

# GLOBAL SOUTH

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ENCOUNTER  
ARTICLES  
ARCHIVE  
REVIEW  
AND FIELD NOTES

# VOLUME 9 NO 4 OCTOBER 2013

## Content

3.....	<b>Editorial</b>
	<b>Encounter</b>
6.....	<b>With Willem van Schendel:</b> Kashshaf Ghani
	<b>Articles</b>
10.....	<b>Claudio Pinheiro,</b> <i>The Global South on Movement</i>
16.....	<b>Marina de Regt,</b> <i>My Own Sephis Trajectory: A Paper for the Sephis e-Magazine</i>
22.....	<b>Jacqueline Rutte,</b> <i>Reaching the South from 'ten square metres' in Amsterdam</i>
25.....	<b>Dan Tschirgi,</b> <i>The Problem of 'Sovereignty' in Today's World</i>
32.....	<b>Verene Shepherd,</b> <i>People of African Descent: Education, Development &amp; Human Rights</i>
38.....	<b>David Moore,</b> <i>Generations, Class Formations and Elections in Zimbabwe: Methodological Notes for Analysing the Historical Construction of Political Power and Resistance in a New African State</i>
46.....	<b>Mirzokhid Rakhimov,</b> <i>Role of SEPHIS in Academic Partnership between Uzbekistan and India</i>
	<b>Archive and Field Notes: Experiencing Research</b>
49.....	<b>Hardik Brata Biswas,</b> <i>Kartini Asia Network: Frontiers of Women and Gender Rights Research in the Global South</i>
	<b>Review</b>
52.....	<b>Ranjita Biswas,</b> <i>(Dis) Locating Sexuality in the Global South: An Epistemological Political Agenda</i>
	<b>Saskia Wieringa, Horacio Sivori (eds.),</b> <i>The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America,</i> Zed Books, London, 2013.
55.....	<b>Kashshaf Ghani,</b> <i>In the Footsteps of Mystics</i>
	<b>Muzaffar Ali (ed.),</b> <i>A Leaf Turns Yellow: The Sufis of Awadh,</i> Bloomsbury Publishing India, New Delhi, 2013.
60.....	<b>Our Team</b>

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# ditorial

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In a career spanning close to two decades, SEPHIS (South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development) has worked tirelessly to forge south-south academic linkages. We aimed at two things: First, to develop south-south networks independent of a north mediation. Secondly, to further an eclectic understanding of South regions. The *Global South* Sephis e-Magazine, together with the SEPHIS regional centres, has been instrumental in the realisation of such aims, for almost a decade. Among many, an important development, over these eventful years, has been the shifting meanings of the 'South', questioning settled assumptions or social, cultural and economic stereotypes. The magazine has thus made a constant effort towards understanding such new forms of interaction between South regions along with ideas that have given rise to new focus areas for research.

The above realisation therefore triggered a necessity for a process of self-definition – to expand our understanding of the South and simultaneously challenge conventional modes of regional investigation. The path taken by the publication, for doing so, too, looked beyond normative ways of reaching out – through an electronic medium, combining, at the same time, both the academic and the popular. The agenda therefore was to be an active arm of the SEPHIS network, bringing together scholars from different corners of the Global South.

Speaking to Kashshaf Ghani, in the Encounter section, Willem van Schendel, one of the founding members of SEPHIS, recalls how the SEPHIS programme emerged as a necessity of the age when issues of development in the South, in the post-Cold War world needed to be addressed. One aim of SEPHIS was to persuade historians to explore new development paradigms in the context of long-term social change. The main theme of the programme, stated as 'Historicising Modernity and Development', was discussed through conferences, workshops, lectures and publications which saw an engagement of scholarship across Brazil, Senegal, India and the Philippines. An innovative network of scholars was sustained through a decentralised structure working through regional centres, towards comparative research linking these regions. In his interview, Van Schendel gives a comprehensive account of the aims and operation of SEPHIS over the years, along with the

important role played by the e-zine in being a meeting ground for young scholars across Africa, Asia and Latin America sharing their ideas and research with a wide readership.

In the Articles section, Claudio Pinheiro's essay dwells on the ideas of the global south as it emerged in the 1960s out of debates and investigations on problems of inequality together with the economic failure of the capitalist system to produce a universal welfare state. It then looks into north-south interaction beyond intellectual limitations. In the light of this discussion, Pinheiro contemplates the future of the SEPHIS programme on the eve of its relocation in the South. Recognising the relevance of the programme in contemporary times, Pinheiro argues for a South-North-South cooperation in knowledge production which would sustain the programme in the coming years.

The engagement of SEPHIS with the development paradigm in the South also encouraged young scholars to work with the programme beyond the capacity of researchers and workshop participants. In the Articles section, Marina de Regt shares her engagement with the SEPHIS programme as a coordinator. Not only did her stint with SEPHIS allow her to interact with young minds from the South working on diverse areas but with similar interests, it also helped her intellectually by aiding her own research. She explored Yemeni women as primary healthcare workers and subsequently went on to explore strong historical links between gender, labour and social status among migrant domestic workers in Yemen. Alongside Marina, Jacqueline Rutte too shares her experiences as the SEPHIS office manager at a time when the programme entered a new phase with a noticeable increase in its activities. Her short, yet interesting, account takes us through some of the important phases the programme passed through over the last decade.

One of the lesser-explored regions from where SEPHIS could successfully engage some young scholars has been Central Asia. One of them, Mirzokhid Rakhimov along with Dilorom Alimova, former Director, Institute of History at Academy of Social Sciences of Uzbekistan, visited Calcutta under a lecture series programme. Also in the agenda was exploring centres of Central Asian studies in India and establishing contacts with them. The contribution reflects on their experiences in Calcutta and the contacts they could successfully establish with Central Asian experts in this part of the South.

Verene Shepherd has been associated with the SEPHIS programme as a steering committee member. Her paper in this issue explores the question of development of Africa and its diaspora, which she chooses to analyse through a post-modern lens. She examines the African diaspora in the Caribbean and Latin America, especially into the aspect of discrimination in the field of education, which in turn is reflected in high rates of under-employment, illiteracy, violence, together with limited access to tertiary education, and a low ranking in research and development. Such structural discrimination, Shepherd argues, plague African societies even after successful decolonisation.

Dan Tschirgi, in his piece, looks into the idea of sovereignty in a globalised world while remarking that current events can hardly be analysed without taking into consideration the ubiquitous forces of globalisation. He goes on to argue that while the forces of globalisation has led to a situation of interconnectedness among various global forces, the idea of globalisation needs to be employed in an intellectual capacity to understand such interconnections and in turn their implications.

David Moore's article seeks to understand how patterns of resistance to restrictive forms of political and socio-economic power structures have emerged through Zimbabwe's historical past and culminated in the present. The paper traces the rise of political activism in the region, across generations, within the conflict between democracy and authoritarianism, which has led to the charting out of a

democratic space in contemporary Zimbabwe.

In the Archives and Field Notes section, the importance of the Kartini Asia Network, as a hub for researchers and activists on Asian women, gender and sexualities, formed in 2003 in Manila, is traced by Hardik Brata Biswas. The piece combines the his personal experiences with the research network and the role Kartini has played as a flexible platform of exchange in the area of women's/gender studies between Asian scholars/activists working within academic institutes and in women's organisations.

In the Reviews section, two important collections of essays are focused upon. The first by Ranjita Biswas examines *The Sexual History of the Global South* as an important contribution on sexuality studies adding to the existing scholarship. The book follows a project undertaken by SEPHIS in collaboration with the Ford Foundation. The second review by Kashshaf Ghani looks into a regional study of Muslim society and culture in north India, along lines of inter-communal interaction and composite culture brought about under the influence of the Islamic mystical Sufi tradition.

This issue is the last from the Kolkata office (India). We hope that you will soon see a new-look e-zine from Latin America. We will continue to meet and pursue our many conversations on this platform.

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## Encounter: Willem van Schendel



**Willem van Schendel**

Willem van Schendel is Professor of Modern Asian History at the University of Amsterdam. For his publications, see [www.willemvanschendel.com](http://www.willemvanschendel.com)

1. How long have you been involved with the SEPHIS programme, and in what capacities?

I have been with SEPHIS from before its birth in 1994. My formal connection with the programme ended in 2007 but obviously not my interest in it. I have been following its developments ever since. It was a motley bunch of people who gathered as the first SEPHIS Steering Committee some twenty years ago. We came from different parts of the world and had various disciplinary backgrounds and work experiences. Most of us had never met before. To some of us the name of the new programme sounded like a serious disease. And yet, it became clear at once that we could work as a group. We shared a number of concerns and, although we would disagree and debate over many issues, the underlying consensus was that we had been handed a fantastic opportunity to create an innovative network of scholars – a type of network that did not exist but should.

2. What was the vision behind such a South-South programme?

The brief of the ‘South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development’ was 1) to create connections between historically grounded research and discussions on development; 2) to establish viable links between scholars working and living in Africa, Asia and Latin America – the Global South; 3) to encourage comparative research linking these regions.

There were five points that we could agree on straight away:

1 The insights of historians have been marginalised in debates on development, despite historians' obvious expertise in analysing and explaining histories of development and their knowledge of the long-term effects of past policies aimed at bringing about development. Historians can make important contributions to development as well as to development studies.

2 In the practice of history/historically-grounded social science, a scholar's spatial and social location is of importance. Her/his social, political and institutional environment matters: It colours research choices, frameworks of interpretation, practical applications and funding opportunities. Clearly, there is no such thing as a 'Southern voice' or a 'Southern view' but historians of development working in different environments in the Global South do share many issues, perspectives and answers. These are underrated in dominant visions of development.

3 SEPHIS had a role to play in making these issues and answers more noticeable worldwide, by strengthening links between scholars working in the South, by providing them with new channels for spreading their views, and by training young researchers from all over the South. By acting as a meeting ground, the programme could create new ways to make Southern scholars heard.

4 SEPHIS started from a broad conception of history. All historically oriented social science fell within its purview. It encouraged participants to employ a comparative approach to the history of development. The programme could help researchers rethink development across disciplinary boundaries and beyond national(ist) and regional frameworks.

5 SEPHIS aimed at involving a broad spectrum of scholars. It sought to work closely with the thin layer of globally connected and established historians from the South who have access to each other's work, often via Northern links, Northern education and in translation. But SEPHIS also sought to network and encourage younger historians trained entirely in the South, as well as scholars in less prominent institutions, and scholars in societies where there is relatively little political space for independent research or critical thought on development. The positionality of these scholars makes them crucial to the programme's purpose.

The main theme chosen for the programme was 'Historicizing Modernity and Development'. Much of the work being done in the programme fell under the themes of 'equity' and 'identity', or more broadly formulated 'Equity, Exclusion and Liberalization' and 'The Forging of Nationhood & the Contest over Citizenship, Ethnicity and History'.

3. How has the SEPHIS grant programme contributed towards strengthening South-South scholarship?

That is for the recipients of grants, participants in conferences and training courses, audiences of SEPHIS lecturers, and readers of the SEPHIS e-zine to say.

The programme's organisational structure changed over time to strengthen South-South institutional links. SEPHIS started out as a simple organisation. An international steering committee, meeting once a year, set the agenda. A coordinator and an associate implemented it. The SEPHIS secretariat in the Netherlands was minuscule in order to be able to spend the lion's share of the SEPHIS funds in the South, as was stipulated in the programme's charter.

Over time this centralised structure changed. SEPHIS nodes were created within research centres and networks in Senegal, Brazil, India, and then Peru and the Philippines, each with their own coordinator or administrative support, thereby changing the role of the secretariat in the Netherlands and building a web of implementing nodes, so to speak, still under the agenda-setting steering committee. This has been a gradual process, facilitated by rapidly improving means of communication. All this made perfect sense with regard to the ambitions and ideas fuelling the SEPHIS programme. The decentralisation of SEPHIS has created a remarkable web structure. Recently the steering committee was dissolved and the main SEPHIS coordination point moved to Brazil.

4. Did the contemporary academic climate have any role to play behind this initiative? Has that context changed?

The SEPHIS programme clearly was a child of its time. It bore the marks of the issues of the mid-1990s, when the world was digesting the collapse of the Soviet bloc, when postmodernism and postcolonial studies were on the rise in the social sciences, overarching development theory was under attack, history-writing in the service of nation-building was in retreat, and institutions of higher education in many parts of the South were starved of funds, partly as a result of structural adjustment programmes. Now, twenty years later, the world looks very different. Confidence in neo-liberalism has been shaken by various economic shocks and bursting bubbles. The events of 9/11 and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have transformed international relations and the politics of development. Environmental sustainability is a more prominent element of development thinking and internet connectivity has moved the digital divide to new frontiers. Last but not the least, the concept of the 'Global South', always an uneasy construct, is now challenged by new ones, from the BRICS countries to the Global Umma.

It was not primarily the academic climate but the policy climate that made SEPHIS a reality. In the 1990s, development policy-makers put considerable emphasis on cultural factors and on reviewing the histories of 'development co-operation'. They were also concerned about conflicts in the Global South and their social contexts. This made it possible to propose a programme on the lines of SEPHIS, partly on the strength of the argument that historians were experts in understanding and explaining long-term social change but that their voices were rarely heard in development circles.

Some of us thought that, once the SEPHIS programme had run for some years, similar programmes would develop independently, and SEPHIS could gracefully retire to the background. This proved to be a fallacy. SEPHIS has remained very much one of a kind and serves interests that no other programme addresses.

5. If at all, in what way does such a South-South programme speak to scholarship in the North?

It is part of a much larger movement in which scholarship from the Global South has made itself more visible globally. The specific SEPHIS contribution is perhaps that it has enabled hundreds of young scholars to interact face-to-face with colleagues from very different parts of the world at an early stage of their career, thereby enabling them to ask new questions and frame their subsequent research in novel ways. This has made their work more influential in setting research agendas around the world.

6. Being yourself a historian of the South, focusing on Bangladesh, how do you draw a connection, if at all, between your work and your involvement with SEPHIS?

For me, personally, the SEPHIS experience has been extraordinarily important and enriching. It exposed me to ideas, historical processes, and first-hand familiarity of parts of the world that I would otherwise never have encountered. The main lesson that SEPHIS drove home was how very ignorant we all are about most of the world's history, how hard it is to break away from our molehill views and preconceptions, how difficult it is to turn aspirations of 'global history' and 'world history' into balanced and effective research programmes, and why self-proclaimed universal theories need to be continually challenged by fine-grained historical research in different parts of the world. The greatest benefit that SEPHIS bestowed on me was that it put me in touch with many colleagues and friends who helped me to think in new ways about my own research and its theoretical framing.

7. What was the idea behind an electronic magazine? Do you think the SEPHIS e-Magazine has helped the cause of SEPHIS in its South-South activities?

From the start, SEPHIS bristled with ideas about how to support historians of development in the South, how to create ways for them to meet and exchange ideas, and how to make their voices better heard and heeded. Some of the tools we envisaged proved unrealistic. For example, initially we assumed that thematic workshops, bringing people together who worked on the same theme in different parts of the South, would act as spring boards for them to apply, in the next round, for joint cross-continental comparative research projects. We underestimated the difficulty of imagining, devising and executing such projects, given differences of language, academic traditions, institutional obstructions and physical distance. Such projects did develop but they needed much longer incubation periods and more support than we originally imagined. Another issue that needed more input than anticipated was the uneven



participation in the SEPHIS programme of different regions in the South. Great efforts were made to involve regions with less robust academic cultures, and with considerable success.

SEPHIS worked out an array of tools, far too many to discuss in full here. Some were quite conventional, for example grants for Ph.D. and postdoctoral research. These were highly prized, however, drawing many applications and quickly making SEPHIS well known, because its red-and-yellow posters and flyers popped up in history departments all over Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. They laid the basis for what was to become a SEPHIS community of sorts, as many grantees remained connected with the programme and each other over the years. The SEPHIS lecture tours were instrumental in giving the programme a face beyond the academic community, often drawing large audiences. SEPHIS books and papers in several languages facilitated dissemination of the programme's output.

Among the more innovative forms that SEPHIS tools took was the training of young scholars from all over the South – organised on a regular basis by the SEPHIS centres, first in Dakar, and then also in Kolkata, Salvador de Bahia and Manila – and focusing on methodological issues and on familiarising young scholars with theoretical work across the South. They proved highly popular and are much appreciated. A second development was the creation of grants for the preservation of 'alternative' historical sources, especially those linked with social movements in the South and in danger of being lost or destroyed.

The e-Magazine and interactive website 'Global South' was another novelty, hard to imagine at the beginning of the programme when internet access was still a distant dream to many in the Global South. The idea was to give young historians in the South a platform for sharing their views and findings with a broad spectrum of readers. Going public is an important aspect of SEPHIS and the e-Magazine's success clearly proves the efficacy of networking in this way.

8 Over the years SEPHIS has been successful in forging networks between various institutions and individuals in the global south. How do you see SEPHIS in the future?

SEPHIS has created a lot of enthusiasm and goodwill. It is now moving into a phase in which the established networks and institutional connections are being tested anew. With proper funding, vision and management, SEPHIS can move in exciting new directions to attain its original aims: Creating connections between historically-grounded research and discussions on development, establishing viable links between scholars working and living in the Global South, and encouraging comparative research linking these regions.

# The Global South on Movement



**Cláudio Pinheiro**

Claudio Pinheiro is Chairman of the Sephis Programme since December 2012. For the last ten years, he has been investing in South-South connections in academics and politics, especially around India and Brazil. His research interests include colonial and post-colonialism, sociology of knowledge, history of knowledge circulation, politics of language and epistemology.

After living in India for sometime, he became addicted to its cuisine, music and above all its people. His hobbies include cooking, listening to Brazilian music and jazz and furniture designing with his father. Despite being a globetrotter, his heart lives at his beloved Copacabana neighborhood, Rio.

Email: [c.pinheiro@sephis.org](mailto:c.pinheiro@sephis.org)

In the history of modern navigation, orientation was crucial. Many instruments were developed to help in that regard. The compass was one of the most important of these.

According to the 1999 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, this invention materialised independently in Europe and China. Some historians attributed the creation of the compass to the Italian inventor Flavio Gioia (c.1300) while others maintain that Chinese sailors already had the help of a navigational compass when they reached the east coast of India for the first time in 101 B.C. Compasses were popular in China for orientation and geomancy since the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.). The remarkable distinction was that the Chinese instrument points only to the South Pole. Not gratuitously, it used to be known as *zhì nán zhēn*, or the ‘south-pointer’.

Despite the fact that the Chinese had invented the compass much before the beginning of the Christian era, it remains in history as a major sign of modern European maritime expansion, conquests and colonisation. This identification is so strong that not surprisingly the invention of the ‘compass’ is credited to the West, obliterating the fact that knowledge was (and can still be) produced outside Europe.

Coincidentally *zhì nán zhēn* might work as a powerful metaphor for present-day geopolitics. The world observes the political consolidation of emergent countries of the *South* and its progressively strong participation in the global economy. At the same time that the *South* gains more relevance influencing the international distribution of power, it shares space and importance with the longstanding presence of the North. It does not only allude to North-South relations, but reinforces the importance of this as a cleavage in the history of ideas.

This became especially true after the 2008 world crisis and its consequences for the agenda of cooperation for development, particularly concerning the place of the rising South with respect to the rest of the former Third World. So, how to define the South? Which countries or regions are parts of it?

### ***Global South, What is in a Name?***

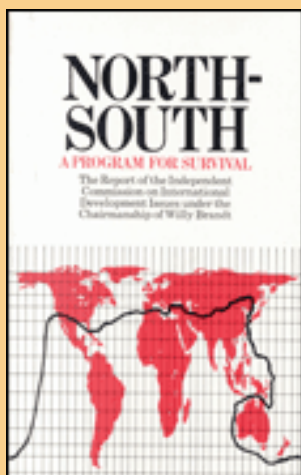
*Global South* is definitely one of the most recurrent concepts in the present political arena. Though it is widely used, its definitions remain largely imprecise. Where exactly is it and how do we identify its frontiers? The majority of the people take the South as a euphemism for the old ‘Third World’ and as a synonym for ‘the Periphery’ — the well known developing or underdeveloped countries and regions.

The concept of South emerges from the 1960s debates and investigations on problems of the world’s inequality, considered as the economic failure of the capitalist system to produce a universal welfare state. In the early 1970s, the concept of *South* was used as a political tool for organising demands of the oil-producing countries for the reorganisation of geo-economics of petroleum at the centre of world politics. This effort has been carried out by OPEC

(Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) who managed to raise the

world price of petroleum and to change the balance of power on this particular economic issue. OPEC was created in 1960 to organise the demands of oil producing countries, much of which were identified as underdeveloped. The events of the 1970s and strong discussions around the world crisis of petroleum prices helped OPEC to voice and support the Third World agenda. It worked especially to encourage other attempts of underdeveloped commodity-producing countries to put pressure to raise the prices of other ‘raw materials’. In that arena, the concept of *South* still shared the same semantics that animated other binary divisions that organised the nations and regions through ‘Antinomies of Modernity’. The debates identified the South-North divide with the widening of the ‘material inequalities’ that separated ‘affluent nations’ (in North America, Western Europe and Japan) and ‘poor countries’ (in Asia, Africa and Latin America) and aimed for the establishment of a new international economic order that could revise this untenable relationship. At that moment, *South* was economically and geographically identified as the ‘poor developing nations living in the Southern Hemisphere’.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the *South* became more unstable with initiatives like the Brandt Commission (1977-78) and the South Commission (1987), which tried to define the geography of the *South* according



to problems such as the 'struggle against poverty, prices of commodities, industrialisation, corruption, and militarism.' Until the 1990s, the idea of *South* was mostly addressed to economies with deprived wealth production, as the visible effect of unequal development.

What did the *South* mean then? It meant, largely, the absence of Modernity. 'South' was used as a synonym for terms such as third world, peripheral, underdeveloped countries, concerning the outskirts of a bipolarised world that emerged after the Second World War. This was a world structured through antinomian oppositions that animated the Cold War and where a number of countries fighting against colonialism or dictatorships tried to find new pathways to promote progress.

All in all, the idea of *South* presupposed conceptual cleavages and animated a comprehension of the world through antinomian divisions, demonstrated by indicators, league tables and by a whole iconography that illustrates the absence of Modernity.

### A New Concept of *South* for a Multilateral World

*The South needs the North not only as a mature market, but also as a source of innovation and complex technologies.* (2013 UNDP Human Development Report)

The world has radically changed since the 1990s. The international architecture of geopolitics evolved from a binary division to a multipolar orientation, not only because of actual changes in the international structure of power and economic production, but also due to reviewing priorities on how to approach development. Initiatives like the *South Commission* played an important role in this matter, introducing issues related to people-centered development — human resources, gender dimension, culture, and science and technology — categories later included in the Human Development Index (1990). Instead of limiting it to the analysis of statistics of income, production and concentration — which actually found new settlements in the former underdeveloped world — it is essential to consider other aspects of social life that help to define Human Development.

The 2013 UNDP Human Development Report — *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World* — addresses this issue very vividly, showing the increasing participation of the South in world economy and human development. Countries and regions formerly considered part of an underdeveloped South are now among the most progressive and economically productive.

Then, where is the *South* today? If we insist on associating well-being with income rates, the figures can look dynamic, with the South scattered through parts of Europe, regions inside the US, and parts of the former Third World. Conversely, North could include newcomers like Indonesia, Brazil, China, India, parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Turkey.

The concept of a 'Global South' should not consequently reinforce the idea of absence of development. Conversely, it should claim for a different idea of development. In a world reorganised under multilateralism where Southern prominent countries have a distinctive role within global wealth production and in the political scenario, a central issue still remains to suggest a continuation with the 1970-80s North and South divide: Knowledge production and circulation. In times of a global frenzy for internationalisation of intellectual capacities, the importance of knowledge production should be reconsidered to portray a more equitable South-North cooperation. This is an opportunity to confront the international division of academic labour where scholars of the South produce data to be interpreted by intellectuals of the North.<sup>2</sup>

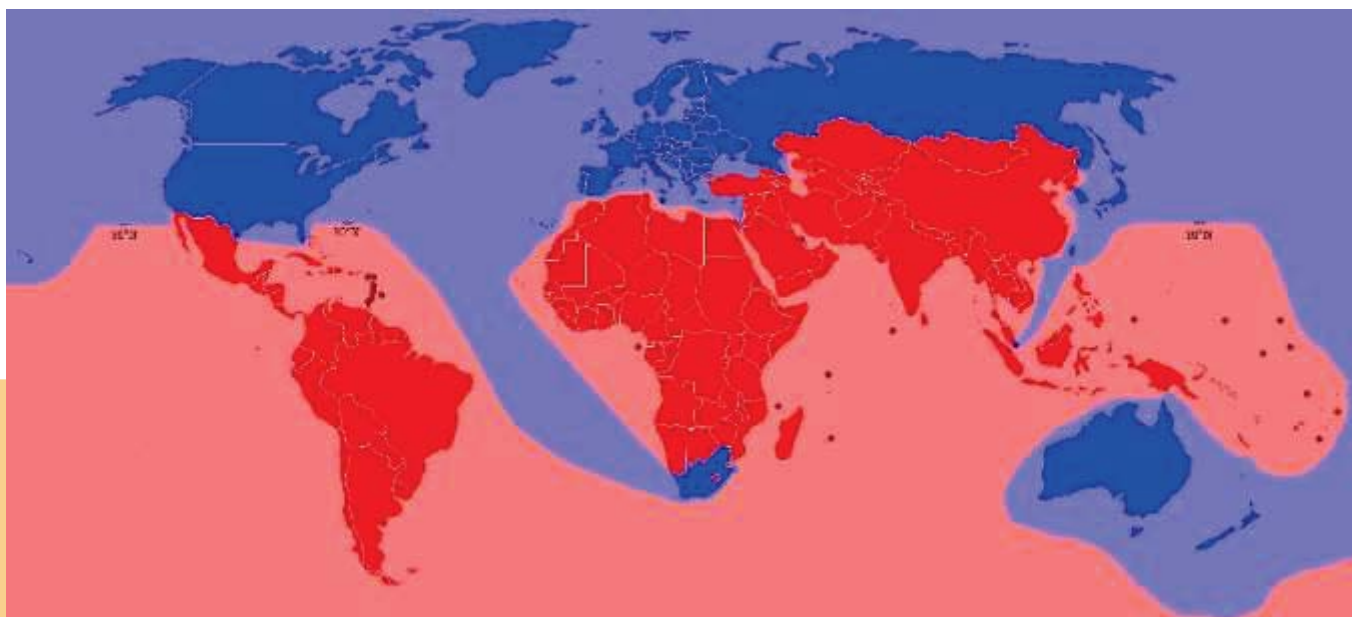
Instead of a mere geo-economic area, the South might also be considered as a site of enunciation from where hegemony can be reviewed. If, at political and economic level, the multilateral condition of contemporaneity is beyond doubt, at the level of knowledge production and circulation, we are still facing a model of inequalities whose more dramatic effect concerns the lack of diversity in producing ideas and thinkers. This structure creates a socio-ecological inequality in the production and circulation of ideas that reinforces intellectual nationalisms and plays against a renewed platform for North-South cooperation.

Considering the South, as a place of enunciation allows the preservation and promotion of diversity (in terms of social life, theories and methodologies) at the global level. The lack of diversity is indeed a central issue. Social categories (of gender, ethnicity, politics, religion etc.) emerging from the



diversity of human experience of Southern societies should also be a part of the contents of universal vocabularies, not only in theoretical debates, but also in order to help define the politics of economic development. The lack of diversity also produces restrictions on intellectual imagination as a whole, and constrains the possibility for innovative thinking and creativity.

A renewed proposal for innovative models of a sustainable knowledge development should take into account epistemic and theoretical diversity as part of a universal ecosystem of ideas. The South-North divide cannot reinforce cleavages where wealth is the main scope, but should help to promote progress outside hegemonic frameworks that translate diversity in terms of inequality.



### South and North – Geopolitics of Knowledge Production

The consistent economic performances of emergent countries of the South in recent years indicate a reorientation of the traditional North-South divide of global geo-politics. However, within the agenda of knowledge production, severely pressured by topics such as internationalisation and productivity, this divide has not been reviewed or outdone. Though countries like Brazil, China or Iran show an increasing participation at top rank league tables of knowledge production, this arena continues to be defined by standards of the North, constraining knowledge diversity and the development of new patterns of creativity. By and large, countries of the South still foresee international cooperation for knowledge production as a platform to 'Modernisation', valuing North-South and underestimating South-South cooperation.

Ironically, though not surprisingly, it had been easier for countries of the North to agree on the relevance and importance of South-South cooperation to globally benefit knowledge production. Nonetheless, the international picture of knowledge production observes a situation where resources continue to concentrate in the North. The scenario after the world crises of 2008 made this picture even more unequal, with resources fleeing from Southern countries to the North. Most of the funds for research on South are now directed to short-term applied research (on themes like poverty relief) instead of sponsoring long-term investigations on politics of inequality or on the development of new theoretical debates.

This situation reinforces a restricted participation of contributions coming from the South into the international academic scenario. It also strengthens the existence of a regime of durable inequalities that disconnects and hierarchises academies from the North and the South. This circumstance reinforces a trap that associates 'methodological monoculturalism' with the lack of theoretical diversity at a global level.<sup>3</sup>

The present moment observes a global picture where social sciences as a whole urges for a revision of the theoretical assumptions that advocate for ideas of universality. This is a perspective on



which many scholars have worked reinforcing the idea that the internationalisation of social sciences should be discussed beyond the framework that projects ‘North Atlantic perspectives and understandings onto data from the rest of the world’.<sup>4</sup> The reproduction of this paradigm of knowledge production, circulation and consumption crystallises a situation of academic dependency and contributes, moreover, to the consolidation of durable inequalities.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, it is necessary to identify and classify inequality in its various scales and strategies of production and reproduction, as observed by Göran Therborn.<sup>6</sup>

The very existence of a globalised academia is well founded on the preeminence of a model of structuration of knowledge production that is Europhilic and North Atlantic.<sup>7</sup> In fact, an important part of the formal structure of academic training and intellectual formation in postcolonial contexts is largely indebted to colonialism. One of the most powerful legacies of this process is the misconception of a romanticised, abstract and movable *North* that serves as a zenith dangling above our heads informing and conforming our imaginative horizons. This conforms a global academia permeated by a ‘centre-periphery continuum or structure of academic dependency’, that is particularly though not exclusively, characteristic of social sciences and humanities.<sup>8</sup> Such a division also reinforces an international division that separates contexts that produce ideas and theories to those that produce mainly empirical investigation. This characteristic has marked generations of intellectuals from postcolonial contexts. The restrictions on the horizons of sociological imagination are updated through theoretical criteria, on the socio-linguistic categories of analysis that ultimately influence the structures of cognition and the divisions that compartmentalise knowledge and that limit, moreover, the conditions of possibility to intellectual creativity.<sup>9</sup> Such a limitation on the imaginative horizon results in a movement where many intellectuals from peripheral contexts try to illustrate what is keeping their societies and countries from realising full modernity and development. It reinforces an idea of “development through ‘catching-up’”, as suggested by Wiebke Keim and restricts the production of *autonomous thinking* in the Global South.<sup>10</sup> It is fundamental, therefore, to consider the most perverse face of this movement, that is the development of theories, reflexive paradigms and models of analysis that are the sole horizon of imagination of the North. The first step is most probably to restrict authors and theories from the North to the idiosyncrasies of their own historical experiences, thus limiting their claim for universal thinking — something that both Dipesh Chakrabarty or Michael Burawoy have criticised.<sup>11</sup>

## Sephis and the South

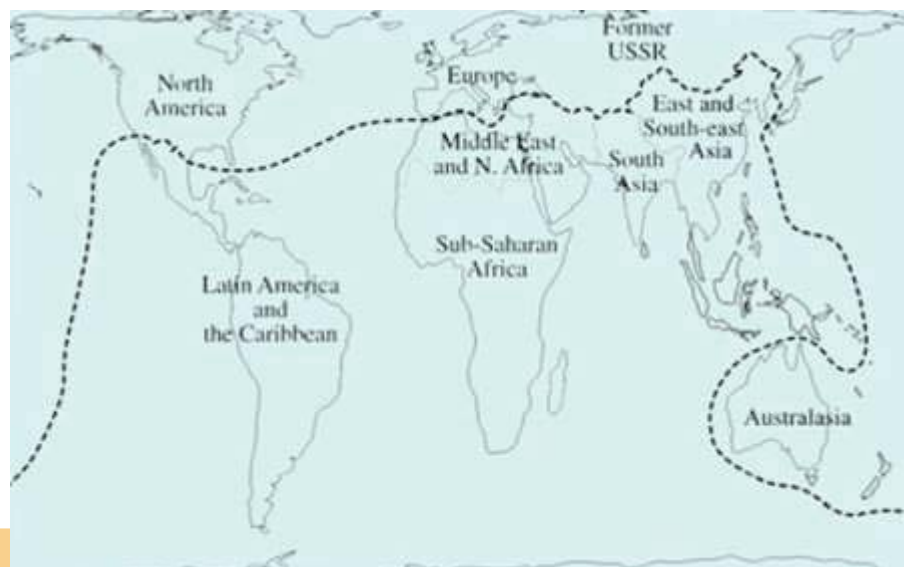
*Never doubt that small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.* Margaret Mead (Ford Foundation Grantee, 1956-1961), Ford Foundation Portfolio — 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Most of the issues discussed above have been present since the initial debates to develop the Sephis Programme in 1993–94. Conversely, as we see, there is a huge change in world geopolitics, which also affected the geography of this North-South division and the concept of South. To face this changing situation, Sephis also needs to be reshaped.

The Programme was established in 1994 as an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the mandate of encouraging researchers located in the South to expand their scholarly horizons and cultivate links with their colleagues in other parts of the South. Its main objective has always been to support dialogue and collaboration between researchers and institutions, to encourage comparative research, and to strengthen research capacity in the South. Over almost 20 years, Sephis has developed several initiatives that made this mandate achievable — a Ph.D. and postdoctoral grant program; a small grants program (to preserve alternative historical sources, preferably linked to social movements); workshops (for Ph.D. students, mid-career and senior scholars); policy dialogue seminars between academics, activists, and policy makers; lecture tours and faculty exchanges; publications and translations; and an electronic journal. The Programme has also established several collaborative programs with different institutions in the North and South.

Throughout these two decades, the Sephis Programme has evolved into a brand name for South-South intellectual cooperation and policy dialogue between academics, NGOs, governments, and social movements. The most sustainable emphasis of Sephis Programme has been on intellectual capacity-

building initiatives, helping to create and maintain an active network of scholars and policy makers with more than five thousand interlocutors around the globe. Several important scholars and institutions point out that Sepsis is considered today as one of the most important programs for promoting South-South academic cooperation in the world.



Years ago, I myself learned about the 'South' and about the *zhī nán zhēn* southern viewpoint through a Sepsis Programme. It was the fall of 2000 and I was in Dakar, Senegal to attend a workshop for young Ph.D. scholars from the South. We all came from countries that faced the challenges of producing knowledge in structurally and economically deprived social contexts. This experience was decisive to both my life and career. With this southern view I have incorporated a comparative perspective in my research.

Since the development of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism in modern era have been globalised and connected, why should we not think about the effects of this process in the South (colonial and post-colonial) as also connected and comparable? Could we think about the production of 'identities of exclusion and inequality' on a large scale and within the long-term process of development across the South? These questions have changed my work and my dissertation which investigated a historical comparison of slavery in Brazil and India under European colonialism.

Thirteen years after my Dakar experience, I assumed the coordination of the Sepsis Programme and the challenge to finally transfer it to the South. From the beginning of 2013, the Programme has been transferred to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The idea of transferring Sepsis to the South was an old plan, finally made possible and I am proud to be involved with it.

This movement is not a mechanical task, but a very interesting one. The world has changed a lot since the Programme was inaugurated in the 1990s and it is natural and necessary for Sepsis to revise its trajectory for the future. Transferring Sepsis to the South also means reframing its identity and the entire idea of cooperation for development.

The Sepsis Programme has been most successful in addressing cooperation between prominent Southern countries concerning knowledge production outside the South-North framework. But there is still much to be done. If the world has changed into a more multipolar orientation, the idea of academic cooperation should correspondingly be revisited. The debate of international cooperation on knowledge production should be addressed as an essential aspect of the sustainable development agenda in the contemporary world.

Talking about the *Global South* claims for a decentered international initiative, naturally inviting gatekeeping institutions that can think and work across borders. However, especially in the South, this agenda depends heavily on merging efforts with structures of nation-state that work on financing and organising this initiative at local and regional levels. In countries of the South, intellectuals cannot help but have a voice in nation-state politics concerning knowledge production, funding agendas and the demands and problems of under-representation of diversity that affect and structure the South globally.

In those spaces, Sepsis has a very important role to play. The Programme needs to foresee the promotion of South-North-South cooperation for development in knowledge production in order to continue to be a synonym to 'Global South' in academics. At this challenging moment, Sepsis aims at playing a role in helping to redefine the structure of international cooperation in knowledge production

considering South-North-South dialogues to be a key strategy to promote an intellectual development in a renewed global geopolitical scenario.

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## My Own Sephis Trajectory



Marina de Regt

Marina de Regt worked as a coordinator of the SEPHIS programme in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, from August 2007 to October 2011. In this article, she writes about the ways in which working for SEPHIS affected her own research projects. Marina has a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from the University of Amsterdam. Her specialisations are on gender, labour and migration in the Middle East, particularly in Yemen.

Marina is currently Assistant Professor in Social and Cultural Anthropology at VU University Amsterdam. She is the author of *Pioneers or Pawns? Women Health Workers and the Politics of Development in Yemen* (2007).

Email: [m.c.de.reg@vu.nl](mailto:m.c.de.reg@vu.nl)



## Introduction

I came in touch with SEPHIS via Willem van Schendel, one of its founders. We were both working at the University of Amsterdam, he as full Professor in the History of Modern Asia, and I, at the time, as Ph.D. coordinator. The tenure of my postdoctoral fellowship had just got over and I was looking for a new job. In April 2007, Willem alerted me to the vacancy for a coordinator in SEPHIS. I had never heard about SEPHIS, but when I looked at the website I was immediately interested. Prior to my Ph.D. research, I had worked for six years in development projects in Yemen and thereafter completed my postdoctoral research project on migrant domestic workers in Yemen. My experience had made me rather critical of mainstream development aid, yet I was looking for ways to combine my intellectual interests with my ambition to work for social change. SEPHIS looked like an ideal job for me where I could focus on both academic research and applied work.

One reason why I was very attracted to the SEPHIS programme was because it encouraged a new generation of researchers from the South to participate in global debates on development. During the years that I worked in Yemen, I had become gradually sceptical about the benefits of development aid from the North to the South. This scepticism was one of the reasons why I decided to return to The Netherlands to work on a Ph.D. dissertation that critically analysed western notions of development. I had, however, not lost my belief in social change completely and was looking for ways to combine academic research with activities that would directly contribute to social change. Stimulating researchers from the South to work on alternative histories of labour and development, facilitating contacts between them, and organising activities to exchange ideas and experiences was something I was very eager to contribute to. I applied for the job and was selected.

In August 2007, I started my new job. I immediately felt at home in SEPHIS. Although I was an anthropologist with only limited experience in historical research, I was impressed by the valuable research projects that were carried out under the SEPHIS flag and the workshop topics for Ph.D. students and senior faculty. The idea of lecture tours also seemed brilliant to me. As soon as I started travelling



for SEPHIS and meeting young Ph.D. students from all parts of the Global South. I became even more inspired by the programme as I heard and saw with my own ears and eyes what it meant to young scholars to meet other scholars with similar interests but from very different parts of the world. The first workshop I attended was the Alternative Research Methodologies Workshop organised by Maris Diokno of the University of Dilliman in Manila. Around twenty Ph.D. students from Asia, Africa and Latin America were trained in oral history methodologies and alternative ways of doing archival work. They clearly learned a lot, not only from the lectures but also from each other and from being in a very different part of the world. In this article, I will, however, not go into further details about the SEPHIS programme itself. Instead, I will focus on how SEPHIS inspired me

intellectually and affected the focus of my research projects. I will start with my encounters with African women in Yemen during my years as a development worker there, and gradually move onto my academic interests in Yemeni-Ethiopian migration.

## First Encounters with Women of African Descent in Yemen

At the end of 1991, I went to Yemen as a development worker in a Dutch development project in the district of Rada', a small town southeast of former North Yemen. My counterpart, Zahra, was a young woman of eighteen years. She stood out in the project because while her female colleagues were dressed in black and covered their faces, she did not wear a face veil and wore colourful overcoats. One of the reasons for Zahra's different appearance was that she was of mixed descent: Her father was Yemeni and her mother came from Chad. Zahra's father had migrated to Chad during the Imamate and had married a local woman. In the mid-1980s, he decided to return to Yemen, bringing his wife and eight children



with him. The family settled in his home village in Rada' district, where he intended to set up a business. Unfortunately he died soon after his return, leaving his wife and children behind. Zahra's mother was a big black woman who stood out in the village, just like her daughters. Although there were a number of other women of African descent living in the same village, who had also returned with their husbands, Zahra's mother did not feel at home in Yemen; nor did her children. The area was very conservative, and people's lifestyles differed to a large extent from what the family was used to in Chad. Moreover, people of African descent have low social status in Yemen, particularly in tribal areas, and the family was often discriminated against.

Zahra was the first *muwallada* (woman of mixed descent) I got to know in Yemen. When I moved to the Yemeni port town of Hodeidah in 1993, I met many other Yemeni women of African descent. The Tihama, the coastal strip on the Red Sea, is known for its African influences. One of them was Noha, who introduced me to *qat* and waterpipe at a wedding. We became very close friends, and I spent a lot of time with her and her family. Noha's mother came from Eritrea, while her father was Yemeni. Her father had returned to Yemen in the early 1960s, when the Imamate had just been overthrown and a civil war was going on. Stories about the improved situation in Yemen had made him decide to return home, taking his wife and children with him. In contrast to Zahra's family, this family did not return to the father's home village but settled in Hodeidah because employment opportunities were better there. Noha was born in Hodeidah, just like her elder sister. Her three elder siblings who were born in Eritrea died during the first year of their stay in Yemen; her father also died a couple of years after his return to Yemen. Her mother had been forced to provide for her children, and hence, took up paid domestic work. Noha quit school at the age of sixteen to take up employment as a cashier in a bank so that her mother could stop working and her elder sister study nursing. Unlike many other *muwalladat* who sometimes downplayed or even denied their African descent, Noha was proud to be of mixed Yemeni-African descent. Her mother used to prepare Ethiopian coffee and, after her death, Noha continued this tradition. She also liked to talk about the history of *muwalladin* and knew almost everybody in Hodeidah who was of mixed descent.



I was intrigued by these African mothers and their daughters of mixed-descent. In the literature on Yemen I had read almost nothing about migration between Yemen and Africa, and the ways in which this migration had affected Yemen's population. The large majority of studies focuses on Yemenis of 'pure' Yemeni descent and, in particular, those living in tribal areas in the interior of the country.<sup>1</sup> Some research has been done on the *abid* and the *akhdam*, the lowest social status groups with perceived African ancestry.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the migration of Yemenis particularly of Hadramis, to Asia has received ample scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup> The few studies that have been conducted on the migration of Yemenis to East Africa and the status of *muwalladin* of African descent in Yemen have not paid attention to African women who married Yemeni men, joined them together with their offspring when they returned to Yemen, and spent the rest of their lives there.<sup>4</sup> These women form a very particular segment of Yemen's social landscape, embodying a part of Yemeni history that may be purposely silenced because of the ways in which it challenges notions about Yemeni identity, ethnicity and unity. How had these women experienced their migration from the Horn of Africa to Yemen? Did they take up paid work, and if so, what kind of work? And what about their children of mixed descent? What was their status in Yemeni society? These are some of the questions that have interested me since my first years in Yemen.

### Women, Ethnicity and Work

As part of my Ph.D. research on Yemeni primary healthcare workers in Hodeidah, I interviewed a number of women of mixed African-Yemeni descent.<sup>5</sup> Paid employment for women had, and sometimes still has, low status in Yemeni society, mainly because it challenges the ideology of the male breadwinner and practices of gender segregation. Healthcare professions, particularly women, also had low status because of contacts with male patients and doctors, night shifts and physical contact with bodily fluids.

It is only in the past three decades that the number of women healthcare workers has rapidly increased, amongst other factors, because of increased level of education and the deteriorating economic situation which forces families to allow their daughters, sisters and wives to take up paid work in healthcare.

Because of their ambiguous status in Yemeni society, *muwalladat* functioned as pioneers, entering certain categories of work that were not yet culturally acceptable for Yemeni women. In the interviews, I also asked the women about the backgrounds of their parents. Some of the *muwalladat* did not want to acknowledge that their mothers were of African descent or that they themselves were born in the Horn of Africa. Such refusal underlines the stigma attached to an African background in Yemen. They came to Yemen at a young age, or were born in Yemen, and saw themselves as Yemeni. Many had been able to



attend school and sometimes took vocational training to help them take up skilled work such as in healthcare and teaching. The women who I introduced earlier in this paper are strong examples. Zahra became an agricultural extension worker in a development project, whereas Noha took up work in a bank. Both women had lost their fathers at a young age and took up paid work to provide for their families. The strong historical link between gender, labour and social status became clearer to me during my postdoctoral research on migrant domestic workers in Yemen. Although the Yemeni economy has only deteriorated in the past three decades, a considerable number of urban families

made use of migrant domestic workers in the 1990s and 2000s. The increased demand for paid domestic labour coincided with the influx of a growing number of migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa, after the downfall of the regimes of Mengistu in Ethiopia and Siad Barre in Somalia in 1991. The majority of domestic workers come from Somalia and Ethiopia, but there are also Asian women working as domestics. While in the past men were also doing servant work, nowadays almost all domestic workers are female, a shift which has also occurred in other parts of the world.

Yemenis of mixed descent started to bring Ethiopian women as domestics when the demand for paid domestic labour increased in the 1990s. Some of them are registered with official employment agencies with the Yemeni Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, while others perform their business without an official license. Ethiopian women also come to Yemen via relatives or friends already residing in the country. Yemen used to have an open-door policy towards foreigners, with control of residence and work permits being relatively weak. It was easy to obtain a tourist visa and overstay, or to get a visa on the basis of a fake employment contract. As a result, there are numerous undocumented Ethiopian women in Yemen. In 2001, it became more difficult to enter the country, partly because of the Yemeni government's involvement in the 'war on terror'. Since the popular uprisings against the 33 year old regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, and his eventual ousting, migration of domestic workers from the Horn of Africa has decreased. There is less demand for paid domestic work because Yemeni families cannot afford to employ domestics anymore. In addition, women prefer to migrate to other countries on the Peninsula because of the insecure situation.

During my postdoctoral research, I interviewed women of various ethnic and religious backgrounds who were working as domestics to chalk their migration and employment patterns.<sup>6</sup> I also interviewed a number of Ethiopian women who had come to Yemen in the 1960s and 1970s, following their Yemeni husbands and children. Noha's mother had unfortunately died in 1998 but Noha was very willing to introduce me to some of her peers. Through these interviews, I learned that many Ethiopian women had also been employed as domestic workers. Some had been domestics in Ethiopia/Eritrea, while others had taken up domestic work in Yemen. They also sold food items in the streets or were employed as cleaners in offices and hospitals. As non-Yemeni women they took up paid work that was considered inappropriate for Yemeni women. Yet, their and their husbands' social status was negatively

affected by the work they did. As a result, their husbands sometimes asked them to quit domestic work. Sometimes domestic labour was preferred over other types of labour because women were less visible when they were working in the private sphere of the house. In other cases, domestic work was valued negatively because it put women of African origin in a hierarchical relationship with Yemeni women, who were their employers. Most women, therefore, preferred to work for expatriates and, in particular, Western employers.

### Towards a Social History of Ethiopian-Yemeni Migration

When I started working for SEPHIS I was writing up the results of my postdoctoral research. Most of the articles I published were based on the contemporary situation of domestic workers in Yemen (de Regt 2008, 2009, 2010).<sup>7</sup> Inspired by SEPHIS, I began to see the strong links between current forms of migration and employment and the historical ties between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. I transcribed and analysed three life-stories of Ethiopian women who came to Yemen in the 1960s and 1970s, following their Yemeni husbands, and presented a paper about the gendered memories of migration at the European Social Science History Conference in April 2010. While writing that paper, I came up with the idea to write a social history of Yemeni-Ethiopian migration through the lenses of gender, labour and migration. Such a study could make an important contribution to Yemeni and Ethiopian historiographies and ethnographies, both of which suffer from ‘methodological nationalism’. In addition, it would speak to current debates in global labour history, which emphasise the importance of studying relationships between societies in the Global South, also those between more ‘peripheral’ regions and societies, such as Yemen and the Horn of Africa.

Yet, my commitments as SEPHIS coordinator left me with little time to do more fieldwork and gather new data. During the Christmas break in December 2009, I returned to Yemen to visit friends and former colleagues, but also to record Noha’s family history. Although I had known Noha for more than eighteen years, and she had become one of my closest friends in Yemen, she had never told me the history of her family in detail. The interview was very insightful and inspired me to continue my project. In November 2010, I applied for a fellowship at the International Research Center ‘Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History’ at Humboldt University in Berlin. I submitted a research proposal to study the gendered, ethnic and generational aspects of paid domestic labour in Yemen, focusing on the changing place of domestic labour in the life cycles of three groups of women of African descent: Ethiopian and Eritrean women who married Yemenis and came with them to Yemen in the 1960s and 1970s, women of mixed descent who took up paid work in the 1980s, and Ethiopian and Eritrean women who came to Yemen as labour migrants in the 1990s and the 2000s. These three groups coincide with particular moments in Yemen’s socio-political history, with specific social and economic conditions and producing specific discourses on gender, labour, and ethnicity. This would, in my view, be an excellent start for a social history of Yemeni-Ethiopian migration in the second half of the twentieth century.

My project was accepted but the developments in Yemen in 2011 made it impossible for me to gather new data. Inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, Yemeni youth took to the streets to overthrow President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in power since 1978. However, it took until November 2011, when Saleh signed an agreement to step down, handing over his power to the vice-president. As a result, the security situation in Yemen deteriorated greatly, and I refrained from doing fieldwork there. Instead, I decided to go for a few weeks to Ethiopia to study Yemeni-Ethiopian migration from the other side of the Red Sea. In October 2011, I officially stopped working as a SEPHIS coordinator. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs had decided not to extend its grant to SEPHIS, but





allowed us to use the remaining budget to transfer SEPHIS to the South. I moved to Berlin and using new material, delved into the history of Yemeni migration to the Horn of Africa. In addition, I transcribed the first part of Noha's family history, and began to see its richness. My fellows at 'Re: Work' encouraged me to continue my project, emphasising that it is not always the quantity but often the quality of the data that counts. Yet, in addition to doing research, I also had to find a new job, and I was very lucky to be offered a position at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at VU University Amsterdam. Although my most important responsibility is teaching, I do have time for research. In February 2013, I returned for two weeks to Yemen, and interviewed Noha again. This time the focus was on her own life story, and the impact of the current events in Yemen on her life. I hope to be able to realise my ambition to write a social history of Yemeni-Ethiopian migration, an ambition that has been inspired by my work for SEPHIS. I am therefore not only grateful to SEPHIS because it has brought me in touch with numerous inspiring individuals and institutions in the Global South, working in the fields of humanities and social sciences, but also because it has greatly enriched my own research projects.

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## Reaching the South from 'ten square metres' in Amsterdam



Jacqueline Rutte

Jacqueline Rutte (L) & Marina de Regt (R)

Jacqueline Rutte (left) works at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Email: [jru@iisg.nl](mailto:jru@iisg.nl)



Quite unexpectedly, I received an invitation from the e-zine editors asking me to write an article, about my experiences with Sephis, for the last issue from Kolkata.

Very enthusiastically, I said yes only to realise a little later that I am not used to writing articles, especially about myself. The request made me think about the past and I became somewhat nostalgic. It was in 2004 that I was asked to assist the former Sephis office manager, Ingrid Goedhart for a few hours per week. During that time I was working at the IISH secretariat where Sephis was also housed. Ingrid was working with Ulbe Bosma, who was Marina de Regt's predecessor. I already knew Willem van Schendel, Sephis's founding father, who was also working at the IISH for some hours per week.

I have to admit that I learned a lot from Ingrid, especially her organisation skills, and the way she set up the whole Sephis administration. At that time, things were not as digitised as they are now, and a lot of letters, flight tickets, insurance papers were still sent out via snail mail and special delivery couriers. Internet communication was not always possible and it was sometimes quite difficult to get in touch with people.

Things changed at the Sephis office and during a period in 2007 I was the only Sephis part-time employee. The other part of my job was still with the IISH secretariat. That was not the easiest of times but luckily things became better. During the summer of 2007, Marina de Regt was employed as the new Sephis coordinator and I was appointed Sephis office manager. In fall 2007, Annelou Ypeij came to help us out with the finances for one day a week.

A whole new period started as we worked hard to give Sephis a fresh restart with lots of activities, ideas, workshops and by broadening the network. The Steering committee members were far away, apart from Michiel Baud, who is based in Amsterdam. We were in contact with the Steering Committee mostly via email. Of course we had regular meetings with Michiel Baud and we organised our annual Steering Committee Meeting every June in order to discuss everything that went on with Sephis in person with the complete Steering Committee. These meetings were held every year in a different place. From time to time we had to say goodbye to a Steering Committee member because his or her membership ended and we welcomed new members.

In 2011, we received the very sad news of the passing away of Carlos Ivan Degregori, our beloved Peruvian Steering committee member who died on 18 May 2011. During all the Sephis years we were able to build our network thanks to the activities and help from our local partners in Brazil, Senegal, India, Peru and the Philippines, and last but not the least, the e-Magazine. I would like to specially remember Anjan Ghosh, from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta, who, suddenly, passed away 5 June 2010.

When I am in my office now it gives me pleasure to look at my book case, where I keep a copy of every book that we published during the whole Sephis period. I think it is quite impressive. We have books in many languages from various countries. I was personally much involved in the French book series 'Histoire des Suds' that we published with Karthala in France.

Sephis allowed me to get to know the world a little better. I enjoyed being in touch with people from the South and communicated directly with citizens from countries where I have never been nor probably ever will. Sephis also gave me the opportunity to travel sometimes to faraway places where I learned about local culture, food and people. I was always generously welcomed and very hospitably treated.

I still think it is a pity that the Dutch Ministry did not grant us another five year extension. Even though we saw it coming, I kept hoping against all odds. I still do think that we did contribute to building a Global South network and that we were able to make a difference. Working for Sephis was a good and meaningful experience and it brought me in contact with many nice people. The South has a lot to offer. The good side of the end of Sephis in Amsterdam is the relocation to Brazil where an enthusiastic team is ready to take over and broaden the network. I wish Claudio Pinheiro and his team success in keeping Sephis going.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everybody I was in touch with during my Sephis years, the grantees, the publishers, the workshop participants and many many others. My special thanks to everybody I so happily worked with, the Steering Committee, the Sephis centres and the e-zine team, and last but certainly not the least, my very good friends and colleagues Marina and Annelou.

# The Problem of 'Sovereignty' in Today's World



**Dan Tschirgi**

Dan Tschirgi is Professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo. His most recent book is *Egypt's Tahrir Revolution*. Email: [tschirgi@aucegypt.edu](mailto:tschirgi@aucegypt.edu)

Some years ago, sociologist Manuel Castells noted that a key aspect of contemporary life is ‘the sudden acceleration of the historical tempo’<sup>1</sup>. It is a telling insight, one that simultaneously captures a self-evident truth and a subtle part of the reality of modern life, a reality which many sensed but few could express so succinctly.

Let me give one example that I hope will make my point clear. The term ‘globalisation’, by which I mean *the process through which the combination of economics, politics and technology unleashes forces that increasingly make various societies of our world not only more interconnected but also more susceptible to similar experiences, both good and bad*, appears to have gained currency in the social sciences in the previous twenty-five years. Today, ‘globalisation’ has become such a ubiquitous concept that it is virtually impossible to avoid in any deep discussion of current events. This seems to be the essence of Castells’ claim about the ‘sudden acceleration of the historical tempo’. Few serious examinations of social phenomena can proceed today without taking into account globalisation as a factor. I would add a cognitive dimension to Castells’ essentially empirical argument: I would suggest that if ‘globalisation’ implies an empirically verifiable reality of interconnectedness at a global level, it must also simultaneously imply an intellectual capacity to apprehend both these interconnections and their implications.

I put this view into practice when I published my book *Turning Point: The Arab World’s Marginalisation and International Security After 9/11*<sup>2</sup>. My chief concern was to explain the suicidal nature of the 9/11 attacks and determine whether they were part of an identifiable pattern affecting politics in a far wider realm than merely the Arab world. I, therefore, rejected the well-trodden path of ‘exceptionalist’ approaches to Arab life — the idea that Arab social dynamics do not conform to patterns commonly found in other societies. Instead, I chose to view the 9/11 attacks as acts of war, specifically as acts of asymmetrical war, a type of conflict in which the balance of power is severely unequal.

This proved to be a useful approach, for it permitted me to analyse 9/11 in the light of a particular type of asymmetrical conflict I had earlier identified as ‘Marginalised Violent Internal Conflict’, or MVIC.<sup>3</sup> Comparing three instances of Marginalised Violent Internal Conflicts — Mexico’s Zapatista conflict, Nigeria’s struggle against the Ogoni, Egypt’s conflict with the *Gamaa’ al-Islamiyya*, — with the 9/11 events yielded many valuable insights into the dynamics of these conflicts. This was, perhaps, only to have been expected. For, in addition to occurring in the same time-frame (the last decade of the twentieth century), the three MVICs pitted marginalised communities — the Highland Maya in Mexico; the Ogoni people in Nigeria, and the Upper Egyptians — against the military power of modern states. 9/11 did the same, if on a much grander scale.

Among the many strong parallels between the three MVICs and the 9/11 conflict, two proved particularly relevant. The first was the clear interface between all three marginalised communities and the pressures generated by globalisation. The second was the ‘traditional’ status of all three groups. As I remarked in the book, while the label ‘traditional’ is accurate if it implies ‘that these groups cherished and found identity in beliefs, practices, and values that have historically been central to their cultures...’ [but] it is totally inappropriate if taken to mean ‘an uncompromising resistance to... change and the material benefits of the modern world’<sup>4</sup>.

The hallmark of a ‘traditional’ social group is its underlying cognitive orientation, its cosmological assumptions. Anthropologists have done a far better job of dealing with belief systems than have political scientists. Each of the groups I studied depended strongly on traditional cosmological belief-systems to support their respective identities. In each case, the operative traditional cosmology was manifested as a ‘folk religion’. This, in turn, is the product of a syncretistic blend of (a) the marginalised group’s religious beliefs and practices, and (b) those more recently introduced by the society’s dominant groups. Thus, the cosmological factor in the Zapatista struggle was the syncretistic admixture of Roman Catholicism and historical native beliefs and practices, while that of the Ogoni mixed animistic beliefs and practices with the various dominant forms of Christianity currently prevailing in Nigeria. Finally, the *Gamaa’ al-Islamiyya*’s cosmological vision rested on a combination of orthodox Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs<sup>5</sup>.

Two anthropologists, Evon Vogt and El-Sayed El-Eswad, who focused on Mexico’s Highland Maya communities and Egypt’s rural peasantry, respectively, have clarified much of cosmology’s central

role in the identities of traditional communities<sup>6</sup>. El-Aswad consciously hoped his study would demonstrate ‘that in rural Egypt, as in other parts of the world, the individual is part not only of the society but also of the total cosmological system’<sup>7</sup>. Although Vogt’s work is separated by over thirty years from that of El-Aswad, and despite the fact that the two men sought to understand traditional cultures more than half a world away from each other, both scholars concur that:

Traditional cosmology provides its adherents with an internalised, holistic vision that unifies visible and invisible realities in one understandable system. It is a system in which invisible reality takes precedence, giving meaning and purpose to the visible, or the empirical. In doing so, the cosmological vision also — and very significantly — provides meaning for the individual’s life and relationships with others.<sup>8</sup>

However, as El-Aswad further argues that since invisible reality takes precedence over the visible, it adheres to a unique logic of its own, one that permits a knowledge of the invisible to overcome ‘the limitations of common sense experience in this worldly life...’<sup>9</sup>. In addition — and this is very important — the logic of the invisible supports the notion that ‘justice will be attained by a higher power’.<sup>10</sup> Thus, concludes El-Aswad, ‘anything is possible, because there is always room for the invisible to work’.<sup>11</sup>

It is here, as I noted in my 2007 book, that we find ‘the fundamental explanation of how and why ideologies based on traditional cosmologies attract sufficient followers to enter into conflict against objectively hopeless odds’.<sup>12</sup>

It seemed to me that the link between MVICs and 9/11 was strongly reinforced. The CIA official, long charged with studying Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, Michael Scheuer, hit the mark when he wrote a CIA-approved book charging Washington’s leaders with an inability to accept or understand the mindset of the enemy, which is both rooted in hatred and the presumption of ‘a counter-intuitive reality’. Surely, Scheuer wrote:

...if we drive and manage an Islamic Reformation that makes Muslims secular like us, all this unfortunate talk about religious war will end and Muslims will be eager to keep God in the same kind of narrow locker in which the West is slowly asphyxiating Him.<sup>13</sup>

Scheuer’s point is fundamentally paradoxical: Western leaders were simply unable to understand Osama bin Laden’s hostility because they were too modern to believe that notions of ‘counter-intuitive reality’ could have such motivational power. Scheuer’s point regarding the importance of counter-intuitive reality to Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda followers, was corroborated by journalist James Poniewozik in his 2001 account of a videotape captured by US forces, shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan:

...the tape is a firsthand look at the absolute religious certainty of bin Laden and his followers. Repeatedly he and the sheikh [who appears in the tape] talk about visions and dreams that associates had before the attack [of 9/11], about planes crashing into buildings. This, perhaps, is something that Americans do not yet fully appreciate: these people live in another millennium, another mental universe. These are people who think magically, who see the world in terms of visions and fate, who honestly feel they have a divine mandate.<sup>14</sup>

The examination of 9/11 through the comparative lens of Marginalised Violent Internal Conflict, therefore, produced two striking results. On the one hand, strong similarities were highlighted between MVICs and the events related to 9/11, among which were the formative pressures of globalisation and the mindsets produced by marginalisation and traditionalism. On the other hand, the fight started by Al-Qaeda was not in any sense an ‘internal conflict’. By its very nature, it was an international war, a conflict launched by a marginalised non-state actor against the most powerful state in the world, and, by

extension, against the state-system itself. Thus, I conclude:

...the long-term threat raised by 9/11 marked a fundamental turning point in global international relations. The obvious paradox lies in the implication that the individual state must be weakened so that the state-system itself may be strengthened...international politics must give priority to creating political and economic conditions that will allow, persuade, and even require governments to function in ways that not only sustain their own legitimacy but also that of the state-dominated international system.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear to everyone that the world we have created is inherently unfair in what it offers to people. Efforts to countervail such systematic marginalisation have not altered the situation, nor do they seem likely to do so in the near future. In this climate the technology of anger — the means to inflict massive damage on the developed world — will steadily proliferate and this indicates the significance of the observation by Castells with which I began this analysis.

The marginalised people of the world, as established by the string of MVICs in the closing decade of the previous century, gave powerful expression to their frustrated anger in the attacks of 9/11. A part of the Arab World has taken the lead in the current war against the modern state system and a belligerent non-state actor is seeking weapons of mass destruction to employ in its struggle. To my mind, this is the most direct and compelling argument for abandoning the idea of sovereignty that has prevailed since the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648.

The modern state system, also known as the Westphalian System, was developed in the 450 years since the end of the Thirty Years War. This is the basis of our current international system, which, in turn, rests on the concept of 'sovereignty'. Sovereignty is, of course, a purely man-made conceptual creation. It is a legal fiction claiming to embody the supreme authority of a state within its own boundaries. The concept was clearly expressed in Max Weber's dictum that sovereignty is the quality affording a state the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. From this seminal idea, two further characteristics of sovereignty were rapidly developed: One was the notion that all states were legally equal; the other was the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states.

Before the ink had dried on the Westphalia Treaties, some thinkers recognised the full implications of the emerging Westphalia System and sought to overcome them. German philosopher Immanuel Kant saw clearly, and with alarm, that the developing idea of sovereignty was rooted in 'The concept of a law of nations as a right to make war [which would actually be only] a law of deciding what is right by unilateral maxims through force...' <sup>16</sup> For Kant, the solution lay in the willingness of states to surrender their 'savage (lawless) freedom, adjust themselves to the constraints of public law, and thus establish a continuously growing state consisting of various nations... which will ultimately include all the nations of the world'. <sup>17</sup>

With the passage of time, Kant's early suggestion for a world governed by a 'public law', to which states would subject themselves, increasingly assumed the role of a well-meant but utterly impractical idea. However, it may now be time for this historical worm to turn. While recognition has increasingly grown, a host of issues might support the idea that global interdependence has rendered the Westphalian concept of 'sovereignty' obsolete. The salient point is that the same result was achieved by 9/11 in a manner that could not have more strongly or directly reinforced the original meaning of 'security': The condition of safety in the face of potential threats from other human beings.

It is towards this narrower, but nonetheless salient, concept of 'security' that I wish to direct the remainder of this paper.

During the first years of the twenty-first century, a variety of thinkers with practical experience in international politics have increasingly recognised the urgency of modifying the established Westphalian view of sovereignty. Their reactions have been mirrored by changes in the prevailing norms of international institutions, particularly in the past decade.

The backdrop against which these developments occurred included such events as civil strife in



Africa, the Rwanda genocide, and the wars in Yugoslavia. The result was the growth of an effective movement for the expansion of international law into the realm of human rights protection. The venue where most of this took place was the United Nations.

The upshot came in the form of major modifications in the application of international criminal law through the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. Over the past decade and a half, the viability of these outfits, in practice, has been clearly established. At this time, the movement in support of an International Criminal Court gained traction, leading to the 2002 Treaty of Rome, establishing that body which is currently supported by some 114 states. Among the first tasks of the ICC was that of hosting the trial of Charles Taylor, who was to be judged by yet another international tribunal, the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Bill Clinton assumed American presidency in 1993 and served until nine months before the attacks on the twin towers in 2001. Having direct experience with the cases of Rwanda and Yugoslavia, Clinton was sensitive to the limitations of sovereignty in modern times. In December 2001, the ex-president delivered the Richard Dimbleby Lecture in London, a preliminary — and almost unnoticed — version of which he had already given at Yale University in October. Entitled ‘The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century’, Clinton’s address provided a broad overview of the 9/11 attacks. ‘September 11,’ he said, ‘was the dark side of this new age of global interdependence’.<sup>18</sup> Pointing out that science, technology and economics had yielded tremendous benefits for much of the world in terms of life-choices, he also noted that those same benefits had been denied to massive numbers of persons in less-developed regions of the globe. Poverty and hopelessness had become the fate of the latter. This global bifurcation of the human living experience required a reordering of international priorities and practices: ‘All of us,’ he said, ‘will have to develop a truly global consciousness’.<sup>19</sup>

In calling for people to transcend the ‘little boxes’ of their national identities and religious affiliations, Clinton went a long way in questioning the usefulness of the concept of sovereignty in the modern world. Clinton came close to spelling out the obvious implication of his position: The old Westphalian concept required serious revision. But he refrained from specifying this clearly.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the prominent academic who served as National Security Adviser under Jimmy Carter, also raised his voice against the easy acceptance of the traditional view of sovereignty. He too was affected by 9/11 in ways that impacted his outlook on the nature of modern international relations. Brzezinski laid emphasis on:

...the massive worldwide political awakening of mankind and its intensifying awareness of intolerable disparities in the human condition.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of recalling Clinton’s reference to ‘the dark side of global interdependence,’ Brzezinski flagged ‘global turmoil’ as the most menacing feature of globalisation. He implicitly chastised the Bush administration for failing to perceive this. Particularly critical of the administration’s approach to issues of national security, Brzezinski noted that 9/11 had intensified a running debate that was itself provoked by the rise of the United States as the sole superpower. The point of contention was whether the United States would,

engage in a gradual, carefully managed transformation of its own supremacy into a self-sustaining international system, or...[alternatively] rely primarily on its own national power to insulate itself from the international anarchy that would follow its disengagement.<sup>23</sup>

Brzezinski’s understanding of Washington’s options rested on his historical perspective, which was based on the commonplace assumption that all dominant powers eventually decline. This, Brzezinski felt, would ultimately also be the fate of the United States. The question facing the country was whether the United States would try to retreat from history by isolating itself as ‘a fortress on a hill,’ or opt to shape the international system in ways congenial to America’s most enduring values. In either case, Brzezinski concluded, a major problem in international relations would be that of coping with globalisation, a phenomenon that Brzezinski saw as having a deep ‘moral dimension’.<sup>24</sup>

Zbigniew Brzezinski had come closer than Bill Clinton to identifying the full scope of the

problems besetting the notion of sovereignty today. In referring to what he presumed was an imminent historical change in the nature of international relations, and linking this to the 'worldwide awakening of mankind', Brzezinski implied that generalised social pressures lay behind the drive for fundamental political change. He stopped just short of specifying what the nature of this change might be.

Strangely enough, it was left to George W. Bush — a president not noted for sensitivity to international public opinion — to articulate the thrust of what had led Brzezinski to see history as driving us toward a redefinition, or at least a new understanding, of 'sovereignty'. The irony was that Bush kept strictly within the bounds of his unilateral, America-first outlook on international relations, as he made clear his belief that the worldwide 'awakening' was caused by other governments' marginalisation of parts of their own populations. A significant part of Bush's Second Inaugural Address was devoted to a pledge to interfere unilaterally in the sovereignty of states that were so misgoverned. 'We will,' he promised, 'encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require decent treatment of their own people'.<sup>25</sup>

In a speech delivered in 2004, it was the British prime minister, Tony Blair, who finally proclaimed what the Americans had refrained from articulating clearly. He explained the development of his own thinking, saying that even before 9/11, he had begun to move away from the philosophy of international relations that '...has held sway since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648; namely that a country's internal affairs are for it and you don't interfere....'<sup>26</sup> However, 9/11 had been 'a revelation'. The direction taken by Blair's thinking led him to the belief that self-interest, in today's world, demands modification of the concept of sovereignty and, therefore, of international law. In short, Blair advocated the view that it would be impossible to maintain international order if states continued to marginalise or oppress sections of their own populations; in such circumstances, the international community must have the legal right to intervene:

It may well be that under international law as presently constituted, a regime can systematically brutalise and oppress its people and there is nothing anyone can do, when dialogue, diplomacy and even sanctions fail, unless it comes within the definition of a humanitarian catastrophe.... This may be the law, but should it be?<sup>27</sup>

Tony Blair's question was rhetorical. His argument was clear: While the nation-state still remains the basic unit of global organisation, and will, in all probability, continue to be so in the foreseeable future, the demands of the twenty-first century imply that the same unit be given new and greater responsibilities for ensuring international security. Moreover, the nation-state now had to be made accountable to the international community.

In the past ten years, the concerns voiced by Clinton, Brzezinski, Bush and Blair were reflected in the rapid growth of an international movement in support of the notion 'Responsibility to Protect'. The idea was first broached at the end of 2001 by a commission of the Canadian government. At its core, the concept was rooted in the argument that sovereignty is a responsibility rather than a privilege. A corollary to this central feature is the idea that the international community has a right to intervene in situations where a sovereign state either cannot or will not fulfill its role in protecting its own citizens. In 2006, the Security Council invoked this idea when it invited Sudan to allow the entry of UN troops assigned to replace those of the African Union. That was the first occasion on which the Council enforced the responsibility to protect. At the time, the Christian Science Monitor explained the underlying concept in the following words:

The responsibility to protect means that if a country cannot or will not protect its citizens from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or ethnic cleansing, then it must accept support or assistance from other nations to end the violence. While the sovereignty of countries to regulate their own internal affairs is respected, it is conditional and not absolute. When peaceful means are exhausted and leaders of a UN member state are 'manifestly failing to protect their populations,' then other states have the responsibility to take collective action through the Security Council.<sup>29</sup>

Five years later, in 2011, the Security Council went even further in the case of Libya, after the country's ruler specifically threatened the inhabitants of the rebel-held city of Benghazi. The council not only imposed a 'no fly zone' over the whole of Libya, but also authorised 'all necessary measures' to protect civilians.<sup>30</sup>

For those hoping to see a more equitable international system, the rapidity with which the concept of sovereignty has changed in the past few decades is a welcome sign. While the worm may not have yet turned totally, it has clearly veered in a promising direction.

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# People of African Descent: Education, Development & Human Rights<sup>1</sup>



**Verene A. Shepherd**

Verene A. Shepherd is Professor of Social History & University Director of the Institute for Gender & Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. She was a member of the Sephis Steering Committee. Her research interests cover the broad fields of slavery, migration, gender and human rights. Verene is the chair of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent and the Jamaica Reparation Commission.

Her publications include *I Want to Disturb My Neighbour* and *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean*. Email: [verenalber@yahoo.com](mailto:verenalber@yahoo.com)



The theme ‘People of African Descent and the Right to Development’ fits into the theme adopted during the 2011 International Year for People of African Descent proclaimed by the United Nations Resolution 64/169 — ‘*People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice, Development.*’ It will remain relevant as the United Nations’s Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent contemplates the General Assembly’s declaration of the Decade for People of African Descent, 2013–2023. The preoccupation with the issue of development of Africa and its diaspora, indeed of the South, is an age old one, dating back to the period of modernity, but it continues to have a postmodern relevance.

It is no secret that people of African descent are among the most marginalised groups in the Americas, even in multicultural societies where they form the majority population. The roots of this situation are well-known and lie deep in the history of conquest, colonisation, the rape of Africa through the trans-Atlantic trade in captives, African enslavement and the continuing struggle of people of African ancestry for social and economic justice. More recently, we have watched as the old colonialism has been replaced by the new, with new imperialists imposing their brand of exploitation on Africa and the Americas. One contemporary impact is that the African diaspora appears to be returning to a time when people of African descent formed the labour force and were alienated from the means and markets of production, and denied their basic right to development.

The developmental problems refuse to go away, despite the great strides that have been made in many parts of Africa and the diaspora. In fact, in many cases, what we are seeing is a reversal of some of the progress that was made in the immediate post-independence period.

Nowhere is the discrimination against Africans and people of African descent in the Caribbean and Latin America more evident than in the field of education, reflected in what Christopher Zambakari calls ‘intellectual poverty’. This is manifested in the high rates of un- and under-employment, illiteracy, violence including gender-based violence, the over-representation of young, uneducated black men in the prison systems, limited access to tertiary education, and a low ranking among the continents in scientific output and research and development expenditure. In the article, ‘Recolonizing the African Mind: Africa and the Poverty of Knowledge Production’, Zambakari uses the example of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean to demonstrate the relationship between education and development. Starting with Africa, he observes that ‘violence and poverty have come to define how the world relates to Africa’, that sub-Saharan Africa remains the region least at peace and that forty per cent of the world’s least peaceful countries are in Africa, according to the 2011 Global Peace Index. He argues that despite the urgency to end violence and reduce poverty, a different kind of poverty holds the key to violence, poverty and the many other problems that the continent is facing today. That poverty he labels ‘intellectual poverty’ and he bolsters his argument with data from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). The statistical data of 1990 and 2000 show that Africa’s share of publications stood at 1.4 per cent in both the years, while its share of Research and Development (R&D) expenditure went down from 1.3 per cent in 1990 to 0.8 per cent in 2000.

Latin America and the Caribbean, did slightly better and had a steady increase over the period, from 1.7 to 3.2 per cent in global share in publication and from 2.8 to 2.9 per cent in world share in R&D expenditure. But both regions are still struggling to increase the number of universities and access to tertiary education since structural adjustment from the 1980s to 2000 had dismantled the educational infrastructure in these regions. Zambakari thinks that such reversals pleased the colonialists, who did not wish to develop an educated middle class that would fuel the national, anti-colonial movement, so the focus was on primary education during the colonial period in both regions and only after independence, or shortly before in the case of the English-speaking Caribbean, was there a move to establish universities. Universities have a longer history in Latin America, but the percentage of black students in them continues to decline.

Even for years after, postgraduate education was attainable mostly in the ‘mother’ countries, signifying an attempt to develop loyalty to empire or train rulers to uphold Europeaness in the colonies or ex-colonies. He argues that education is very market-driven now and the focus is not on formulating original problems but on finding solutions to problems — problems for the market-driven economy.

So, he concludes that postgraduate education, the type needed to develop Africa and its diaspora started late — for example, it has been just fifty years in some Caribbean countries. But, he continues,

there is a bigger problem with regard to primary education and limited secondary education. Many secondary schools have no higher grades — called Sixth Forms in Africa — to prepare students for tertiary institutions. Where there are these two extra years of secondary training, funding to maintain them is decreasing. This, Zambakari argues, is affecting the research and development output in the region. As a result, there is a severe dearth of local expertise which forces recruitment from countries having better infrastructure for research.

Some of these similar tendencies are also visible in the Caribbean and Latin America where there is a structural discrimination in education and the overall social infrastructure in the midst of a growing tourist industry. Like Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America are increasingly becoming simply consumers of external production and its people are servicing industries like tourism and commerce. The investors are not people of African descent. This is certainly evident in Jamaica, where many of the schools in the tourist areas offer no higher level secondary programme to prepare students for the university. Such poorly educated students provide a steady reservoir of cheap labour for the tourist industry and ready applicants to the hotel training schools. The consequence is a reversal of the progress in the first years of independence, manifested in an unsatisfactory literacy rate, a re-colonisation by those with investment capital, a marginalisation of Caribbean and Latin American people to the position of labourers.

Some may well ask, why do we have these problems years after the successful decolonisation struggle? In the case of the Caribbean and Latin America, in addition to the new imperialism imposed by outsiders, colonialism resides among our own public and private leaders, even the young ones, who should long have been educated away from those mentalities, as they do not harness African and diaspora studies for the development of their people.

Clearly, the interpretation of ‘development’ in the Caribbean is still along traditional lines and does not take on board the relationship between education, development and post-colonialism. Yet post-colonialism demands that development takes into consideration the presence and significance of the voices of the masses. It also takes into account the ways in which contemporary societies have been shaped by agency and resistance in the South.

How can we use education effectively to contribute towards the development of the challenged areas of the diaspora, which are in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America? How can we harness the history we know to help to reverse the type of knowledge being circulated in Africa and the diaspora and about Africa and the diaspora that could help intellectual and economic development?

A key strategy is for policy-makers and activists to be vigilant to ensure that people of African descent get the type of education they need to ensure development of our countries. This must be seen as a right and not a privilege. It has long been argued that education is a key component of development, a needed investment in nation-building and a means of empowering a nation’s people by developing their minds. We need to lobby for the end of structural and direct discrimination in education for the people of African descent and we need to lobby for quality education that will make our graduates fit for university, where they can learn skills that will later result in a higher R&D index for our countries. We also need to ensure that the content of education is culturally relevant and serves the needs of our post-colonial state. If it has the right content and ideological orientation, culturally grounded education can be the most effective weapon against that mental slavery of which Garvey and Marley spoke, a most effective Afro-centric weapon against the imperial canon and a counter-force to that weapon of mass destruction represented by Euro-centric education.

A word about structural discrimination which disproportionately affects people of African descent — the typical definition of structural discrimination is ‘the policies of empowered race, ethnic, gender institutions and the behaviour of the individuals who implement these policies and control these institutions which are race/ethnic/gender neutral in intent, but which have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority/race/ethnic/gender groups’.<sup>2</sup>

Structural discrimination involves situations where a neutral, or seemingly harmless, policy, rule or practice (such as competitive examinations that place primary/prep school children in secondary schools), has a discriminatory effect against a certain group of people. Such a policy or procedure appears to treat everyone equally (everyone is free to take the exams and progress to a secondary

school), but creates disadvantages for certain groups.

So, let me stress that the problem in many post-colonial societies is not the laws with regard to education — laws which appear to guarantee the right to primary and secondary education for all — but their insidious practices. Structural discrimination in education causes inequalities and has an impact on identity and ethnic pride.

There are two other issues in our educational system that, if not addressed, will impede intellectual development, for development must be defined in more than economic terms. The first issue is the content of history education/history textbooks, which does not empower people of African descent, Asians and indigenous peoples, while the second is the sexism in the textbooks.

I am not denying that the former colonies in the African diaspora have come a long way since emancipation and independence, with improved access, resources and infrastructure, allowing higher literacy rates and upward social mobility. According to a 2009 UNDP report, the rates now range from a low of 54.8 per cent and 75.1 per cent in Haiti and Belize, respectively, to a high of 99.7 per cent and 99.8 per cent in Barbados and Cuba, respectively. Jamaica's literacy rate hovers around the high 70s. However, no Caribbean country has yet achieved 100 per cent literacy. They have revised their curriculum to get rid of the legacy of colonialism. But the impact of the colonial ideology on education has proven hard to dislodge. And the multiple effects of colonialism, slavery and patriarchy are still evident in the education system, a situation which promotes social exclusion. This is why many argue that the Caribbean region still displays structural discrimination in its system of education. States would deny that such a discrimination exists, but the effects are very much visible and we have to continue our fight to eliminate them.

### **Evidence of Structural Discrimination:**

I wish to elaborate a bit more on how structural discrimination is manifested in some post-colonial societies. One manifestation in the former British colonies is the differential access to quality education because of the competitive nature of the movement from primary to secondary level. The existence of the British colonial relic, the Common Entrance examination, or its equivalent, means that there is no automatic progress of eleven year olds from primary to secondary schools.

In addition, certain schools get all the so-called 'bright' children, leaving other schools to cope with more 'mediocre' and invariably black students. In an article in the *Jamaica Gleaner* in 2010, titled 'Out of Many, Two Educational Systems', 2009 Jamaican Rhodes Scholar Michael Waul put it this way, 'Access to quality education [in Jamaica] remains largely determined by societal class... The education system in its current format, perpetuates historical societal divisions, rewarding those from higher social classes, while placing those from lower social classes at an increasing disadvantage.'<sup>3</sup> So, some students are exposed to good teachers, good infrastructure, smaller classes and co-curricular activities that balance their educational experience. Others have never touched a computer and sit in hot, overcrowded classrooms with barely trained teachers. They typically have less facility in the formal language of education, being more fluent in the creole language, which, they are told, should not be spoken in the classroom. Language, then, constitutes one key element in discriminatory practices in education.

Michael Waul brought this home when he compared his own experience at two different schools: Campion and Old Harbour High, the former with all the enhancements, including tennis court and swimming pool, the latter struggling to find even the basics like adequate classroom space. 'What differentiates them is largely a matter of economics', he argues. The schools that depend solely on government resources are at a disadvantage, while those with wealthier parents are better able to fund their children's education in institutions which are better equipped to meet the students' learning needs.<sup>4</sup>

Another issue, and this applies more broadly, is the curriculum. For developing countries, the issue cannot only be related to that of the provision of hardware and software but also of inputs. More specifically the provision of quality inputs in terms of the textbooks used, must be related to the overall objective of education as articulated by governments, which is to improve not just access, but also quality, equity and relevance.<sup>5</sup> The debate surrounding the factors responsible for the lingering racist and sexist content of the syllabus (like the quarrel over classism in the movement from primary to secondary)

ebbs and flows, but it cannot be denied that structural discrimination is the result if not the intent.

The battle over content is particularly evident in History. I have singled out History education because, as Garvey tells us, ‘the history of a race is the guidepost of a nation’s and a race’s identity’; and this identity can best be fostered through History education that incorporates race and gender identity.

Alongside its socialising function, post-colonial education has a major responsibility for identity formation. We do not often include the content of education in discussions of institutionalised racism, but increasingly textbooks and curriculum are coming under scrutiny because of the effect they can have on people of African descent. An education that privileges boys by teaching that they were naturally in the leadership and managerial positions while women existed in the private sphere, that empowers Asians (who are represented as innately business-savvy as opposed to people of African descent who are lazy and non-entrepreneurial) and that does not stress the non-slave dimension of the African experience is potentially damaging to the psyche of the people of African descent.

Another issue relates to the cues that History education sends out to children of African descent. Taking the Caribbean as an example, it is evident that despite the efforts of post-colonial regimes, misrepresentations and stereotypes about people of African descent persist in some of the textbooks used to teach history. Indeed, the Caribbean has been affected by a historically constructed image that still influences self-knowledge as well as global attitudes towards its citizens.

Admittedly, since the period of modernity, Caribbean people have sought to eradicate and dismantle historical representations of the Caribbean in text and image that mostly reflected European colonial subjectivity and authority.<sup>6</sup> The production of alternative knowledge was a particularly critical aspect of what scholars refer to as the counter-colonial resistance.<sup>7</sup>

Whether reflected in the research on colonial, post-colonial or postmodern Caribbean societies, our scholars have intervened in and destabilised the dominant discourse that used to argue that the Caribbean was a place devoid of ideas and intellectual thought. Political ideology and concepts of human rights were already sophisticated in the political philosophies and ideologies of black abolitionists long before the emergence of the philosophical teachings of Marcus Garvey and others.<sup>8</sup> Still, new knowledge has not resulted in the transformation of our societies in ideological, philosophical and psychological terms, small steps along the way notwithstanding.

Many Caribbean and Latin American countries will deny that their education systems contain features of institutionalised or structural discrimination, even sexism, racism and classism. They posture as independent states where the legacy of colonial rule have long disappeared, as multicultural societies where the constitution protects citizens from discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity, colour, gender or religious persuasion. They are more likely to point to the existence of such institutionalised racism in European countries, even those that have an international reputation as successful, advanced capitalist states, highly networked, knowledge societies, imbued with human rights and gender equality, and with a strong commitment both to the environment and to the welfare of its citizens.<sup>9</sup>

But what is referred to as ‘unintended’ or ‘structural’ discrimination, is clearly evident, even in states with black majorities. In such scenarios, racism masquerades as classism, because low-income students, (usually black, even in multi-ethnic societies) from non-elite neighbourhoods have differential access to quality education. Clearly, social forces or policies that have racially disparate adverse effects are ‘discriminatory’ by result, whether intended or not.

## Conclusion:

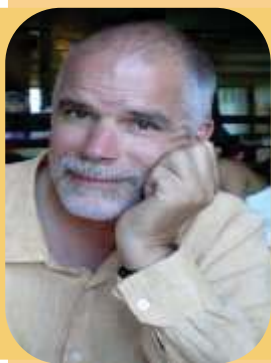
Michael Waul observed in his *Gleaner* article from which I quoted earlier, ‘...efforts must be geared towards establishing and maintaining a standard across all schools within the public system...After all, education is a merit with enormous benefits for social and economic advancement and is the foundation of any well-functioning society.’

Let us each cement this idea in our plans as we contemplate the Decade for People of African descent.



- 1 A version of this paper was presented at the Sub-Regional Seminar on *People of African Descent and the Right to Development*, Panama City, Panama, 17 February 2012.
- 2 It would be useful to consult Fred L. Pincus, "Discrimination Comes in Many Forms: Individual, Institutional, and Structural", in Maurianne Adams, et. al. (eds.), *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Routledge, New York, 2010.
- 3 Michael Waul, "Out of Many: Two Educational Systems", *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 11 July 2010, p. D12.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Economic and Social Survey: Jamaica 2001*, section on Education and Training (chapter 22).
- 6 Petrina Dacres, "Monument and Meaning", *Small Axe*, 16, September 2004, p. 149. See also in the same volume, Carolyn Cooper, "Enslaved in Stereotype: Race and Representation in Post-Independence Jamaica", pp. 154-169.
- 7 Bill Ashcroft, et. al. (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, p. 1.
- 8 See for example, Denis Benn, *The Caribbean: An Intellectual History 1774-2003*, Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, 2004; O. Nigel Bolland, *The Birth of Caribbean Civilisation: A Century of Ideas about Culture, Identity, Nation and Society*, Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston & Oxford, 2004; Brian Meeks and Folke Lindhal (eds.), *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, University of West Indies Press, Kingston, 2001; Veronica Marie Gregg, *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-fiction Writing 1890-1980*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2005.
- 9 For a discussion on direct and structural discrimination in Europe, see Paul Lappalainen, "Institutional Racism in Sweden and Europe", [http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN\\_EU\\_ZE\\_racism.pdf](http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN_EU_ZE_racism.pdf), accessed on 1 September 2013.

## Generations, Class Formations and Elections in Zimbabwe: Methodological Notes for Analysing the Historical Construction of Political Power and Resistance in a New African State



**David Moore**

David Moore is Professor of Development Studies at the University of Johannesburg. His Ph.D. on the contradictions of the liberation war in Zimbabwe, was completed in 1990 at York University in Toronto. The contradictions continue. He is also a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town.  
Email: [dbmzim@yahoo.ca](mailto:dbmzim@yahoo.ca)

*It's just about time that new generations rolled back time and rewrote their own history.* Tendai Biti, Secretary-General, MDC-T<sup>1</sup>

This paper is an effort to develop a method to understand how and to what effect patterns of resistance to restrictive forms of political and socio-economic power have emerged through Zimbabwe's past, and have culminated (for the present!) in the current crisis. It attempts to systematise an explanation of how different generations of political activists have pushed open democratic space in Rhodesia<sup>2</sup> and contemporary Zimbabwe. Many observers of the recent (31 July 2013) elections<sup>3</sup> in Zimbabwe might say that the last clause in the preceding sentence is nonsense. They would argue that the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has — with the help of the Israeli electoral mercenaries Nikuv<sup>4</sup> — closed off that space for the foreseeable future. However, one can contest that Zimbabwe's history is one of 'progress'<sup>5</sup> on the democratic front, bearing in mind that moments of advance are often followed by periods of regression and repression. How progress towards deep democratic participation is won, and what form it takes, is far from pre-determined. It consists of combinations of ideological and political elements embedded in particular conjunctures of global and domestic configurations of politics and economics. It is brought into play through the agency of radical political actors acted out in moments of near revolutionary impetus and impact. The fact that 'elections' — no matter how rigged — are the mode of political change (or of political retrenchment), rather than a war of liberation indicates 'progress' too. However, the way in which the criteria for 'credibility' in the discourse of international election observations in Africa have shifted to 'peaceful' rather than 'fair' in the past few years suggests that this headway has not been as fast as international democracy evangelists — and many Africans — expected in the wake of the Cold War. As long-time participant-observer in the Zimbabwean political process Ibbo Mandaza has noted, his country's recent exercise shows that in Africa, in the past few years, the bar for electoral integrity has been lowered significantly.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the expansion of political space calls into question the content of 'progress' — because it changes it. Neither form nor content of the headway to the enlargement of life's possibilities can be foretold. It cannot be predicted within the framework of a liberal-democratic teleology à la Fukuyama's end of history (which for many Marxists might be its *beginning*): But neither is this to say that 'democracy-lite' is not an advance on forms of authoritarianism defended in the name of particularistic regionally or racially delineated essentialisms, often invoked by representatives of the *status quo* as they react against forms of modernity and their agents, challenging their power and privilege. Such transformations are usually condemned as 'foreign ideologies'. These men and women are often indeed reactionaries in the double sense of the word, responding to challenges with a repertoire of ideological defences torn from their remembered, imagined, or reinvented — but usually only partially practiced — articulations of pristine pasts.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, most of these remnants of history are much less cognisant of the structures within which they live and lived — and have created — than those challenging them. They react to such challenges with a repertoire of repression itself made up of an armoury of historically constructed *mentalités* and *materiel*. Added to the mix are the reformers in the challenged ruling class, including some who move completely over to the side of the contenders. The combinations of the challenges and reactions create freshly tilled terrain on which new generations struggle for more space. It hardly needs adding that the *contexts* for these struggles over the parameters of power are best theorised in a universalistic way even though their form and content may not match the theories that were developed in the heartlands of capitalism. In other words, as capital becomes imperial, the classes and their intellectuals formed in its wake will follow its flows, but will be joined to and transform the social formations that have arisen in societies on the edges of capital's birthplace and finally be absorbed into it in various ways. And as time takes the centre to the edges and *vice versa* via the 'semi-periphery' à la China, India and others of the BRICS that were once in the 'third world', so



classes will 'progress' in ways Anglo-American ideologues might not recognise.



<http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/posterselection.jpg>

In trying to track Zimbabwe's history (once a well-industrialised settler-colonial-capitalist society between, in sociological terms, South Africa and Kenya) of political openings and the efforts to close them, this methodological consideration focuses on what can be called three generations of struggle against different forms of closure in Zimbabwe's political space.<sup>8</sup> It is not an effort to grapple forthrightly with theories of 'generation'<sup>9</sup> but it is a way of periodising historical phases of transformation and the agency within them. It is a way of identifying the people pushing political space in different times and against varying constraints.

Their biographies are very important in their own right, not only for challenging 'official histories' but because they are the 'heroes', the winners of most 'revolutions', even after having been wiped out of the history books and erased from photographs. Recall in this connection the ways of Soviet hagiography and the expunging of figures such as Trotsky. The actions of generations of political actors shape the more structural processes of primitive accumulation (more broadly the processes of socio-economic transformation inherent in 'becoming capitalist' in the 'third world'), as hegemonic constructions of domination, subordination and resistance (counter-hegemonic deconstruction and rebuilding) transform the world from which they emerge. The class formations contingent with the uneven unfolding of 'modernisation' are shaped by the people, usually the 'youth', who struggle to change them as they battle to 'inherit' them from their political fathers, mothers and extra-familial elders. These processes include elements of the construction of the institutions, ideologies and identities of the 'nation-state' and are combined with the expansion of participation in all aspects of life. The latter process is 'democratisation' that goes further than the ritualistic swapping of élites at elections, but extends into the widening of socio-economic spaces from workplaces to families. But even 'democracy-lite' is a fundamental advance on a myriad of authoritarian forms.<sup>10</sup>

That said, the fact that in Zimbabwe now the main opposition has 'lost' an election and will be forced onto the streets and into parliamentary seats as a *real* opposition rather than participate in an artificially constructed 'government of national unity' as it had for the past nearly five years<sup>11</sup> — after it won an election in 2008, but 'lost' in the run-off because the violence meted by the 'revolutionary ruling party' forced Morgan Tsvangirai to withdraw<sup>12</sup> — may be considered a strategic advance after a tactical retreat.

These three periods in Zimbabwe are (some more roughly than others):

- 1) The mid-1950s, when 'African nationalism' made its first substantial appearance in Rhodesia with the founding of the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress, the context being the continent-wide move to decolonisation stymied by the settler-colonial regime.
- 2) The early and mid-1970s, when young radicals in the armies of firstly the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and secondly in the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) challenged the hegemony of an 'old guard' nationalist leadership, the regional context being efforts by local powers (e.g. Zambia and apartheid-South Africa) to ensure the leaders of the Zimbabwean liberation movements would not become as 'Marxist' as their neighbours in Angola and Mozambique, and globally the Americans worrying about



Wilfred Mhanda, one of the 'young turks' who in late 1976 challenged Robert Mugabe in the guerrilla camps in Mozambique, thus spending the next three years in Mozambican prison camps, with Tapera Kapuya, a student activist in the early 2000s, thrown out of his university residence.



Soviet influence in the region.

- 3) Finally, (given the ruling party's semi-hegemony in the 1980s,<sup>13</sup> aside from Matabeleland and the Midlands where Gukurahundi violence ruled — which was ignored by the 'West' given Mugabe's distance from the USSR and thus his legitimacy in that important realm of hegemonic maintenance) in the 1990s to the present. This period witnessed how youthful activists challenged — and continue to so do — the same, now much older, 'political class' and the 'revolutionary party' of which it is part and parcel that developed through the 1950s and 1970s to take power in 1980 at the culmination of the processes of nationalism. The context of the challenge was the ramifications of neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes and working class resistance to them, which developed a tradition of strikes and opposition in general, *and* the global waves of 'democratisation' as the Soviet mode of statehood withered away. The movement of the 1990s combined with a crisis of state power and new alliances for the ruling party — with the 'war veterans' occupying a simultaneously contesting and confirming role, resulting in the land crisis of the 2000s — created a new and still shifting terrain, on which



This is the remains, about 10 days after he was killed, of a supporter of the Movement for Democratic Change, in the run-up to the June 27 election for president.

electoral and 'civil society' politics trialled a *de facto* albeit tension-ridden marriage. As, what Takura Zhangaza calls the 'google generation', enters the scene, so arrives another discursive constellation,<sup>14</sup> some elements of which are counter-hegemonic and others which fit in whatever reinventions ZANU-PF makes of traditions. One sees a cohort connected by social media in the diaspora — many having flown for their lives — counterpoised against youth raised in ZANU-PF's militias and those raised on 'new farms' with an ideology as yet uncovered by globalised intellectuals.

The first question to be asked of such a formulation could be how does it account for the fact that one 'generation' — the nationalists who were challenging power in the 1950s and have it now — spans all these periods. Signified in the personage of Robert Mugabe, perhaps this should be called the single generation — with a single ideology — of power-holders in Zimbabwe. But during the period in which what one group of young turks called the 'old guard's'<sup>15</sup> ascension to and culmination of power (arguably 1955 to 2013), another *two* generations of challengers emerged to challenge that configuration of power and to expand its space. It should be remembered here, too, that the question is not about a 'generation of power' (or a generation that has managed to hold onto power since it gained access to the state in 1980) but *generations of challenges to power, during which democratic space is expanded unevenly*. Another question that could be asked of this formulation is 'what of Morgan Tsvangirai?', who is the personification of the opposition, representing the party under his leadership, the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T — with the suffix because a group that split off from Tsvangirai managed to retain the MDC tag through legal means). Tsvangirai (b. 1952) is quite a bit older than the progenitors of change in the 1990s. He is in the same age cohort as the youthful guerrilla leaders who in 1971 (in ZAPU) and 1976-77 (in ZANU) challenged the same 'old guard', but he did so nearly a quarter of a century later, and in the 'democratic' generation rather than the one embedded in the contradictions of an armed struggle. In many respects, he was 'pushed' into the position he holds currently by the most recent generation of challengers, who formed the National Constitutional Assembly in the late 1990s, and persuaded Morgan Tsvangirai to be chair because of his position as Secretary-General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Tsvangirai suffered not a few attempts on his life at the hands of the state as a result. After a 'working people's conference' in February 1999 at which the decision was taken to form an opposition party, Tsvangirai took up the leadership of the MDC on 11 September 1999, where he remains.

It may not be that important to focus on the age of the participants in this generational history: No matter how old the subject, what matters is the time of his or her participation in the political process.

The effect of his or her role on cohort, context, and the construction of democratic space — in short, the object of examination and periodisation is the dialectic of generation and transformation. More important questions, then, must be asked of an examination of these three generational cohorts. That is: What was different about the ways in which these three cohorts challenged power (this means, too: How different was ‘power’ at each of the three different times?) and how did their challenges alter the nature of the way in which power was exercised? How did these three moments expand freedom (and the power needed to be free — that is, to gain increasingly more ‘individual and collective power and control over our natural, social and political environment’<sup>16</sup>) in Zimbabwe — or not?

The best way to get at this question is to undertake a brief historical outline of why the delineations made above are crucial factors in Zimbabwe’s political history. Thus, the local and global political, economic and ideological contexts in each period are very important.

The first was the age of decolonisation and the birth of the ‘third world’ as the European empires were falling. The second was the development of liberation wars and the challenge posed to the limited scope of the nationalists (sometimes tribal, sometimes narrowly liberal, sometimes inept on the battlefield, sometimes too eager for limited gains at the international bargaining table) by youthful guerrilla soldiers. These guerrillas were influenced by shifts in the global political and ideological environment including Stalinist/Maoist modes of primitive ‘socialist’ accumulation, the libertarian leftism of the era in the centres of global capitalism symbolised by ‘1968’ (a good part of which was constituted by solidarity with ‘third world’ struggles), the ‘critical third worldism’ signified by the works of Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney, and traces of liberalism from these young intellectuals’ contact with an important strain of the Rhodesian educational system that was much more liberal and progressive than generally acknowledged.<sup>17</sup> The third was in the mists of the Cold War as liberalism — embedded in the new guise of ‘human rights’ — took a new life. American democratic idealists were more than happy to dispense with their previous one-party bulwarks against the menace of ‘Communism’ to freedom, and/or (in terms of *realpolitik*) great power rivalry as the Cold War disappeared and the grounds for economic liberalism had supposedly been laid with structural adjustment policies in the 1980s. These missionaries for democracy (by no means in a comfortable relationship with their masters, who preferred to trade with ‘strong’ leaders — à la Pinochet in Chile and Rawlings in Ghana — and were willing to implement neo-liberalism and go slow on a democratic process that risked fragile *fiscis* if they became too populist<sup>18</sup>) marched across the continent. But in Zimbabwe this could never be a pure form of liberalism because of some of the deeper aspirations that stayed with the democratic discourse since the trade union days of the 1950s, the creative efforts to bring Maoism, Stalinism and Western Marxism to ground in the 1970s, the social democratic elements of ZANU-PF policies in the 1980s (always in very uncomfortable relation to Gukurahundi, its brutal combination of an effort to eliminate its opposition and respond to a small group of ‘dissidents’ and mild South African destabilisation efforts<sup>19</sup>), and strong trade union responses to ESAP, Zimbabwe’s Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. Furthermore, the conflation of the land question, as ‘resolved’ with the invasions of commercial farms at the turn of the millennium, adds an important dimension to the means, ends and meaning of democratic space. For those defending a particular view of the ‘national democratic revolution’, the distribution of land to small farmers is much more important than the distribution of votes to liberal dupes.<sup>20</sup> Across these generations, the blend of liberal ‘human rights’ discourses with those of redistribution and political economy needs further analysis<sup>21</sup> — especially as the social forces behind such language have changed fundamentally in the past fifteen years. Now the subalterns are more likely to be newly settled peasants rather than workers. The newer intelligentsia has been groomed in post-Cold War liberalism (although an earlier cohort worked with the trade unions and church-instigated socio-economic think-tanks) and is supported by donor-funded NGOs rather than based in the state, as was more likely to be the case in the 1980s. The *nouveau bourgeoisie* tends to be of the crony-capitalist genre networked closely with the ruling party rather than an industrialising one<sup>22</sup> — although in time, the discourse of ‘indigenisation’ (the ruling party promises to force all foreign investors to sell fifty-one per cent of their property to African Zimbabweans) could become that of a ‘patriotic/developmental bourgeoisie’ rather than that of a class which consumes more than it produces. With the large diaspora — a good proportion of which is not poor — comes another fraction of a bourgeoisie, albeit again more trading than productive.<sup>23</sup>

The ideas and strategies of the current ‘generation’ of political pushing are constituted by many elements of the past. It is quite possible that the post-mortem of the 2013 election may indicate the beginning of a new conjuncture and generation of resistance — based on social forces altered greatly from the 1990s and the past decades, given de-industrialisation, deepened peasantisation, the militarised accumulation strategies of a party/state-class, a new ZANU-PF generation spanning the sons and daughters of the *chiefs*, and the incorporation of *lumpenproletariat* into militias through the National Youth Service — that will carry the old into the new.

No matter which ‘era’, ‘conjuncture’ or generation, no cohort will be uniform. Nor will the responses of nascent and formed party-states and Empire. These too change shape before our very eyes. The point is to see where ideology and structure merge and diverge, where strategy and tactics come together or split apart, and most importantly, to determine how the political spaces changed and are changing as they are articulated across modes of production and politics in the ‘regions’ of class, nation and other structures of materiality, politics and identity. Very brave individuals, embedded in these structures but altering them ceaselessly, widen these spaces — changing history, as Marx might have said, to make circumstances they would prefer. In Zimbabwe, as in so many other social formations where capitalism is struggling to emerge, the struggle will continue for a long time.

This paper was presented in a seminar at the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town on 11 September 2013.

- 1 Tendai Biti, “Tendai Biti Strips Down Dictators”, *Zimeye*, 31 August 2013, <http://www.zimeye.org/?p=88873> (accessed 31.08.2013). ‘MDC-T’ is the acronym for the ‘main’ Movement for Democratic Change.
- 2 I will label the social formation that preceded ‘Zimbabwe’ as ‘Rhodesia’ when necessary, although most of the time ‘Zimbabwe’ will be used.
- 3 See my, ‘11 Theses (with Appropriate Apologies) on Zimbabwe’s Moment of Magical Realism: Waiting for Elections in 2013’, *African Arguments*, Royal African Society, 18 June 2013, <http://africanarguments.org/2013/06/18/11-theses-with-appropriate-apologies-on-zimbabwe-s-moment-of-magical-realism-waiting-for-elections-in-2013> (accessed 01.09.2013) and ‘Zimbabwe’s democrats: *A luta perdido – e reinício*’, *Solidarity Peace Trust*, 4 September 2013, <http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/1330/zimbabwes-democrats-a-luta-perdido-e-reinicio/> (accessed 05.09.2013).
- 4 Elias Mambo and Herbert Moyo, “Nikuv Polls Rigging Saga takes new Twist”, *Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 August 2013, <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2013/08/16/nikuv-polls-rigging-saga-takes-new-twist/> (accessed 04.09.2103). For a critical perspective on the elections’ free and fairness see *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Zimbabwe Briefing: Measuring the Zimbabwe 2013 Harmonised Elections’ Compliance in Accordance with the SADC Principles and Guidelines*, Issue 115, 4-10 September 2013, <http://www.crisisizimbabwe.org/> (accessed 05.09.2013).
- 5 See Moore, with Norma Kriger and Brian Raftopoulos, (eds.), “‘Progress’” in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Special Issue, 30, 4, January 2012, the most philosophical of which is John Hoffman’s ‘Reflections on the Concept of Progress – and Zimbabwe’, pp. 139-145.
- 6 Ibbo Mandaza, ‘Reflections on the 2013 Zimbabwe Elections’, *Mail and Guardian*, 8 August 2013, <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-08-08-00-reflections-on-the-2013-zimbabwe-elections>, (accessed 05.09.2013).
- 7 For examples in South Africa, responding to the Zimbabwean case, see Phathekile Holomisa, ‘Why Mugabe is a True African Hero’, *Sunday Independent*, 1 September 2013, [http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/why-mugabe-is-a-true-african-hero-1.1571234#.UihIyj\\_OTbo](http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/why-mugabe-is-a-true-african-hero-1.1571234#.UihIyj_OTbo), (accessed 05.09.2013); Thabo Mbeki, ‘What Thabo Mbeki said about Zimbabwe Elections, Land Reform’, speech at University of South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, Tshwane, South Africa, 23 August 2013, available at <http://www.safpi.org/print/4330>, (accessed 05.09.2013).
- 8 This idea may have first been broached by Lionel Cliffe, ‘Towards an Evaluation of the



- Zimbabwean Liberation Movement,' Leeds University, Department of Politics Zimbabwe Conference, 21-22 June 1980, introducing the notion of 'generations' into the study of the Zimbabwean liberation movement, including the first nationalists, exiles, and the younger radicals in the seventies.
- 9 Jane Pilcher, 'Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy,' *British Journal of Sociology*, 45, 3, September 1994, pp. 481-95. Pilcher (p. 484) notes that 'generations' (better called 'social generations' or 'cohorts') should never be seen as uniform: 'the multiple nature of time and ... the complexity of biographical and historical connections' mean age groups experience their political moments in many ways. One would think that a focus on class formation and ideology in the context of complex modes of production and primitive accumulation would make such warnings redundant. Pilcher makes another point worth noting: 'contemporaneity is conceived not as the co-existence of persons between two sets of dates, but as a subjective condition of having experienced the same dominant influences' (p. 486). These would be both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. They would be "sucked in to the vortex of social change" [or] *actually participating* in "the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period"' (Mannheim 1952 in Pilcher, and Pilcher, p. 490). One would have to add that the subjective condition would also be affected by class, gender, ethnicity and position in the global political economy. Michael X. Delli Carpini, "Age and History: Generations and Sociopolitical Change", in Roberta Sigel (ed.), *Political Learning in Adulthood: A Sourcebook of Theory and Research*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, pp. 1-10, brings the notion of generational self-consciousness upfront.
  - 10 For more elaborate formulations see my, 'Neo-liberal Globalisation and the Triple Crisis of 'Modernisation' in Africa: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe and South Africa,' *Third World Quarterly*, 22, 6, December 2001, pp. 909-929; "Zimbabwe's Triple Crisis: Primitive Accumulation, Nation-State Formation and Democratisation in the Age of Neo-Liberal Globalisation", *African Studies Quarterly*, 7, 2-3, Winter 2003, pp. 35-47; "The Second Age of the Third World: From Primitive Accumulation to Global Public Goods?" *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 1, February 2004, pp. 87-109; "Coercion, Consent, Context: *Operation Murambatsvina* and ZANU-PF's Illusory Quest for Hegemony", in Maurice Vambe (ed.), *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe*, Weaver Press and the African Institute of South Africa, Harare & Pretoria, 2008, pp. 29-48; and "Coercion, Consent, and the Construction of Capitalism in Africa: Development Studies, Political Economy, Politics and the "Dark Continent", forthcoming in *Transformation*.
  - 11 Brian Raftopoulos (ed.), *The Hard Road to Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2013.
  - 12 Amnesty International states that 180 opposition supporters were killed, over 9,000 were tortured or beaten, and 28,000 displaced in the three months preceding the 'run-off' to the presidential elections: "Amnesty International Report 2009: Zimbabwe", Amnesty International, London, 2009, <http://report2009.amnesty.org/en/regions/africa/zimbabwe>, (accessed 06.09.2013).
  - 13 See my, "Coercion, Consent, Context", pp. 29-48.
  - 14 Takura Zhangazha, "A Clash of Generations, Zimbabwe at 33", <http://takura-zhangazha.blogspot.com/2013/04/a-clash-of-generations-zimbabwe-at-33.html>, 17 April 2013 (accessed 06.09.2013). I would contend that this 'google generation' should be considered part of the struggle condensed into that of dislodging the ruling party – and the class tied up with it (which makes the struggle even more difficult: This class *can* transcend parties if need be, and indeed indicated some of these propensities during the four and half years of the inclusive government). Thus, it should be considered a *cohort* of the larger generation. It is more difficult, however, to analyse the connections and contradictions between the array of issues arising in the 1990s, given the nature of their socio-economic critiques of structural adjustment policies, with the later move to human rights and 'dislodge ZANU-PF' discursive practice.
  - 15 For a celebration of the 'old guard', asserting that it had changed to meet the challenge of the new, see Terence Ranger, "The Changing of the Old Guard: Robert Mugabe and the Revival of ZANU", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 1, October 1980, pp. 71-90. For Ranger's claims that ZANU-PF represented the views of a genteel class of middle peasants – no longer the 'Castro' type of 1980, see his *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study*, James Currey,



- London, 1985, and crucially, Norma Kriger's countervailing perspectives in her *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.
- 16 Lawrence Hamilton, *Freedom is Power: Liberty through Political Representation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, forthcoming 2014. Hamilton expands his notion of freedom as involving four dimensions, 1) The power for people to 'get what (they) want and to act, or be as (they) would choose 'in the absence of either internal or external obstacles or both'; 2) the power for people 'to determine the government of (their) political association or community'; 3) the ability for people to 'develop and exercise (their) powers and capacities self-reflectively within and against existing norms, expectations and power relations', and 4) the power for people to 'determine (their) social and economic environment via meaningful control over (their) economic and political representatives'.
  - 17 Wilfred Mhanda, *Memories of a Freedom Fighter*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2011, is the autobiography of the leader of one of these movements.
  - 18 Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*, Zed Books, London, 2001.
  - 19 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Centre, with an introduction by Eleanor Sisulu, *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Report on the Disturbances in Matebeleland and the Midlands, 1980-88*, Hurst, London, 2008.
  - 20 Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (eds.), *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Zed Books, London, 2005.
  - 21 Brian Raftopolous, "The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Challenges for the Left", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 2, June 2006, pp. 203-19.
  - 22 Martin Dawson and Tim Kelsall, "Anti-developmental Patrimonialism in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30, 1, January 2012, pp. 49-66, and in the same journal, Norma Kriger, "ZANU PF Politics under Zimbabwe's 'Power-Sharing' Government", pp. 11-26.
  - 23 JoAnn McGregor and Ranka Primorac (eds.), *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*, Berghahn, Oxford, 2010.

## Role of SEPHIS in Academic Partnership between Uzbekistan and India



**Mirzokhid Rakhimov**

Mirzokhid Rakhimov is Head of the Department of Contemporary History and International Relations at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, Uzbekistan. He is also a Professor at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

His research interests cover contemporary history, politics, regional integration and international relations in post-Soviet Central Asia.

Email: [mirzonur@yahoo.com](mailto:mirzonur@yahoo.com)

Over the last two decades, the Sephis programme has played a considerable role in enhancing cultural and academic partnership between Asia, Africa and Latin America. I was introduced to the Sephis programme during the international conference on Young Movements in the History of South, which was jointly organised in Tashkent between 16-18 October 2003 by Sephis and the Institute of History at the Academy of Social Sciences, Uzbekistan. There were participants from many countries, including Mansura Haidar (India), Nodir Devlet (Turkey), Willem van Schendel and Touraj Atabaki (the Netherlands) and Shamil Jeppie (South Africa). The conference was the biggest event in Tashkent since 1991 in the field of history and like many young Uzbek scholars I too got the opportunity to listen and interact with leading experts on the subject.

In 2004 Dilorom Alimova, former Director, Institute of History at Academy of Social Sciences of Uzbekistan and myself had a chance to participate at the lecture visit program of Sephis. On 16 November 2004, we arrived in Kolkata for a week-long visit on the eve of a general strike. But we were able to participate in the seminar. This was my second visit to India, and the first to its eastern part. I visited Agra and Jaipur too. The first time I was here was to undertake a computer course organised by Tata Infotech. I also carried out my research work in course of this visit.

This visit, as part of the Sephis programme, was aimed primarily at exploring centres of Central Asian studies in India and establishing contacts with them. Dilorom Alimova and myself shared our research with our Indian colleagues. We discussed research concerns with scholars in three major academic institutions in Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta, the University of Calcutta (Department of History) and the Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies. Alimova's primary research interests lay in the history of Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan and the history of national movements in these regions, along with social history, especially gender relations in Uzbekistan. My research is primarily in the discipline of international relations, including Uzbek foreign policy, contemporary politics and regional integration in Central Asia.

We greatly enjoyed our stay in Calcutta, thanks to the considerable support of Lakshmi Subramaniam and Samita Sen. Though the visit was too short to get a good sense of the city and its people, we were lucky to receive a wedding invitation on the first two days of our visit and we fully enjoyed the kindness and hospitality. We were surprised to see a fair amount of similarity with Uzbek weddings. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet people, which may have been difficult otherwise in such a short research visit. Even within this short visit, we made a lot of good friends with shared interests and common concerns. Lakshmi Subramaniam suggested that I be called 'Mir' instead of the longer Mirzohid. Since then even my friends and colleagues from different countries prefer to call me Mir.

During this visit we stayed both in Calcutta and Delhi for few days. While in Calcutta we had the opportunity to speak to Samita Sen, editor of the Sephis e-Magazine. We narrated how Uzbeks are greatly interested in knowing about India, along with the popularity of Indian films in Uzbekistan, and that there has been a long cultural relationship between the two countries.

As an independent country, it is important for Uzbekistan to develop academic exchanges with different Western, CIS, and also south countries. In the case of India, there exists a historical and cultural connection which can be used to further this relationship. Like Central Asian history, Indian history is also of particular interest to Uzbek historians. The early processes of nation building and the 'nationalist' influences on Indian history writing engage Uzbek historians. Indian historiography still bears the mark of an early 'nationalist' phase of history writing, some of it patronised and sponsored by the state.

During the meeting with Nirban Basu, Head of the Department of History (Calcutta University) we had an informal exchange on the possibility of exploring and sharing Uzbek and Indian archives for scholars of both the countries. Basu pointed out that exiled Indian 'revolutionaries' led by M.N. Roy established the Communist Party of India in Tashkent. Alimova responded that the Communist Party archives in Uzbekistan were one of the best organised and preserved with a good chance that there would be a record of such an event.

Apart from archives and exchanges, we were interested in finding out more about the methodological issues and debates in Indian social sciences, together with research trends, opinions and ideas. Mutual interactions along these lines hold out possibilities for new and exciting directions, away

from the established Euro-centric discourse and the 'exceptionalism' that characterises southern engagements with such discourses.

On 22 November 2004, Alimova and I finished our stay in Calcutta and arrived in New Delhi. Here we met Hari Vasudevan and thanks to him we had a very good time in the capital of India. We stayed at the Jamia Millia Islamia and gave two lectures in Delhi on 23 November 2004. The first was at Jamia Millia, where Alimova spoke to the students on various aspects of Uzbekistan culture both in the past and present. She presented students with information about traditions of history writing in Uzbekistan and distributed handouts prepared by her Institute. I dealt with aspects of Uzbekistan's foreign policy and geopolitical situation in Central Asia at the Institute for Defence and Strategic Analysis.

On 24 November 2004, we returned to Tashkent, after which I received an invitation to be a correspondent for the Sephis e-Magazine which I readily accepted. Over the years, a number of Uzbek scholars have published their papers in the Sephis e-Magazine on history, anthropology and culture of Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

The Sephis lecture programme was important for my future academic progress and I deeply thank the Sephis programme and Willem van Schendel from the International Institute of Social History (the Netherlands) for supporting this visit. Since 2004, I have participated in a number international conferences and seminars at the Maulana Azad Institute for Asian Studies (Calcutta), Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia Millia Islamia University (Delhi), Institute of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir (Srinagar). In 2011 and 2012, I was a visiting professor for a short period at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and Mumbai University, India.

I would like to deeply thank my Indian colleagues P. Das, H. Vasudevan, A. Patnaik, M. Kaw, Anita Sengupta, S. Deshpande and many others for their friendship and academic support.



## Kartini Asia Network: Frontiers of Women and Gender Rights Research in the Global South



**Hardik Brata Biswas**

Trained in Comparative Literature and Women's Studies, Hardik Brata Biswas was a SEPHIS fellow under the History of Modernities and Sexualities in the Global South programme. He is currently working on his doctoral thesis on Visualities and Women in Bengal at the Jadavpur University. Apart from building a digital archive of Women's visuals, Hardik has published on popular print cultures, archives, visual studies and sexualities. He lives in Kolkata. Email: [hardikbb@gmail.com](mailto:hardikbb@gmail.com)

In 2010, I went to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to participate in an international policy dialogue, *Bridging the Gap between Sexuality Research and Advocacy for Sexual Rights*. It was a multi-partner event where Kartini Asia Network, CPPS/University of Gadjah Mada, Institute of International Education, SEPHIS and the Ford Foundation came forward to collaborate. I was then researching on the representations of the family and related structures and gendered violence in popular Bengali pornographic print cultures. Obvious enough, it was quite exciting for me to be part of a gathering which thrashed out and ingeminated the increasing necessity of sexuality research based on regional specificities, importance of exchange of academic research and activism in an effort to bridge the age old gap between the two. The dialogue, as evident from the title, provided a good opportunity to bring in 45 researchers and activists from India, Brazil, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Syria, Egypt and the Philippines to share and discuss issues of contemporary sexuality research and activism while not diluting the methodological rigour or the zeal.



Raden Ayu Kartini

Needless to say, the thrust on sexualities' research beyond the ambit of medicalisation of the body has been low. It is a fairly recent phenomenon that such research which explore intimacies and its complex and changing histories are on the rise. Kartini Asia Network is an important network hub for researchers and activists on Asian women, gender and sexualities. It was formed in 2003 in Manila and now has its secretariat office in Jakarta, Indonesia. 'The major objectives of the Kartini Network are to increase the knowledge base of the participating members, to strengthen their inter-disciplinary research skills, to contribute to the development of comparative and collaborative research programs that respond to the needs of women in the region and to create an open and flexible platform of exchange in the area of women's/gender studies between Asian scholars/activists working within academic institutes and in women's organisations through regular Kartini Network Asian Women's Studies conferences. Another issue Kartini members are concerned with is the training of

gender trainers and policy-makers in the field of women's and gender issues at the operational level, sharing of methodologies and data exchange.'<sup>1</sup> The organisation is named after Raden Ayu Kartini, (1879–1904), an early Indonesian figure of repute. A pioneer in the area of women's rights for Indonesians, Kartini's interest in European feminist thinking was fed by her wide survey of pertinent literatures from Europe. She 'fostered the desire to improve the conditions of indigenous Indonesian women, who at that time had a very low social status. Kartini's concerns were not only in the area of the emancipation of women, but also other problems of her society. Kartini saw that the struggle for women to obtain their freedom, autonomy and legal equality was just part of a wider movement.'<sup>2</sup>

Partnership between the academia and activism is high on the agenda of the Network. My experience as a sexualities researcher from the global south is that the gap between the academia and activism is slowly but steadily inching towards convergence. Much more needs to be done at least in India where I am situated. The question of truth and objectivity has been a traditional bone of contention between the two parties. Traditional academia with its vertically higher institutional support structures has been going through changes by becoming more accepting towards activism and the range of situated knowledge it creates, although I am not sure to what degree institutional scientific quests about sexualities are informed by the social. By following the works of women scientists like Evelyn Fox Keller and others, it has been established beyond doubt that empirical cultures of science vis-à-vis women has been thoroughly masculine even in the spaces of objective scientific laboratories. Social research about intimacies are, at present, widely influenced by global activism and sharing of data. In fact, a lot of re-defining of what constitutes data itself is going on right now to situate experiences and sharpen strategies against dominant-normative sexual cultures. Research and activism platforms like the KAN (Kartini Asia Network) are important as it pulls together experts, young scholars, activists and policy makers from across the global south towards a better understanding of differing views,

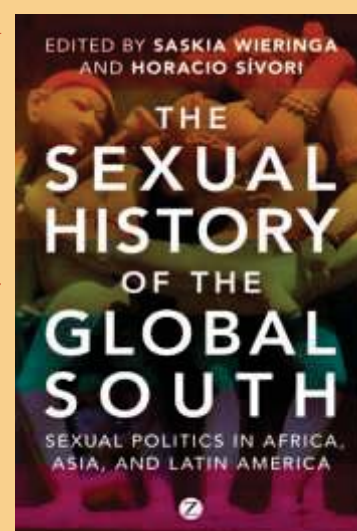
collaborative possibilities and epistemological interventions. In the Indonesian context, KAN has also been up in arms against fundamentalism and homophobic cultures. Participants in such forums learn a lot from the field. Common grounds of fundamentalism, taboo about polymorphous cultures of body and intimacies, deprivation of women and other similar issues brought us together. Listening to the lives and experiences of activists and researchers from various parts of Indonesia, and beyond, who have been systematically intimidated by statist and fundamental forces for demanding their rights. Meeting them was a rare opportunity which opened up sources of light at the end of the tunnel for the many questions that have remained unanswered in my work. Abha Bhaiya, Theme Convener for Sexuality at the KAN, reiterated the never ending necessity of coming together in order to resist and claim while celebrating the success that such rights movements in Asia have achieved. Apart from publishing on themes of women, gender and sexualities, the KAN regularly organises conferences and trans-national dialogues. KAN is constantly partnering with other bodies in the global south for a better understanding of the changing scenarios of women's rights, gender and sexualities issues in order to produce a firmly grounded base of empirical work and epistemological interventions.

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1 <http://www.kartiniasia.org/about/> accessed on 8.10.2013.

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kartini> accessed on 8.10.2013.

## (Dis)Locating Sexuality in the Global South: An Epistemological Political Agenda



Saskia E. Wieringa and Horacio Sivori (eds.), *The Sexual History of the Global South, Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Zed Books, London, 2013, pp. 288.



**Ranjita Biswas**

Ranjita Biswas is a consultant psychiatrist. She is presently affiliated to the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, as a Research Coordinator in a project on gender and labour migration. Her doctoral thesis explored how medico-legal knowledge of sexual violence is produced in India and its implications for legal justice. She has co-edited a book, *Intimate Others: Marriage and Sexualities in India* and written widely on issues of sexual violence, lesbianism and mental health. She is also actively involved with the queer rights movement in Kolkata.

Email: [ranjitabsws@gmail.com](mailto:ranjitabsws@gmail.com)



*The Sexual History of the Global South*, an outcome of the Sephis Sexualities programme, is a collection of fresh research work by young scholars from Asia, Africa and Latin America on a subject that is identified as a site of complex socio-political contestations, particularly in the context of the global south. The volume is an important contribution to the existing scholarship on sexuality studies as it attempts to rearticulate notions of both the 'global south' and 'sexual histories' beyond available western understandings of the same.

The editors, Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sivori, have a very clear objective for the book – to question the gaze that views all non-western histories and genealogies of sex as pre-rational (therefore irrational) or traditional (therefore non-modern). Given the widely accepted view that sexuality is a modern western invention, how can non-western contexts and stories of agency and desire find space in this web of globalised discourse on sexuality? This is the question that animates most of the essays that make up the volume. More importantly, the book enables a dialogue within the south, between Asia, Africa and Latin America, that is not always interpolated by North American and west European circuits of knowledge exchange.

Challenging the centre/periphery, normal/pathological, modern/traditional binaries so pervasive in discourses of sexuality, the essays chart out narratives of resistance to hegemonic categorisations, power asymmetries and benevolent assimilations. Given that despite a large body of research is being carried out in the south, discourses are still dominated largely by the northern/western paradigm; the book steers away from the usual tradition of adding and stirring the local to the global or projecting the local as a counter cannon to the global. It goes well beyond such convenient interpellations to ask difficult questions to the globalised west that constructs sexuality on its terms.

At the same time, the book is marked by its self-reflexive stance that resists the urge to discover an essential core of a south specific critical understanding of sexuality and creates spaces for revisiting its own epistemological frameworks and experiential categories. The task taken up by the authors is daunting as they attempt to unpack the south outside the overwhelming gaze of the dominant west without falling into the trap of re-presenting a newly packaged exotic south.

The twelve articles bring together diverse perspectives from ten different locations of the global south, each questioning in its own way the received wisdom of modernity constructed through the geo-political intrigues of westernisation and colonisation. The articles in the volume very meticulously plot out the contemporary discourse on gender and sexuality in the non-western world. They also grapple with issues of how sexuality is a site of subversion (Sempol, Ghafari, Cordeiro, Masvawure), reworking of the public-private divide (Vasudevan, Lopez, Kumaramkandath) and sometimes even rewriting the hegemonic gender-sexual norm (Biswas, Masvawure, Cordeiro, Ghafari). The articles take up categories like sexed body, gendered behaviour and sexualised desires in the backdrop of colonialism (Madero, Sadock, Masvawure), nationalism (Sempol, Vasudevan, Madero, Ndjio), family (Biswas) and medical science (Yingying, Sadock, Lopez) to examine how non-normative desiring bodies and situated subjectivities defy categorisation and discourses, perpetuated through daily material practices and textual representations.

A recurring theme of the book is what is popularly known as the 'public-private divide'. Notionally, sexuality has been imagined to be symbolic of the public/private divide where it is considered to remain outside the deliberations of the polis. More so, the homosexual, the prostitute and the deviant also remain invisible as unmarked citizens in such deliberations. The essays in this book deal with the concept of public-private, its shifting boundaries and its significant links with democratic citizenship. Foregrounding the changing meanings of what constitutes the public, the authors relocate the public-private from the understandings of static, homogeneous, divided spaces to the enactments and transactions that regulate the movements between the private and the public, investing each with a self-evident economy of 'permissions' and 'prohibitions'.

Examining how colonial and post-colonial regimes regulate sexuality in the service of knowledge production, nation building and construction of citizen subjects or delimiting the field of the erotic, the book lays bare the fabric of material-discursive interplays of subjection and subjectification. But the essays do not stop there. Each essay in its own way, some directly and some more subtly, map counter-hegemonic practices that undermine oppressive laws, regulatory norms, repressive mechanisms and

sanitising practices.

The book is an important milestone in the historical journey to understand how sexual politics interlink with processes of state formation and community building in the global south. One only wishes the book had more inputs from the other countries in South Asia and South East Asia which would have enriched the volume in terms of diverse perspectives on sexuality and its mores.

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## In the Footsteps of Mystics



Muzaffar Ali (ed.), *A Leaf Turns Yellow: The Sufis of Awadh*, Bloomsbury Publishing India, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 276.



**Kashshaf Ghani**

Kashshaf Ghani completed his Ph.D. on Sufism in South Asia from the Department of History, University of Calcutta. He has held postdoctoral positions at the University of Sorbonne-Nouvelle, Paris and the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin. Kashshaf is currently with the *Global South* Sephis e-Magazine and is working towards a monograph from his dissertation. Email: [kashshaf@hotmail.com](mailto:kashshaf@hotmail.com)

Looking into Muslim societies through lenses of disruption, violence and anarchy undermines the importance of assimilation and accommodation in shaping the community in regions like South Asia. The primary agents of this process were the Sufi saints or Muslim holy men who attached themselves to an Islamic worldview, yet enjoyed sharing the South Asian space with Hindus and other non-Muslims. The current volume is an important contribution to the study of the culture and mystical traditions of Awadh, where Sufi masters succeeded in building up 'the colourful ethos of a composite culture'. This culture moved beyond the physical confines of the shrine (*dargah*) complex to weave itself into Awadh's multi-layered heritage 'felt through its poetry, music, dance and spiritual traditions'. The volume is unique in its attempt to fill a gap in South Asian Sufi historiography by exploring Sufi settlements and their multi-layered activities in the lesser-explored region of Awadh.

Among Sufi orders in South Asia, the *Chishtia* stand out for their respect towards local traditions and customs, like the use of local Awadhi poetry in Sufi musical sessions (*sama*). S.Z.H. Jafri traces the journey of the *Chishtia* order following its shift from Manikpur to Salon (in Rae Bareilly) in *Chishtia Sufi Tradition in Awadh: Khanqah-i Karimiya at Salon*. In the course of time, Salon came to represent the 'prime mystic institution of the kingdom' (p. 73) under Shaikh Pir Muhammad (d. 1687), recognised even in later colonial sources. As a marked departure from the early-*Chishtia* ideology, the Salon shrine accepted numerous land grants from the Mughals. A critical analysis of this departure would have been useful.

If the sedentary *Chishtias* presented one end of the spectrum, at the other end were the *qalandars* or itinerant ascetics. Kumkum Srivastava in an insightful essay, *The Qalandars*, traces the multi-layered characterisation of this group, describing a *qalandar* as 'a faqir (ascetic) who is totally indifferent to the real world' (p. 86). Collating the opinions of various scholars on the origins and characteristics of the *qalandar*, Srivastava argues for the necessity to seriously examine their differences with established Sufi orders. These *qalandars* fasted, performed the obligatory prayers and believed in the Unity of Being (*wahadat ul-wujud*), yet they refused to follow the conservative elements in religion. Over time 'various problems' (p. 96) forced these *qalandars* to give up their itinerant and unsocial way of life towards a more accommodating position with established Sufi orders. However, the author refrains from elaborating on the problems hinted at, neither does she situate the *qalandars* in the context of the Sufi culture in Awadh.

Between these extremes were Sufi masters who undertook spiritual training with multiple orders, with one of them emerging as the dominant affiliation. Three such cases are discussed in the volume. Adil Mehdi in *Radical Renunciation and Love: Haji Sahib of Dewa Sharif* traces the life and activities of Haji Syed Waris Ali Shah (d. 1905) of Dewa, the founder of the *Warisiya* order (*silsila*). Though initiated and trained in the *Qadiriya* and *Chishtia* path, Waris Ali Shah took to a 'free-floating, wandering, spontaneous, even eccentric way of living and preaching, in which he laid great emphasis on the idea of love as the foremost pre-condition as well as the foremost means of knowledge, both worldly and spiritual' (p. 42). The idea of unconditional love combined with principles of simplicity and broadmindedness, reflect his training under the *Chishtia*. The author characterizes Waris Ali Shah as a 'modern' Sufi, with a modern outlook, though he does not elaborate what he means by 'modern outlook'. He could have done well by labelling Waris Ali Shah as colonial/contemporary, rather than a 'modern' Sufi master.

Apart from a culinary delicacy by its name, Kakori, in the Lucknow district, is famous for its aristocracy, scholars, literary figures, and the Khanqah Kazimia Qalandariya Sufi order. Masud Anwar Alavi in *Kakori: Piety's Mass Appeal* traces this order as it emerged from the Mughal service class under Shah Muhammad Kazim Qalandar (d. 1806). The order was affiliated both to the *Qadiriya* and *Qalandariya* methods (*tariqa*) and 'had other spiritual relationships with almost sixteen orders' (p. 62). It achieved great fame under the second successor (*sajjada nashin*) Shah Turaab Ali Qalandar (d. 1868), who apart from his austere lifestyle and spiritual achievements was also involved indirectly in the rebellion of 1857. Khanqah Kazimia was also noted for its rich literary productions in Urdu, Persian, Hindi and local dialects. Kazim Qalandar was fond of music and his book of poetry called *Naghmat ul-Asrar* written in fluent *Braj bhasha* 'is a beautiful rendition of mystical knowledge and truth' (p. 59).



The narration comes to a close with the death of the last successor in 2003, and in the process vividly captures the rise and the severe crises through which the shrine had to pass following the Mughal decline, rise of the British and eventual partition of India in 1947, all of which left their mark on the order while at the same time prepared them to come into terms with the vagaries of postcolonial times.

*Chishtia* and *Suhrawardia* apart from being the foremost Sufi orders in South Asia are also considered different in their approaches towards spiritual and worldly affairs. This difference was reconciled in the spiritual personality of Shah Mina (d. 1478) of Lucknow who, along with his masters, was affiliated to both the orders. Parveen Talha in *Makhdoom Shah Mina: A Born Saint*, provides a hagiographical account of the mystic, and calls him a 'born saint' or *zinda pir* (p. 231) on account of his fantastic miracles (*karamat*), some of which are rather stock-in-trade in South Asian Sufi literatures.

Shah Mina appointed two successors (*khalifas*) during his lifetime, one of whom, Makhdoom Shaikh Saaduddin (d. 1516), also known as Bade Makhdoom Saheb, forms the subject of Vishvjit Prithvijit Singh's article titled *Bade Makhdoom Sahib of Khairabad and the Sufis of Sitapur*.

*Miyan Sahib: Faith in the Time of Rebellion* by Farhat Nasreen looks into the life of Syed Ahmad Ali Shah Miyan Sahib (d. 1895) of Gorakhpur, more particularly his involvement in the Revolt of 1857. A Sufi master who left an eyewitness account of the revolt in his works *Kashf ul-Baghaavat Gorakhpur* (Unveiling of the Uprising at Gorakhpur) and *Noor ul-Haqiqat* (Light of Truth), Miyan Sahib invited the ire of rebel Muslim leaders, who severely damaged and looted the shrine complex, by protecting British officers of his town. His accounts help challenge the dominant discourse of religion as a major determinant of the revolt, by focusing on 'the economic plight of the common man' (p. 165). Miyan Sahib's position in favour of the peasants, whose condition never improved 'between the mighty Mughal Empire and the British Raj' (p. 165), throws light on the landlord-revenue officer-moneylender nexus through the eyes of a Sufi master.

The dynamicity of Sufi traditions in Awadh survived through their ability to challenge dominant paradigms. In *Farangi Mahall and the Sufis of Bansa Sharif*, Francis Robinson visits Farangi Mahall, the leading centre of scholarship on Islamic rational sciences in eighteenth century India, to explore the symbiotic relationship between Farangi Mahall and the Sufis of Bansa in the Barabanki district. Shah Abdul Razzaq successfully established the *Qadiriya* branch in the teeth of an undisputed *Chishtia* dominance in Awadh. In the same vein, Mushirul Hasan in his perceptive account on the north-Indian *qasba* (small town), titled *Qasbas: A Brief in Propinquity*, challenges the urban-centric discourse on north-Indian culture. *Qasbas*, for Hasan, proved to be 'the involuntary heirs of the once-powerful Indo-Persian culture' (p. 112). Through a study of these sleepy townships, Hasan reiterates the importance of looking beyond major urban centres, like Lucknow, in order to explore the rich cultural and mystical traditions of north India in the aftermath of Mughal decline.

Sufi establishments in Awadh played a significant role in building up a syncretistic environment through the combination of Indo-Persian cultural traditions. Madhu Trivedi's *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* explores the impact of this synthesis as manifested in art, architecture, poetry, painting, as well as language and religious customs. Shafey Kidwai in *Awadhi: A Root that Binds*, and Francesca Orsini in *Sufis and Krishna Bhakti in Awadh* studies the contribution of language towards building up a composite culture. Kidwai attempts to situate Awadhi, in contemporary times, by looking into the 'origin, growth and its literature' (p. 132) along with its acceptance as a language of literary and intellectual pursuits. Orsini argues that while 'Persian was the language Awadhi Sufis used, a closer look reveals that they must have spoken in the vernacular and that they listened to and composed songs and verses and tales both in Persian and Hindavi' (p. 143). In support of her argument, Orsini explores the extensive use of Krishna songs written and circulated by Sufi masters in mystical sessions to impart lessons on Sufi spirituality.

It is ironical that this fabric of a rich composite culture is being shredded by divisive forces which, as the review is being written, have turned brothers to foes. With religious structures razed and communities hounded from villages, Asim Rafiqui's *The Sufis of Ayodha: A Photo Essay* familiarises us with the deep suspicion and resultant hatred that prevail in the land where the tradition of Krishna bhakti

was appropriated by Sufis to explain the concept of Unity of Being (*wahadat ul-wujud*). All of which seems a distant illusion.

Literary tradition in the vernacular created opportunities for compositions and adaptations from multiple sources. Smita Tewari Jassal in *Folk Origins of Maulana Daud's Chandayan* offers a fascinating account of how folk ballads inspired Sufi mystical narratives. A disciple of the nephew of the renowned *Chishtia* mystic Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag Dehlvi, Daud's *Chandayan* composed in Hindi in 1379 remains the first of its kind to appropriate a local oral tradition of love and romance between Lorik and Chanaini and adapt it 'fruitfully to the larger project of disseminating Sufi ideology' (p. 152). Languages travel distances, and carry with them traditions which are accepted by people who adopt these tongues. When Urdu was introduced in Lucknow by Mughal officials in the early eighteenth century, it revived with its arrival the lost art of extempore storytelling (*dastangoi*). Mehru Jaffer in *Dastangoi: The Drama of Storytelling* looks into this revived art through the Persian epic of *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*. Originally in Persian for the Persianised northern Indian elite, the sharing of the epic in Urdu, through the practice of *dastangoi*, opened it to the masses leading to the addition of 'an astounding number of Indian stories' (p. 221) to the original narrative.

Rituals and practices constitute some of the primary elements that shape spaces and cultures across generations. For Lucknow, observing Muharram<sup>1</sup> provided such an integrating bond when, as Mushirul Hasan argues in *Muharram: An Individual and Collective Experience*, Lakhnavis, for ten days, shared the pain (*karb*) and trial (*bala*) of the martyrs of Karbala (p. 170). The account takes us through the intense grief and lamentation Lucknow immerses itself in these days, together with the demonstrations, processions, writing of elegies (*marsiya*) and dirges (*soz*), and singing them in assemblies (*majlis*). Apart from bringing together Shia and Sunni Muslims, as Ali Khan Mahmudabad narrates in *Muharram: Re-Living a Sacrifice*, Muharram also diffuses religious boundaries through participation of Hindu men and women, by having Hindu rulers as patrons, 'cantors (*marsiya khwans*) learning ragas and raginis rooted in the Hindu faith' (p. 181) and compositions in Awadhi dialect.

One of the defining mystical practices among South Asian Sufi orders is their attachment to music as a source of spiritual succour. Even before *qawwali* (meaning 'utterance') became popular as the dominant form of Sufi music, the practice of *sama* (meaning 'audition'; also the practice of listening to mystical poetry with or without musical instruments to enhance spiritual ecstasy) was the most important exercise primarily among the *Chishtia*, but also other Sufi orders. Yousuf Saeed's *Qawwali and Sufi Sama in Awadh* 'tries to survey the spaces and institutions that nurtured *qawwali* and Sufi music in Lucknow and its environs' (p. 202). Along with the above Gopi Chand Narang's *Indo-Islamic Cultural Fusion and Qawwali* provides the reader with a fascinating account of how Sufi music developed as a genre in Awadh through the amalgamation of Indo-Islamic musical cultures. *Qawwali* constituted the most popular form of expressing mystical ideas and principles, with a rich vernacular tradition for easy access of the masses, not without facing severe attacks from the orthodox clergy with allegations of diluting the sanctity of Islamic worship.

Three compact discs accompanying this volume, with translation and transliteration, ensure that readers are not deprived from the immersive experience of *qawwali*, by some of the most melodious voices of this tradition in contemporary times, including Abida Parveen and Shafqat Ali Khan. Awadh's Sufi tradition comes alive through the voices of these masters – a rare experience compared to the more commonly heard *qawwalis*. The volume has a promising shelf-life for the sheer variety of articles which bring alive north India's cultural capital through myriad perspectives, beyond Sufism. The articles do not limit themselves only to abstruse Sufi principles, but accommodate dimensions of music, literature, miracles and popular hagiography to ensure a wide readership.

The prolific use of poetry, eye-catching calligraphy and brilliant images add to the aesthetic content of the publication, but cannot hide its editing lapses – an incomplete translation (p. 15, 97), an incorrect translation (p. 18), together with typographical errors (p. 51, 179-80). While the map at the end helps the reader navigate through the spiritual territory of Awadh, a 'further readings' would have benefitted an engaged reader.

At a time when Awadh is making headlines for reasons undesired and unfortunate, the timely publication of this volume will enlighten readers on a culture and tradition that spanned centuries, and is currently in dire need of being resurrected to fight intolerance.

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**1** Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. On the tenth day (*ashura*) of this month, in 680 A.D, Imam Hussain the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), together with his family and seventy two companions, was martyred in the battlefield of Karbala on the banks of the river Euphrates.



Editor: Professor Samita Sen.  
*sensamita@yahoo.co.uk*



Editorial Assistant : Sushmita Chatterjee  
*sushmita.c29@gmail.com*



Editorial Assistant : Kashshaf Ghani.  
*kashshaf@hotmail.com*



Design Assistance : Hardik Brata Biswas.  
*hardikbb@gmail.com*



Administrative Assistant : Joyanti Sen.  
*sachetana@vsnl.net*



On-Line Assistance : Sadik Bhimani.  
*sadikbhimani@gmail.com*



DTP Assistance : Pradipta Saha.  
*pradiptasaha78@gmail.com*