. Indeed some of the momentous national mobilizations have championed the universal rights of the citizen along with special community rights, not as fusion of the present and the pre-modern past, but as "products of the encounter with modernity itself". Postcolonial nationalism, therefore, signifies what Chatterjee calls a "dense and heterogeneous time" of modernity (pages 7-8). Two disparate yet logically connected cases are presented to illustrate this point: Ambedkar's differences with Gandhi on the composition of the nation, and a subaltern hero's predicaments in resolving the tensions between the local and the national in a popular nationalist Bengali novel *Dhorai charitmanas*.

Once the binary of the ethnic and the national is found unhelpful to explain the political modernity of the postcolonial present, the next move is to explore the physiognomy of politically constituted communities. In an extraordinary sweep, Chatterjee sketches the contours of democratic theories evolved in the last three centuries. The political community that found universal and legitimate recognition, in the time of capital, was the nation-state with its promise to secure freedom and equality for its citizens. But freedom and equality as abstract rights



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often pulled in opposite directions and had to be mediated by property and community. Such mediation, however, often proved tenuous, since it either curtailed personal freedom or endangered fraternal equality, generating at least three major currents of criticisms: individualist, communitarian and republican. These strands differed on whether to underscore individual autonomy, or general good of the community, or selective and positive intervention by the state to balance individual and collective interests. Despite such differences, all three agreed that these issues cannot be resolved simply by imposing state laws, it is necessary to harness a network of norms in civil society independent of the state and consistent with its laws. Civil society, therefore, came to be recognized as the social base of (capitalist) democracy in general.

In the colonial and the postcolonial contexts, however, civil society played a significantly different historical role. While power differentials were common to civil society in advanced capitalism as well – Marx saw it essentially as bourgeois – in colonial and postcolonial societies it was framed not only as a realm of domination but also exclusion, preventing entry to a vast majority of people. As the elite society of subjects turned into the civil society of independent citizens, the mechanisms of exclusion and social distancing, maintained by markers such as education, wealth or birth, were not scrapped, rather they were given new meanings. Now the actual act of domination and segregation had to appear consonant with the formal act of citizenship, of legal equality. In this context, it was now imperative for critical social theory to make a distinction between formal citizenship, that encompasses the entire nation, and actual citizenship, that does not include the underclasses – the marginals and the subalterns. Chatterjee in this work finds democracy in the solidarities of the underclasses outside the established civil society, precariously constituted to compel the state to serve those segments for whom the legal protection of freedom, equality or property – idealized as citizenship rights – have little practical value. This he calls political society.

Why is politics in the political society that of the 'governed'? Chatterjee applies a line of analysis that is distinct from the one that links the citizen with the state:

he talks about the connection between the government and the population. In modern mass democracies such as Britain and the USA, policies are made in response to the specific needs of civil society whose members are enumerated, on the basis of their distinctive characteristics, as population. Government here increasingly takes the form of management, more as a sphere of experts than of political representation, while sophisticated technologies are pressed into action to cater to the contingent and flexible requirements of the population, who practically appear as consumers of policies. "Citizens", Chatterjee points out, "inhabit the domain of theory, populations the domain of policy" (page 34).

The process of governmentalization of the state in colonial and postcolonial worlds had a different chronological sequence. It predated the formation of nation-states and it was premised on a social hiatus between the governing elite and the governed subaltern. Both left their traces in the making of the postcolonial political society. On the one hand, the ethnographic categories of the colonial state that preceded nationhood became important markers for newly-formed solidarities in social movements, on the other, the governed continued to invoke the moral language of community (even when it carried no biological or cultural affinity) to realize what it considered its entitlement denied unlawfully by the governing elite. Both these modes were employed to get the recognition of a legitimate population group, of a valid target for public policy, in the absence of adequate civic rights. So to survive in the face of great uncertainties such as displacement and destitution, the politics of the governed managed to muster enough ethical ammunition and to deploy "paralegal" means that are flexible and heterogeneous. Structurally, the political society operated best when the governed succeeded in establishing appropriate contacts with organized politics, influential persons, the media, i.e., the agencies and bodies of the state and the civil society. Though the political society evolved in the spectrum of nationalist political mobilization, "it has taken on something like a distinct form (in India) only since the 1980s" (page 47).

The politics of the governed, in other words, is a learning curve for the deprived

multitude to accrue welfare measures from the developmental state by making better use of governmental technologies. Since the process is one of inclusion of those outside the fold of power and of investing popular imaginations in the area of public policies, it cannot but be democracy on the move. Like all learning processes, it is full of errors and uncharted routes, messy and unwieldy actions, which often soil the neat conceptual portals and corridors of elite-driven civil society. Chatterjee collects his snapshots from the cases of a godman and his followers, settlers in shacks by the metropolitan railway tracks, bookbinders in the dingy lanes of an old urban locality, varied results of resettlement in different public projects, and so on. In the second part of the book he talks at length about the emerging threats that the politics of the governed encounters from an imperial globalization that endangers national sovereignty, and also about aggravated communalization that demands a radical rethinking of some of the basic premises of our secular polity. In this context, he also points at the 'darker' side of the political society that endorses caste and communal violence or gender oppression.

The Politics of the Governed expands Partha Chatterjee's idea of political society, puts it in place with the main currents of theoretical thinking about the state, the civil society, citizenship, property, community, freedom and rights. It shows the limits of applying the state-civil society binary in explaining both democracy and development in the non-western world. Rather than merely a residual category outside the state and the civil society, the essays in the volume demonstrates how political society turns into the domain for democracy – by linking the politically constituted communities with the agencies of the state and the civil society.

Three points need to be noted here: one, the book attempts to understand the politics of the poor and the dispossessed from the standpoint of their own strategies, instrumentalities and interests. It is a careful attempt to steer clear of depicting the marginal either as a client, or a vote-bank, or an object of consciousness-building reforms by the elite. Two, by depicting communities in the political society as constituted by governmental strategies and responses to them in the course of an everyday battle for survival, for resources, for public



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provision, entitlements, and for building capabilities, the essays in the volume simultaneously resist attempts at romanticizing community (essentially anti-modernist) or bids to field spurious oppositions like 'the state versus market' or 'the state versus the civil society'. Three, more significantly, the book offers a prism through which we can actually look at western political theory from a postcolonial point of view. This, in turn, involves two strategic moves. First, it calls into question any claims of universality on the part of historically contextual phenomena such as civic nationalism or civil society. Second, it incites fresh approaches – theoretical as well as empirical – to interpret and intercept postcolonial societies without

unnecessarily getting bogged down in categories and tools developed in theoretical traditions that are ontologically remote and historically different.

The book opens up at least two basic questions for further investigation. First, how can the politics of the governed attain the goal of democratization in the political society? In other words, what can be its institutional forms for eliminating internal domination and exclusion? Second, by what criteria does one assess the "darker" sides of political society? If universal criteria are impossible and those of dominant civil society inappropriate, which norms and standards are to be applied to determine the "darker" versus the more "illuminated" aspects of political society

riven by differences and hierarchies? Chatterjee leaves us with the question: how can we understand the process that gives political society "a widely recognized systematic character, and perhaps even certain conventionally recognized ethical norms, even if subject to varying degrees of contestation"? (page 38).

This outstanding piece of scholarship, theoretical ingenuity and criticality throws an entirely new kind of challenge to the student of democracy in the South.

Photograph of Dwaipayan Bhattacharya courtesy Abhijit Bhattacharya

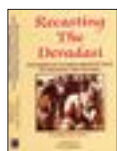
For another review of the same book, please refer to

"Of the people- Politics without form" by Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Telegraph (Calcutta, India)* Friday, 30 July 2004.
Website http://www.telegraphindia.com/1040730/asp/opinion/story_3553333.



Reviews

Vijaisri, P., *Recasting the Devadasi: Patterns of Sacred Prostitution in Colonial South India*. Delhi. Kanishka. 2004. ISBN 81-7391-644-6, pp. 346, Rs. 750.



Amrit Srinivasan

Teaches sociology/social anthropology at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi. Her doctoral work at Cambridge University dealt with reform and revival of the devadasi in Tamil Nadu, India. She now studies family and community; and also science, technology and society within the framework of the sociology of knowledge and culture. Dr Srinivasan has published widely in journals and the popular press. She lives and works in Delhi.

Much of women's history from the Indian sub-continent has been focused on accounts of the nationalist struggle or the religious and social reform movements initiated by renaissance Hinduism, in reaction to western missionary and media attack. It is, consequently, largely the middle class, upper-caste women who have been represented to the wider world, to the exclusion of their lower-caste, more underprivileged sisters. This has left a lacuna not only in feminist historiography but in the history of the nation and Hinduism in general. The book under review is a commendable effort to rectify this lack by re-examining the social history of Hinduism through a particular category of Dalit* women - the devadasi or sacred prostitutes - who were associated with their temples and village shrines. The "patterns" of sexuality exhibited by the Matangi, the Sule/Sani and the Basavi/Jogini, the book argues, is not an aberration but integral to the political economy of Hinduism.

Though focused more narrowly on the Andhra and Karnataka regions, these three distinct forms of sacred prostitution examined in the book testify to the wider history of Dalit sexual oppression within Hinduism. Lower caste women routinely provided village India with its goddess models - all variously associated with disease, pollution and death. The relative sexual autonomy outcaste women enjoyed vis-à-vis structures of household patriarchy was put to systemic purpose in fields of public service involving bodily practices of ritual, healing, midwifery, performing arts and the like. Outcaste women also provided landlords with sexual partnerships both for ritual and secular gratification. Tantric rites in particular, needed degraded women for their very completion in orthodox Brahminical circles and sects. Originally outside the pale of the Hindu social order, outcastes were thus sucked into the caste

hierarchy through the sexual appropriation of their women, which rendered Dalit men powerless and passive yet dependent on their oppressors.

The matangi, the sule/sani and the jogini/basavi, the author argues were merely variations on this larger politico-cultural theme integral to the Hindu social order. Among the three, the matangi most clearly indicated the continuity of outcaste functions because she was invariably recruited from the leatherworkers who deemed her a priestess in her ambiguous, unmarried yet sexually active state. The sule/ sani on the other hand were drawn from clean sudra castes and linked more to the arts and the duties performed in the temples of urban, upper-caste Hinduism. Along with the basavi/jogini who were usually also drawn from the outcaste communities but not necessarily so, the sule/sani added auspicious fertility granting powers to their ritual persona. The basavi, however, unlike the sule/sani, was a rural specialist, not part of any formal temple organisation who bore the deity's marks branded on her own body.

The intimate link between the "cultural hegemony" of caste Hinduism and sacred prostitution re-emerged, the book documents, in the movements for reform in the colonial period, when dedication and initiation of women was banned and the associated customary practices boycotted in temples and peoples' homes. Issues picked up by community protest targeted the exploitation not only of their women but of the entire group by upper-caste Hindu patrons. The book documents this mood of change through the writings and speeches of community reformers like the outcaste Devaraya Ingle and Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy of the devadasi community, which are then contrasted with the Brahminical legitimations of nationalist leaders such

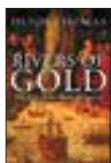
as Ranade. It also looks at literary evidence to highlight the same. Interestingly, however, the author expresses a window of doubt, when she argues that in their zeal to dismantle the system, community members may unfortunately have thrown the baby out with the bath water. Outcaste forms of feminine sexuality, she strongly feels, have a 'feminist' truth hidden within them, which has got utterly lost in the din of social and religious change. The sacred prostitute remains available, therefore, for trying to understand the competing pulls of gender and caste within Hinduism and its Others, in the larger feminist history, yet to be written, of India.

* "Dalit" is the term used to refer to India's former Untouchables, a section of society, whose members, by virtue of their birth, were relegated to the most degrading functions such as sanitation, scavenging and the like; and whose physical touch was considered polluting for upper-caste Hindus. The practice of untouchability is legally banned in India but de-facto it still persists.



Reviews

Thomas, Hugh, *Rivers of Gold. The Rise of the Spanish Empire from Columbus to Magellan.* London. Weidenfeld & Nicholson. First Edition 2003, ISBN: 029764563, pp 544, £25.00.



Jaime Yaffé



Teaches Contemporary History at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruguay, South America. His research focuses on the history of working class organizations and left wing parties in Uruguay, 1943-1973. He is 36, married with two children: Emiliano (9) and Lucía (7). He enjoys novels, films and concerts. In his spare time, he plays football.

The most recent book by Hugh Thomas is a history of the first thirty years of Spanish domination in the Americas, from the arrival of Columbus to the Caribbean islands in 1492 until the return to Spain of the expedition of Magellan-El Cano around the world in 1522.

Organized in chronological order, the ten sections and thirty-eight chapters of the book deal with different aspects and events of the early times of the Spanish venture in the Americas, those of initial exploration, conquest, and colonization. Thomas' style is clear and erudite. He shows a great admiration for the events and protagonists of the story he narrates. The narrative begins by describing the consolidation of Spain as a centralized State, when Fernando of Aragon married Isabel of Castile, and ends with the coronation of Carlos I of Spain as Carlos V of Germany. Thomas interweaves the complexities of royal succession in the metropolis with the adventures of the conquistadors in America. He is also interested in many other important issues, such as the enslavement of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, ensuing debates about their treatment and Christianization, and the so-called "African solution," that is, the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade.

The author is successful at creating a bond between the contemporary reader and two generations of conquistadors who died more than five centuries ago. His main tool to achieve this effect is the detailed description of places, habits, and people. He masters a type of historical narrative that ignores the methodologies and theories of the social sciences,

choosing instead to carefully depict characters and landscapes. The analysis of social, economic, and political matters does not play a relevant role in this type of work.

In addition, Thomas is not interested in framing his short-term narrative with any examination of long-term historical developments. Therefore, the Spanish conquest of the Americas appears as a unique episode and not as yet another step in the transit from the Middle Ages to the modern era, from feudalism to capitalism. Thomas does not present the many exploration voyages and the colonial expansion of Europe as a synthesis of the different dimensions of the broader phenomenon of modernity. He does not relate the subject matter of his book to other contemporary European developments such as political centralization and the consolidation of nation-states, the social and economic transformation of traditional feudal structures, and the complex cultural evolution that led to secularization and sanctioned the importance of science and technology.

The book presents a good case for a European point of view on Spanish colonialism. He is more interested in the early times of the Spanish Empire than in the history of early colonial Latin America. He assumes the point of view of a child of the "old world" and tells the heroic tale of the conquistadors with laudatory overtones.

In this type of historical work, persuasive writing is in itself the most important tool to bring the past alive, and Hugh Thomas

is an excellent writer. To sum up, the book provides a very good account of the origins of the Spanish monarchy, the different exploration voyages, the conquest of new lands and peoples, and the colonial organization, administration, and exploitation of the Americas during the first thirty years of the Spanish Empire. The edition includes maps, portraits, and pictures to offer an erudite and very attractive history book.



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"Scientia est potentia"

AFRICA REVIEW OF BOOKS

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Call for Proposals

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2. TEXTBOOK PROGRAMME

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This workshop is organized by the (Re)Construction of War Torn Communities in the Middle East and Africa (RWCMEA) Working Group. (www.aucegypt.edu/rwcmea<<http://www.aucegypt.edu/rwcmea>>)

Interested scholars are invited to submit an abstract to Ibrahim Elnur (ielnur@aucegypt.edu) by June 20, 2004. Research paper (15-25 pages) based on original research is due 1 August for distribution to participants prior to the workshop. RWCMEA will fund all workshop participants.

THE BEIRUT CONFERENCE

ON PUBLIC SPHERES

Call for Papers

22-24 OCTOBER 2004

Beirut, Lebanon

The Social Science Research Council (New York) and the American University of Beirut invite proposals for papers and presentations at an international conference entitled "The Beirut Conference on Public Spheres," to be held on October 22-24, 2004, in Beirut, Lebanon. The conference will be co-organized by the SSRC Program on the Middle East and North Africa and the Center for Behavioral Research at AUB. We aim at gathering as broad an international and multi-disciplinary representation of scholars as possible. Sessions will be organized in the customary panel format of 3-5 papers followed by a discussant. Based on the proposals, an international panel of scholars will select participants according to the fit with themes and overall goals of the conference. Final papers will be made available to participants on the SSRC website in early October 2004.

Partial and full funding for travel and accommodation may be available for some participants.

Proposals: For full panel sessions, submit a panel title, list of the paper titles, a session abstract of not more than two pages, and a one-page vita or resume for each participant, including the discussant. For individual proposals, submit a one-page abstract and a one-page vita or resume

Deadlines

Paper/Panel proposals due: 2 June 2004

Decisions announced: 25 June 2004

Final papers due: 27 September 2004

All proposals must be sent:

As Rich Text (.rtf) or MS Word attachments to mena@ssrc.org with subject line "Public Spheres Conference."

By post to:

The Social Science Research Council (SSRC)

MENA program

810 seventh Avenue, 31st Floor

New York, NY 10019

Or by Fax to:

MENA Program/Beirut Conference(212)377-2727

Please direct all additional queries to mena@ssrc.org, or (212)377-2700



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONFERENCE

GLOBALIZATION AND LABOUR: STATE, MARKET, AND ORGANIZATION

2-4 DECEMBER 2004

Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

Submission of abstract (of about 250 words) on or before 30 JUNE 2004.

Invitations to the Conference will be extended to the scholars whose abstracts are accepted.

For Concept Note please visit (URL: <http://www.idsk.org>)

Debdas Banerjee

Professor of Economics

Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

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Website: www.idsk.org

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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM to Celebrate the Centenary of Adrian Cola Rienzi

ADRIAN COLA RIENZI: FATHER OF TRADE UNIONISM IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

2-3 JULY 2005

University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

This symposium intends to focus on the life and work of **Adrian Cola Rienzi** (Krishna Deonarine) a lawyer, Indian sympathizer, trade unionist, politician and radical ideologue. Most historical texts have tended to emphasize the activity of Rienzi during the historic June 1937 riots, and overlook the monumental achievements of one of the most prominent East Indians in the Caribbean. Rienzi was the first President of the San Fernando branch of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (which was founded by Captain Arthur Cipriani). By December 1935, Rienzi and Tubal Uriah Butler had departed from the TWA and formed the Trinidad Citizens League. However, in 1936, Butler broke ranks and formed the British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party. In the 1938 elections, Rienzi successfully contested the Victoria seat. He was also acutely aware of his ethnicity and was involved in such groups as the East Indian National Congress and Indian National Party. Rienzi was under constant surveillance by colonial authorities for his Communist beliefs and working class activities. The enduring legacy of Rienzi is his role as President-General of both the Oilfields Workers Trade Union and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factories Workers Trade Union. He also played a pivotal role in the formation of the Federated Workers Trade Union and advised a number of smaller unions.

For more information: thirdworldunited@yahoo.com

Abstracts/ proposals to be sent to

Jerome Teelucksingh

c/o Department of History,

University of the West Indies,

St. Augustine, Trinidad, West Indies.

Deadline for abstracts: 2 February 2005.

Deadline for completed papers: 10 May 2005. Papers not to exceed 25 pages including endnotes and should be in Microsoft Word.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

SHEHR NETWORK

COMPARATIVE URBAN LANDSCAPES AND THEIR SUBALTERN CITIZEN-SUBJECTS IN NORTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

The **shehr** network is an academic initiative that seeks to further social, historical and critical understanding of contemporary cities and urban practices in the Middle East and South Asia. The initiative examines the efficacy of the category of the city in modernist discourse and seeks to chart this spatial imagination and its effects through an exploration of the complex processes through which gendered, classed, and raced citizen subjects have negotiated and been the object of urban projects in these regions. Attuned to both the legacy of modernist conceptual grammars and their inadequacy for understanding the remaking of space and place in the neo-liberal present, the purpose of the network is to open up an arena in which to address the particular positioning(s) of contemporary **urban landscapes** and **urban practices** through theme-based workshops, publications and an on-line discussion and exchange forum.

We endeavor to be inter-disciplinary and focus on scholarship that is empirically and theoretically comparative. For this purpose we seek to emphasize shared histories and contemporary processes that enable scholars to speak to the similarities and divergences that manifest urban practices in the Middle East and South Asia. Hence, we have selected the Urdu word **shehr** (city) as the name for our network. In doing so we draw upon Urdu's ability to bridge and exemplify the historical linkages between South Asian and Middle Eastern languages and cultures. The **shehr** network is coordinated by **Kamran Asdar Ali** (University of Texas, Austin) and **Martina Rieker** (American University in Cairo). For more information on the network or to join our mailing list please visit www.shehr.org

NETWORK OF ACADEMIA IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Murat Cemrek, Ph.D.

The e-NASS group at Yahoo! Groups is a free, easy-to-use email group service.

"Scientia est potentia"

This information e-network aims to deepen communication among academics in Social Sciences, including prospective undergraduate students. The moderator prepares e-NASS Newsletter, e-NASS Bulletin, and e-NASS booklet, compilations of cross-postings from several sources. The e-NASS Fellowships/Scholarships, Websites, Publications, Reviews, Summer Schools and etc... The e-NASS Bulletin is composed of several articles derived from numerous resources of analysis. The e-NASS Booklet informs subscribers about jobs, trainings and internships. Although the primary language of the list is English, contributions in other languages of Latin script are highly welcome to prompt further interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary dialogue in social sciences. The list discourages any form of discussion but open to academic enquiries and advertisements without commercial benefit.

Go to "My Groups", click on the group for which you want to change your subscription and click on the "Delivery Options" in the right hand corner (you can change to digest, individual, webversions or unsubscribe).

To start sending messages to members of this group, send email to e-nass@yahoogroups.com

You may unsubscribe by sending email to e-nass-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

You may also modify your subscriptions at <http://groups.yahoo.com/mygroups>



ANNOUNCEMENTS

AFRICA REVIEW OF BOOKS

Notes for Contributors

The **Africa Review of Books** presents a biannual review of works on Africa in the social sciences, humanities and creative arts. It is also intended to serve as a forum for critical analyses, reflections and debates about Africa. As such, the **Review** solicits book reviews, review articles and essays. Contributions that traverse disciplinary boundaries and encourage interdisciplinary dialogue and debate are particularly welcome.

Reviews and essays should be **original** contributions: they should not have been published elsewhere prior to their submission, nor should they be under consideration for any other publication at the same time.

The recommended **length** of manuscripts is 2000 words, with occasional exceptions of up to 3,000 words for review articles or commissioned essays. Notes (which should be submitted as endnotes rather than as footnotes) should be used sparingly. Manuscripts should begin with the following **publication details**: title of the book; author; publisher; number of pages; price; and ISBN number.

Manuscripts are best sent electronically as e-mail attachments. If sent by post as hard copy, they should be accompanied by soft versions on diskette in the MS Word or RTF format. Authors should also send with their submissions their full address and institutional affiliation as well as a short bio-data (including a sample of recent publications) for use on the "Notes on Contributors" section.

Authors are entitled to two copies of the issue of the **Review** in which their contribution is published. All communications should be addressed to:

Africa Review of Books
Forum for Social Studies
P.O. Box 25864 Code 1000
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: 251-1-572990/91
Fax: 251-1-572979
E-mail: arb.fss@telecom.net.et

CODESRIA Multinational Working Groups

Call for Proposals

LAND IN THE STRUGGLES FOR CITIZENSHIP, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The lifespan of the average MWG is two years during which time all aspects of the research process are expected to be completed and the final results prepared for publication in the CODESRIA Book Series.

More details on the MWG are available on: www.codesria.org

All proposals must be received by **30 September 2004**. Proposals submitted will go through an evaluation process the results of which will be made available by **31 October 2004**. The selected applicants will be invited to participate in a launch/methodological workshop to be held in **November 2004**. Proposals should be sent to:

The CODESRIA MWG on Land,
Research Department
CODESRIA,
Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop x Canal IV
P.O. Box 3304, Dakar, 18524, Senegal.
Tel : +221 825 65 97
Fax: +221 824 12 89/825 66 51
Email: mwg@codesria.sn



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CODESRIA TEXTBOOK PROGRAMME

Call for Proposals for 2004

The **Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)** Applications for consideration under the textbook programme should include the following materials:

- i) A proposal which includes a clear theoretical, methodological and pedagogic justification for the project;
- ii) The curriculum vitae(s) of the project leader(s) and a bio-sketch of all the other contributors;
- iii) Two copies of the publications of the project leader(s) which they consider to be the most significant and relevant to their proposal;
- iv) A detailed calendar and budget for the implementation of the project.

All applications received will be examined by an independent selection committee and those which are recommended for support will be eligible for funding by the Council. For indicative purposes, prospective applicants for support within the textbook programme may wish to note that up to USD 10,000 may be available from CODESRIA resources to assist them in realising their projects. To be eligible for consideration for support within the 2004 financial year of the Council, all applications should be received by **30 November 2004**. Applications should be sent to:

The CODESRIA Textbook Programme
Department of Training and Grants
CODESRIA
Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop x Canal IV
BP 3304, Dakar, 18524, Senegal.
Tel.: +221-8259822/23
Fax.: +221-824 1289
E-mail: text.book@codesria.sn
Website: www.codesria.org

The CODESRIA Annual Social Science Campus

Call for Applications for the 2004 Session

The **Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)** is pleased to announce the third session of its Annual Social Science Campus, and invites applications from African scholars for participation in the programme which, this year, is scheduled to be held in October 2004. The Annual Social Science Campus is conceived as an *advanced research dialogue* which is both *multidisciplinary* and *intergenerational* in nature. It is organised around a specific theme and up to 15 scholars, drawn from different disciplines and reflecting the different generations of African social researchers, are elected to participate in the Campus.

Among the issues which it is hoped that the Campus will cover are:

- i) A critique of the dominant approaches in the literature to understanding the contemporary African state;
- ii) A (re-)reading of the historical processes and forces that shape the modern African state;
- iii) A critique of the logic that drives the African state, makes sense of its workings, and accounts for its performance;
- iv) The processes by which the state mobilises consent and legitimacy and the contexts in which both consent and legitimacy are eroded and lost;
- v) A re-thinking of the state in Africa beyond the parameters set by the dominant discourses; and
- vi) A reflection, in a comparative frame, on the African state and states in other regions of the world.

Scholars who are already reflecting on the problematic of the state in Africa and who have innovative perspectives to share with other researchers and the wider academy are invited to submit their applications to reach the CODESRIA Secretariat not later than **30 September 2004**. In addition to a substantive proposal reflecting on-going work on this theme, interested participants should also send their current curriculum vitae.

Applications should be sent to:
The CODESRIA Annual Social Science Campus,
Department of Training and Grants,
CODESRIA,
Av Cheikh Anta Diop x Canal IV
BP 3304, Dakar, 18524, Senegal.
Tel: +221-8259822/23
Fax: +221-8241289
E-mail: annual.campus@codesria.sn
Website: www.codesria.org