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CCAS Statement of Purpose

Critical Asian Studies continues to be inspired by the statement of purpose formulated in 1969 by its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). CCAS ceased to exist as an organization in 1979, but the BCAS board decided in 1993 that the CCAS Statement of Purpose should be published in our journal at least once a year.

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed, 28–30 March 1969
Boston, Massachusetts
Diffusing Democracy? People Power in Indonesia and the Philippines
A Message from the Showa Emperor
The Empire Strikes Back? Huntington on East and West Debates: Big Dams in India / Capitalism and the Asian Crisis

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Diffusing Democracy?
People Power in Indonesia and the Philippines

This article critically examines the concept that democracy is spread from country to country via the diffusion of democratic ideas. Comparisons between the Philippine democracy transition of 1986 and the 1998 Indonesian movement against President Suharto reveal that, whatever Indonesian activists or authorities thought about Philippine analogs, important structural and historical differences, particularly in the states' relationships to society and in the patterns of repression and resistance that these relationships generated, produced vastly different transitions from authoritarian rule. The article compares the two democracy movements to demonstrate that different patterns of struggle in the two cases reflect distinct histories more than common models of struggle or transition. To test the possibility that Philippine models did inform Indonesian protest or the broader Indonesian transition, the fate of several styles of collective action that Indonesian activists seem directly to have lifted from Philippine precedents is considered. In examining these specific examples of diffused lessons of democracy struggle, it is argued that Indonesia and the Philippines so fundamentally differed from one another that parallels between them are misleading for both practical and interpretive purposes, and that lessons from the Philippines quite often failed in ways that precisely suggest deeper structural differences between the two democracy struggles. The work concludes by urging a greater attention to state and social structures, as well as country-specific legacies of political contention, in interpretations of transitions to democracy.

by Vincent Boudreau

If we take to heart what has been written about democracy movements in Southeast Asia, we might suspect that the region’s political transitions, so much in evidence over the past decade, somehow began in 1986 Manila. For many, Philippine “people power” defines a mode of political transformation during the long period between 1986 (when Corazon Aquino replaced Ferdinand Marcos) and 1998 (when Indonesia’s President Suharto resigned his position). Over that period, analysts, politicians, and activists have, with varying levels of precision or intent, described movements for democracy in terms of their geographic spread from Manila outward.¹ In many respects, of course, the idea is compelling. The explicitly peaceful mass demonstration in which participants demand democracy represents a new form of collective action—one that has overshadowed the once-dominant model of nationalist or communist guerrillas engaging authorities in armed struggle. Moreover, important commonalities emerged in such movements: the centrality of female survivors of nationalist heroes (Aquino, Bhumí, Aung San Suu Kyi, Megawati Sukarnoputri)², the recruitment of former regime stalwarts to the opposition movement, and the absence of any explicit and unifying movement ideology.

Yet, analysts seldom address these questions with care or consistency to determine what is spread, how it is spread, and to what effect? In general, two sorts of answers emerge. On the one hand, some contemporary authors pick up on John Locke’s basic faith in democracy as the natural endpoint in human history and describe the spread of the democratic system as an inevitable trend (eased at certain points by contact between democratic and non-democratic countries). In this sort of account, all one really needs to move a little farther down the democratic road is a shining example and a pocket full of inspiration, as Filipinos provided in 1986. Since this approach regards democracy as natural, it declines to investigate the mechanisms of its spread; indeed, its advocates regard states that buck the democratic tide as more puzzling than those that turn into the current and paddle along. For evidence, one typically is presented a list of recent transitions to democracy bound together by the metaphors of demonstration effects and rolling snowballs.³

On the other hand, those more interested in democracy struggles frequently examine how modes of confronting and prying open the old system spread from one setting to another. Such interpretations depend less on one transition’s ability to inspire others than on contests between social forces, and they propose that this activity itself poses interesting puzzles. Typically, those who envision democratic transitions as processes of struggle examine how ideas about this struggle spread. Some approach the question of spread, or diffusion, by detailing technological developments that allow one society to tune into events abroad more easily than another. Yet such technology-based explanations are most useful in identifying historical thresholds of connection beyond which new forms of protest may develop;⁴ for any historical moment, however, they seldom can explain why increasingly pervasive potential networks only periodically help the transnational spread of movement ideas. Others approach the problem in both more empirical and more political ways. By tracing the rise and fall of coalitions, conflicts or con-
influences of interest, and the interacting plans of different social forces, transactions theorists explain the progress of liberalization and democratization. Regarding these interactions, analysts increasingly argue that ideas and frameworks for democracy affect potential coalition patterns and objectives; in this analysis, the origin of ideas about democracy becomes a significant area of concern, and many analysts attempt to address this concern by interviewing activists and analyzing their writings and speeches.

Whatever their points of difference, all approaches to transnational influences over democracy struggles tend to privilege external influences, or at least to regard them in ways that overlay, rather than interact with any struggle's internal balance of forces. A faith in the power of democratization models often underwrites hasty comparisons between quite dissimilar cases. The description of Manila as the wellspring for subsequent democratic transformations, for example, may ignore the particular conditions that allowed a peaceful demonstration to dethrone Marcos, or may assume that distinct conditions elsewhere will not inhibit massed and peaceful democracy demonstrations from occurring or succeeding. Even among democracy struggle participants, this faith in external models has been profound, often at the cost of severely misjudging a strategy's likely success or danger.

In this article, I critically examine ideas about how diffusion operates in the interpretation of democracy struggles by comparing the Philippine democracy transition of 1986 with the 1998 Indonesian movement against President Suharto. (Although Indonesian demonstrations have continued since Suharto's May 1998 resignation, I confine this analysis to the anti-dictatorship protests, for they offer the strongest grounds for comparison between the two cases and allow for the most telling critique of the diffusion approach.) In assessing the possibility of connection between the two, I concentrate on establishing their structural and historical differences, particularly in their respective states' relationships to society and in the patterns of dissent and resistance that these relationships generated. I then discuss the two democracy movements, arguing that their quite different patterns bear stronger relationship to their distinct histories of state-society relationships than to some common model of struggle.

Finally, as a way of testing the particular possibility that Philippine models informed the activities of Indonesian activists, I examine the fate of several modes of collective action that Indonesian activists seem to have lifted directly from Philippine precedents. In examining these specific examples of diffused lessons of democracy struggle, I argue that the two cases so fundamentally differed from one another that parallels between them are misleading for both practical and interpretive purposes, and that lessons from the Philippines quite often failed in ways that precisely suggest deep structural differences between the two democracy struggles.

Two Dictatorships Compared:
The Philippines and Indonesia

Despite superficial similarities between the two regimes, Suharto's New Order state differed significantly from the Marcos dictatorship. Both Suharto and Marcos seized and consolidated power in ways that reflected distinct challenges to their authoritarian ambitions and they employed a variety of strategies to overcome those challenges. Their different paths to power, moreover, resulted in different state and social legacies that

"Marcos's declaration of martial law in 1972 was a coerced legalistic step meant to establish his dictatorship. After its enactment, he violated the country's laws with impunity." (Speaker addresses an anti-Marcos demonstration in Manila. Credit: Ed Gerlock.)
ruthlessness. From early on, he had strong backers among powerful politicians, a Northern-Luzon network of smugglers and war profiteers, and members of the Chinese community. Marcos directed this support toward an effort to secure lucrative congressional committee assignments; he soon grew formidable. Yet his rise in the 1950s and 60s constituted perhaps the most notable instance of a phenomenon under way on a broader scale: old landed leaders with substantial financial resources—but little in the way of specifically political skills—were being joined, or shouldered aside, by new men who understood how to work the levers of the central state to their advantage and who were building more broadly national networks of support. These new political operators also brought characteristic interests with them. Older politicians with regional and landed power predominantly protected and extended their provincial interests, but men like Marcos had broader, more country-wide objectives precisely because they initially had weak economic bases in the regions. Not coincidentally, Marcos was among the first Filipinos who recognized the material support the United States would lend a politician perceived to be a staunch cold-war ally at a time when the character of that support was shifting from market access to more material grants. From his rise in the senate to his election to the presidency, Marcos spent his political career centralizing governmental and economic activities and laying claim to the most appealing slices of the political and economic pie. Martial law allowed him finally and decisively to prevent established political families from penetrating his new and increasingly centralized state apparatus, or from exacting terms for that penetration. Hence, while Marcos publicly directed authoritarian rule against a growing challenge from the left, he also used it in order to arrest, dispossess, and displace many members of the older political elite.

In contrast, when Suharto assumed the leadership of ABRI (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia/Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia) in 1965, he presided over what most scholars agree was one of only two institutions that could lay claim to national power—and the only one that would survive the next few months. No politically independent business class or strong religious leadership could rival the military or the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or Indonesian Communist Party) in national stature. Several factors combined to make Indonesian business tractable, including high levels of state involvement in enterprise management, a concentration of politically vulnerable Chinese entrepreneurs, and a general industrial dependence on state intervention and subsidies over a prolonged import-substitution period. Sukarno’s prohibitions had disbursed political Islam by the onset of Guided Democracy and, although some Muslim groups supported Suharto during his rise, their support never earned them much power under the new dispensation. In the early 1960s the military and the PKI controlled rival mass organization networks that included labor unions, peasant associations, and student groups. These constituted Guided Democracy’s central organizational connections to mass society. By 1963, however, the PKI had developed a clear edge in building corporatist (golongan) organizations. Beyond these more proximate organizational rivalries, a historical antagonism existed between ABRI and the PKI, a rivalry rooted in both ideological and class frictions and crystallized in the Republic’s campaign against what was dubbed—after the communists’ short-sightedMedium revolt in 1948—an “anti-national.” These antagonisms were extremely useful to Sukarno from the late 1950s and throughout the Guided Democracy period. With no organizational base of his own, he both relied on and mistrusted the national networks of ABRI and the PKI. By playing one off against the other, he retained his central power position, but he also heightened the pitch of ABRI-PKI rivalry. Fueled by this multidimensional rivalry, ABRI’s attacks on the PKI following Suharto’s rise to power resulted in the murder of between 500,000 and 1 million people. As we will see in the next section, these killings fundamentally reshaped the dimensions of social power by decisively eliminating any organized Indonesian resistance to Suharto’s New Order regime from the outset.

Institutions of Resistance

These differing paths to power dictated the forms that resistance to the two regimes could assume. Initially, Marcos jailed students and mass leaders associated with the left as well as politicians or members of the press already working against him in an established parliamentary opposition movement. But while Marcos’s martial law sweeps dispersed and imprisoned across a broad opposition spectrum, they were merely temporary. Few opposition elites remained captive far into 1973, and many who were released began to rally both domestic and foreign opposition to the regime. The radical left suffered severely during martial law’s first months, but its Maoist strategy allowed it to anticipate recovery from this dispersal, and the revolutionary movement had regained much lost ground by 1975. Moderate and radical forces often allied against Marcos, but even without such explicit cooperation, the combination of elite political opposition and rural insurgency imposed limits on Marcos’s authoritarian options. Multiple opposition poles gave the regime pause, for a state policy of harsh or indiscriminate oppression would create an anti-dictatorship alliance between communists, elite dissidents, and the mass bases that all groups could influence. Not incidentally, expatriate regime opponents such as Raul Manglapus were able to publicize such oppression and thereby jeopardize essential U.S. support for the regime. Marcos needed instead to divide parliamentary opposition from radical opposition, and try, at the same time, to prevent mass mobilization. To accomplish these goals in ways that avoided U.S. disapproval, Marcos periodically held elections (1978, 1981, 1983) and allowed brief periods of more liberalized controls over the campuses, the press, and the labor movement (1974, 1981, 1985).

Curiously, however, his short-term strategy to derail an opposition alliance produced over time more movement vehicles directed against the state. Each election, plebiscite, or liberalizing measure enticed new (as well as established) oppositionists to speak and act against the regime. Yet despite his show at liberalization, Marcos was no liberal, and he never tolerated any mobilization or protest that threatened his hold on power; new regime opponents (or claim makers, to use a social movement term) soon felt cheated of their participatory hopes, and they felt the weight of renewed authoritarian control. Hence, for example, in the minor political thaw surrounding the scheduled 15 January 1973 vote on the new constitution, recently released politicians who had been arrested soon after the imposition of martial law instigated anti-regime demonstrations so unruly that Marcos replaced scheduled elections with a nationwide show-of-hands vote. The first full-scale elections in 1978 also produced demonstrations accusing Marcos of electoral fraud. New armed insurgent groups sponsored by LABAN (Lakas ng Bayan, or Strength of the Nation) party leaders associated with Benigno Aquino
were bitterly disappointed at the cheating. Groups newly declared illegal often joined existing underground networks, as students did in 1972 when they joined the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Alternately, existing groups sometimes responded to state pressure by forming illegal affiliates, as when legal social democratic organizations radicalized in 1976 to form a small armed underground group called Sandigan (roughly, “supporter”). The combination of the left insurgency and elite opposition thus created an ebb and flow in authoritarian control and open dissent that helped create a movement network comprised of guerrilla armies, underground parties, semi-legal front organizations, and elite-backed legal institutions sympathetic to the dissident project.

By the early 1980s, expanding guerrilla and protest organizations, in combination, forced Marcos into accelerated and amplified cycles of political liberalization and crackdown that propelled the regime toward its mass-mobilization-caused demise. The 1981 repeal of martial law gave broader latitude to resistance organizations. The National Democratic Front began aggressively organizing semi-legal movement organizations among youths, women, and farmers. These took up positions alongside existing labor groups. At the same time, politicians associated with the parliamentary opposition, and those that existed in the margin between these groups and movement-oriented social democratic groups also expanded. At various moments in the 1980s—such as during the movement to boycott the 1981 elections, or in the more sustained and unified protests to the 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino—these ideologically different groups were able to force broad coalitions. Although these unity-in-action projects grew more contentious and narrow toward 1985, when disagreements emerged between the anti-dictatorship movement and right flanks, the important point is that the anti-dictatorship movement accumulated increasingly broad and established movement institutions over the years leading up to 1986, and this accumulation both forced Marcos’s periodic liberalizing gestures and produced such protest during these open moments as to compel the regime to resort to violence and cheating that in the end further polarized society and hastened the regime’s demise. Hence, while the EDSA rebellion in 1986 gained important momentum for spontaneous protest against the regime, that mobilization rested atop a trend of increasingly powerful, more organized, and broader movement activity.

Suharto faced different conditions as he consolidated his rule. Not only had mass murders utterly destroyed the PKI, they had also cast a pall over any idea of renewed left organization. Moreover, rather than facing down a rebellious student movement (as Marcos had done) Suharto drew important support from student demonstrations in 1965. In the process he acquired street legitimacy essential to his consolidation of New Order Indonesia. Throughout the late 1960s street demonstrations in Jakarta first celebrated, and then demanded stricter adherence to, what they felt was the New Order’s originally more modern and development-oriented thrust. Even when students began to criticize the regime, as in late 1970 when Suharto postponed scheduled elections, they adopted a posture of dissent rather than outright opposition. Only in late 1973 did protests leading up to the Malari riots mark a break between student movement leaders and the regime—a break that protesters announced with great reluctance and that seems only to have been possible because they received encouragement from one side of a factional dispute between rival state intelligence networks. By then, however, the government had so secured its hold on power and so successfully eliminated or domesticated potential social opponents that student protests posed little challenge to the state, particularly compared to that posed by state elites working to advance their position behind the cover of those mobilizations. Political parties were largely paralyzed by new legislation that forced their consolidation into large heterogeneous groupings—labor unions and other associations had been replaced by corporatist associations, and the only insurgent challenges were separatist, rather than state-replacing. Having cleared away the New Order’s potential opponents, the question of regime consolidation settled into one of managing the regime’s internal rivalries rather than of deflecting social challenges.

Suharto’s state never needed to accommodate dissent or protest in order to solidify its power position: it had already eliminated the possibility of any organized or coordinated social challenge to the regime. Absent this kind of opposition, even disruptive and troublesome protest or rioting could not attain the kind of coordination or longevity necessary to contend for state power—or even frame itself as posed for such a contest. Such unrest could provide opportunities for rival state factions, as it did in 1974, but the threat in such cases lay with elite rivalry rather than protest, and Suharto met such threats by shuffling state personnel, not by accommodating protesters. Hence, by the middle 1970s and the early 1980s, he could further restrict opposition-oriented organizations, precisely, we might note, as Marcos was forced to open space for them. Following campus protests in 1978, the Indonesian regime banned campus politics, which eliminated the one source of opposition that had retained institutional resources and independent organizations. Students responded by developing off-campus, NGO-based political activities directed toward small-scale local protests; initially they eschewed demonstrations altogether in favor of community development activities. When, by 1985, these groups had begun to coordinate with one another in more political protest, the regime introduced its Mass Organization legislation prohibiting mass recruitment into political organizations apart from Golkar, the government’s own quasi-party. Each of these measures helped prevent the formation of organizationally powerful bases for anti-regime activity.

As state restrictions on political organization helped constrain opposition activity, an economic boom immensely influenced protest. Activists’ critiques of regime development policies in the 1970s reflected a great deal of students’ own economic uncertainty. Uncertain individual futures, as well as broader elite concern about the regime’s economic policies and accomplishments, helped drive restless and politically skilled students to anti-regime protest. The sustained economic boom of the 1980s siphoned off these energies in two ways. First, ambitious university graduates began to see futures for themselves in the newly dynamic Indonesian economy, something that applied even to activists and workers in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Second, middle- and upper-class Indonesians seemed less restless in the 1980s than they had been in the 1970s, and less personal anxiety augmented activists’ efforts to assist workers or farmers in their local struggles. The boom combined with organizational prohibitions to limit activist careers. Not only did the fragmentation of anti-regime organizations truncate the movement bureaucracy and consequently activists’ “career opportunities” (in contrast to the Philippine situation, where some activists spent decades moving through increasingly important
assignments), but the stronger pull of mainstream careers (in further contrast to sustained economic deterioration in the Philippines) rendered sustained activism an even less attractive choice.

Hence, unlike Marcos’s fourteen-year battle with steadily expanding and diversifying protest and insurgent organizations directed against the state, Suharto faced isolated and largely episodic moments of protest that were not sustained by movement organizations. Moreover, protests against the Indonesian state lacked both the capacity and the perspective to challenge the New Order apparatus for central control: movements in urban centers commonly made moral appeals that depended on state actors’ favorable action; separatist insurrections battled to leave the Republic. Neither, however, sought control over Indonesia. Hence, dissident Indonesian campaigns (and careers) tended toward limited dissent that eventually merged back into the Indonesian mainstream; separatists, on the other hand, waged furious and committed, but politically segregated, battles. In contrast, separatist Philippine movements in Mindanao and the Cordillera mountains encountered and allied with state-replacing movements seeking to build national movement organizations. This goal led movement organizers to work for integrative political programs that accommodated different interests and communities. With no similar state power objective, Indonesian protesters rarely framed their grievances in terms that appealed to diverse perspectives or integrated diverse interests. Hence, not only were the organizational possibilities less robust under Suharto than they were under Marcos, but activist perspectives remained more specific, heterogeneous, and potentially conflicting. The difference affected state policy. Like Marcos, Suharto restricted democratic or associational opportunities after periods of protest. Unlike Marcos, however, Suharto never felt compelled to loosen those restrictions over time. While political opportunity in martial law Philippines ebbed and flowed to diffuse the opposition, Suharto consistently ratcheted down that opportunity in New Order Indonesia.

The Status of Law in Regime Movement Interactions

In regulating anti-regime protest and resistance, the Philippine and Indonesian states adopted different orientations toward the rule of law, and these differences influenced movement opportunities and activities as well. The Philippine martial law regime extended the powers of a sitting president, and, early on, concentrated on providing a legal framework for that extension. After declaring martial law, Marcos coerced delegates to an ongoing constitutional commission into scuttling debate on the working document and supporting instead a hastily drawn replacement that vastly increased executive powers. The finished document was slated to pass through a popular referendum, but as noted above, the opposition campaign attained such strength that Marcos canceled the elections and compelled newly organized village assemblies to ratify the constitution by a closely supervised show of hands. The sequence is typical of Marcos politics and was replicated with variations throughout his regime. At one level, Marcos had enough regard for procedural legality to call repeated elections and plebiscites, periodically stage human rights investigations, and formally end martial law. At another level, however, he was utterly unconstrained by these legal norms, particularly when they jeopardized state or family interests. Hence, even as the state provided for elections, trials, and assurances of political rights, it also manipulated those elections, quashed judicial independence, and retained vast and unregulated emergency powers. Laws permitting demonstrations or assuring citizens’ rights to free speech or assembly were routinely violated by arrests or extrajudicial killings, and it was in fact in the violation of such rules, rather than in the formulation of restrictive laws, that Marcos’s authoritarianism was most manifest.

In Indonesia, things proceeded in an almost entirely opposite fashion. After massive inaugural violence that the state justified in ideological rather than legal terms, and after concerted efforts to build a new state apparatus, the New Order became fascinated with legal avenues for shaping society. Indeed, unlike the Marcos regime, which often violated its own essentially fair laws, the Indonesian state more commonly produced manifestly biased laws that favored its own apparatus over other social segments and then largely adhered to these regulations. While...
Marcos typically alternated seasons of demonstrations and protests with periods of increased surveillance and arrests without changing any legislation, protests in Indonesia often triggered new packages of legislation that further restricted associational rights. While the New Order's legal fabric shifted periodically in response to these efforts, at any single moment, legal avenues of redress attracted relatively great activist attention. Legal aid organizations, particularly those that have adopted a "structural legal aid" orientation, provide a proportionally larger basis for Indonesian activism than is the case in the Philippines: Indonesian structural legal aid workers sought court venues to redress broad social inequities, while Philippine legal aid more commonly defended particular activists arrested for extra-legal acts in pursuit of those same social goals. NGO-sponsored rural advocacy, which began in Indonesia in the 1980s, made mainly legal representations to government courts and assemblies, often at local levels, against land-grabbing corporations or individuals. In the Philippines, rural populations pitted against dispossessing landlords or businesses had more regular resort to New People's Army rebels, or worked as part of national peasant organizations struggling for national reforms. More broadly, Indonesian lawyers, rather than movement activists, have most consistently challenged some of the New Order's basic organizational principles.

Apart from suggesting different political strategies to activists, these different legal frameworks influenced larger approaches to the regimes themselves. In the Philippines the utter bankruptcy of the courts and the regime's own elastic regard for legal norms suggested that efforts at redress and reform could not utilize existing state institutions. Even established politicians and social elites who ran afoul of the Marcos regime seemed rather easily to take up illegal modes of opposition against the state. More importantly, a more powerful, if illegal, mode of challenging the regime existed that attracted more dissident attention than legal avenues. Indonesians, in contrast, worked in ways that suggest a greater regard for legal arenas of struggle. Their judicial system had long been regarded as compromised and corrupt, and for this reason, many activists brought legal demands to government ministries or elected assemblies, instead of to courts. Yet the inclination to seek legal justification for its moves also reflected the comparatively stronger position of Indonesian lawyers (as compared to activists) against the state. They possess what Daniel Lev has called the lawyers' own advantage in "unruliness, disorder and disunity" that have proved resistant to the centralizing and controlling urges of a state interested in taming the profession. At the same time, the Indonesian state's more determined legalism gave advocates comparatively more room to maneuver against the state—even if they frequently did so in losing battles. Similarly, Indonesian activists gave serious thought to how they might accommodate state restrictions on protest activity—both because these restrictions were likely to be enforced with vigor, and because the state probably would not repress protest that steered clear of proscribed activity. Philippine activists could be apprehended for virtually any kind of anti-regime activity—could be killed campaigning in state-sponsored elections as easily as in illegal demonstrations—and this made the distinction between legal and illegal activities less meaningful. Hence, Philippine activists often resorted to illegal movement organizations that called for the state's replacement while Indonesian activists more commonly called for sections of the state to defend the rule of law against officials who violated it.

These different approaches to the rule of law also suggest a broader difference in the relationship between Indonesian and Philippine state authority to their respective societies. The Philippine martial law regime consistently presented authoritarian rule as an extraordinary and transitional governing mode. Given this perspective, the state did not try to mold Philippine social institutions, but rather to scatter and constrain them while the dictatorship consolidated. Ideologically, however, Marcos kept drifting toward obscure and (in practice) much-abused ideas of representation and democracy. This nominal ideological foundation constrained the state formally from privileging itself or its agents over other members of society. The New Order was unconstrained by liberal ideology, and was possessed of the view that the central state, embodying the beleaguered Indonesian community, should be privileged over individual or group interests. Hence, Indonesian laws could, with ideological consistency, replace independent labor unions with state-sponsored associations, or force independent political parties to merge into state-sanctioned parties that were, nevertheless, still underprivileged relative to Golkar (Golongan Karya), the ruling party. Given these legal and ideological foundations, however, the efforts of both states to maintain power over rivals produced different strategies for implementing their laws. The Philippine state could only assure its hegemony over a society it faced on an equal legal footing by ignoring or violating laws, which it did with impunity. An Indonesian state more able to draft and justify systematic legal biases favoring the state over citizens could more faithfully implement those laws without jeopardizing its position.

**Two Militaries**

The final important institutional difference between the two regimes lies in their respective relationships with the mili-
Within the military and did not greatly change the composition of
promote military over civilian interests eventually emerged.

First, Marcos relied on a small and relatively stable set of cronies
his inner circle once it had been established. Second, because so
structures and were identified with the regime's civilian flank, a
itary was not vastly different from the Armed Forces of the Re­
ition to such internal promotions, Marcos also mobilized civilian
round out the AFP's newly political objectives. While designed
in the 1980s. 40 These moves produced an extremely
ally from second lieutenant to captain.38

Yet as Marcos was training a new and politically active
corps of military officers to help build the martial law machinery,
other hierarchy developed inside the security forces. Marcos's
personal dependence on the military encouraged him to promote
within its ranks select personnel whose loyalty to the President
was beyond question—most famously, his ex-driver, Fabian Ver,
who became head of the unified police force in 1967 and AFP
chief of staff in the 1970s, and the civilian Juan Ponce Enrile,
who headed the Ministry of National Defense after Marcos him­
self relinquished the post.39 These moves produced an extremely
stable pattern of AFP leadership, for once promoted, men like
Ver and Enrile held their positions for years and years. In addi­
tion to such internal promotions, Marcos also mobilized civilian
graduates of leading Philippine universities—men with only ru­
dimentary military training (received in ROTC programs), but
who had the political and administrative skills necessary to
round out the AFP's newly political objectives. While designed
to bolster Marcos's power in the short term, over the long haul
these appointments and promotions proved destabilizing, for
they produced a dual hierarchy in the AFP: on the one hand, a
political and well-trained corps of career soldiers became martial
law cadres; on the other hand, these cadres often served under
rupt and professionally suspect leaders, whose rise through
the AFP had little to do with criteria that professional soldiers
acknowledged. Divisions between martial law cadres and loyalty
appointees prepared the seedbed for intra-institutional conflict
in the 1980s. 40

As to the prevalence of loyalty promotions, the Marcos mil­
itary was not vastly different from the Armed Forces of the Re­
public of Indonesia (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia,
ABRI) under Suharto, particularly over the regime’s last decade.
Still, two elements of these Philippine promotions are distinct.
First, Marcos relied on a small and relatively stable set of cronies
within the military and did not greatly change the composition of
his inner circle once it had been established. Second, because so
many military men came from outside the AFP’s main recruiting
structures and were identified with the regime’s civilian flank, a
group within the AFP that envisioned itself actively struggling to
promote military over civilian interests eventually emerged.
Hence, the cleavages within the AFP developed into large and
mutually autonomous factions with established access to the
president and fixed mutual antagonisms. Organizationally, how­
ever, there were few checks on the respective faction’s ability to
accumulate power—except for the rivalries themselves and each
leader’s loyalty to the president.

For Suharto, the military was perhaps a more tractable in­
strument, not least because unlike Marcos, Suharto was himself
a soldier. Though not a particularly important fighter during the
revolutionary period (when so many military reputations had
been established) Suharto later commanded the Central Java­
nese Diponegoro regional command and served as commander
of the Mandala campaign in Irian Jaya. Suharto’s quick actions
at the helm of the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad)
helped convert that crisis from what appeared to be a commu­
nist-supported coup into a national anti-communist campaign
that soon eliminated the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai
Komunis Indonesia, PKI), removed Sukarno from effective
power, and placed ABRI in undisputed control of Indonesian
politics. More importantly, perhaps, as an instrument of Indone­
sia’s Revolution, ABRI had a far stronger sense of its inde­
dependence and centrality to Indonesian political life than did the
pre-martial-law AFP. It had also developed formal doctrines—
most prominently the doctrine of dwi fungsi, or dual func­
tion—to assure its freedom from civilian control and its inde­
pendent role in Indonesian politics.41 Suharto began to construct
his rule from within a military strongly positioned in Indonesian
society.

This also meant, however, that Suharto did not play the
same role as Marcos did in building his military. He therefore
stood in greater danger of being upset by ambitious generals who
possessed qualifications similar to his own. Because the cur­
cency of potential rivalry between Suharto and other generals
was more similar, ABRI generals with independent power bases
were comparatively more threatening to Suharto than similarly
empowered generals were to Marcos—who as president stood
above the military. To insure his position, Suharto frequently ro­
tated generals who had acquired too much strength (or displayed
too much ambition) out of strategic positions and into formally
prestigious posts that had little actual power. At the same time,
he developed a pattern of interlocking commands according to
which powerful generals maintained some presence in rival ser­
vice branches or organizations. Hence, while rivalries existed
between different service branches, even after 1965, these were
subordinate to and contained by larger military units precisely
because no faction acquired enough autonomous power to make
a play for the top position.42 Ultimately, service branch rivalries
were resolved within the institution, and whoever controlled the
military controlled Indonesia. Thus, in their very beginnings,
the two dictatorships contrasted starkly with one another. Marcos
faced an organized left opposition settled into the countryside
and periodically supported by more moderate elite opponents
with significant financial clout, international influence, and
institutional sources of support (i.e., the Church, the universities,
and business associations). Once anti-Marcos demonstrations
began in 1975, they never completely disappeared from the ur­
ban scene. Urban and legal activists continuously tested the au­
institutional edifice for signs of a political opening. Yet these
probes occurred in the context of an armed resistance that urban
protesters could either embrace or stand apart from—and the po­
tential for either division or alliance among a broad range of dis­sidents formed the crucial political dynamic between the state
and its opponents. Martial law shaped up as an extended struggle between the left and the Marcos regime for influence over those caught in the middle of a periodically polarizing society.

The combination of insurgent struggle and popular demonstrations influenced Philippine contention in ways that become clearer with a comparative glance at Indonesia. There, absent any organized underground movement, demonstrations, even when they multiplied in the 1990s, remained isolated rather than connected to larger campaigns. Until the 1990s, no significant organizations existed to coordinate or aggregate Indonesian protest across time or space, although NGOs did render this assistance to smaller collectives. Consequently, working class protests (particularly) were organized at village and factory levels. Such demonstrations could not serve the movement-building functions they did in the Philippines, and protests that seemed unlikely to produce immediate reform quickly lost momentum. Over time, patterns of local and isolated struggle designed to circumvent restrictive policies on dissent acquired their own momentum and resonance. Hence, even when more national organizations like the SBSI (Sejahtera Buru Serikat Indonesia, or Prosperous Indonesian Workers Union) emerged in the early 1990s, they attracted but mixed support. Partly, regime intimidation and propaganda continued to link movement organization to subversion (particularly after the violent strikes in 1994 in Medan) and members of larger national organizations ran greater risks than factory-level activists. More generally, broad political organization cut against the grain of established regime proscriptions from the 1965-66 PKI killings onward, and a full-fledged political culture of caution, circumspection, and moral witness (rather than political force) worked to undermine these unions’ recruitment. Hence, Indonesian protest could never develop the dual logic that sustained Philippine movements, where protests set out to accomplish both specific demands (e.g., workers’ rights or land reform) and to recruit support and soldiers for the insurgency. Indonesian demonstrations had little organizational logic beyond those concessions they could immediately wrest from government.

Facing such varied social challenges, the two states responded differently as well. Marcos’s competition with organized opponents over his society’s political center produced for him a particular puzzle: he needed not merely to prevent demonstrations in his cities, but to prevent the potentially dangerous alliance between the moderate elites and the radical opposition movement, and to stem the flow of frustrated civil protesters to the radical opposition. Hence, Marcos alternated between periods of repression and reformist gestures. Suharto had so effectively isolated his opponents—and so thoroughly menaced the prospects of organized opposition—that he never had any real incentives toward reform. Rather, his policy throughout was to isolate and depoliticize the opposition through legislation that virtually eliminated the possibility of organizing protest, through direct attacks on dissidents and through education and conscious efforts to depoliticize language. Such work became less difficult as the economic boom swept across Indonesia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, attracting students and young activists to non-political careers.

Finally, the two regimes related differently to their coercive forces. As Marcos centralized and strengthened the AFP, he promoted loyal officers in ways that resulted in a more stable inner circle, divided into two groups but with each led by men with long records of loyal service. Marcos secured his control over these forces through strong ties with their leaders rather than by limiting their power. Suharto played ABRI’s different branches against one another in a much more active way. He reshuffled or purged ABRI leaders who accumulated too much power and arranged things so that powerful rivals held positions in each other’s organizations. The program helped assure that no single officer acquired a too strongly independent power base in ABRI. Hence, while ABRI controlled Indonesian politics, only Suharto controlled ABRI. 

Two Democracy Movements

The assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983 galvanized the Philippine opposition. The senator’s murder was one of those extraordinary occurrences on which history sometimes turns, and it set off a chain of events entirely in keeping with the larger themes of opposition to Marcos rule—electoral opportunity stirred elites to activity, authorities violently cracked down on dissent, triggering a broad mobilization that combined radical and moderate themes. Smaller-scale but similar mobilization patterns had followed the Philippine elections of 1978 and 1981. Still, several important factors distinguish the protests that began with Aquino’s assassination and ended in the 1986 popular uprising. A deepening economic crisis by the early 1980s increased the disposition of economic elites to support opposition movements. With more social support for political opposition, established movement organizations secured substantial human and material resources and substantially

"The explicitly peaceful mass demonstration in which participants demand democracy represents a new form of collective action—one that has overshadowed the once-dominant model of nationalist or communist guerrillas engaging authorities in armed struggle." (Demonstration in front of Camp Aguinaldo, Manila, February 1987. Credit: Ed Gerlock.)
increased their power. By late 1985, the regime crisis reached such proportions that Marcos called elections to re legitimize his rule. The election, however, only demonstrated that oppositionists had a more prominent and practiced leadership, new symbols, a state-sanctioned framework for mobilization, and a set of political rules binding both government and opposition parties. All of these increased the capacity of the opposition forces to challenge the state. In the re-polaterized environment created by the election and its attendant fraud, the United States rapidly withdrew support for Marcos. The final crisis also brought the military’s latent factionalism to the point of overt division and rebellion. By that point the struggle against Marcos had created progressively expanding and significantly organized dissent that was positioned to confront the regime with a state-replacing program when it was joined in 1985 by moderate resistance forces that were mobilized by the regime’s own decay.

The idea of “people power” that emerged following Mar­cos’s demise had both a general celebratory aspect and a strategic face. Filipinos moved from dictatorship to democracy with character­istic spectacle—color, music, emotion, and drama. That these images were televised worldwide helped secure for them a place in the twentieth century’s collective memory, an example for those enmeshed in their own democracy struggles.46 Beyond this long celebratory shadow, however, lessons about modes and strategies of democratic struggle also emerged from the experience. In particular, the Philippine model contained three strateg­ic elements. First, people power signified overwhelmingly large, geographically central and socially diverse demonstrations supporting the democratic cause. Second, people power was nonviolent—and broadened its social base explicitly by re­fraining from violence. Finally, people power worked in significant part to convince the military to break with the dictatorship and support the popular movement.

On the face of it, it seems improbable that Indonesian events in 1998 would follow a Philippine script. Rather than emerging as a central anti-dictatorship movement, as in the Philip­pines, Indonesian political contention during the first half of the 1980s was scattered, as it had been throughout the New Or­der. Workers’ strikes, among the most consistent and powerfully organized forms of Indonesian dissent through the 1990s, tailed off by the end of 1997. Riots in the countryside accelerated from the beginning of January until the middle of February. They started in East Jember (in East Java) on 3 January and occurred outside Cirebon in West Java (13-16 February), on Sumatra (13 February), and in Sulawesi and Lombok (14 February).47 As these rural riots were taking place, Indonesia’s public intellectuals46 also began to gather more frequently in round tables and at lectures and seasonal Halal Bihalal celebrations, events that had become staples of their cautious advocacy for re­form. In such gatherings, “critical social leaders” suggested a na­tional dialogue with government officials, as Amien Rais, did on 7 January, decreed government policies and deteriorating eco­nomic conditions, or nominated themselves to contest the presi­dency (Rias and Megawati Sukarnoputri, for instance). Most such fora produced criticism of the regime that drew press attention, stirred excitement among Jakarta’s elite, and sometimes merited a government response. Yet press coverage and state­ments demanding reform were about the extent of the concrete political activity these fora produced, and the meetings never in­stigated more concrete political activity. Indeed that anti-gov­ernment criticisms remain purely rhetorical seems to have been one of the unwritten rules that guided these fora and permitted them to take place.47

Riots ended by the second week in February just as new protests by ad hoc pro-Megawati Sukarnoputri groups like the Barisan Merah Putih (BMP, or Red and White Front) and the Tim Pembela Demokrasi Indonesia (TPDI, or Team for the Defense of Indonesian Democracy) began protest marches in Jakarta (starting on 9 February). These demonstrations, in turn, ended by 20 February, partly because the government issued repeated statements prohibiting street demonstrations and partly because soldiers (later identified as part of the Kopassus [Komoro Pasukan Khusus, Indonesia’s Special Forces Command]) began covertly abducting activists. Despite the prohibition on street dem­onstrations, on 23 February, a women’s group called Suara Ibu Peduli (SIP, or the Voice of Concerned Mothers) rallied outside the Hotel Indonesia, an event that produced several follow-up press conferences and a courtroom confrontation, but did not spark further protest demonstrations. As the SIP protesters were being hustled away by police and soldiers, another protest, by students at the University of Indonesia, was taking place—among the first university-based protests in a series that would soon sweep across virtually all parts of Indonesia.

What is striking about protests and riots to this point, partic­ularly in comparison with the Philippine case, is their isolation from one another. Labor strikes ended before riots began; riots tapered off as electoral protests got underway, the SIP protest oc­curred when electoral protests had ceased, and all the while, “critical social leaders” were giving lectures and issuing state­ments, though they refrained from taking direct leadership roles in the protests. In large measure, long-standing New Order prohibitions on political dissent and organization help explain this separation, for aggrieved populations had little political connec­tion with one another that might help coordinate their activity. The hallmark of Philippine protest toward the end of Marcos’s regime (massed demonstrations sponsored by multisectoral co­alitions—involving labor, farmers, women, and students) there­fore, lay beyond Indonesian capacities, or indeed inclinations. In contrast the New Order’s early moves to prohibit anti-regime or­ganization, backed by the chilling precedent of the 1965-66 kill­ings, quickly replaced ideas of political movements (which rec­ruited and deployed mass members to pressure adversaries) with the idea of protest as moral force (which relied on moral suasion and the purity of participant motives). In the resulting di­chotomy between political and moral expressions, state sources threatened by conflated dissident organizations with communist conspiracies. Hence, if public intellectuals were too cautious to call forth mass mobilizations to back their critical assertions, this disposition sprang from long-standing New Order influences over Indonesian society.

At the same time, shorter-term state actions in 1998 further divided and isolated specific streams of protest from potential al­lies. Consumer price subsidies in February helped ease the ten­sions that earlier had produced riots in the weeks leading up to the 1-11 March Special Session of the MPR (Mejelis Permusya­waratan Rakyat, or People’s Consultative Assembly). In the past, the MPR meeting to elect the president predictably pro­duced some urban demonstrations, and authorities apparently wanted to insure that such protests break out, they would not be augmented by further consumer price riots. Activist dis­appearances combined with government warnings later in Feb­ruary also discouraged electoral protests in advance of the Spe-
Indonesian newspapers carried an announcement by Armed forces movement and the state. While campus protests drew increasing reports of these demonstrations touching offbroader expressions having broken through military barricades around the campuses, but also began to resist restrictions on their forms of struggle. 

Forces Major General Djaja Suparman denying that demonstra­tion leaders, including Amien Rais, to plan mobilizations to disrupt the MPR. As with the Sofjan case, a round of military disclosures proved enough for all those suspected to disassociate themselves from any such meeting, and to issue calls for national unity.

The student demonstrations dissipated, and even those students who made it to the streets continued to distinguish themselves from non-students by cordons and distinctive university jackets. The student protests did start to garner support among university alumni, many of whom belonged to a professional and business class that was worried about the economic crisis and the state leadership. Still, the confrontation between students and soldiers was often tense and dangerous, and outbreaks of violence and charges that the military used excessive force stoked the resistance.

Alongside state efforts to fend off student protest, parallel battles against international pressure and internal fragmentation also took place. From the onset of the monetary crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and related financial institutions came to exercise considerably more power in Indonesia. As the devalued rupiah and economic slow down undermined Indonesian efforts to exercise considerably more power in Indonesia. As the devalued rupiah and economic slow down undermined Indonesian efforts to meet foreign debt obligations, state leaders entered negotiations with the IMF for short-term stabilization assistance.

The IMF, however, demanded substantial reforms as a precondi­tion for that assistance, including reforms in the banking sector, determined efforts to reduce corruption, and an end to consumer price subsidies. By February, even sharper disagree­ments emerged between Indonesian authorities and the IMF over Suharto’s intention to introduce a fixed exchange rate and currency stabilization board. The standoff placed two important pressures on the regime. First, IMF reforms would make it more difficult for the state to meet short-term social demands. An end to price supports might be essential to Indonesian economic re­form, but it risked provoking renewed rural unrest if commodity prices were to rise once more. Similarly, provided that a currency stabilization fund was not exhausted by speculative assaults (which was of course a real danger), the fixed rupiah rate would have helped Indonesian investors (and Suharto family members) pay debt obligations, checked capital flight, and diminished in­vestor anxiety. Beyond the impact of specific reforms, the spec­tacle of Suharto’s losing struggle with international financial institutions vastly undermined his aura of invincibility domes­tically and altered the power equation for anti-regime activists. In light of this struggle a new idea began to dawn on some Indo­nesians, an idea suggested most directly by foreign news publi­cations, namely, that their government was seriously weakened.

Perhaps nowhere was the specter of regime vulnerability more important than in its effect on Suharto’s ability to control rogue elements in ABRI. The question of succession had lurked behind many political discussions throughout the 1990s, but the economic crisis accelerated officers’ moves to reposition them­selves to acquire more power should the Suharto regime falter. The most restless military officer seemed clearly to be Suharto’s son-in-law General Prabowo Subianto, a man who had risen rapid­ly through ABRI’s hierarchy. Prabowo had been promoted to commander of the Army Strategic Reserve Command on 16 February, at the same time that General Wiranto (of whom Prabowo had been critical) rose to take command of ABRI. Prabowo apparently calculated that social unrest and violence would increase his influence in ABRI, particularly before his promotion, when he still served as commandant of Kopassus (the special forces). According to trial evidence, Kopassus troops loyal to Prabowo had been responsible for activist abduc­tions in early 1998, and seem also to have been the most likely military parties responsible for stirring up riots in January and February. In publicized remarks, as with those he made at a
breaking of the Ramadan fast on 23 January, Prabowo placed
implicit blame for the economic crisis on ethnic Chinese. Before the
May 1998 riots reports were that Prabowo had attempted to
secure emergency powers from Suharto before the president left
Indonesia for a trip to Cairo on 9 May, and that Prabowo and sup-
porters were likely responsible for provoking rioting and the
rapes of an estimated sixty-six Chinese women in the May un-
rest. Plans for much of this activity may have been formalized
at a meeting between Prabowo and others at the headquarters of
Kostrad (Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat, the In-
donesian Army’s Strategic Reserve Command) on May 14. On
May 21, the night Suharto resigned, Prabowo’s Kostrad troops
surrounded Habibie’s house, and it was only the next day that
ABRI Commander Wiranto was able to order those troops back
to their barracks, on orders from the new president.

The events that finally broke Suharto’s weakening hold on
power combined influences of broadening protests, interna-
tional pressure, and the activities of rogue groups within the mili-

tary. On 4 May, in response to IMF demands, the government
lifted consumer price subsidies on gas and oil. Immediately, on-
going student protests, building on a month’s-long pattern of
demonstrations from campus bases, grew larger and (in a num-
ber of places) were joined by transportation workers and other
non-students (often reported in the press as rakyat, or members
of society). Starting with protests on 5 May, marines often ac-
accompanied the demonstrations, marching with the students in
what was described as a relaxed manner, sharing songs and
drinks. Without taking anti-regime positions, the accompanying
marines were able to tap into ideas of protest as “moral force” in
order to urge students to conduct their activity together with ma-

rines for the country’s benefit. Students reportedly valued the
marines’ good-natured presence, which seemed to diffuse ten-
sion between demonstrators and other security forces. This
general goodwill, however, was shattered on 12 May, when
marines (suspected to be acting on orders from Prabowo) fired on
student demonstrators at Trisakti University, killing four. Popu-
lar outrage at the murders was immediate and nationwide. At
Trisakti University itself, students, faculty and critical social
leaders gathered the next day in a memorial free-speech forum,
in which students and other speakers called for calm, and point-
eless requested that students and media representatives not stir up
the passions of the masses. By ten o’clock, however, mass vi-

olence had begun, first in the vicinity of Trisakti University, but
then across Jakarta. As angry mobs spread across the city, they
burned vehicles, gasoline pumps, and stores, and (with provoca-
tion by soldiers) they also began to loot and burn large shopping
centers throughout the city.

While it was not immediately possible to calculate the toll
in human lives, by late June one fact-finding team estimated that
by the time rioting had stopped (on 16 May), 2,244 people had
died, and 31 were missing. While earlier estimates ran higher,
in November the government’s “Fact-Finding Team on the May
Riots” reported that around sixty-six Chinese women had been
raped in what appeared to be related assaults coordinated by
troops loyal to Prabowo. Moreover, by mid-morning on 14
May, much of Jakarta was on fire; the city would continue to
burn for three days.

Security forces managed to calm Jakarta’s streets by 15
May, but the riots had fundamentally shaken popular faith in
Suharto’s ability to govern. Although the government had with-
stood student protests since February, those protests had ac-
quired a strong enough institutional base to persist until interna-
tional pressure forced the regime to take measures that further
weakened its domestic position. Mass transport protests in May
were more powerful than similar demonstrations had been in the
past because they merged with the mobilizing framework of the
ongoing and coordinated student movement, which already had
attracted elite attention. Together, these demonstrations pro-
vided new and explosive opportunities for destabilizing ele-
ments in the military, and produced the May riots.

Afterward, when student demonstrations resumed by 17
May, their demands that Suharto resign seemed counterposed to
threats of a renewed descent into chaos and violence. Badly
shaken by the riots, political and social elites began to support
student demands in preference to a government that no longer
seemed able to surmount the economic crisis nor maintain the
peace. By 19 May, students from around Jakarta had gathered at
the parliamentary building; they would remain there for the next
several days. Soon, delegations from around Java were arriving
at the building; participants estimated that upwards of 200,000
people gathered to demand Suharto’s resignation. The military
reacted with a mixture of anxiety and sympathy: they set up
roadblocks throughout the capital and on 20 May prevented stu-
dents from marching into the city, yet they refrained from taking
any action that might provoke student anger and they allowed
the occupation to continue with little interference. Increasingly,
government officials began to discuss measures (like a special
election) that might provide a face-saving way for Suharto to
leave office, but events were moving too quickly for such an ele-
gant exit strategy. Democracy advocates, party leaders, and even
parliamentary officials began speaking at rallies, and on 21 May,
fourteen members of Suharto’s cabinet resigned. That night, af-

ter pressure from House Speaker Harmoko, ABRI Commander
in Chief Wiranto, and Habibie himself, Suharto resigned the
presidency.

Comparison

If the Philippine model described a center-left coalition expand-
ing during a period of polarization, Indonesian protest acceler-
ated when a crisis-ridden state was no longer able to wait out
protest or isolate student unrest from the actions of other restless
social sectors (including rogue elements in ABRI). Previously
separate pockets of Indonesian dissent united in a violent up-
surge that divided Suharto from his erstwhile supporters. Given
the divisions in the Indonesian opposition movement, the deci-
sive elements in the transition did not involve the mobilization of
a single but socially diverse opposition movement, but a gather-
ing of more dispersed discontent, unrest, and violence (to which
the students gave a politically identifiable face) and a military
worried about maintaining national security. Suharto’s govern-
ment ended when members of his administration withdrew their
support in order to maintain—or to improve— their positions. The
initial success of the Indonesian democracy protests, then,
produced a transition within established government parame-
ters. The military did not split along pro- and anti-government
lines—but instead endorsed the president’s withdrawal from of-
cice and set about reconsolidating state power under a new lead-
ership. The opposition did not secure power—it lacked the unity
to act as a single movement organization—but it did convince
those in power to exercise their authority to move Suharto aside.
In each of these aspects, the Indonesian movement differed radic-
ally from that which ended Marcos’s career.
The essential absence of organized resistance to Suharto’s rule and his firm control over the major institutions of rule (ABRI and Golkar) rendered the Indonesian regime far less vulnerable to the possibility that an external challenge would split and replace the regime. Indeed the Indonesian state’s comparatively strong central monopoly over political organization made the regime structurally more vulnerable to either a palace coup or an unorganized mass uprising. Not surprisingly, what happened was in fact a combination of the two: rising mass activity, synchronized powerfully by a pervasive economic crisis, challenged for the first time the state’s capacities to repress or isolate contention. Yet this popular contention had neither the organizational capacities nor the political leeway to direct these expressions against the state in a single movement. Although students laid rhetorical claim to broad support from Indonesian society, and in some places even mobilized some workers or farmers, the democracy movement rose on an essentially student base of support. The Indonesian state had never made substantial concessions to protest or to dissent—rather they had followed each episode of contention with more restrictive laws further marginalizing dissent and depoliticizing society. Each such move strengthened the state vis-à-vis its people, and made it less likely that principled and peaceful appeals would demonstrate the regime’s limits or exacerbate its divisions. The Philippine state’s concessions to its center-left opponents helped make the moderate opposition increasingly credible to both international actors like the United States and members of the Philippine social and state institutions. Indonesian policy never allowed any strong and organized alternative to the state to take shape—even when political tolerance increased. Hence, as Suharto entered his final crisis, the only Indonesian actors positioned to take power were those with some existing access to state power.

Beyond Indonesian democracy advocates’ relative inability to contend credibly for state power, the state apparatus was structurally less likely to divide as the Philippine state had done. Marcos cultivated a small number of close allies of long standing, and from them he formed a remarkably stable inner circle: key figures in 1986 like Defense Minister Enrile and Constabulary Chief General Fidel Ramos had helped establish martial law in 1972. When factional struggles moved members of that inner circle to challenge Marcos, they brought substantial resources into the contest against the president, accumulated over long and uninterrupted years at the helm of state institutions. In contrast to Suharto, Marcos had not bothered to shuffle his lieutenants or provide checks against their power. When the AFP divided, its rebel faction almost naturally sought allies in the strong and credible opposition movement. Suharto, by contrast, had regularly shuffled and purged officers who had accumulated an uncomfortably large amount of power. The movement of ABRI commanders into one-term stints as vice-president, helped rotate leaders through and out of command positions, as did more purposeful moves to marginalize generals who grew too powerful. Hence, no single officer developed too strong or too autonomous a power base, and all were kept in check by mutual suspicions, rivalries, and a fear of Suharto. Hence, when Suharto was visibly weakened in 1998, no single faction was positioned to move against the rest. In this situation, the regime’s apparent inability to contain violence or economic decline moved government leaders like ABRI Chief of Staff Wiranto, House Speaker Harmoko, and eventually even the vice president to press Suharto to resign. Each, however, moved on behalf of state institutions whose actors had been kept so individually weak, in relationship to the central authority, that they had no choice but to act as unified institutions.

Diffusion?

Where, then, does this leave ideas about the spread of democracy movements through demonstration effects and diffusion? So far, the argument indicates that important differences, associated with long-term patterns of state and social power, distinguish the democracy movements in the Philippines and Indonesia. Accordingly, the Indonesian transition did not reproduce some of the more prominent features of Philippine patterns of struggle. In place of the heterogeneous but unified central Philippine demonstrations, Indonesian protest was scattered and decentralized until the very end. While nonviolence was necessary to the Philippine movement’s success in winning crucial support from the political center, in Indonesia only a shocking degree of violence finally convinced sections of the New Order state, as well as non-state elites, that Suharto could no longer govern the Republic. Finally, Indonesian military sympathies with demonstrators worked mainly through the marines, and functioned as much to contain violence as to undermine the regime.

Despite important structural differences between the two cases, there is still reason to believe that ideas about Philippine people power were on at least some peoples’ minds in Indonesia throughout 1998.61 The theme emerged in interviews I conducted with movement participants and leaders, as well as in printed movement materials. One Jakarta activist said, “We are testing the popular reaction to our demonstration. We cannot do anything without mass support, but we are hoping that our actions will attract a sort of spontaneous ‘people power’ support. Remember in the Philippines, it was electoral protest that touched off mass protest.”62 In Yogyakarta, students involved in a hunger strike on 27 February said, “Right now, we are isolated on the campus, and we know that this is a problem. We’re trying to figure out how to link up with people outside, in the society. It’s clear that as long as we’re confined to this campus, we’ll never have the opportunity to launch something like people power in the Philippines.”63 A survey of the newspaper Kompas demonstrates that journalists also frequently referred to the 1986 Philippine transition in the first months of 1998. From December 1997 to the end of February 1998, only one Kompas article referred to those events: a negative reference in a 28 January 1998 speech by Muhamadiyah leader Amien Rais that equates people power with revolution and violence.64 From March through May, fifteen separate Kompas articles discussed people power, and on three occasions—20 March, 28 March, and 13 May—Kompas writers described the Philippine movement in some depth.

Yet how can we assess the practical importance of these ideas? Beyond merely considering the explanatory power of countervailing structural arguments, I think we might also consider instances in which Indonesian activists attempted collective tactics out of keeping with established Indonesian patterns of struggle and suggestive of Philippine techniques. Early evidence that Philippine lessons figured into the Indonesian effort came in July 1996, when Yogyakarta activists staged a protest called the “Action of 1,000 fruits.” The account of the event published by LBB (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia, or Legal Aid Foundation) quotes a student who explains that the action was inspired by Philippine examples.65 Similarly, the SIP demonstration cited above featured participants attempting to hand
bread and flowers to security forces as these latter closed in to disperse and arrest protesters. The soldiers brushed aside both offerings, arrested three women, and chased everyone else away. Leaflets handed out at a press conference three days later at the LBH office drew explicit parallels between the SIP actions and those in the Philippines. Finally, at the standoff between students and soldiers on university campuses, students explicitly directed many protest banners to military personnel stationed outside the campus gates, attempting to sway military sympathies.66 Throughout the student demonstrations, moreover, the military often received cheers from demonstrators, even after initial violent incidents began between students and military.67 Even where students and military personnel most successfully established good relations with one another—as when marines accompanied student marchers in early May—that good will served a different function in the Indonesian case than it had in the Philippines. Structurally inhibited from joining anti-regime demonstrations, marines developed good will with the students to prevent violence, which ultimately helped smooth the transition to a leadership change within the existing state institution.

There is less specific evidence that Indonesian activists attempted to adopt patterns of nonviolence or massed and centralized multiclass struggle from the Philippines, although both ideas about nonviolence and unity between student protesters and mass members of Indonesian society received a fair share of lip service. In fact, however, many student demonstrations from April through May produced violence between protesters and security forces trying to confine protests to the campuses. The most explicit activist pleas for nonviolence occurred in the immediate aftermath of the May riots and certainly represent reactions to that violence more clearly than they do any application of lessons from the Philippines. Similarly, despite discussions about student activists joining with mass society, the final demonstrations against the regime appeared to be more exclusionary than inclusive. In contrast to the anti-Marcos EDSA rebellion, which brought together a cross section of Philippine society, the Indonesian demonstrations differentiated students from non-students, even excluding non-students from the final protests at the parliamentary building. This approach to demonstrations was rooted in Indonesian suspicions of explosive and undisciplined mass violence—as when protests in 1974 erupted into the Malari riots when Jakarta residents of working communities joined student protesters. Hence, almost without exception, forms of struggle that seem most likely to have been copied from Philippine precedents (whether in fact they actually were or not) failed instructively, in ways that emphasize differences between Indonesian and Philippine power relationships.

The point, of course, is that Philippine examples and tactics worked as they did within a particularly structured context between a society and its state. The central Philippine struggle occurred over the kinds of support—from the middle class, established Church and social institutions, and the United States—that Marcos had enjoyed with varying degrees of enthusiasm because no credible alternative existed. When a more broadly elaborated opposition took shape, including political moderates, it pried these sources of support away from the regime. In this context, peaceful protest was an essential element of a political formula designed to cultivate non-radical support, and the entire project was led by strong movement organizations able to plan and implement a strategy of struggle. Even where Indonesians paid close attention to Philippine events, many believed the cases too dissimilar to permit the transfer of tactics from one place to another. Some recognized that the Indonesian state had a more elaborate and successful repressive apparatus than the Philippines; they felt that clearer parallels could be drawn between their own situation and that in China or Burma—discouraging thoughts, to be sure.68 Where activists attempted to apply Philippine lessons, moreover, things worked differently in Indonesia. Marines who supported the student protests did not join the movement or submit to its leadership, but friendly soldiers did take positions between activists and other troops in order to help prevent violence. Traditions of struggle also weighed against large massed movements, and established state proscriptions prevented a strong activist leadership or powerful movement organizations from emerging. In fact, even at the height of the anti-Suharto protests, the most credible and powerful Indonesian political institutions were those attached to the New Order state, and both the processes of struggle and the eventual political settlement reflect this single fact far more than the influence of models received from the Philippines or elsewhere.

Conclusions

In the foregoing, I have argued that differences in the Philippine and Indonesian states, and particularly in the programs they adopted toward political resistance, worked to produce substantial differences in the movements that ended their two long dictatorships. Even if Indonesian activists studied and tried to replicate the Philippine people power experience, I maintain that the institutions of state rule and the legacies of that state’s dominance in Indonesian society essentially foreclosed the “people power” option to the Indonesian protesters. The argument has implications for the status of “diffusion” as an explanation for how and when democracy movements occur. In the contemporary age of global communication and transportation technology, we can no longer rely on the possibility of information exchange to explain diffusion—for most modern citizens of places like Jakarta and Manila can learn about politics overseas without too much trouble. Rather it makes more sense to concentrate on the specific needs and questions with which individuals turn their attention to these foreign examples. Students and democracy advocates in Indonesia may have turned to the Philippines in order to ask how Filipinos managed to mount so massive a democracy demonstration with such success; but the relationship between this action and political practice is particularly difficult to assume. While one who examines democratic transitions as a kind of evolutionary process might be fooled into thinking that ideas about democracy are crucial beginnings to that transition, anyone with a deeper appreciation of a democratic transition as a struggle between those holding power and those who are marginalized will be less sure.

In Indonesia, arguments about the centrality of democratic ideas to transitions to democracy have particularly strong standing, and a fair amount of discussion about opposition politics during Suharto’s regime has centered on the spread of opposition ideas. This is the case, however, precisely because of the contours of New Order repression and its effect on the opposition. With the state so actively vigilant against opposition organization, but more willing to allow a kind of political (consequentially theoretical) debate, critical members of society often accepted what was given them, gathered to discuss democracy, and began, over time, to imagine that this sort of intellectual exercise was central to building democracy itself. In this, of course, many
were abetted by a strongly cognitive bent in some of the democratization literature, which either describes the growth of democratic ideas as a consequence of an expanding middle class or the diffusion of democratic ideas as directly productive of democracy struggles. The comparison between cases of such protests, however, helps demonstrate more than simply the differences between cases that too often have been discussed as separate iterations of the same basic phenomenon. It also emphasizes that democratic transitions are different from merely evolutionary processes or the acceptance and application of new political ideas. Rather, democratic transitions, particularly when these take place via broad protest movements, are contests for political power between societies and regimes. While ideas about democracy figure in these struggles, they are by no means determinate. More fruitfully, analysts seeking to understand why movements emerge as they do, or produce the post-transition states they have, should look at the structures that mediate regime repression and the mobilization of social power against that regime.

Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges suggestions made by Mary Callahan and Ben Abel. Both helped me sharpen the arguments presented in this article.


4. The idea of increased connection between and within societies producing new forms of collective action has been important in what has been called the political process school of social movement theory. Sidney Tarrow, for example, associates the rise of the national movement with newly elaborated communication and transportation networks (Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994], especially pp. 48-78). McAdam and Rucht link the comparatively more global spread of anti-war and student movements of the 1960s to new electronic media. (Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, “The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas,” _Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science_, no. 528 (1993): 56-74.)


Enrile, Ricardo Silverio, and Herminio Disini, all of whom parlayed modest origins and political skills into powerful political and economic positions.


11. According to Amnesty International, while most of the 30,000 people arrested during the first months of martial law had connections to radical groups, many parliamentary oppositionists were also arrested. Benigno Aquino, for example, was the very first political prisoner under Marcos. (Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Republic of the Philippines*, 22 November-5 December 1975 [London: AI Publications, 1977]). As David Wurfel points out, while there were arrests among the legal opposition, particularly from 1972 to 1974, martial law struck more decisively at their power base by closing institutions like the press and Congress, which elites depended on. See David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), pp. 114-53. See also Thompson, *The Anti-Marcos Struggle*, pp. 57-63, and a staff report prepared for use by the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Korea and the Philippines, November 1972* (Committee Print, 93rd Congress, 1st Session, 18 February 1973), pp. 1-4.


18. Throughout this work, I describe Indonesian protest or movements in contradistinction to movements that have adopted some other identity (Acehnese, West Papuan, East Timorese); in contrast to such separatist movements, Indonesian movements challenge political authority in Indonesia without taking themselves outside the Indonesian national framework.


21. One of the most embarrassing such anti-regime attacks by an expatriate elite was the publication in 1976 of Primitivo Mijares’s book *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos* (San Francisco: Union Square Publications, 1976).

22. See Wurfel, *Filipino Politics*.

23. Accounts of some of the more prominent student leaders to join the NPA can be found, in biographical form, in Six *Young Filipino Martyrs*, ed. Asuncion David Maramba (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Pub-


40. Miranda, Politicization of the Military.


42. David Jenkins, Suharto and His Generals: Indonesian Military Politics, 1975-1983 (Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1984), Cornell Modern Indonesia Project Monograph Series, no. 64, especially pp. 134-56.

43. See Thompson, The Anti-Marcos Struggle.

44. For discussions that describe the international impact of the Philippine transition in such celebratory terms, see virtually every article in Felipe B. Miranda, ed., Democratization: Philippine Perspectives (Oлим, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1997).

45. Data on these strikes comes from a review of reports in the Indonesian periodicals Jawa Pos, Kompas, and Media Indonesia.

46. Amien Rais used the phrase “tokoh-tokoh masyarakat yang kritis” (critical leaders of society) on 6 January 1998 to describe the sorts of people I mean (Kompas, 7 January 1998). University professors, journalists, NGO leaders, and heads of large religious organizations all fall into this category. They are noteworthy not because they speak for specific organizations, but because they have somehow attracted a more diffuse following, largely by the force of their ideas or suggestions.

47. All of those who allowed their names to be circulated as alternative candidates for the presidency and the vice-presidency, for example, had withdrawn their names before the MPR met, and so the discussion about alternative presidential and vice-presidential candidates at the special session never produced a movement to advance those candidacies.

48. News of the case was front-page fare in Indonesian dailies such as Kompas and Suara Pembaruan from early March through 20 March.

49. See the issues of Suara Pembaruan for 18 and 19 March, for example.


51. The efforts of students to leave campus in their demonstrations is reported as something new in a Kompas article on 3 April 1998, “Keberanian Pecah di UGM dan IAIN Yogy, 29 Mahasiswa dan Pelajar Luka-luka” (Violence breaks out at the University of Gadjah Mada and the Government Islamic Institute, 29 students wounded).


55. In an interview with the Straights Times on 5 November, Marzuki Darusman said that “testimony on what transpired at the Prabowo meeting further suggested that the “riots were a high-point in an escalating process which started long before the May riots took place.”

56. According to Suara Pembaruan, for example, 10,000 university students, accompanied by high-school students and members of “society” staged a four-kilometer march in Jakarta on May 4. In Semarang, on that same day, a smaller demonstration march of 500 students joined with workers and becak (trishaw) drivers to denounce increased oil prices. That same story reported other demonstrations on May 5 in Bogor and Bandung, and an additional 10,000 person protest in Unggungkandang the next day. Suara Pembaruan, “Mahasiswa Dan Pasukan Keamanan ‘Long March’,” 6 May 1998.


58. These figures were assembled by a fact-finding committee called the Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan (Volunteer Team for Humanitarianism) in its 28 July 1998 report. These figures are generally supported by the report issued by the government-sponsored Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta (TGPB, or Consolidated Fact-Finding Team). “Pemerintah Akui Ada Perkosaan Massal” (“Government admits that there was massive incidences of rape”) Media, 22 September 1998.


61. Apart from the examples cited in this article, more systematic evidence that Philippine examples have influenced the Indonesian “democracy discourse” can be found in Uhlin, Democracy and Diffusion. For the most part, however, Uhin’s work concentrates on ideas about democracy, rather than on modes of struggle, and does not examine what either discourse or modes of struggle may have been learned from Philippine (or other) examples.

62. I assured my interview sources of anonymity, therefore I will not refer to them by name. I use a coded system to specify the tape, the tape side, and the date of the interview, e.g., Tape I.1.A, 13 February 1998.

63. Interview I-73, 27 February 1998. I interviewed students on the campus of Gadjah Mada University near the site of their hunger strike, which at the time had entered its fourth day.

64. The quote appears in a Kompas article entitled “Amien Rais: Mari Bersatu, Jangan Saling Menyalahkan” (Amien Rais: Let’s unite, don’t blame one another), 28 January 1998. The quotation translated above, in the original: “Ada filosofi setiap Anda membuat kekerasan maka akan timbul kekerasan baru. Dengan begitu kekerasan perlu dihindari, cara-cara revolusi, dan people power hendaknya kita buang jauh-jauh dari kamus politik kita” (There is a philosophy that when you act in violence, you bring out new violence. Because of this, we need to avoid violence, and modes like revolution and people power need to be thrown out of our political dictionary).


66. Field notes from a visit to the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) on 4 March 1998, and to the University of Indonesia on 2 March. Personal communication with Gadjah Mada University students in Jogjakarta; their description of the demonstration on 6 March also confirms this strategy.

67. Increasing conflict between soldiers and students, most manifest in the fatal shooting of student demonstrators at the special legislative assembly between 11 and 13 November 1998, soon ended demonstrators’ broad articulations of support for the military. By 15 November 1998, movement activists and NGOs were increasingly calling for ABRI Chief Wiranto’s resignation and for the drastic restriction of military powers and prerogatives. See, for example, Jakarta Post, “Calls Mount for Habibie and Wiranto to Step Down,” Monday, 16 November 1998.

A Message from the Showa Emperor

The American occupation of Japan following World War II lasted from 1945 to 1952 and produced a mixed legacy. Initially, the Americans promoted a progressive and even revolutionary agenda of "demilitarization and democratization." As the cold war intensified, however, a "reverse course" policy assumed center stage, in which U.S. policy-makers threw their support behind the reconstruction of Japan as a conservative cold war bastion against the rise of communism in Asia.

In his recent book Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II, John W. Dower assesses these developments, paying particular attention to how the Japanese people themselves responded to defeat and the multiple challenges of creating a new society. The essay that follows below expands on one of the themes in Embracing Defeat: "oxymoronic democracy." One aspect of this was the "bureaucratic democracy" that the U.S. occupation authorities promoted through their own authoritarian, top-down modus operandi. Another manifestation of "oxymoronic democracy"—that focused on in this article—was the peculiar "emperor-system democracy" that General Douglas MacArthur and his top aides ensured by not only retaining the Japanese imperial institution, but also insisting that Emperor Hirohito, whose reign defined the "Showa era" (1926-1989), be exonerated from war responsibility and retained on the throne. This article introduces (and reproduces in full) a formerly top-secret "message" from Emperor Hirohito to the Americans that Professor Dower came upon after completing Embracing Defeat.

Embracing Defeat won the 1999 National Book Award in nonfiction, and was awarded the 1999 John K. Fairbank Prize of the American Historical Association (for best historical study dealing with Asia since 1800). This present article was originally published in the September 1999 issue of the Japanese journal Sekai (and later cited as one of the "best articles of 1999" in the newspaper Asahi Shimbun). A slightly abridged version in English, titled "The Showa Emperor and Japan’s Postwar Imperial Democracy," was published by the Japan Policy Research Institute (Cardiff, Calif.) as IPRI Working Paper no. 61 (October 1999). BCAS is grateful to Chalmers Johnson of the JPRI for permission to reproduce this original version of the text.

by John W. Dower

It is always instructive for a foreigner such as myself to pick up a Japanese newspaper and look at the date. Why? Because it is such a graphic reminder that contemporary Japan operates in two kinds of time. To see "2000 (Heisei 12)" on the top of every page is to be reminded that Japan has defined itself—prudently and explicitly—as being of the world but also uniquely separate from it.

"2000 (Heisei 12)" also encodes some grand lessons of history. Its first half (2000) reflects the extraordinary hegemonic power of the Christian West, which succeeded in imposing its calendar upon the entire world. This is cultural imperialism of a very potent sort indeed. The gengo ("era name") dating, on the other hand, reminds us of how strenuously the Japanese have struggled to create a unique modern identity. The gengo system, which reckons time by the reign year of the current emperor, only dates back to 1890. Its adoption is a splendid example of what scholars of modern nationalism refer to as the "invention of tradition."

That this modern "gengo identity" is inseparable from the imperial dynasty makes it even more difficult to characterize the nature of Japan’s place in the world in simple terms. Monarchy has not disappeared from the globe, but one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century was the collapse of previously powerful and charismatic royal houses in China, Russia, and throughout Europe. Even Great Britain’s constitutional monarchy, so admired by Japanese royalists, differs fundamentally from the modern Japanese imperial institution (by accepting female sovereigns and transnational intermarriage, for example, and eschewing a gengo-style calendar).

Since most Japanese also express pride in being citizens of a major "democratic" nation, the most accurate term to describe the country’s political and ideological identity would thus seem to be "emperor-system democracy." By any formal standard of judgment, contemporary Japan is a democratic society, with strong institutional guarantees of popular sovereignty and civil rights. On the other hand, the hereditary, patriarchal, and racially exclusive nature of the imperial institution points in the direction of countervailing and non-democratic values and ideals. Like the two kinds of time that Japanese readers confront daily in their newspapers, "emperor-system democracy" is a hybrid concept full of tensions.

These inherent contradictions are neither new nor hidden. The struggle for a national identity runs like a deep current through the entire course of Japanese history since the Meiji Restoration, sometimes peacefully, sometimes violently. Its most recent vivid expression can be seen in the controversial formal adoption of Kimigayo as the national anthem, accompanied by the government’s statement in June 1999 that Kimi refers explic-
itly to the emperor "as a symbol of the country and the unity of the people" (Nihonkoku oyobi Nihon kokumin togo no shocho de aru tenno). This is obviously one more way of emphasizing Japan's "gengo identity," but the situation is more complicated. For Kimigayo, like the modern emperor system itself, is an excellent example of the constant "reinvention of tradition" in Japan. As a national anthem, it only dates from the Meiji period. It was turned into a tool of virulent militarism in the 1930s and early 1940s. And it is now being presented to the Japanese people in yet another "reinvented" form—that of the "symbol emperor" (shocho tenno).

There is more than a little irony in this present expression of Japanese nationalism, since this is not a purely "Japanese" construction at all. On the contrary, the very concept and term "symbol emperor" derive from the postwar American occupation of Japan. Like so much of what is usually presented as "uniquely Japanese" by foreign and Japanese commentators alike, Japan's present-day emperor-style democracy is a binational U.S.-Japan construction. To introduce yet another hybrid concept—this time a humorous one dating from the occupation period itself—the currently fashionable "symbol emperor" concept is peculiarly "SCAPanese." 2

I have addressed the many hybrid legacies of the occupation in my recent book, Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II. 3 In this study I was particularly concerned to go beyond the policymakers and elites on whom I had focused in earlier writings. And I emerged with admiration for the vigor, imagination, and diversity with which Japanese at all levels responded to the challenges of creating a new society free of war and oppression. In the immediate aftermath of the war, I have argued, the ideals of "demilitarization and democratization" that the American-led victors initially promoted were embraced in an enormous variety of interesting and intelligent ways. 3

The dynamism of these "grass roots" responses to defeat a half century ago is worth recalling when we address the issue of democracy in contemporary Japan. No one really predicted this. On the contrary, up to the very moment of Japan's surrender, American and British "Asia specialists" routinely characterized the Japanese people as an "obedient herd" incapable of genuine self-government. At first glance, this might seem an unusually crude example of Western racism. In fact, it was a conservative, elitist observation that was reinforced by the rhetoric and practices of Japan's own autocratic leaders and ideologues. The most obvious wartime Japanese counterpart of the Anglo-American image of the "obedient herd" was "the hundred million hearts beating as one" (ichioku ishin). The Western "experts" who spoke so condescendingly about the inability of ordinary Japanese to govern themselves were essentially parroting views they had heard in Japanese propaganda and upper-class Japanese ruling circles.

In scholarly literature, the Euro-American tendency to see Asian or "Eastern" populations as essentially homogeneous and obedient "herds" is often identified as "Orientalism." What is really involved here, however—as we see in the case of Japan at war's end (and today as well)—is a "collusive Orientalism" that rests as much on class arrogance as it does on racial or cultural stereotyping. Even in 1945, after Japan's supposedly enlightened elites had led the country into unprecedented disaster, the nation's leadership—including the emperor and his entourage as well as conservative politicians like Yoshida Shigeru—still argued that the Japanese people were incapable of governing themselves as a truly "democratic" nation and could not be trusted with too many "rights."

As it turned out, for complicated reasons involving personnel changes in Washington in the final stages of the war, initial U.S. policy for defeated Japan did not follow the "obedient herd" line. 4 On the contrary, the Americans introduced their radical agenda of "revolution from above"—and the erstwhile "obedient herd" or "hundred million" embraced much of this agenda in diversified and creative ways. In some instances, individuals and nongovernmental organizations took the initiative to promote more thoroughgoing democratization than the victors themselves had envisioned. However one may evaluate the occupation-era legacies to the present day, the "Japanization" of reform and the fundamentally hybrid or binational nature of the great institutional and ideological transformations that took place in the wake of defeat must be acknowledged.

I believe that "democracy" and "antimilitarism" both have strong roots in postwar Japan. These roots lie not in the occupation era alone, but in the deeper and more shattering collective experience of war, repression, defeat, and occupation that extended from the early 1930s until Japan regained its independence in 1952. These are not easy arguments to make to non-Japanese audiences. Skepticism about Japan runs high in Asia as well as the West—and today, as in the 1940s, it is helpful to keep the concept of "collusive Orientalism" in mind when trying to understand why much of the outside world still sees Japan as a weak democracy with un-
repentant militaristic inclinations. The many non-Japanese who still regard the Japanese people as an "obedient herd" can quote countless contemporary Japanese pundits and leaders who advance Nihonjin-ron (On Being Japanese) arguments and emphasize that "harmony" (wa) is the key to understanding Japanese social behavior. And the many non-Japanese who believe that the Japanese are still inherently militaristic can usually cite in detail the absurd denials of wartime atrocities by Japanese neo-nationalists and—beyond this—the decades-long difficulty the government itself has had in articulating a clear and unequivocal position on Japan's war responsibility.  

**Japan's Oxymoronic Democracy**

The problem, of course, is that contemporary Japanese democracy is flawed and imperfect. So is contemporary American democracy (and "democracy" anywhere else in the world). But where the weakness of Japanese democracy is concerned, it is again necessary to keep in mind the peculiar binational legacies of the occupation. The institutions of participatory democracy that the early reformers introduced were from the outset offset by policies and practices that were inherently anti-democratic. I refer to this in *Embracing Defeat* as "oxymoronic democracy." What I have in mind are two developments in particular.

The first is "bureaucratic democracy." We usually speak of August 1945 as a great "turning point" for Japan. And, indeed, it was. At the same time, however, the occupation lasted from August 1945 to April 1952 (almost twice as long as the time between Pearl Harbor and the end of the war) and was conducted by the most rigidly hierarchical and authoritarian regime imaginable: a military bureaucracy. "SCAP" was a military command. General MacArthur was the "Supreme Commander," and his authority (like the emperor's before 15 August 1945) was unassailable. Criticism of SCAP policy—or of the victorious "Allied Powers" more generally—was not permitted. This was a pure military modus operandi rather than an "American model" as such, and it severely impeded the maturation of genuine participatory democracy. SCAP did not merely perpetuate the model and practice of top-heavy bureaucratic control that had become so conspicuous in Japan during the war years. By working "indirectly" through the existing government, the occupation command actually gave elements within the Japanese bureaucracy even greater control than they had possessed up to the time of the defeat.

The other leg of postwar Japan's "oxymoronic democracy" is, of course, the already mentioned phenomenon of "emperor-system democracy." After the occupation, the long-time conservative prime minister Yoshida Shigeru praised General MacArthur as the "great benefactor" (daionjin) of defeated Japan. What he meant by this was very clear. MacArthur, in Yoshida's view, had saved the throne and personally ensured the continued reign of Emperor Hirohito.

Years ago, when I wrote a biography of Yoshida, I introduced this comment but did not really grasp its full significance. Now, I am persuaded that Yoshida was correct. It is sometimes argued that General MacArthur's personal support for the Showa emperor derived from their first meeting (on 27 September 1945), at which the emperor impressed the general with his fine personal qualities and his willingness to take the burden of responsibility for the war upon himself. This, in my estimation, is a myth promoted by MacArthur. In fact, the historical record suggests that MacArthur had decided to retain the throne—and Hirohito on it—long before the war ended and he arrived in Japan. His reasons for doing this were eminently simple: he was persuaded that "the Oriental mind" (a favorite MacArthur phrase) was indeed inclined to behave subserviently to authority.

The implications of this are far-reaching: in MacArthur's eyes, it was essential to promote "imperial democracy" in postwar Japan because the Japanese people were incapable of engaging in real democracy or real popular sovereignty. They would accept "democracy" only if the emperor told them to do so.

This conservative reading of the Japanese national character led MacArthur to become the emperor's daionjin in several concrete ways. First, as is well known, he insulated the emperor from any involvement whatsoever in the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. This entailed not merely protecting the emperor from indictment as a war criminal, but also exempting him from any interrogation about what he knew concerning the policies pursued in his name.

Second—and of especially great interest to us now, I think—is our growing awareness of how vigorously MacArthur and other key Americans opposed any serious discussion of whether the Showa emperor should abdicate once the surrender had been peacefully carried out. The argument that he should do so did not come from just left-wing circles. Many Japanese conservatives, including individuals close to the throne, believed that the emperor had a moral obligation to take responsibility for the huge numbers of Japanese who had died in his name. The question of abdication arose in a serious manner on three separate occasions: at the start of the occupation in 1945-46; when the Tokyo trials came to a close at the end of 1948; and when the occupation was winding up in 1951-52. Each time, the American side strongly opposed Hirohito's departure from the throne.

General MacArthur's third great intervention involving the emperor was, of course, the new postwar constitution, in which the formal concept of the "symbol emperor" was introduced—with all the previously mentioned ambiguity this entails.

All nationalism emphasizes difference, and the Japanese people certainly have every right to choose the "symbol emperor" as the key to their identity. Why, then, does all this background history matter? It matters, I think, because national symbols are important not only in forging a sense of solidarity and common values within any given country, but also in shaping how that country is perceived by others. And both domestically and internationally, what these symbols really signify can only be understood by grasping how they have functioned—how they have been used or abused—in actual practice. Symbols are meaningless divorced from history.

Where Japan is concerned, it is simply undeniable that the very concept of the "symbol emperor" is inseparable from the reign and role of the Showa emperor. This is true within Japan, and it is likewise true in the eyes of the world. It is also true, unfortunately, that both the Japanese and American governments have made it difficult to see Emperor Hirohito's historical role clearly. They have consistently manipulated images and destroyed or suppressed documents to serve their own immediate political and ideological purposes—with the result that Japan's chosen symbolic identity remains exceptionally ambiguous.

This ambiguity involves the most fundamental issues of contemporary identity for Japan—namely, "democracy" and "war responsibility." That the Showa emperor presided over so many different kinds of political behavior during his long reign simply must be clarified if one is to understand what *Kimi* (the
imperial “you” venerated in the national anthem) really symbolizes. And his failure to take even moral responsibility for the “Great East Asia War” (Dai Toa Senso) that devastated Asia and his own subjects will probably go down in history as a terrible mistake on the part of General MacArthur as well as the emperor himself. By failing to abdicate, Emperor Hirohito signaled that issues of personal as well as institutional “responsibility” are not taken seriously in Japan. In the eyes of the rest of the world, this is a legacy of irresponsibility that still stains Japan’s reputation. 7

It is fair to ask whether I am not giving too much historical importance to Emperor Hirohito personally. I do not think so. The more one studies twentieth-century Japan, the more the Showa emperor emerges as the nation’s most interesting and influential political actor. He was, without question, a cautious and conservative man. He was also intelligent, well educated in military as well as civilian matters, opinionated, and obsessed with detail. He used people, and knowingly allowed himself to be used by them. He was extremely well informed about what was going on at the top levels of policy-making.

This, of course, is a rather heretical observation. “Symbols” are not supposed to be “actors,” and the mainstream of American as well as Japanese scholarship in the postwar period has tended to emphasize how “passive” and “pacifistic”—and how isolated from actual policy-making—the Showa emperor was, both before and after the defeat in 1945. I do not think the historical record bears this out. 8 Certainly, the centrality of the emperor’s active as well as “symbolic” role impressed me when writing Embracing Defeat. And I was further impressed to find in archives in the United States—after the book was finished—a curious English-language memorandum that clearly derives from court circles and that offers an unusually detailed picture of Emperor Hirohito’s political views at the outset of the occupation.

Although apparently hitherto unknown to American researchers, this memo is not in fact unknown to Japanese scholars. It was mentioned and discussed in some detail by Professor Hata Ikuhiko in his valuable 1984 book, Hirohito Tenno Itsutsu no Ketsudan (Emperor Hirohito’s Five Decisions).9 Still, in light of our ongoing fascination with the nature of “emperor-system democracy” and the role of Emperor Hirohito personally, this strikes me as a text that deserves to be reemphasized and made a part of the public record. It is reproduced in full below.

The document poses some unusual problems for scholars. Typed in English, classified “Top Secret,” and covering a little more than three double-spaced pages, it is devoted entirely to summarizing the emperor’s opinions as conveyed through an intermediary. Until the early 1970s, it was in the personal possession of MacArthur’s former aide and personal confidant, General Courtney Whitney, although it is not mentioned in either Whitney’s or MacArthur’s memoirs. Whitney’s papers were turned over to the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia, and declassified in 1978.

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Full Text of the Top-Secret “Emperor’s Message”

He said that the Emperor wanted him to explain the basis for the latter’s remark of a couple of weeks ago that he hoped the Occupation would not be too short. The Emperor felt that there were still many remnants of feudalism in the Japanese mind and that it would take a long time to eradicate them. He said the Japanese people as a whole were lacking in education which was necessary for their democratization and also that they were lacking in real religious feeling and were accordingly easy to sway from one extreme to the other. He said that one of the feudalistic traits was their willingness to be led and that they were not trained like Americans to think for themselves. He said the Tokugawa regime had been built on the theory that people should follow their leaders and should not be given any reason therefor except loyalty. Thus the average Japanese faced a traditional handicap in trying to think for himself. With his instinct to follow rather blindly, the Japanese were now eagerly endeavoring to adopt American ideas but, as witness the labor situation, they were selfishly concentrating their attention on their rights and not thinking about their duties and obligations. Part of the reason for this stems from the long-standing habit of clanishness in their thinking and attitudes. The days when the Japanese people were divided into clans are not really over. The average Japanese considers his relatives as friends whose interests he would pursue, and other people as enemies whose interests do not merit consideration.

He said the Emperor had talked a great deal lately about the lack of religious feeling among the Japanese. The Emperor did not consider Shinto a religion. It was merely a ceremony and he thought that it had been greatly over-rated in the United States. It still had some dangerous aspects, however, because most Shintoists were ultra-conservative and they and ex-soldiers and others who had identified Shintoism with ultranationalism had a tendency to cling together. This was dangerous now the Government was without any means of supervising [sic] them because of its strict observance under orders of the freedom of religion. The Emperor thought that the Shinto elements and their fellow travelers would bear watching because they were anti-American.

The Emperor felt that this was no time to talk about whatever virtues the Japanese people possessed but rather to consider their faults. Some of their faults were indicated in the foregoing general outline of the Emperor’s thoughts which had brought him to the conclusion that the Occupation should last for a long time.

He said that the Emperor was very greatly impressed.
Not only is the memo one of the most fascinating official documents we have in English pertaining to the Showa emperor, but it also presents several tantalizing puzzles. It is not clear who wrote the memorandum on the American side, when the reported conversation (or conversations) with the emperor took place, or who was conveying this information to the Americans. Whitney's papers were in disarray when submitted to the MacArthur Memorial. Not only was the memorandum not filed in any meaningful way, it also lacked the usual cover sheet identifying its origins. Like so much of the SCAP activity concerning the emperor after the defeat, this document conveys the impression (even apart from its formal "Top Secret" classification) of having been handled with exceptional secrecy and subterfuge.

Although the memorandum appeared in a file marked "1951," James Zobel and other archivists at the MacArthur Memorial speculate from internal evidence that it was probably written between April and July 1946 (roughly the same time that Emperor Hirohito was dictating to court aides his dokuhakuroku, or "Monologue," preparing for possible indictment as a war criminal). The paper size and typing format suggest that the writer in all likelihood was someone attached to the State Department and permanently or temporarily in Tokyo (if so, possible writers would include George Atcheson, William Sebald, Robert Fearey, and Max Bishop). The source of information, carefully and obviously deliberately concealed throughout the entire memorandum, is almost certainly one of the Japanese who served as intermediaries between court circles and GHQ (logical candidates, in this case, would include Terasaki Hidenari and Matsudaira Yasumasa).

All of this, however, remains speculation. What is not in doubt is that this an authentic U.S. document recording Emperor Hirohito's opinions as conveyed by someone who was understood to be speaking at the emperor's request. The emperor emerges from behind the "chrysanthemum curtain" with unusual clarity as an individual who held strong opinions and did not hesitate to make them known to others.

Much of what is said reinforces what we now know about the emperor's views from other sources such as the diary of the former vice chamberlain Kinoshita Michio and the rare official Japanese transcript that has been uncovered summarizing the emperor's third meeting with General MacArthur (on 15 October 1946). The emperor worries about labor unrest and the growing popular emphasis on "rights" as opposed to "duties and obligations." He thinks the Americans have "over-rated" the influence of Shinto as a religion. He is impressed with General MacArthur's vision and activities as supreme commander. None of this is particularly new. At the same time, it is startling to read about the emperor bluntly expressing the hope that "the Occupation would not be too short." And it is shocking, at least to me, to encounter his harsh criticism of "the Japanese mind." The fact that the emperor did not really trust his subjects also emerges in his third meeting with General MacArthur. In the official tran-
script of that conversation, recorded by Terasaki Hidenari, Emperor Hirohito expressed concern that “the Japanese people’s cultural level is still low” (Nihonjin no kyoyo imada hikaku), thus making them dangerously receptive to left-wing emphasis on “rights” as opposed to “duties.” In the “emperor’s message” found in General Whitney’s papers, his reservations about the propensities of the Japanese people come through even more strongly—and with a peculiarly perverse twist. Here, after all, is the living embodiment of yesterday’s emperor worship sternly condemning his country’s “feudal remnants,” and especially its tradition of mindless “loyalty.”

What is one to make of this? Is this the posturing of an opportunist playing up to MacArthur, or is it the opinion of a man truly lacking in any self-reflection about the role he had played during the first two decades of his reign? Why did the emperor never convey such strong opinions to the Japanese militarists and ideologues under his own command? Why, indeed, did he allow himself to be used—far more than any emperor before him had ever done—as the very symbol of such mindless “loyalty”?

Notes
1. This humorous term derives from merging the formal name of the Occupation command headed by General Douglas MacArthur—Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, abbreviated as SCAP—with “Japanese.”
2. Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II (New York: W. W. Norton and The New Press, 1999; the British edition is by Penguin, and a Japanese translation will be published by Iwanami Shoten).
4. In good part these personnel changes brought more radical “New Deal”-type American reformers into the process of planning and implementing U.S. policy toward Japan. Had Emperor Hirohito followed Konoe Fumimaro’s recommendation that Japan surrender in February 1945 (in the famous “Konoe Memorial”), Japan’s postwar experience would have been very different. The country would have been spared the devastating U.S. air raids that culminated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but that is not all. In all probability, defeated Japan also would have escaped a truly sweeping reformist agenda of “demilitarization and democratization” such as that which had emerged in U.S. planning circles by August 1945.
5. Shortly after Embracing Defeat appeared, I received a phone call from a journalist who had served in Tokyo for three years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He found the book fascinating, he said, because of the impressive diversity of Japanese “voices” it conveyed. Foreign journalists, he went on to say, rarely regarded Japan as a “real nation.” I found this shocking, and when I asked what he meant, he offered an explanation very different from the “real nation” arguments of Japanese conservatives (who focus on Japan’s lack of an autonomous military). No matter whom one talked to at elite political, bureaucratic, or business levels in Japan, he explained, the response was usually a boring speech about how “Wa” (harmony) was the key to Japanese society. Concepts (such as serious “conflict”) that one took for granted in other democratic nations, the foreign journalists were commonly told, simply had little serious meaning in Japan. Wa is a perfect “Orientalist” word; and it was clear that this was the key concept he and his fellow foreign journalists had absorbed from their Japanese handlers.
6. There was more than just a little irony in this. One of SCAP’s most dramatic reforms, the elimination of the Japanese military establishment (and, with this, the Ministry of War and Navy Ministry), served to enhance the power of the Ministry of Finance. SCAP’s creation of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1949 as a vehicle for Japanese “export promotion” went beyond anything the Japanese militarists themselves had succeeded in creating during the mobilization for “total war.”
7. I should note, at this point, that I admire the sensitivity with which the current Heisei emperor has personally attempted to deal with fundamental issues of “peace” and “democracy.” One of the illustrations I use in Embracing Defeat to illustrate the idealism of the early occupation period is, in fact, a reproduction of calligraphy that the present emperor produced, as crown prince, at the age of twelve. It presents one of the most famous sayings of the time: Construct a Nation of Peace (Heiwa Kokka Kensetsu).
8. This is a problem, of course, since the Imperial Household Agency (Kunaicho), the Foreign Ministry (Gaimusho), and the Japanese government in general have been zealous in sanitizing and censoring the official record. They resemble the CIA and other American security agencies in this regard. In Embracing Defeat, I devoted three chapters to developing my view of the Showa emperor as a political (and not just “symbolic”) actor. In this regard, I again found the comments of the American journalist cited in note 5 above interesting. Although he had covered Japan at the time of the Showa emperor’s death, he said, never got the impression from his official Japanese contacts that the emperor had been a “real” person.
10. This transcript has been made public in two sources. See the August 15, 1975 issue of Sankei Shim bun; also Naganuma Setsuo, “Hatsukokai Saretu ‘Tenno-Makkasa’ Daisankai Kaiken no Zenyo,” Sankei Shimbun, March 5, 1989, pp. 26-30. I am grateful to Professor Toyoshita Narahiko for calling this document to my attention.
11. For some reason, this phrase is omitted from the official summary of the meeting published in 1975 by Sankei Shim bun.

"Photographs of the emperor's tours rarely showed, as here, the role played by U.S. personnel in his entourage." (Text and photo from John W. Dower, Embracing Defeat, p. 335. Courtesy of the author.)
The Empire Strikes Back?
Huntington on East and West

In his book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Harvard University’s Samuel P. Huntington made several very large claims and offered numerous policy prescriptions for the West and for non-Western countries as well. The book was greeted with rather uncritical acclaim by such luminaries of the U.S. foreign policy establishment as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, but as this article explains The Clash of Civilizations is a seriously flawed piece of work. The author uses a critique of Huntington’s book as a springboard to examine several broad issues: (1) the rise of China and its possible implications for the West; (2) the idea that the West’s days of primacy are numbered; (3) the question of whether the West has pioneered ideas—philosophical, scientific, economic, moral, or political—that have universal validity, or whether they are “uniquely” Western; (4) the concept of “civilization”—its foundations and boundaries; (5) whether withdrawal and defensiveness or boldness and openness will be the better prescription for the West in the coming decades; and, finally, (6) Australia’s place in the West in the context of a changing strategic environment in Asia. This article concludes that it is not the cultivation of a single, defensive, univocal Western civilization that is our best hope, but embracing polylingualism and diversity in a world of unprecedented and anti-traditional change.

by Paul M. Monk

“The emergence of new great powers is always highly destabilizing,” wrote Harvard University’s Samuel Huntington, in his controversial book of late 1996, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, “and if it occurs, China’s emergence as a major power will dwarf any comparable phenomena during the last half of the second millennium.” Portentous and dramatic words. Yet, in the mid-1990s, they became for a while the “buzz” in strategic and economic thinking alike. What basis was there, or could there be, for such extraordinary predictions? They certainly stir the geopolitical imagination. My purpose in the present paper is to reflect on the underpinnings to Huntington’s prognosis. I shall examine the internal coherence of Huntington’s position, its historical validity, and its geopolitical implications. There is, of course, much else in The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order that might be addressed, but it is this central idea of the dramatic reshaping of the geopolitical order of things—in ways that could “dwarf” anything else that has happened since 1500—that I want to concentrate on.

Huntington was adding his voice to a considerable chorus, in anticipating the rise of China to truly awesome stature. Speaking in 1994, Lee Kwan Yew—whom few, I think, would accuse of being prone to light-headedness or bombast—declared, “The size of China’s displacement of the world is such that the world must find a new balance in thirty or forty years. It’s not possible to pretend that this is just another big player. This is the biggest player in the history of man.” Viewed in such terms, the world of the mid-1990s was not the post-cold war world, but the pre-Sino-centric world. Contrary to the famous proclamation of Frank Fukuyama, in 1992, history had not—and has not—come to an end at all. Indeed, if old Harry Lee is right, then just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water of liberal internationalism, as it were, a behemoth is stirring in the deeps and the waters are about to be displaced on such a scale as to generate tidal waves, so that even the coastlands will offer no safety from what is about to happen. It seems quite odd to contemplate such prophecies alongside more sober estimates of China’s condition and prospects. One thinks, for instance, of Gerald Segal’s essay in Foreign Affairs of September/October 1999, “Does China Matter?”—but it is important to contemplate them nonetheless, in order to come to grips with the attitudes from which they spring and the policy implications that they entail.

Australia is a country that will be markedly affected if anything resembling the Huntington prognosis (or the Lee Kwan Yew prognosis) should come about. And senior Australian political figures have been waking up to this fact in recent years. Stuart Harris, former secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was addressing that audience as much as any other, in his 1998 monograph Will China Divide Australia and the US? Yet his own prognosis of the extent of China’s rise was very modest indeed by comparison with those of Huntington and Lee. Two former Australian prime ministers added their voices to the Lee/Huntington chorus in early 1997. Malcolm Fraser (prime minister from 1975 to 1983) observed that China’s “economic strength” means that global power is “up for grabs.” He declared confidently, “America is doomed to be passed by China, which will become the world’s number one economic power within a foreseeable time frame. It may be in ten years; it probably won’t be longer than fifteen.” Bob Hawke (prime minister from 1983 to 1991) commented that China had been the “dominant power...
in the world for most of the last 2,500 years” and was about to resume that role. Such talk has also been heard, at times, from Chinese officials and military officers of the more hawkish kind, especially in the variant that, after 200 years of weakness and humiliation, China is about to put things to order and, in the words of one senior military officer, “nobody is going to stop us.” By “nobody,” of course, one must assume that the officer meant the United States. Australia, for obvious reasons, is not a candidate to do so, even if its political leaders had any inclination to try.

How has all this even become the subject of discussion or a matter for speculation? Just twenty years ago, China was ragged and poverty-stricken and its political leaders, at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee (December 1978) had committed themselves to a program of economic and political reform to mend China after the disasters of the Mao years (from the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957-58 and the Great Leap Forward, with its catastrophic famine [1959-61], to the Cultural Revolution [1966-76]). The individual at the forefront of this program of change was, of course, Deng Xiaoping. By putting Maoism behind China and the destructive Gang of Four behind bars, this tiny, tough, chain-smoking, spitting Party machine boss opened the way for basic economic reforms that unleashed an astonishing process of growth in China and began to turn it into what looked increasingly like the engine of growth for the whole Asian Pacific region. Perceiving this, but clearly not sharing the apprehensions of Samuel Huntington, one of Australia’s leading economists, Professor Ross Garnaut, himself a former Australian Ambassador to China (1985-88), wrote in the Australian Financial Review (Australia’s counterpart to the Wall Street Journal) the morning after Deng Xiaoping’s death in February 1997, “the economic reforms he engineered and the huge response to them in China [have] transformed the outlook for the Asia Pacific region and the strategic outlook for the Western Pacific and the Eurasian continent. For Australia, the transformation is immeasurably for the better.” Immeasurably for the better? Isn’t this a judgment in stark contrast to the rather ominous premonitions of Huntington? Surely. For if Huntington is even approximately correct in his view of what lies ahead of us, the implications for Australia—a notoriously thinly populated, continental-sized Sybaris out on the “exposed” fringes of the “Greek” world as the new Empire rises—are highly unlikely to be “immeasurably for the better.” And this, I would suggest, should make Australia the “canary in the coal mine” as far as the level of threat to the West by a renascent China is concerned.

The very title of Huntington’s book, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, makes the future sound ominously like a “clash of the titans” movie. This is accentuated, of course, by his explicit remark that the rise of China will be on a scale that will “dwarf” any precedent for such phenomena in the past five hundred years and that such developments “have always been highly destabilizing.” His choice of the 500-year time frame looks very much as though it must be an allusion to Paul Kennedy’s high-impact book The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000. That half millennium certainly brought several clashes of civilizations, ones in which the ideas and technology of the West consistently came off the victors. What Huntington is now arguing is that all that is over and done with and was only ever, in fact, a sort of illusion based on very temporary conditions. Such views are rather fashionable and need to be contested, quite apart from whether further clashes lie ahead of us. In particular, it is necessary to critically examine Huntington’s underlying supposition that Western civilization has simply enjoyed a sort of fortuitous ascendancy and that it is an illusion to believe that the ideas on which its ascendancy has been based are universally applicable or prescribable. For this, in the final analysis, is the principal issue on which the whole debate about a “clash of civilizations” turns. I shall argue that, in fact, Huntington’s position in this regard is internally incoherent and that this undermines the policy suggestions he makes, and would do so even if his prognostication about the extent of China’s rise could be shown to be warranted. That the prognostication itself is open to serious question is actually only a secondary objection to his argument, though clearly an important one.

Looked at in the perspective of 500 years, the rise of the West and the belated response of other civilizations to that phenomenon is overwhelmingly a matter of the accelerated development of human material civilization. What has cried out for explanation for several hundred years, but not least in the twentieth century, is why it was Western Europe that demonstrably initiated and dominated this process, while the other great centers of civilization—most notably the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire in India, and the Ming and Ch’ing Empires in China stagnated by comparison and became geopolitically and economically subordinated to the Europeans and then the Americans. As late as 1800, by common scholarly agreement, the Chinese economy was still, in aggregate terms, the largest in the world—as its population was, by a wide margin, the largest of any political entity in the world. Yet, in the nineteenth century, it sank into decrepitude compared with the industrializing West. The famous work of Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China, was prompted, as we recall, by curiosity as to why this should

“[Deng Xiaoping] opened the way for basic economic reforms that unleashed an astonishing process of growth in China and began to turn it into what looked increasingly like the engine of growth for the whole Asian Pacific region.” (Reprinted with permission from M.E. Sharpe, Inc., Publisher, Armonk, NY 10504.)

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have been so. As late as the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire was still seen as a major threat to the security of Western Europe, but in the nineteenth century it also sank into such decrepitude that it became known as the “sick man of Europe.” This perceived decadence of the old civilizations of “all points East” was notably expressed by the English poet Alfred Tennyson, in 1842, in the early days of the British industrial revolution and in the immediate wake of the First Opium War against China. In his lyric “Locksley Hall,” he wrote:

Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward, let us range;  
Let the great world spin forever down the ringing grooves of change.  
Thro’ the shadows of the globe we sweep into the younger day:  
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

Tennyson’s bold Occidentalism stood only at the beginning of the long upward sweep of Western ascendency. At the high tide of that ascendency, just before the First World War (or as it is sometimes described, the Great European Civil War) and even more in its aftermath—when they partitioned the Ottoman Empire—the Europeans and their colonists controlled something like an astonishing 75 percent of the world’s land surface and dominated all its oceans. Even a few decades of hegemonic wars, climaxing in the devastation of Europe itself by the Second World War, did not seem to shake this domination, since it was the United States and Russia (both European powers in important respects) that emerged to take the place of the exhausted Western European powers as hegemons on the world stage. However, by the last decade of the cold war, the economic rise of Japan and the beginnings of China’s economic transformation under Deng Xiaoping gave rise to the idea that a whole new epoch of Asian resurgence was under way.

Asian Resurgence

It is a commonplace to remark that all this dates back to the Meiji Restoration in Japan. Properly speaking, in fact, it does not, for that impulse disintegrated with Japan’s total defeat in the Pacific War. The phenomenon so much in evidence by the early 1980s was much more the product of, to borrow the title of John Dower’s superb book, Japan “embracing defeat” and charting a whole new course within the U.S.-dominated Pacific basin after 1945. This is something that must be registered with some emphasis, since parallels between the behavior of Japan from 1868 to 1945 and the anticipated behavior of China over the next half century or so could be systematically misleading. It is Japan’s remarkable resurgence under the Pax Americana that is more notable and may well be, for compelling reasons, the more appropriate model for what to expect of China in the next few decades at least—i.e., the time frame used by Lee Kwan Yew and also by Samuel Huntington in prophesying the massive increase of China’s “displacement of the world.”

As Japan rose further and further in the 1970s and 1980s—to the point where, in the wake of the Plaza Accord, it replaced the United States as the world’s number one creditor, while America became the world’s number one debtor—a rising chorus of voices was suggesting that Japan was on the verge of displacing the United States of America as “Number One.” One of the first such voices was that of Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute, whose book The Emerging Japanese Superstate: Challenge and Response hailed the rise of Japan and anticipated its “successful and peaceful integration into the international system.” As time passed, however, other observers, with perhaps less robust nerves than Kahn, began to see Japan and its way of doing business, its massive trade surpluses, and its putatively hidden agenda, as increasingly threatening. In 1991, George Friedman and Meredith Le Bard published a book called The Coming War with Japan in which they warned of the dangers of a second Pacific War. They foretold generations of struggle between Japan and the United States for mastery of the Pacific basin and commented ominously, “If there is any hope of avoiding a second US-Japanese war, it rests in our leaders becoming frightened.” Of China there was virtually no mention and that was less than a decade ago.

The real significance of the rise of Japan was not that it represented a threat to America, so much as that it inspired emulation elsewhere in Asia, starting with its own erstwhile colonies in Taiwan and (South) Korea and culminating in the China of Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, and Zhu Rongji. What was just as significant was that, even as these East Asian economies truly “took off” economically (in a quite Rostowian sense) in the 1970s and 1980s, the communist economies everywhere, starting with the Soviet Union, were clearly running into intractable developmental bottlenecks rooted in their command economics. In China’s case, this had been seriously compounded in the 1960s by the irrational and uncontrollable tendency of Mao Zedong to try radical politics and anti-intellectual flying leaps in economic development. As Dali Yang has argued, in his excellent 1996 history, Calamity and Reform: State, Rural Society and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine, it was the catastrophe of the Great Leap Forward and the consequent famine, which took the lives of up to 30 million Chinese peasants, even more than the later Maoist catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution, that convinced masses of Chinese, in and outside of the Communist Party, that communism could not work; and that both economic and political reform were imperative. The examples of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan loomed large in the thinking that was then done about what precise reforms would make a difference.

Summarizing the ideas that China’s paramount leaders adopted in the late 1970s, William Overholt, a protégé of Herman Kahn’s back in the early 1970s, remarked in China: The Next Economic Superpower that the core ideas amounted to a common policy package across East Asia, with seven key elements:

- a reduced military budget;
- subordination of political ideology to the imperatives of economic growth;
- strategic reliance on the United States to keep the peace;
- acceptance of foreign corporations and technologies;
- an increasingly market-oriented economy;
- encouragement of domestic economic competition; and
- an outward-looking economic and social posture.

China’s Reform Agenda

This is a rather neat summary of what came to be the reform agenda of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang; it remains that of Zhu Rongji in China. The reform agenda was accepted ambivalently
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by Deng Xiaoping and it is clear that considerable ambivalence about some aspects of it prevails in the Chinese polity at the end of the 1990s. It is this agenda, nonetheless, and not any autochthonous virtues of the Chinese Communist Party or the traditional Chinese culture, that have made possible the growth that has occurred over the past two decades. This seems to elude those like Huntington who see in China’s recent economic revival the resurgence of a traditional civilization. To grasp this is, already, to see beyond the more ill-considered kinds of geopolitical rhetoric that tend to cloud conversation about what China is and where it could be heading.

The economic upsurge in China in the 1980s astonished everyone, inside and outside China, though arguably it should not have done so. Writing in the early 1970s, before it was clear that the reform and opening would occur at all, much less within a decade, Mark Elvin wrote, in concluding his pathbreaking study _The Pattern of the Chinese Past:_

The technological creativity of the Chinese people has deep historical roots and [has] slumbered for a while, mostly for practical considerations. As it slowly reawakens, we may expect it to astonish us. Chinese agriculture, however, can only grow fast by using a vast and ever-increasing quantity of industrial inputs and can, therefore, never be a leading sector. If industry is to advance rapidly enough to let agriculture, and the economy as a whole, break out once and for all from the old high-level equilibrium trap, it almost certainly needs to enter the international market to a far greater extent than hitherto. It is capable of doing this with an effectiveness that will come as a shock, if the decision is taken to do so. The consequence, however, will be a disruption over the control of information and thought which is essential to the survival of the Chinese Communist regime. Whether this latent contradiction is potentially lethal or merely troublesome is, perhaps, the riddle of the longer term future of the country. Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.\(^{15}\)

Given what has transpired in China since 1973, it would have been fortunate indeed had more people read and reflected on these lines in the years that followed. In fact, of course, the contradiction pointed out by Elvin has certainly not been resolved and goes to the heart of current debates about political and economic reform in China and its way of dealing with the external world. Yet in the years after 1979, responding to the market signals sent by the reform and opening that Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues initiated, China’s economy began to grow, in gross and uncorrected terms at least, at an astonishing pace. Dwight Perkins, at Harvard University, had estimated in 1980 that China might grow at an average annual rate of 6 percent for a decade or so, but that the 10 percent growth rates achieved for a time by Japan and South Korea were “beyond China’s reach.” As it happened, China’s annual growth rate averaged 10 percent for the whole period from 1981 until 1995, which, of course, is what gave rise, in the mid-1990s, to the sorts of projections about China’s future wealth and power with which we are chiefly concerned in the present paper.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the spectacle of China’s economic growth had presented economists with a conundrum. The standard means for assessing the size of developing economies indicated that, in 1991, China had a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of around US$370 [\(^{16}\) all dollar figures are U.S.-denominated unless otherwise noted]. Yet it was more or less universally accepted that China’s GDP had doubled in the preceding decade. No one believed that its per capita GDP had been as low as US$200 in 1979-80 and many believed that the observable evidence of well-being in China meant that its economy had to be larger than the US$370 per capita figure given for 1991. This led to various efforts to arrive at more plausible measures and it is the figures produced by these efforts that have really generated the widespread and extravagant expectations of China’s rapid ascent to parity with the United States. Briefly put, work done in the International Monetary Fund and by analysts in Australia and the United States\(^{17}\) concluded that evidence from food consumption, materials consumption, and longevity data indicated that China was clearly much better off than it could possibly have been if it truly had a GDP of US$370 per capita.

Using a number of purchasing power parity approaches, analysts arrived at revised estimates of the size of China’s GDP that varied from $1,200 to $2,500 per capita. These figures, of course, combined with the acceptance that the Chinese economy was continuing to grow at double digit rates, quickly led to extrapolations that had the gross size of China’s economy overtaking that of Japan and then the United States within a decade or two. It was, as Sherlock Holmes would have put it, simply a matter of mathematics, my dear Watson. Take a high median figure of US$2,000, multiply by a population of 1.3 billion, and you have an economy almost as large as Japan’s in 1991, which, growing at 10 percent per annum, would double in ten years, making it...

"...China had slipped so far behind the West in military technology that it was China, not the United States, that had reason to be alarmed about the trend of things." (Reprinted with permission from M.E. Sharpe, Inc., Publisher, Armonk, NY 10504.)
Communist Party continues to suppress, will be greater than ever? Yet it is precisely Chinese "civilization," that which sank into torpor in the many centuries between the downfall of the Southern Sung and the upheavals of the twentieth century—that China, conversely, even then, was as large as it is today and had a population was a fraction of its present 50 million or so.

**China's Military Modernization**

The primary inference from such figures from a military security point of view was, of course, that they would underwrite huge increases in Chinese military expenditure. Indeed, such huge increases were alleged to be occurring already, by the early 1990s. Even as Western military budgets shrank appreciably, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, China's was observed to be rising annually by double digit increments. One RAND study asserted in 1995 that China's military budget was not the $15 to $20 billion estimated by the CIA, but the equivalent of $140 billion in purchasing power parity terms. While this figure was ridiculed by RAND's own leading China specialists, Michael Swaine and Jonathan Pollack, it was symptomatic of the sudden alarms being sounded about China's potential to become the new strategic rival to the United States within a decade or two. In actual fact, as I pointed out in briefings within Australia's Defence Intelligence Organisation at the time, military modernization was neither high on China's list of priorities nor observably occurring at other than a very modest net rate; and, moreover, once the series data going back over several decades were deflated it became clear that China's defense expenditure had decreased substantially in the 1980s and had only regained the real levels of 1979 in about 1992. In the interim, China had slipped so far behind the West in military technology that it was China, not the United States, that had reason to be alarmed about the trend of things. This, of course, was the underlying reason why China's defense budget had been increasing again in the 1990s—apart from the fact that economic growth made it possible.

Huntington, at some points in his book if not at all points, appears to subscribe to the most alarming and ill-founded sort of estimate as to the rate of China's progress in military modernization. Taking off, as it were, from the premature expectations that Japan was about to become "No. 1" within the near future, Huntington sketches out an image of China as a civilization apart from the West, with the weight and mass to be able to displace the West on the global stage. The fact that China is geographically and demographically so much larger than Japan seems to contribute considerably to such apprehensions, as if these things, in themselves, lent great advantage to China. Yet when Britain rose and demographically so much larger than Japan seems to confirm, the fact that economic growth made it possible.

Now, the last half of the second millennium dates from 1500, but might usefully be considered as starting from either 1492, when Columbus crossed the Atlantic to Hispaniola, or 1498, when da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope. The former date perhaps merits preference because it also happens to be the year in which the last of the Moslem Moorish kingdoms was destroyed in Spain. At any rate, it was the decade before 1500 that initiated what all those of us given pre-deconstructive Western educations were told was the "Age of Discovery": that era in which Christian, humanist, energetic, "enlightened" Renaissance Westerners voyaged everywhere into the "unknown" and brought more and more of the world under the aegis of Western civilization. That other perspectives are possible concerning what took place in those centuries was not, until very recently, something most of those in the West were accustomed to considering closely. There are still those to whom doing so is so counter-intuitive as to seem an affront to good sense and self-evident historical reality. Yet to the vast, civilized, and culturally complacent empires of the Ottomans, the Mughals, and the Ch'ing, the Western seafarers were very much barbarians disturbing the established order—certainly not the bearers of a recognizably "Western civilization"—seen as their equals, much less as their superiors. The resulting clash of civilizations drastically altered the world order and we may be quite certain that the way in which this occurred and the extent to which it did so are not remembered outside the West in the heroic terms in which it is taught to Western children. Quite the contrary.

If, therefore, we cast our minds back to, let us call it the status quo ante, that is to say the way the world order was before the eruption into the Indian and Pacific Oceans of the seafaring European barbarians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we might be able better to envisage what a fundamental remaking of the civilizational world order could entail, if as Huntington asserts, the Western "blip" on the "screen" of the world economy is about to come to an end and other civilizations are about to rise in its place. It seems to me probable that Huntington borrowed the very term "clash of civilizations" from an essay in The Atlantic Monthly in 1990, by the distinguished scholar of Middle Eastern affairs Bernard Lewis. The essay was called "The Roots of Muslim Rage" and in it Lewis wrote:

It should now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—that perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judaeo-Christian heritage, our secular present and the worldwide expansion of both.17

**The Islamic World**

My principal concern here is China, but it seems to me that the question of Islam and the West is germane for at least three reasons. First, because Huntington himself links the two, seeing the Islamic resurgence and the rise of China as a dual and even allied challenge to the West. Second, because Islam was pre-eminently the civilization that nearly overwhelmed the West in the European Dark Ages, after the fall of the Roman Empire. It was, also,
the great obstacle around which the Europeans needed to negotiate, one way or another, in order to get to China. Third, because the question of what clashes of civilization are and how we are conditioned to look at their histories, begins in the second half of the second millennium for the West, with the huge threat that Islam was then seen to pose to the West—in the decades after the fall of Constantinople (1453) and the Battle of Lepanto (1571). The sense of superiority that the Islamic world enjoyed over Europe in 1500 is easy for Westerners in the twentieth century to forget, but it is very much comparable to the sense of superiority the Chinese felt in regard to the Europeans, when the bearded barbarians arrived off Cathay; and the comparison is useful for understanding what may be at stake in the coming century, if Huntington is correct in his prophecy. There is a fourth reason, but I shall come to that presently.

Writing of the Islamic world of the Arabic caliphs in the centuries before the Mongol conquests devastated their realms in the old civilizational demesnes of the Middle East, Bernard Lewis comments:

While Europe was caught between Islam in the south, the steppe in the east, the ocean in the west and the frozen wastes in the north, the world of Islam was in contact...with the rich and ancient civilizations of India and China. From the one they imported positional, decimal notation of numbers; from the other paper, with immense effect both on their sciences and on their humanities, as well as on government and business. The Islamic world enjoyed a rich and diverse culture, vast lands and resources and a complex and flourishing economy. It also had a sophisticated and law-abiding society, in such contrast to Europe that, as late as Ottoman times, European travelers marvelled at the city of Istanbul, where gentlemen and even soldiers walked without swords. The Islamic occumene was one society...united by one language and the culture which it expressed. In the Arabic language, the Islamic world possessed a medium of communication without equal in pre-modern Christendom—a language of government and commerce, science and philosophy, religion and law, with a rich and diverse literature that, in scope, variety and sophistication was unparalleled as it was unprecedented. The ossified Greek, de-based Latin and primitive vernaculars of Europe in the early medieval centuries could offer nothing even remotely comparable.... Compared with Islam, Christendom was, indeed, poor, small, backward and monochromatic....

Starting as this still sounds to Western ears in the twilight of the twentieth century, much the same might be said of T'ang and Sung China by comparison with Europe between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. Indeed, Marco Polo remarked even of Yuan China, reduced as it had been from its Sung apogee by the depredations of the Mongols, that it was wondrous, opulent, and sophisticated beyond the imaginations of his thirteenth century Italian contemporaries. Jonathan Spence's marvellous essay “The Worlds of Marco Polo,” in his The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds reminds us, of course, that Marco Polo's account of China was (and remains): “a combination of verifiable fact, random information posing as statistics, exaggeration, make-believe, gullible acceptance of unsubstantiated stories and a certain amount of outright fabrication.” So much so that Spence is prompted to ask, “Was Polo there at all? And was he writing about China or about something else?” There are points in The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order at which one might substitute “Huntington” for “Polo” and ask the same questions; but the point here is simply that, by common agreement, China, like Islam, had attained a level of civilizational development by the end of the first millennium that Western Europeans conspicuously did not enjoy.

Writing from the court of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, at Istanbul, to which he was the Ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq commented to his master, Emperor Charles V, in the early 1550s, that the Ottoman Empire would surely conquer Christendom, since the latter, being divided, irresponsible, and debauched, would be incapable of withstanding the disciplined might of the Turks. Istanbul was detained only by the need to deal with Persia, he averred, and then it would turn its attentions to Europe, “supported by the might of the whole East.” Yet, even as he wrote, the geographers and strategists in the Ottoman court were becoming concerned at reports of the European conquests in the New World, their penetration of the Indian Ocean, and their advances in navigational technologies and naval artillery. They were—almost exactly three hundred years before the Suez Canal Company went to work at Port Said—urging the Sultan to construct a canal through the Suez isthmus in order to be able to concentrate naval and land forces in the Red Sea to protect Aden and the Yemen from Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch encroachments.

It is increasingly well known that in the century prior to the “Age of Discovery” (i.e., the fifteenth century) the Chinese Admiral Zheng He, whose personal name was Ma Sanbao, had conducted a series of remarkable naval expeditions from China through the “Spice Islands” and the Indian Ocean, as far as the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the eastern coast of Africa. With large fleets of ocean-going white ships displacing up to 1,500 tons—making them an astonishing five times the size of the vessels used by da Gama or Columbus in their historic voyages—Ma Sanbao made seven voyages and entered into Arabic and Persian folklore as “Sinbad the Sailor” and so we inherited what was long regarded as an apocryphal legend, like that of Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp. Ma Sanbao, unlike Aladdin, was a historical figure. His voyages were ended, however, by the Ming Emperor Zhengtong, in order to concentrate the resources of an inward-looking realm on defense against the Mongols of Esen Khan in the north. It is purely fanciful, of course, to speculate on what might have transpired had the Chinese Imperial Court in the 1440s determined on a policy of naval development, established permanent bases in the “Spice Islands” and a portage in the Malacca Strait, and then made common cause with the great Sultan, a century later, against the barbarian intruders—collaborating in building the Suez Canal in the 1550s and sending a powerful fleet to the aid of the Sultan at Lepanto in 1571; but it is an engaging thought, given Huntington’s current speculation about Sino-Islamic collaboration against the West in the twenty-first century.

Islam was certainly outflanked by the West in the sixteenth century, but it was also trumped by the vast acquisition of wealth by the West in the Americas; by the rise of systematic capitalism and technological inventiveness in the West; and, more subtly, by the rise of mercantilism in the West, that, as Bernard Lewis has observed, helped European states and companies to achieve a level of commercial organization and concentration unknown in the Islamic world. The extraterritorial immunities bestowed on them—as an act of condescension—by Muslim rulers, made it easier for them to exploit and, in time, to dominate the open markets of the Islamic world.
And this, of course, is the fourth reason why the parallel between China (or East Asia more broadly) and the Islamic antecedent is useful. For is not this issue, of mercantilism and open markets (bestowed as an act of condensation by the United States after the Second World War), precisely that which is at stake in the debate over the strengths of the East Asian model—especially as it was widely perceived before the Asian financial meltdown of 1997-98—trade imbalances and the challenge to Western primacy by Japan and its emulators? Only, in this instructive instance, the boot was on the other foot.

The Rise of Europe

The decline and humiliation of Islam was prolonged. Yet in the intervening centuries, the second half of the second millennium, the wars that preoccupied the powers of Europe were mostly with one another. The further we progress into the era, the more easily non-European foes were disposed of by the forces of even second-tier European states. Spain, Holland, England, France, and, much later, Germany and Russia, all fought wars for mastery in crucial parts of Europe, with the far-flung colonial possessions of all of them being comparatively minor theaters of conflict—something that remained true even in the First World War. It is these wars for mastery in Europe that chiefly preoccupied Paul Kennedy, in his 1988 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers.* If the thesis of that weighty and fascinating tome could be summarized in one sentence, it would, perhaps, be that powers rise militarily in direct proportion to their command over economic resources and decline in direct proportion to the insolvency induced by over-commitment to securing access to just such resources. In particular, Kennedy was at pains to point out to his American readers that the British Empire had begun to decline, relative to rising powers—most notably America itself and Germany—from the late nineteenth century, well before such decline was evident to any but the most astute of observers.

He sought to highlight the indications that the United States is now at a comparable stage to that at which Britain stood a hundred years ago and that it should heed the warning signs. It is notable that Kennedy saw the United States as suffering from more serious over-commitment than the Soviet Union, that reads oddly now that the Soviet Union is no more. He also, however, saw China as the most probable challenger to the United States in the not-too-distant future. What he did not say was to show just how China’s rise was likely to displace the United States on the global stage, but we shall return to that matter presently.

Before returning to the matter of the rise of China, however, it seems worth lingering a little longer over the matter of the decline of Islam in the second half of the second millennium. The Ottoman Empire, Europe’s most formidable rival and enemy in the sixteenth and even in the seventeenth century—for Ottoman forces besieged Vienna as late as 1683!—was the proverbial “sick man of Europe” by the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, on the other hand, Turkey, stripped of its empire, has rebounded as a modernized and coherent state, to the point where it is now both a member of NATO and an aspirant to European Union membership.

One might have thought this to be considerable progress from both a European and a Turkish point of view, but Huntington believes that Turkey has merely become what he calls a “torn country,” one that, because Muslim, can never be part of the West, but because aligned with the West and officially secularized, does not live comfortably within the Islamic world either. Rather oddly, I think, Huntington counsels that Turkey would do well to turn back to the Islamic fold and position itself to become, as in its Ottoman days, the core state of Islam. Whether in fact it could do this, given the size and diversity of the Islamic world (from Morocco to Indonesia) must be considered extremely doubtful. What is most significant, however, is the vicious circularity of Huntington’s argument at this juncture. Having begun by asserting that what we are seeing in the post-cold war world is the resurgence of old civilizational identities, and having remarked on how dangerous this could be, he then proceeds to urge the consolidation of just such sweeping identities. It is arguable that this would not only fail to prevent the clash of civilizations he warns of, but would serve to precipitate it. It could even more probably, however, trigger a series of intra-civilizational hegemonic conflicts, that as the First and Second World Wars demonstrated, can be every bit as devastating as any inter-civilizational ones. His argument is flawed, though, at a more fundamental level: for the very idea that a unitary civilization thrives because of its imperial unity is dubious historically and radically unsound as a prescription for the kinds of economic and political vitality that will be required for prosperity and freedom in the twenty-first century.

At the very time when the Europeans were outflanking Islam and conquering the Americas, in the sixteenth century, the Ming emperors in China were laboring to complete the Great Wall of China, in an effort to shut out the Mongols. They apprehended no danger to their realm from the sea. And why should they have done so? After all, China had only ever been threatened from the north in its long history; never had it been assailed by a maritime power. Indeed, it had no reason to think in the sixteenth century that maritime powers of a kind that might conceivably threaten its sovereignty even existed. It is a great irony of history, of course, that the Great Wall that the Ming emperors completed, is still widely believed to have been constructed by the First August Emperor in the third century BCE and to be visible from the moon, when it was not completed as a continuous defensive work until the seventeenth century, is not visible from the moon at all, and was no sooner completed than it was opened to the Manchus by Chinese generals. As Arthur Waldron pointed out, in his splendid study *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth,* the irony deepens when we consider that the Great Wall has been turned into a sort of icon of China’s enduring civilization—not least by the Communist Party itself during Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening era!—when, in fact, it would better be seen as a mournful symbol of the futility and failure of Ming introversion. Such reflections were very much the theme of the famous and trenchant Chinese television series *River Elegy,* in 1988, which, in Merle Goldman’s words:

condemned China’s traditional civilization, represented by the Yellow River, the Great Wall, the dragon, and other symbols, as hindering the nation’s modernization. Visually, the series conveyed the sense that the once flowing Yellow River civilization had dried up because of China’s emphasis since the seventeenth century on stability, isolation and conservatism. With vivid cinematography, it compared China’s civilization with the extinct cultures of the Middle East, South America and Africa, warning that if China did not open itself to the outside world, symbolized by the blue ocean leading to the West, it too might become extinct.

In other words, the sort of civilizational conservatism and defensive unity being advocated by Huntington for the West was just...
what led China into stagnation centuries ago and that continues to bedevil it because of the Communist Party’s obsession with maintaining a monopoly on political power and ideological authority. Instead of such conservatism and monolithicity, what is actually needed is a certain amount of disunity, of dissonance; what we in market economies are wont to call competition. The Ottomans and the Mings and the Ch’ings suppressed such dissonance to the best of their ability, until it was too late for them to compete or adapt. The Europeans, conversely, were animated by a fierce spirit of competition with one another and this was the source of their vitality.

Let me quote Huntington’s prescription for what he goes so far as to call the “survival” of the West: “The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique, not universal, and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies” (20-21). Now, I want to suggest that this begs some very basic questions. First of all, it is rather dramatic to write of the “survival” of the West being in the balance, when by Huntington’s own account: “The West is and will remain for years to come the most powerful civilization” (29). Secondly, he asserts that the West must, at one and the same time, recover a sense of its uniqueness and give up its universalist aspirations. Yet, by his own account, it is Western Christianity that is, and I quote, “historically the single most important source of Western civilization” (70). As Bernard Lewis has pointed out: “The idea that there is a single truth for all mankind and that it is the duty of those who possess it to share it with others begins with the advent of Christianity…” 26

I would suggest that a good case could be made that the deeper universalism of Western civilization dates back to the speculations of the pre-Socrates, as Karl Popper argues in The World of Parmenides,27 and as surfaces again with Giordano Bruno (as Hilary Gatti has shown in Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science28) in opposition to the anti-scientific orthodoxy of Western Christianity in the sixteenth century, but it is Huntington’s own premises I am concerned with here, for the moment.

My question would be: is not Huntington trying to have it both ways here? Would he have us reaffirm the uniqueness of our strife-torn heritage on a Catholic basis without universalist theological claims, on a Protestant basis without universalist evangelical aspirations, or an Enlightenment one without universalist natural law and critical reason? If any one of these, how does he propose that the evident contradiction be dealt with? If none of them, what Western civilization can he be talking about? Oddly enough, he remarks at one point that the West has derived some of its vitality and inventiveness from its multiplicity of tongues. This is surely true, and yet it stands in marked opposition to the observation by Bernard Lewis, to which I have already drawn attention, that the Islamic world of the ninth and tenth centuries CE flourished on account of the universality of Arabic as the language of a cosmopolitan and sophisticated civilization. The two observations intersect, as it were, in the sixteenth century, by which time the Arabic universe had given way to the Ottoman domain and the crude European vernaculars have become the vigorous languages of Shakespeare, Luther, Rabelais, Machiavelli, and Cervantes. Now however, Huntington seems to suggest, we should learn once more to speak with one voice. His deep error here is to imply that Western civilization is or could be in the future something “univocal”; since it is radically “dialogical” in Mikhail Bakhtin’s sense. That has been the source of its fertility, interrogating itself, the external world, and other civilizations. This is not only its future, but the human future universally and not one from which there can be a fruitful turning back or away from.

Let us imagine, for a moment, that in the sixteenth century, the Catholic Counter-Reformation had succeeded in suppressing the Protestant revolts, north of the Alps, against Papal authority; that the Habsburgs had succeeded in universalizing the Holy Roman Empire, subduing their rivals in France and England and keeping the Netherlands in hand. Let us imagine further that the Ottomans had, after all, built the Suez Canal and embarked on a systematic program of naval development and alliance formation around the Indian Ocean littoral. Let us imagine, finally, that Ming China had decided against building the Great Wall and, instead, had divided, under the pressure of Mongols, into several separate, but vigorous states, of which at least two, inspired by the breathtaking voyages of Zheng He (Ma Sanbao) had set out to become maritime powers in the “Spice Islands” and the Indian Ocean. I submit that, under this completely hypothetical scenario, Holy Roman Europe might well have remained a mere jutting out promontory of Asia, its navies unable to take command of the Indian Ocean and ultimately being ousted by the Chinese from the Pacific and then the Atlantic; and that the Industrial Revolution might have taken place in China after all, with the obstacles to it—that have been retrospectively identified by Joseph Needham and Mark Elvin in the twentieth century—having been removed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Ottomans might then have gone on, at last, to conquer much of Habsburg and Papal Europe and the Chinese to colonize North America and Australia. Indeed, it tickles one’s sense of historical irony to ponder the remote counterfactual possibility of the Chinese entering the Atlantic Ocean and, after the First Silk War against the Habsburg Emperor, in 1842, compelling him to cede in perpetuity the City of London as a trading entrepôt and colony of the rapidly industrializing state of Great Guangzhou. My more serious point is that it was nor by trying to prevent rapid change or avoid dangerous ventures that Europe emerged from the Dark Ages and went on to create, by force and invention, chicanery and science, what is universally called the modern world, with its expanding universe cosmology and its solar calendar. With-
drawing into confused and defensive "uniqueness" was not the way forward in the sixteenth century and it will be even less so in the twenty-first.

Of course, Huntington's real problem—or rather ours, he would want to suggest—is that what the Muslims and especially the Chinese did not do in the sixteenth century they seem to be on the verge of doing in the twenty-first: looking outward and actively engaging in the world. And this brings us back to the prospect of confronting his behemoth: a China disposing of a wealth and weight that might enable it at last to overmaster the West. In his own words: "By 2020, the age of Western dominance will be over" (103).

If, by this, he means that Western leaders will not, by 2019, be able to decide the fate of the world as Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, and Georges Clemenceau did at the Versailles Conference in 1919, he is surely right. This is especially—and rightly—so in regard to the treatment of China at Versailles compared with the way it is already treated, never mind how things may stand twenty years hence. What threat need this represent to the West, though? Much depends on just how emphatic one anticipates the end of Western dominance to be. Huntington is not very helpful on this point. He declares on the one hand, for example, that "the West is overwhelmingly dominant now and will remain number one in terms of power and influence well into the twenty-first century,..." (82). But on the other hand, he adds: "By the middle of the twenty-first century, if not before, the distribution of economic product and manufacturing output among leading civilizations is likely to resemble that of 1800. The two-hundred-year "Western blip" on the world economy will be over" (88). It is not clear to me that these two statements are reconcilable even in principle. Certainly, current evidence from the Middle East, India, and China does not suggest that these regions are set to overtake the West. The picture is far more ambiguous than Huntington allows and the next few decades could well see startling developments that will complicate the matter further.

Since, however, Huntington seems convinced that China really is looming up as a twenty-first century colossus of the kind hinted at by Lee Kwan Yew—i.e., "the biggest player in the history of man"—let us ponder briefly the sort of "displacement of the world," in Lee Kwan Yew's phrase, that this would entail. Consider that, in the century between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe (1815) and the Versailles Conference (1919), some 55 million people emigrated from a Europe, which had a total population in 1815 of approximately 150 million and in 1919 of around 400 million. They emigrated overwhelmingly to the Americas, but some also went to Australasia and Africa. Being able to emigrate and colonize these lands was a huge source of political and social relief and economic expansion for the European peoples generally, but especially the British, who got the lion's share of the available territory, in more ways than one. As it happens, the number of "Overseas Chinese" (including those 20 million or so in Taiwan) is currently just under 55 million (being reduced by some 6 million with the retrocession of Hong Kong in 1997).

Suppose, however, that between now and, say, 2100, the same proportion of Asia's (not China's alone) population emigrated as emigrated from Europe's much smaller population pool in the nineteenth century. Very roughly, this would mean an outpouring of about 500 million people. Where would they go, in a world without vast territories thinly inhabited by technologically backward peoples? And that is only the Asians. The Middle East is also crowded and the Islamic world's population is increasing rapidly, from Indonesia to Nigeria. Must we—can we, indeed—conceive of vast and devastating wars of clearance for the sake of Lebensraum for these hundreds of millions in the next century? Perhaps, but does Huntington seriously imagine that the current Western lead in military technology is going to yield to such pressure? Unfortunately, just where these questions become truly frightening and awesome—in the manner of thermonuclear war—he melts away on us and does not even raise the most elementary questions.

What, then, of military power itself? If we allow our imaginations to run along the extrapolative curves that Huntington and others sketch out before us, is it not conceivable that China will, in the first quarter, or more realistically the second quarter, of the next century acquire state of the art military power on a scale that it has not had, in relative terms, since perhaps the far off days of the Sun Dynasty? Might it not well within that time frame become too powerful for the United States to directly challenge without serious risk of a global conflagration? How far off, then, are the days when Chinese naval flotillas of impressive size emulate Zheng He and pass the Malacca Strait on their way to the Strait of Hormuz and Socotra? There were unconfirmed reports in the early to mid-1990s of China building naval tracking stations and a naval base on the Andaman Sea, in the Bay of Bengal, and on the coast of Burma.

In 1994, I sat in conference rooms in Taipei and discussed with Taiwanese strategists the naval vision of Admiral Liu Huaqing of the Chinese Central Military Commission: that over the next half century China would build up its blue water naval power to the point where it would be the dominant power in the Pacific as far east as what was designated "the second island chain." What is the second island chain? It is delineated by a line that runs east of Japan, Guam, and the eastern coast of Australia. Liu Huaqing's vision is one of sharing naval primacy with the United States in the Pacific Ocean by 2050. No other power has even seriously aspired to this since the Battle of Midway, not even the Soviet Union at its height. Here again, unfortunately, Huntington lets us down completely. He fails to so much as sketch out how such a vision might unfold in the decades between now and 2050, even though he seems to believe that, in those very years, China's rise will dwarf the rise of the United States and Japan in the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that he nowhere develops a halfway serious or systematic scenario for the rise of Chinese economic and military power, Huntington nonetheless declares that the United States "cannot tolerate a powerful adversary in East Asia" and is already engaged in an effort to "divide China territorially, subvert it politically, contain it strategically and frustrate it economically" (223). These are remarkable claims to make and highly likely to feed Chinese paranoia, but they are rather difficult to sustain.

A good case could be made that, to the contrary, the United States has been trying with great patience and circumspection for many years to draw China into the world beyond its borders and to engage it in trade and economic agreements. In any case, it is not the United States but China that, by Huntington's own account, is the problematic power in the equation, since every earlier great modern power, he says, "has engaged in outward expansion, assertion and imperialism coincidental with or immediately following the years in which it went through rapid
ble into a war with China without considering carefully whether to make a clear strategic choice in this regard, leading it to "stumble ahead of us all, he suggests, is that the United States will fail it is in its national interest and without being prepared to wage such a war effectively" (232-33).

Characteristically, he makes no attempt to outline what "waging such a war effectively" might entail, should it occur at any point in the next few decades. What he does do is conclude with a scenario for a war of China against the West set in 2010, that ends with NATO and Russian combined forces assembling in Siberia and undertaking what he alarmingly describes as a "final" offensive across Manchuria and through the Great Wall to Beijing (312-16).

From a strategic and geopolitical point of view, it seems to me, his thinking is very muddled in itself and of no practical use to anyone seeking to chart a policy course for the next decade or two. His future war scenario would have been more interesting and thought-provoking had it consisted of a limited war in which the United States was defeated by China in Asian waters, much as, say, Russia was defeated by Japan in 1905; or else of a major war that goes disastrously wrong for the West, precipitating a drastic mutation in the balance of global power. The first is at least conceivable. The second would take rather more serious thought. What Huntington gives us, instead, is little more than a thinly veiled reprise of the Western expedition of 1900 to put down the Boxer Rebellion. Surely one can do better than this? What should be clear is that, as of 2010, American military power will remain overwhelmingly greater than China’s. Also, that any conflict between the two powers for the foreseeable future would be an offshore affair, in which U.S. naval and air power and the U.S. nuclear arsenal would present insuperable obstacles to China acting beyond its own coastlands. Inserting U.S. ground forces into China would be both inconceivable in any but the most apocalyptic of scenarios and altogether unnecessary for the purposes of checking Chinese aggression, should it eventuate. It is, of course, conceivable that China might score a tactical victory of considerable importance over an irresolute United States —say, the capitulation of a Taiwan that the United States backed away from defending or resupplying—but something far more dramatic than this would be required to justify Huntington’s portentous language about “highly destabilizing” developments that would “dwarf any comparable phenomena” of the past five hundred years and put the very “survival of the West” at issue.

For anything like these high dramas to be acted out, I suggest, we would need to see at least three things over the next generation: the massive, sustained growth of the Chinese economy at a rate and for a period of time unprecedented in all economic history; the unrelenting commitment of China to a military buildup that could allow it, by 2025, to overtake the United States in terms of Pacific naval power and strategic air power; and the defection of Japan and even the European Union from the U.S. alliance, in favor of an alignment with China. Under these improbable conditions, especially if accompanied by a deep-seated and unappeasable Chinese thirst for “revenge” against the West, we might at least imagine a concerted Chinese effort to humiliate and subordinate the United States of America. This would surely result in a hegemonic war of historic proportions and most uncertain outcome. Let us allow, however, for Lee Kwan Yew’s sake, as it were, that China meaningfully won such a war. The way might then be more or less clear for the “biggest player in the history of man” to strut its hour upon the stage and do things that would “dwarf any comparable phenomenon in the last half of the second millennium.” Merely to state this scenario, however, is to realize how much further from reality it is than Huntington’s inflated language implies.

In actual fact, there are observable constraints on the growth of Chinese power, independent of any notional U.S. effort to contain it, that should lead us to more sober estimates of how big this “biggest player” will become. These constraints are such, I believe, that China’s continued growth will be caught between the imperative of unity for the sake of stability and market coherence, on the one hand; and the pressures for fragmentation and evolution, for the sake of flexibility and vitality, on the other hand. I have never been impressed by the argument that China’s sheer geographic and demographic size makes it a supreme player. Its size, like that of many an empire before it, is actually
one of its greatest liabilities. It was Deng Xiaoping himself, during a visit to Singapore in the early 1980s, who was overheard to remark, “Ah! If only I had just Shanghai!” The very uniformity of language and ideology that are entailed in empire hamper the capacity of its subjects to maneuver, learn, and reinvent themselves. Even more decisive, however, is the consideration that China, so long turned in on itself, has finally turned outward into a world that has changed radically from the one in which earlier imperial powers carved out their spheres of hegemony. In such a world, China is almost certainly at its maximum feasible territorial extent already and would find no cost-efficient rationale for even attempting significant further expansion. It follows from these premises that China could disintegrate or disaggregate quite as readily as it may exert imperial sway over Asia. And even if it does not do so, the conditions of its continued economic growth are more likely to make it a cosmopolitan and commercial civilization than an imperialist one, even if its civilizational influence does gain a new lease on life in places like Central Asia, in the manner of the great T’ang dynasty of the eighth and ninth centuries CE.

Australia

Under any of these circumstances, what would be the implications for Australia, as a far-flung outpost of Western civilization? Plainly, the first requirement is that it come to terms vigorously and creatively with its geography. This process has begun. If we conceive late twentieth-century “Western civilization” along the lines of an analogy with the Grecian world of the third century BCE, then Australia may be likened to Sicily. Settled by the Greeks for centuries before that time, the great Mediterranean island became a bone of contention between the contending empires of the Carthaginians and the Romans in the third century BCE and had no way of avoiding being drawn into their huge wars. Like Sicily, not only in that remote time, but for over a thousand years afterwards, down through Islamic to Norman times, Australia is a crossroads between East and West. It must increasingly and energetically seek its prosperity—and possibly contend for its very survival, if Huntington is even half right—by exploiting the opportunities and thriving on the stimulating dangers that this situation affords.

It was something along these lines, I should think, that Ross Garnaut had in mind, when he remarked, in early 1997, that China’s rise is something “immeasurably” to Australia’s benefit. He may have been too sanguine, but plainly he had a very different view of the matter to that of Huntington. For Huntington sees Australia’s efforts to ennoble itself more fully in Asia as self-defeating. He sees only a clash of civilizations in the future and urges Australia to draw in under the shelter of the U.S. mantle (as if it were not there already) and affirm its Western identity, as its last best hope, if it does not want to be swept away in the rising tide.

One could be forgiven for thinking, both in 1997 and in 1999, that Huntington has been working as a personal adviser to Australian Prime Minister John Howard. Yet the choice is neither as simple nor as craven as Huntington presents it: between defecting guilelessly and furtively from the West and huddling under the Western banner as it retreats. What, after all, does it mean to be “Asian”? The term is itself of European derivation. Indeed, in its very beginning, as “Azawa,” it was the Hittite name for the Aegean coast of Anatolia, only gradually becoming “Asia” to the Greeks, then Asia Minor to the Romans, as the Western sense of “Asia” extended indefinitely eastwards from Athens.

By Huntington’s own account, Asia is a vast geographic region filled with extremely diverse civilizations: Sinic or Confucian, Japanese, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Russian. Why not, therefore, also Australian—however its civilization might be defined? Besides, where is the spice or enticement in doing what he counsels us to do: withdrawing into a conservative, defensive, culturally diffident bastion of “Western civilization” to fend off the strange and the challenging? Such has not been the Western way since the Greeks explored the Mediterranean and planted their colonies on its many then wild and daunting shores. That way and the way of the Greek natural scientists and skeptical philosophers was to inquire, contradict, experiment, trade, negotiate. A similar spirit arose after the downfall of the Roman Empire, giving rise slowly to what Huntington sees as Western civilization—essentially Western Christendom. Through many centuries, the post-Roman Western barbarians learned from the Arab Muslims, even as they fought them; developed various state forms; invented the politics of contestation and civil liberties; invented modern capitalism and experimental science; and fought their way free of theological orthodoxy to a civilization of which one could truly say e pluribus unum. And this stands in significant contrast with the fate of those other civilizations, especially after 1500, that looked inward rather than outward, to the past rather than to the future, and to dogmatic creeds rather than to critical reason. That Huntington should counsel us now to do likewise is poor counsel indeed and should on no account be heeded.

Huntington calls upon Western civilization in general to give up its universalist pretensions; something which, as I have remarked, it cannot do without ceasing to be Western civilization: since its religion, its science, and its political philosophy are all alike universalist in their foundations. He then urges that a world order of co-existing civilizations be brought into being, along the lines of the “peaceful co-existence” attempted during the height of the cold war. Now as he actually admits, this would require the acceptance by other civilizations of international norms of a kind that can only be traced to Grotius and Western diplomatic discourse.

How does Huntington get out of this peculiar philosophical contradiction? He doesn’t, because he doesn’t appear to so much as recognize that he is caught in it. We must do better than this. Australia, for one, clearly requires the growing acceptance of international norms conducive to strategic and economic stability. The effort to develop such norms has been a major feature of twentieth-century international relations and it certainly has not proceeded by means of retreats into civilizational bunkers. In any case, it is frankly difficult to see how civilizational blocs of the kind Huntington calls for would work. Even in the general war he sketches out as happening in 2010, China opens its game by attacking its Sinic kin in Vietnam, while Australia works closely with its giant Muslim neighbor, Indonesia, to check Chinese aggression. So much, one has to comment, for “civilizational blocs”! And when does he anticipate that Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey will form even a regional Islamic bloc? Under the aegis of which of them?

Early in this paper, I quoted Alfred Tennyson on the decrepitude of nineteenth-century China. Let me quote once more from the same lyric poem, Locksley Hall, penned in 1842, on the old dream, even then, of a peaceful world:

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For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that could be;
Till the war drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furlèd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

Perhaps Lord Tennyson had just lately been reading Immanuel Kant? Yet the century following the writing of those lines—up to Stalingrad and Alamein in 1942—witnessed the throbbing of many a war drum: the completion almost of the conquest of the world by the Europeans and their offspring in the Americas, then huge wars over primacy and ideology, not between civilizations. There has always been something rather millenarian about the hope for a “Federation of the world” and an end to human strife. It is, therefore, quite odd to see Huntington, in one and the same tome, prophesying the clash of civilizations and calling for a federation of civilizations to hold the general peace. If it could be shown that nation states were, indeed, passing away into civilizational blocs and given that one would need some form of dialogue between the real powers, then his suggestion might have some merit, but of course he begs the question by urging that nation states coalesce into the dangerous and unnatural blocs required for his prescription to have any purpose to serve.

Our freedom and inventiveness are rooted in the protean multiplicity and mutability that derive from our being the language animal. Only in the twentieth century have we truly begun to make headway, as Franz Kafka intimated in his parable “The Great Wall of China,” in the immense task of understanding our humanity “after Babel”—i.e., in terms of the astonishing variety of human languages and what that wealth and proximity of the human mind signifies. Linguistic variety and the capacity of human beings to rethink themselves through language are far deeper realities than the mere civilizational differences Huntington seeks to highlight. If, therefore, out of a commitment to human freedom and the human future, consistent with the brightest hopes of the modern world, one was to prescribe a simple rule for the twenty-first century, I want to suggest that it would not be that we should all decide which civilization we belong to and draw in behind its battlements to withstand the siege of otherness, but rather that we should all strive to become polylingual, so that possibilities for communication across all manner of boundaries and obscurities will be multiplied manifold. Then, in the great oecumene of third millennium civilization, the few centuries of confusion and strife that Huntington refers us back to in foreboding a clash of civilizations could pale into insignificance by comparison with the astonishing multiplicity of real and possible worlds that open up before us, in the manner of the cosmology of Giordano Bruno. To assay this future, whether one is Western, Muslim or Chinese, will be to sail out into the blue oceans. To opt for anything resembling Huntington’s view of things would be to settle in behind the delusion and implicit decay of the Great Wall.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was delivered to a business forum at the Australian Institute of Management, Melbourne, in March 1997.


2. Ibid.


10. The Plaza Accord is the agreement of 1985 under which, bowing to U.S. pressure, Japan agreed to end its policy of yen stability and allow the yen to rise relative to the dollar.


13. Dali Yang, Calamity and Reform: State, Rural Society and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). “The central thesis of the present study, to summarise drastically, is that the key to understanding the rise of rural reforms in China and the interactive relationship between state and rural society that went with them lies in the Great Leap Famine of 1959-61, the worst in human history,” p. 1.


15. Mark Elvin, The Pattern of the Chinese Past: A Social and Economic Interpretation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 319. For those to whom Latin is all Greek, Elvin’s final phrase translates as “Fortunate are those who understand the causes of things.”

16. The Australian analysts were Ross Garnaut and Ma Guonan, at the Australian National University, and the U.S.-based analysts were Nicholas Lardy and Lawrence Summers.


20. Ibid., p. 3.


22. Ibid., p. 19.


26. Lewis, Islam and the West, p. 5.


28. Hilary Gatti, Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Gatti “reconsiders a dimension of Giordano Bruno’s philosophy that has been ignored in recent years in favor of his Hermeticism and magic…. His attention was more often directed elsewhere, to subjects such as the new cosmology and the revival of ancient atomism, to number theory and the possibility of investigating, measuring and mapping out anew the shape of the natural world,” p. ix.

Capitalism and the Asian Crisis: A Critique and Rejoinder

In this “critique and rejoinder” Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett argue that Constance Lever-Tracy and Noel Tracy (authors of “Mismatch at the Interface,” Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 31, no. 3 [1999]) have fallen into the trap of searching for an “optimal” form of capitalism rather than moving beyond contemporary capitalism’s “end-of-history” ideology and envisioning and struggling for a more sustainable and human-developmental system. Lever-Tracy and Tracy reply that however much one might hope for a revival in the fortunes of workers in China and Southeast Asia the reality is that “in the kind of short-term perspective relevant to a temporary, frictional crisis, there really is no realistic prospect for solving [the current crisis] by constructing an alternative society.”

A Critique of the “Mismatch” Model by Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett

In “Mismatch at the Interface,” Constance Lever-Tracy and Noel Tracy (hereafter “the authors”) treat the East Asian crisis as an outgrowth of the tensions among alternative varieties of capitalism. While most mainstream accounts of the crisis focus on purported conflicts between free markets and state regulation, the authors expand the roster of contending regimes to include Chinese diaspora capitalism, a form based on “horizontal networks of mainly small and medium, entrepreneurial family businesses, linked transnationally through long-term personal relationships of reputation-based trust” (5). Indeed, the authors’ examination of the crisis, and of the prospects for recovery, emphasizes the purported virtues of diaspora horizontal network capitalism compared to both free-market and state-regulated capitalism. The authors even suggest—albeit tentatively—that the uneven incidence of both the crisis and the initial “recovery” can be explained in terms of the different degrees to which diaspora capitalism has been contaminated by free-market or state-regulated capitalism in different national contexts.

The authors’ intervention is welcome for two reasons. First, it points out the need to reject the simple dichotomy between free markets and state planning by incorporating the real social relations in and through which development and crises occur. A more structural perspective informed by the underlying social relations of production and competition can help us move beyond the simplistic “policy mistakes” interpretations of the crisis so common among mainstream (free-market and state-regulationist) scholars. Second, by emphasizing the role of transnational capitalist networks, the authors highlight the need for an analytical framework that is regional in scope, but that takes account of national differences in capitalist relations and policy regimes. Up until now the most popular regional perspective on the East Asian economy has been the “flying geese” approach, which celebrates the spread of development impulses from Japan to other countries of the region. With Japan’s recent economic difficulties, it is not surprising to see the flying geese paradigm disputed by alternative regional perspectives that emphasize the role of (mainland or diaspora) Chinese capitalism.

In short, the authors are right to reject the simple state-versus-market dichotomy and to search for a structural and regional explanation that does not simply blame the crisis on “mistaken policies.” Unfortunately, they pursue this potentially useful analytical strategy using a methodology that is basically uncritical of capitalism and limited to the concerns of competing capitalists—with workers and their communities treated as passive spectators in the drama of development, crisis, and socioeconomic change. The usefulness of the authors’ analysis is undermined by the absence of a class perspective that recognizes that exploitation, uneven development, and crisis tendencies are essential aspects of capitalism in all its historically specific forms.

The next section examines the authors’ conception of East Asian capitalism in general and Chinese diaspora capitalism in particular, referring to the crisis only as absolutely necessary to point out the shortcomings of the authors’ basic analytical approach. Three points are made here. First, the authors’ framework arbitrarily limits development alternatives and concerns to those consistent with capitalism, thereby implicitly identifying the development interests of workers and communities with the interests of competing capitalists. Second, the authors’ non-class treatment of free-market, state-regulated, and diaspora capitalism as distinct economic forms leads to theoretical confusion and a series of false dichotomies between different elements of capitalism as an organic whole, and this produces a distorted understanding of capitalist development in East Asia. Third, and closely related to the second point, the authors’ framework generates a reified, idealized picture of Chinese diaspora capitalism in which all suboptimal or undesirable aspects of capitalism in general are arbitrarily separated from this particular “pure” form.

A subsequent section demonstrates the practical importance of the above three points by criticizing the authors’ understanding of the crisis and its aftermath. It is shown that despite its
structural pretensions, the authors’ explanation of the crisis is not fundamentally different from mainstream accounts that emphasize the roles of short-term capital movements, financial deregulation, and corruption. Moreover, the authors’ non-class and non-holistic approach to diaspora capitalism leads to a one-sided projection of the prospects for an East Asian development recovery, especially from the standpoint of workers and communities. The present article concludes by arguing that the East Asian crisis is a crisis of capitalism (not of “globalization”) and as such it is counterproductive to focus solely on the relative superiority of one form of capitalism over another. Now is the time to support region-wide efforts by working people to build an alternative to capitalism.

East Asian Capitalism and Chinese Diaspora Capitalism

For the authors, there is no single Asian capitalism, but rather three main kinds of capitalism that have been “co-existing and interacting in the region” (4). One relies on “hierarchical planning,” another works through “free-market relations,” and the third is based on “horizontal networks.” The authors give concrete meaning to these “three types of integration” by identifying the first with the Japanese developmental state model, the second with (Western) free-market capitalism, and the third with Chinese diaspora capitalism. They claim that while most analysts spend their time debating the relative merits of the first two forms, their own interest is in studying “the opportunities and dangers that result from the interrelationship of [all] three” (4).

There are three problems with this typology and the authors’ application of it. First, it places clear ideological and political limits on the analysis of development and crisis. Specifically, within the authors’ tripartite classification, it is the world as seen through the eyes of capitalists that commands analytical attention. The critical terms of the authors’ framework—hierarchical, free-market, and horizontal—speak only to capitalist prerogatives and relations, with workers and communities (not to speak of capital-labor relations) playing no active role whatsoever. Thus, within the hierarchical system, capitalists are directed by a powerful developmental state. In the free-market system, capitalists meet as unrelated and autonomous equals. In horizontal networks, capitalists form long-term relations that guide their business practices.

Inter-capitalist and capitalist-state relations are an important factor in development. But unless embedded in a larger framework that includes the social relations of production and is alert to national and regional class conflicts and contradictions, the study of such relations is unlikely to be of significant use to East Asian working people. The authors never consider the “three capitals” from the point of view of workers and their communities. If they had, they might have been forced to reassess the artificial dichotomies built into their three-pronged framework—e.g., the separation of “hierarchy” from both markets and “horizontal” inter-capitalist networks (see below). More important for present purposes is the political one-sidedness implicit in the authors’ framework. This is evident from their uncritical account of the East Asian growth “miracle”: the exploitation, oppression, and conflicts that fueled and accompanied the “miracle” are never mentioned. Even the crisis that resulted from it does not cause the authors to question the desirability of capitalism as an engine of sustainable social improvement for working people. For the authors, the main priority seems to be helping East Asian scholars appreciate both the importance of smooth working relations between the different capitals and the heretofore underrated role of network capitalism in the region’s development. Indeed, the authors appear more concerned about the effects of the crisis on diaspora capital’s horizontal networks (and what the crisis tells us about the relative resiliency of alternative forms of capitalism) than about its devastating impacts on East Asian workers and communities.

The authors’ identification with capitalism—their uncritical embrace of this system’s latest wave of “end of history” ideology—is further revealed by their understanding of the causes of the East Asian crisis (to be discussed more fully in the next section). In brief, the story they tell is that globalization generated increased interactions between the three different forms of capitalism, thereby leading to an unbalanced interrelationship. Thus, for the authors, the crisis is a “crisis of globalization,” not of capitalism as such (1). They do not consider what the crisis tells us about the limits and tensions built into capitalism in all its historically specific forms and the corresponding need for non-capitalist alternatives—not just choices among alternative forms of capitalism. The authors’ apparent capitulation to the elite notion that “There Is No Alternative” to capitalism (TINA) seems intellectually irresponsible given the enormous costs workers in East Asia have paid for past growth and the additional misery they are being asked to bear to “resolve” the current crisis on terms consistent with existing capitalist institutions and privileges.

The second major problem with the authors’ framework is that its imprecise demarcation of the three main systems of East Asian capitalism leads to theoretical confusion and historical distortion. The Japanese development system, as the authors themselves note, is composed not only of hierarchical state-capital relations, but also network relations between firms within keiretsu conglomerates. (It may be added that different keiretsu often engage in joint ventures, and that Japanese capitalists are as effectively organized into “horizontal” business associations as any capitalist class in the world.) Moreover, exports have long played a critical role in Japan’s growth, in large part as a result of the systemic gap between productive capacity and effective demand stemming from the effective exploitation of labor by Japanese capital. Yet the authors repeatedly identify export-orientation with the free-market system, while treating state-directed import-substitution as part of the hierarchical system. In reality, of course, developmental-state policies (implemented in quite hierarchical fashion) were crucial to the export successes not only of Japan but also of South Korea and Taiwan—all of which actively pursued import-substitution in coordination with export-led growth. Adding to the confusion is the fact that the “network” system of Chinese diaspora capitalism has been heavily trade-oriented and in many cases integrated with or dependent upon the actions of developmental states, especially in Taiwan and mainland China.

Whether Chinese diaspora capitalism is really less market-oriented than Western “free-market” capitalism, as the authors would have it, is certainly unclear. The main basis of this claim seems to be the internalization of transactions in (largely family- and ethnic-based) relations of reciprocity within and among diaspora enterprises. But then it would seem to follow that the internalization of erstwhile market transactions on a much larger scale in U.S.-based transnational corporations (utilizing highly differentiated, particularistic modes of administration) would also connote a “less market-oriented” form of capi-
talism. In short, the authors’ conceptions of network and free-market capitalism are both based on a false dichotomy between capitalist management (or “entrepreneurship”) and market forces. Their rather elastic use of the term “free-market” does not help with this difficulty. At times the authors use “free-market” to connote a system that is relatively trade-oriented, but elsewhere they apply the term to trade activity between unrelated enterprises both domestically and internationally. At other times, they use “free-market” to describe particular market transactions that involve short-term speculative activity (e.g., increases in enterprises’ short-term debts and rapid cross-national movements of short-term capital). These cross-cutting definitions create such a loose and constantly changing theoretical backdrop that the resulting analysis often becomes almost unintelligible.

Part of the problem here is that the authors attempt to demarcate three distinct forms of inter-capitalist competition without addressing how each form concretizes, and is shaped by, the more basic class relation between capital and labor. For example, “market orientation” is hardly an incidental feature of capitalism in general—one essential only to particular varieties of capitalism. Production for the market is naturally the dominant form of production in any system of wage-labor, in which labor power is itself treated as a commodity. Generalized commodity production is an essential feature of an economic system in which workers are first socially separated from control over necessary conditions of production and then only reunited with these conditions as wage-labor conducted under capitalist control. This essential connection between the capital-labor relation and commodity production means that market relations are necessarily class-hierarchical relations in capitalist society. Only by submerging capitalism’s class dimension are the authors able to describe the market as a “level playing field” (9).

Lacking a class perspective, the authors do not apply their conception of “hierarchy” to the relations between capitalists (and their managerial functionaries) and workers. This point is directly connected to the third major shortcoming of the authors’ analytical approach: its tendency to produce an idealized model of Chinese diaspora capitalism artificially separated from capitalism’s real-world downsides. For example, they never ask whether horizontal network capitalism is any less hierarchical (or exploitative) than the other two varieties with regard to capitalist-labor relations. Insofar as diaspora enterprises employ wage-labor, are their managerial practices more “horizontal” in terms of enterprise authority structures, control by workers over production decisions, the health and safety of work conditions, and the wage and benefit levels for workers? How is it that diaspora capitalists can enjoy both “flexibility” and “long-term relationships” with other capitalists if not via a high degree of economic insecurity for their labor forces? Such questions are evidently not a major concern for the authors.8

Even from the limited standpoint of capitalist-state and inter-capitalist relations, the authors’ model of Chinese diaspora capitalism is highly idealized—one could say utopian. In discussing the crisis, for example, they suggest that diaspora capitalism failed mainly where and when it became overly dependent on corrupt governments or too enamored of markets, speculation, and profits. If only diaspora capitalists had behaved as they are supposed to in the “pure” horizontal network model, they would not have gotten into trouble! This analysis presumes that corruption and profit-seeking, market-oriented, and speculative behavior—and all the systemic risks, uncertainties, and instabilities associated with such behaviors—are not essential aspects of diaspora capitalism. But since when do capitalists not compete by seeking to enhance their profits (i.e., to increase their stock of capital) by any means necessary—including speculation and connections with the state? The authors implicitly assume that horizontal networks can somehow insulate diaspora capital from competitive pressures and corruption (or at least could do so, in a “pure” network environment) even though these networks are immersed in a competitive market setting structured by other competing enterprises and the state. What seems more likely is that these networks are themselves an institutional instrument wielded in, and thus increasing the intensity of, capitalist competition over markets and state connections.9

In sum, the authors deserve credit for calling attention to competing capitalist interests in East Asia; but their non-holistic conception of capitalism causes them to filter these interests through a series of artificial dichotomies and a misleading idealization of Chinese diaspora capitalism. More importantly, their attempt to distinguish between the three systems solely in terms of inter-capitalist and capitalist-state relations does little to further what should be a primary interest of concerned East Asian scholars: illuminating the impact of capitalist dynamics on workers and their communities. The limitations of the authors’
As noted above, the authors blame the crisis on growing imbalances produced by the interaction of the three different capitalist systems operating in East Asia. They explain the initial development of this “mismatch” in terms of the changing weights of hierarchical and network capitalism in the region’s growth.

Initially the hierarchical mode was predominant, with Japan emerging as the leading economy in Asia. However, with increasing deregulation and the increasing importance of manufacturing for export, the network and market models increased in importance. The focus of the new dynamic was now Hong Kong and Taiwan. What shifted the balance of power in favor of the latter was the opening of China in 1985. The personal networks gave them preferential access to partnerships with the new local forces for development in China. In China they found new, cheaper sources of land and labor and potential new markets. This access allowed the networks to increase their production facilities exponentially, seizing a greater share of world markets as a result. (6-7)

According to the authors, the Japanese-led hierarchical system eventually lost ground to the Chinese-based network system because networks proved better able to take advantage of new technologies and market opportunities than the developmental state. The growing inefficiency of the Japanese system did not harm East Asia, however. Thanks to the networks created by Chinese entrepreneurs operating in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, mainland China (especially in Township and Village Enterprises and local governments), and the west coast of the United States, “the countries of Asia outside Japan grew” (7). The authors’ account of the prelude to the crisis evidences major problems even in terms of basic factual accuracy. For example, it is certainly not the case that the market system and manufacturing for export only became important for East Asian growth “with increasing deregulation” and the relative decline of Japan as a regional growth-center especially after 1985. Japan’s own postwar growth “miracle”—and even more so South Korea’s and Taiwan’s—were export-led long before the mid-1980s, based largely on their relatively open access to U.S. and other developed country markets. The authors also overstate the extent to which mainland China and Chinese network capital took over as the region’s growth engine in the post-1985 period, while understating the continued regional role of Japanese big business. From the mid-1980s onward, the growth and industrialization “miracles” of Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia were largely driven, not by Chinese diaspora capital, but by massive inflows of direct foreign investment by Japanese corporations. Finally, the attempt to distinguish the post-1985 growth of Chinese network capitalism from the growth of market-oriented activity is simply unconvincing. The main tendency of the post-1985 economic reforms in mainland China was precisely the liberalization of market activity, and—as the authors themselves note—Chinese diaspora capitalists were and are heavily involved in production for export, merchant import/export operations, and speculative finance.

The effect of the authors’ questionable narrative is to insulate all three varieties of capitalism from direct blame for the crisis. For the authors, the crisis was not caused by a breakdown in the network system, a fundamental collapse of the hierarchical system, or even instabilities generated from within the free-market system. Rather, it was caused by a growing imbalance between the former two systems and the free-market system as represented by the actions of global financial investors. The “progressive deregulation of global financial markets,” along with the “increasing boom conditions in the region (Japan excluded)” led to a “massive increase in footloose capital flows” (8). East Asian capitalism, which was increasingly dominated by Chinese network capitalism (but with Japanese-led hierarchical capitalism still having a strong presence in various states of the region), became imbalanced as a result of its penetration by Western free-market capitalism in the shape of “international banks and mutual funds, operating on short-term market principles” (7). In short, there was “a clash at the interface of potentially incompatible systems, which had been previously developing along partially independent trajectories, due to a sudden change in the balance between them” (9). Eventually this escalating incompatibility “ceased to be manageable” (8).

According to the authors, this crisis of unmanageability evolved as follows. East Asia’s developmental states and Chinese network systems were unprepared to handle the massive amounts of short-term capital provided by Western free-market lenders, and these lenders were themselves unprepared to evaluate the costs and benefits of investing in the region. As the authors put it, “Western ignorance combined with Asian opacity to produce an undiscriminating perception of risk throughout an undifferentiated Asia” (9; emphasis in original). As developmental state planning and regulation broke down under the weight of too much money, corruption grew—leading to bad investment decisions. Many members of the Chinese diaspora responded to this situation either by seeking closer relations with their respective states in an attempt to capture monopoly profits or by joining in with the short-termist speculation promoted by Western free-market finance capitalists. In sum, the incompatibility of different kinds of capitalist integration has sparked a clash at the interface. The liberalization and deregulation of global capital markets have undermined the integrity of developmental states. The corruption of developmental states, in turn, has accentuated moral hazard for market participants, creating conditions for irrational bubbles and disproportionate panics that, through ignorantly spread contagion, undermine even the healthy parts of the real economy. Some sections of the networked diaspora are drawn into global speculation or crony capitalism, paying a price in loss of control and reputation and attracting scapegoating attacks on the whole community. In turn, through their particularistic relationships they contribute to the undermining of systemic trust in both the level playing field of the market and the legitimacy of the state’s public purpose. (9)

It is obvious that for the authors, the East Asian crisis was not caused by the basic contradictions of capitalism, nor even by specific weaknesses in any of the three ways of organizing capitalism. Rather, it was just a “mismatch, a lack of synergy, at certain interfaces between different kinds of capitalist integration” (9). Unfortunately, it is just as obvious that the authors’ explanation does not progress beyond free-market and state-regulationist accounts of the crisis, which also emphasize (albeit in different ways) the combined effects of corruption and short-term capital movements. Of course, free-market economists suggest that corruption, bad investment decisions, and financial instability mainly resulted from an inadequate market-orientation (although some
also call for improved prudential regulation of financial institutions, whereas the state-regulationists place the primary blame on "premature" and overly rapid liberalization of both domestic and external finance—with corruption and misallocation of capital mainly following in the train of enhanced free-market opportunities. But both mainstream perspectives treat the crisis as an outcome not of fundamental capitalist contradictions, but of mistaken state policies in a given environment of increasingly globalized capital movements. Similarly, the authors take financial liberalization (both domestic and international) as either a policy mistake or a given factor of "globalization" (their discussion is ambiguous on this point), while treating the actual crisis process in terms of the mistakes made by East Asian states and network capitalists.

Stated differently, the authors do not detect any built-in contradictions in the East Asian growth "miracle" that could have led to the crisis. For them, the basic ingredients of the miracle—markets dominated by Japanese-type hierarchies and (increasingly) Chinese diaspora networks—were fundamentally sound. If only they had not been contaminated by Western, free-market, short-term capital! It is not surprising that the authors reach this conclusion, considering that their analytical framework treats market-oriented production and production-for-profit as incidental aspects of capitalism. Such an approach naturally draws attention away from reductions in the relative profitability of East Asian capital accumulation—including overproduction problems—as a potential endogenous force leading to crisis. Such an approach also naturally downplays the contradictions of export-led growth, including its reliance on "competitive" unit wage costs, i.e., its unsustainability whenever workers' wages cannot be kept below international standards for labor of comparable productivity. This is not the place to set out a more structural and class-based account of the crisis—a task pursued elsewhere. The point here is that the authors try to analyze the crisis of East Asian capitalism without solidly anchoring their analysis in capitalism's most fundamental characteristics. They treat the different forms of capitalism as separable "capitalisms" when in reality they are mutually constituted elements of capitalism as a holistic, historical, regional, and global system. It is this non-holistic, undialectical approach that causes them to ascribe the crisis to factors "external" to the East Asian growth miracle itself.

Remedies

The authors' essentially exogenous, non-structural explanation of the crisis shapes their discussion of "remedies and prospects." For the authors, there is no need to consider radical change. They consider but reject as unsatisfactory arguments for reform that seek to place blame or devise solutions focusing exclusively on either markets or states. Instead, they recommend pursuit of policies that moderate the ways in which all three varieties of capitalism interact. Nonetheless, the authors' sole concrete proposal for "insulation at this perilous interface...to attenuate future crises" is to implement "restrictions on short-term foreign borrowing and... stricter requirements for transparency where it does occur" (11). These reforms do not go a single step beyond the mainstream free-market and state-regulationist policy agendas.

For the authors, however, the main role of financial regulation seems to be that of creating a stable environment in which Chinese diaspora capitalism can continue to thrive. In fact, although the authors claim that nothing is certain and more research is needed to draw any firm conclusions, they clearly hold out the possibility of (and throw their normative support behind) an East Asian recovery led by Chinese diaspora capitalism—with financial controls insulating this regional resurgence from disruptive incursions by Western free-market capitalism. The authors point to the fact that Taiwan and mainland China have done the best in avoiding the crisis and sustaining growth. While acknowledging that countries in Southeast Asia, which are also connected to the Chinese network system, are doing relatively poorly, they see this as confirmation of their main point: These countries are doing poorly because their Chinese diaspora capitalists abandoned the fundamental principles of horizontal network systems by engaging in deals with their respective states and/or excessive financial speculation. If they had remained true to their principles, like the Taiwanese entrepreneurs and Town­ship and Village Enterprises in China, the countries of Southeast Asia would be in far better shape.

The authors' analysis of "remedies and prospects" leaves some large questions unanswered. How much of China's and Taiwan's relative insulation from the crisis should be credited to the "pure" operation of network capitalism and how much simply to capital controls and state planning? More crucially, given diaspora capital's "long history of successful evasion of state controls" (11), how will financial controls work to stabilize Chinese network capitalism (and East Asian capitalism in general)? The presumption seems to be that network capitalism is itself immune from (or can be immunized against) the instabilities of capitalist accumulation and competition.

Most importantly, the authors do not consider what a diaspora-led "recovery" would look like from the perspective of working people. Indeed, their discussion of recent "indications of an end to the slide and some projections of slow recovery" is even more non-structural than their explanation of the crisis itself:

In mid-1999 it seems clear that recovery from the Asian crisis is becoming established (although it will depend on continuing growth in the world economy). Stocks, currencies, and property markets are rising throughout the region and a return of growth in the real economy is expected, with forecasts being periodically revised upward. Those who claimed that such recovery would require fundamental restructuring have been taken aback at the speed of recovery, despite the slow progress in supposedly essential reforms. One commentator complained that investors' revived confidence was that of 'lemmings' with the 'attention span of a mosquito', but this does suggest that the prior destructive panic may have, indeed, been equally arbitrary. (11)

The recovery indicators cited by the authors, like their basic analytical approach to East Asian development and crisis, are largely limited to the concerns of capitalists. Although they do refer to a prospective recovery of "growth in the real economy," the authors choose not to mention the regressive presumptions built into this mainstream projection—among them mass unemployment, reduced real wages, cutbacks in social spending, and large-scale denationalization of both productive and financial wealth; all to be implemented by undemocratic methods. The struggles by workers and communities throughout the region against such class-biased economic and political retrenchment (struggles widely reported even in mainstream Western media, albeit in distorted fashion) play no role in the authors' discussion of regional "prospects"—except perhaps as a potentially disruptive force. Workers and communities are not allowed any voice

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Workers and communities in East Asia are facing a real crisis, a crisis of capitalism. This crisis—like all capitalist crises—has intensified the struggle between capital and labor over basic living and work conditions, as the International Monetary Fund and developed capitalist governments, in concert with East Asian ruling classes, are seeking to solve the crisis on the backs of working people. (Fish-packing plant in Thailand. Credit: Jacques Maillard/ILO Photo Library.)

in determining the basic pattern of economic development; this field is evidently best left to network capitalists and other regional elites.

Workers and communities in East Asia are facing a real crisis, a crisis of capitalism. This crisis—like all capitalist crises—has intensified the struggle between capital and labor over basic living and work conditions, as the International Monetary Fund and developed capitalist governments, in concert with East Asian ruling classes, are seeking to solve the crisis on the backs of working people. In order for workers and their communities to effectively defend themselves against the ruling-class onslaught, they need to understand the system that exploits them. Concerned East Asian scholars can help by constructing solid, structural, class-based analyses of the growth "miracle" and crisis—not by attempting to promote idealized forms of "Asian" capitalism.

It is sad to see the search for an "optimal" form of capitalism continuing even among non-mainstream scholars—even as capitalism's inability to provide a sustainable economic basis of human development becomes increasingly clear. Rather than investigating the relative resiliency of alternative models of capitalism, now is the time to move beyond contemporary capitalism's "end-of-history" ideology, and begin the much more difficult work of envisioning and struggling for a more sustainable and human-developmental system. It is true that we need to move beyond the simple dichotomy of free markets versus state activism; but this movement cannot be advanced by embracing the false "third ways" offered by capitalist elites. Workers and communities need to construct their own "third ways" based on cooperation and democracy instead of markets and hierarchies. If progressive intellectuals want to assist this process, they need to critically engage with the various ongoing movements of worker-community resistance to capitalism's growth-crisis-retrenchment logic in East Asia and elsewhere.

An understanding of capitalist dynamics at the elite level is important, but we must remember that the conflicts among alternative capitalist models are only a family feud, and that our real sisters and brothers are not located among the entrepreneurial and bureaucratic functionaries of capital, but among the workers and communities that are exploited and oppressed by these elites. Truly liberating development visions and movements can only come from the latter, grassroots level—not from the latest elite development fads.

Notes

4. For details on the costs borne by workers in both the crisis and the uneven "recovery," see Paul Burkett and Martin Hart-Landsberg, Development, Crisis, and Class Struggle: Learning from Japan and East Asia (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, in press), introduction and chapter 14.
5. On this point, see Rob Steven, Japan's New Imperialism (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); also Burkett and Hart-Landsberg, Development, Crisis, and Class Struggle, chapters 6-9.
9. Network theory's distinction between corruption and "reciprocal gift exchanges" in capitalist-state relations is artificial at best. In practice, the choice of label seems to be determined mainly by whether the country in question is in crisis or not. If the country is in crisis, the term "corruption" is used; but if the country is experiencing rapid growth, the term "reciprocal gift exchanges" is preferred. The danger of ex post theorizing is obvious here. See, for example, Y. Hsing, "Blood, Thicker than Water: Interpersonal Relations and Taiwanese Invest-
development of the crisis, starting with Thailand and then spreading to
JASEAN,” in Development, Crisis, and Class Struggle, chapter 12.


A critical analysis of mainstream “recovery” projections for East Asia is provided in Burkett and Hart-Landsberg, Development, Crisis, and Class Struggle, chapter 14.

A Rejoinder
by Constance Lever-Tracy and Noel Tracy

Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett (hereafter “the authors”) attack our paper on three main counts. The first claims that we have set up an absurd model of three separate and distinct capitalism, in which exploitation of workers plays no significant part, and in two of which market relations have no place. The second is that we have misunderstood the Asian financial crisis as a temporary crisis of friction between these capitalisms, rather than as a fundamental crisis of a single capitalist system, derived from class conflict, a declining rate of profit, and overproduction. The third accuses us of Thatcherism, of presenting a scenario in which “There Is No Alternative” to capitalism. We respond that the authors have largely misrepresented our paper and its purpose and that where the disagreements are real, they are wrong.

In chapter 1 of Capital, Marx contrasts the division of labor in society at large with “the division of labour in the workshop,” with both together constituting the capitalist system. He describes capitalism as Janus-faced, with one face directed outward, to the anarchic relations between supposedly free and equal independent actors, and the other inward, to the exploitative plans of autocratic management, concealed behind the factory walls. While these two faces of capitalism mutually condition each other, they are clearly distinct, and the first (which occurs in all societies) can take various forms, including but not restricted to commodity exchange, while the second is specific to capitalism. Both Marx and others since have shown that, especially in the period when capitalism is being established, the working of market forces alone cannot ensure that the system prevails or even survives. Market relations are (and perhaps must be) to varying degrees supported by states or embedded within longer-term social relationships.

Our paper was not trying to construct a model of three distinct capitalisms but, more modestly, to analyse some internal components and contradictions within this first, outward-looking aspect of capitalism. It sought to focus on the “different ways of integrating” the division of labor in society between “separate units of capital” (3). These outward looking relationships, we argued, might involve hierarchical plans and embedded networks, in addition to market relations. The inward-facing structures of power, control, and exploitation were in no way belittled or denied, but were not the focus of this particular paper.

Furthermore, we never suggested that one could have a “pure” capitalism whose external relations were integrated solely by networks or state plans (just as we believe “pure market relations” could not, in isolation, sustain the system for long). Clearly markets are central to the very definition of any capitalism (just as Marx’s other face, involving the exploitation of workers in production, is essential). What we were concerned with was the way different groups of capitalists might rely on different combinations, giving different relative weight to these different kinds of integration, for their inter-capitalist relationships.

We wanted to explore how these might supplement each other or clash, producing internal contradictions, in the context of recent Asian growth and crisis. In particular we were concerned with the way a sudden change in the balance might significantly exacerbate tensions in the system as a whole.

We had thought these limited goals, aiming to focus on “three distinctive types of capitalist integration with different relative importance for different kinds of capitalism” (3) were quite explicit and clear. We speak of “the precarious balance between the three types of integration,” noting that all three in varying proportions, can be found in all economies of the region (and no doubt elsewhere), that to varying degrees they cross the boundaries between public and private sectors and that none are uniquely Asian or Western in character. Nonetheless different kinds of capitalism give different relative weight to these three forms of integration. (4)

The Asian economic miracle manifested the effectiveness of a competitive assault on global markets, coordinated by developmental states and diaspora Chinese capitalism. (5)

So how do the authors manage so to misunderstand or misrepresent our argument? The method seems to consist of first erecting a straw person and then quoting contrary statements by us as proof that our (supposed) case is confused, or that even we have reservations and must concede its weaknesses. For example they attribute to us a monist model of Japanese development and then allege inconsistency in that “the Japanese development system, as [Lever-Tracy and Tracy] themselves note, is composed not only of hierarchical state-capital relations, but also network relations between firms.”

Causes of the Crisis

On the second question, about the causes of the crisis, our differences are more substantive than concocted. Unlike the authors, we do indeed understand the crisis to be frictional and temporary. It was, we think, clearly brought on by a financial crash, caused by an excess of “overtrading.” We apologize if this is not terribly original. This occurred when sudden increases in flows of very short-term “hot money” (the most extreme and disembedded form of anonymous free market flows) came into parts of the
system that had previously tended rather to rely on long-term relations and embedded trust, rather than on abstract rules and transparency, to supplement or support market forces.

Here too, however, lurk smaller straw persons. For example we do not, as the authors claim, suggest that markets are somehow "Western" (although the ideology that promotes their monist dominance may be). Indeed in footnote 58 we explicitly deny seeing even "hot money" as "Western" and note that "the largest source of short-term loans to Southeast Asia came from Japanese banks, and domestic holders...were prominent in the flight from the currencies." 

Similarly we do not suggest that the reason for the lesser vulnerability of Taiwan and China lies in their "purer" networks. It is rather the effectiveness of the balance between states, markets, and networks that we stress: "Both China and Taiwan... have capital controls, limited foreign debt and a thriving sector of export-oriented small firms, linked through networks to global markets." 

Disagreements can be debated and tested by events. We await Hart-Landsberg and Burkett's book, but hope it will appear soon, as the pace of the current rapid recovery of the region seems to be overtaking what we take will be their projection of impending systemic Armageddon. We do however object to a critique that judges a different interpretation of the prospects for imminent capitalist collapse as a lapse from morality or political correctness.

To us it seems that capitalism at present is in the early years of a new major upswing. New technology has transformed the organization of production and extended the horizon of actual and potentially saleable products. In the last twenty years, and accelerating in the last decade, tens of millions of workers in China and Southeast Asia have been incorporated into the world market as producers and consumers. The working class around the world, however, is, for the time being, weakened, disorganized. Any vision that goes beyond the confines of capitalism, and points to a better world, has been made to seem utopian by the inability of the working class and the socialist movements anywhere around the world, to sustain their victories or to prevent their leaders from betraying or perverting them. One may hope and work for a revival in the long term, but in the kind of short-term perspective relevant to a temporary, frictional crisis there really is no realistic prospect for solving it by constructing an alternative society.

It is true that gains in living and working conditions and in welfare provision within the system, although eroded, continue to be defended, and that new working classes are certainly pushing to acquire them. However, in the current period of expanding capitalism, these are likely to remain, not unrealistically, within the bounds of the system. It is foolish to pretend that the lives of most ordinary people there have not benefitted, even if unequally, from economic growth in East Asia and China, or that workers do not benefit from a recovery and a subsequent revival of growth (and thus of jobs and wages), in comparison with the suffering imposed by a crisis.

In the end outrage is no substitute for analysis, and knowing your enemy should seem a worthwhile exercise, especially in a rapidly changing world and when previous strategies have led nowhere. As Machiavelli argued, it is much more important to study what people do and why, than to be endlessly repeating pious generalities about what they should be doing.

Notes


2. For example, see Marx, Capital, pp. 471-72 and Part 8, passim; Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1947). 

3. Hart-Landsberg and Burkett could have found references to exploitation elsewhere in our work, where the focus was different. For example, in The Chinese Diaspora and Mainland China (by Constance Lever-Tracy, David Ip, and Noel Tracy [Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996]) we note and document how, despite the prevalence of long-term ties between diaspora Chinese capitalists, in the relationship between the "new foreign [diaspora Chinese] capital and the new [migratory] labor in southern China, the strongest impression is of an almost exclusive domination of market forces, the predominance of the pure "cash nexus". As one might expect, reports of the outcome for such seemingly weak workers often record not only high profit extraction but also a variety of abuses" (pp. 273-74). We emphasized the potential for self-organization and point out that "newly formed migrant working classes have been known to move rapidly from passivity and victimisation to high levels of class consciousness and militancy" (p. 279).

4. Another example of an obviously false view, wrongly attributed to us, is that "the market system and manufacturing for export only became important for East Asian growth... after 1985" (our emphasis). The quotation from our paper, provided by Hart-Landsberg and Burkett (as well as its unquoted context and associated footnote), makes clear that the reference to the post-1985 period is not about the importance of manufacturing for export (which of course predates that time) but specifically about a "new dynamic," which "shifts the balance of power in favor of Hong and Taiwan vis-à-vis Japan, because their networks give them preferential access to an opening China.

5. There are other disagreements we cannot deal with here, for example on the importance of Japan in the region and of the decline of Japanese investment in triggering the Asian crisis. While the withdrawal of Japanese short-term loans has been noted, the decline of Japanese foreign direct investment starts in the early 1990s, and had no dampening effect on the subsequent boom in East and Southeast Asia. See "The Decline of Japan in Asia: An Update," Policy, Organisation and Society, no. 14 (winter 1997). At present the recovery of Japan is clearly lagging rather than leading that of the rest of Asia.
Big Dams in India: Necessities or Threats?

Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy (The God of Small Things) has become a vocal critic of the construction of big dams in India, particularly the Sardar Sarovar dam presently under construction on the Narmada river. (For a recent summary of her position see The Cost of Living [HarperCollins, 1999].) In July 1999 Gail Omvedt published an open letter to Arundhati Roy in which she claims that Roy is “missing many things” in her efforts to defeat the dams. “Are you so convinced,” she asks Roy, “that the thousands of dams built since independence have been an unmitigated evil? Or that the goal should not be to restructure and improve them rather than abandon them? Or that the struggle should not be to unite all the rural people aspiring to a life of prosperity and achievement in the modern world—drought-afflicted and dam-afflicted—rather than to just take up the cause of the opposition to change?” Roy has not replied in public to Omvedt’s open letter but other activists have responded in various forums. In this “critique and rejoinder” we publish one such response: by Ashish Kothari, an anti-dam activist who drafted the first detailed critique of the Narmada projects back in 1983 (as a member of Kalpavriksh, an environmental group). Omvedt replies to Kothari’s criticisms of her position and Kothari responds in his own defense.

An Open Letter to Arundhati Roy
from Gail Omvedt

Dear Arundhati,

I’m sorry to have to write a critical letter to you. I very much liked The God of Small Things. I also appreciated your intervention on the nuclear issue. I was impressed on reading in Indian Express that you had decided to donate some royalties to the Dalit Sahitya Academy....

However, when it comes to the issue of “big dams,” I can understand the urgency you feel for the people of the valley and the victims of misguided development projects everywhere, but I feel that you’re missing many things. There are important questions not only regarding the dam-afflicted but also the drought-afflicted, issues of water for agriculture, and of democracy in peoples’ movements. I would like to share with you some of my experiences, mainly in Maharashtra, with drought and water issues, and with movements opposing eviction and in favor of building small dams, among farmers and agricultural laborers of various castes and among adivasis in northern Maharashtra, near the Narmada.

The first time I even heard of the Narmada dams was around 1984. The CPI(M), the Shramik Mukti Dal (SMD), and the Shramik Sanghatana, an organization of adivasis in Dhubale district, had organized a demonstration in Akkalkuva, where they presented a petition to the government demanding mainly that Maharashtrian evictees be given alternative land in Maharashtra itself and calling for alternatives to the Sardar Sarovar. I remember that it was during the monsoon season; we walked miles afterwards through drizzling rain to enjoy discussions, intellectual puzzles with matchboxes, and a simple meal in one of the many remote villages of the area.

A little after that, in 1986, many of the same activists of the Shramik Sanghatana and SMD organized an “Adivasi-Forest Conference” in Shahada. I had come to Dhule to help in rallying support among the social and political activists of the district. This was just after Medha Patkar [a leader in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and an opponent of India’s present line of development] had made her first visit to the district. She had crossed the Narmada with Achyut Yagnik of Ahmedabad; their boat had capsized but somehow they had made their way down through the district, stopping off at Shahada to meet Shramik Sanghatana people—the main organization of adivasi tillers in the region—and then coming to Dhule, where she formed a support organization. All this was fine. There were only two critical questions raised. One was mine: Medha at that time was following the guidelines of the World Bank in demanding justice for evictees, and these guidelines identified only male heads of families as eligible for alternative land. We were at the time already starting to raise the question of land for women, and I felt it was too bad that the landlessness of women was being neglected in the process of rehabilitation and building anew.

Sardar Sarovar Project

Co-sponsored by the Indian states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, the Sardar Sarovar Project is designed to dam and utilize the waters of the Narmada—the largest West-flowing river in the country—for the benefit of the population of the sponsoring states. Prime Minister Nehru laid the foundation stone for the massive dam on 5 April 1961, but work on the project began only in 1987. As of March 1998, excavation for the main dam was all but complete and 82 percent of the concrete works had been finished. The Indian Government’s position on the controversial project is available online at http://www.sardarsarovar-dam.com/index.htm.
But that was minor. Looking back, probably a more important negative reaction came from Waharu Sonavane, at that time the leading young adivasi activist of Shramik Sanghatana. Waharu had been in the movement since 1971-72, working with Ambarsingh Maharaj, a truly unique indigenous leader, and with the Shramik Sanghatana and SMD, a Maharashtra-wide organization of Marxist activists. Waharu is a poet and an intellectual—though he has never had the opportunity to learn English—and I will quote for you a few lines of one of his poems that came out of his years of experience with movements. It is given as a title the English word (a word that also has come in Marathi) —“Stage”:

We did not go on to the stage,  
Neither were we called.  
We were shown our places,  
told to sit.  
But they, sitting on the stage,  
went on telling us of our sorrows,  
our sorrows remained ours, they never became theirs.

There is more, but that is the main point. Waharu’s main objection was that in all her discussions on the anti-dam movement, Medha never gave credit to those who had organized on the issue before her. More recently also it was Waharu who raised the question to Sanjay Sanghvi of the NBA [Narmada Bachao Andolan], “Why is it that there is no top-ranking adivasi leadership in the NBA?” This was at a seminar organized by the Pune University Women’s Studies Centre. Sanjay could not answer except to say: “But all our village leaders are adivasis.” This is no answer, I hope you understand, when you are dealing with villages that are nearly 100 percent adivasi. Why are all the leaders from the urban elite, and how democratic exactly is their relationship with the rural poor they are organizing?

There were and are real questions about the way in which the leadership of the NBA relates to—“represents” and uses, its adivasi and nonadivasi farmer following. One of these has to do with an area you should be an expert in: words. Why the term “tribal”? I know, nearly every English-speaker in India, apparently including supporters and activists of the NBA, uses “tribal” for adivasis when speaking in English. (In Indian languages all now use “adivasi” or some equivalent.) But, although established now, the term “tribal” is an insulting and demeaning word, inaccurate even from a social-scientific point of view; I don’t know of any group of indigenous people the world over who would accept it for themselves. (I won’t here go into the debate about whether or not “adivasis” should be called “indigenous people.”) The only reason it survives in India is that because of the abysmal state of education in general among adivasis and even worse state of English education, there is no one really in a position to protest. Otherwise there would be massive objections, just as Dalits have thrown out the term “harijan.” Those classified as a “scheduled tribe” in northeast India—people like Mr. Sangma—made clear long ago their feelings about being called “hill tribes.” The fact that “tribal” is still a widely used word in English, I think, has something to do with the way people are a little careless about the identities and real feelings of those they represent. And if this includes you and the NBA, then you should think about it.

In any case, Waharu’s earliest objection was in terms of non-recognition of what they had done before; and this was very early on in the anti-Narmada movement, when there was no NBA as such and Medha and others were still talking mainly of rehabilitation and not of total opposition to big dams as such. But the tendency of not recognizing the work of others, or really being willing to admit that there has been a history of struggles, has remained. You write very easily of “people’s organizations” in different states coming together to form the NBA. These were organizations set up by Medha and her associates. In Maharashtra the largest “people’s organization” or alliance working on rehabilitation issues is the Maharashtra Rajya Dharangrast va Prakalgrast Shetkari Parishad (Maharashtra State Conference of Dam- and Project-Affected Farmers), which has been working since the 1970s. It has offered a broad platform in which various local struggles have united. Its leaders from the beginning were people like Baba Adhav, a socialist and also a man very much involved in anti-caste campaigns; Datta Deshmukh, a communist of the Lal Nishan Party (now deceased); Naganath Naikaudi, an independent Marxist and freedom fighter from southern Maharashtra; Bharat Patankar of the Shramik Mukti Dal, among many others. These have nearly all been involved on issues of irrigation and water, as well as problems of dam evictees.

The Meaning of Water

People in these organizations were concerned about the social justice of dams and the sustainable use of water from very early on. But they never opposed dams as such. The main slogan of the people involved in their struggles was “first rehabilitation, then the dam.” Later this was linked to “equal water distribution”—the demand that irrigation projects should be restructured to provide water to every family in every village in a watershed area. Movements are going on for this, for example in regard to the Krishna Valley dams.

Bharat Patankar (my husband, to keep things in perspective) and others were involved in a fight for one rather well-known peasant-built small dam in Sangli district in Maharashtra, the Bali Rajya Memorial Dam, irrigating two villages. This was even taken as a kind of model of the type of dams the NBA would approve of. But they, we, have never opposed “big dams” as such. Bharat, at the time when Medha turned from simply agitation-for-rehabilitation to opposing big dams as such, was also active in a movement of Koyna dam evictees—working with farmers who had lost their land decades back at the time of construction of the Koyna dam. He very simply felt that there were at least some big dams—Koyna was one—that were not by any means inherently destructive and that did not submerge significant areas of forest.

Why does anybody need “big dams” or “big irrigation projects”? Arundhati, there is a very simple issue here, one that urban people—I hope this doesn’t sound too sarcastic—find hard to understand. Water is needed, not only for drinking, but for agriculture. NBA documents have talked a lot about drinking water, but they have not had much to say about water for agriculture. You cannot grow crops without water, and when there is only 500mm of rainwater per year—this is true of three-fourths of the Krishna valley area in Maharashtra and of much of Gujarat including Saurashtra and Kutch—then some external water, provided by canals, is necessary to supplement rainfall. “Rainwater harvesting” is not enough in such areas of low rainfall. The millions of people living in such areas are the drought-afflicted, suffering from years of parched earth and damaged crops; they are driven off their lands to the cities to live, or migrate to work as laborers, for instance sugar cane cutters, in areas of irrigation. But
they would prefer to be able to prosper in their homes just as much as those threatened by dam and project eviction want the alternative of not moving. You say that the thousands of dams built in India since independence have simply led to eviction on one hand and waterlogging on the other, but this is not true. So many farmers have benefited from irrigation water, and millions who have not can see this, and want such benefits also. Our arguments are not against big irrigation projects as such, but against badly conceived ones; big projects can be sustainable and work in a decentralized manner.

It may well be that, hundreds of years ago when the low rainfall regions were mainly occupied by pastoralists, people could carry on traditional livelihoods. That is no longer true. Population has multiplied, and the ways of using natural resources, converting them into food and materials for living, have to be developed. Productivity has to be increased, and this means that some form of irrigation projects as well as other kinds of technological development are necessary. In areas of very low rainfall, even villages that have become famous for “watershed development” and using rainwater—such as Ralegan Siddhi in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra—are supplementing this with canal water.

In any case, most of those who stand to lose their lands for dam projects are farmers, whether adivasis or non-adivasis, who understand the need for water for agriculture. Their refusal to be victims of development does not mean an opposition to development; they would like a share in it; they would like it to be just and sustainable. (Indeed, one of the achievements of the Maharashtra Rajya Dharongrast va Prakalgrast Shetkari Parishad was to win acceptance of the principle that those losing their land in the catchment area of dams should get alternative land in the command area—a share of the water of the dam.)

I visited Ferkuva in early 1991. I had come from the Gujarat side, from Surat—along with a representative of a farmers’ organization that would be considered a “rich peasant” organization by most NBA supporters. Ferkuva was staunchly for the dam, and when I brought up the usual objections, the farmers’ representative simply responded, “There’s a cup of water which is half full. You say it’s half empty, I say it’s half full.” Gujarat so badly needed the water, he felt, that it could deal with flaws. He, like most Gujaratis I know, was adamantly against any compromise, and could not be argued with. However, he was an old Gandhian and wanted to visit Baba Amte and Medha, both of whom he knew. We approached from the Gujarat side—where the government had organized large rallies made up of both of adivasi and non-adivasi farmers. Well, they were “brought there,” I suppose. On the Maharashtra side, where the NBA was camped out, were a band of adivasis and also some farmers from the Niphad area. Medha’s fast had started. I talked a bit to the Niphad farmers—I suppose they are the ones who call themselves “Rajputs,” though this honorary title is mainly a claim to status and they may not be much different from the mainly Kunbi-Maratha families in the Maharashtrian village where I live. They said, “people of both sides should sit down and talk it over.” “People”—not the government, not just the organization leaders. People like themselves, from both sides.

This never happened.

Arundhati, you see the NBA as a “small ragtag army” confronting the mighty forces of government and the World Bank. I see it as a worldwide alliance with considerable amounts of money and backing from upper-middle-class people in North America and Europe, not to mention Delhi and Mumbai, along with a rather small local base in the Narmada valley. Medha Patkar stands in between, at the intersection between the two. You are calling for the people of the world, doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, whatever, to join the NBA—you don’t need to call them, they have been there almost from the beginning.

So what is the NBA? An adivasi organization? Ask Warahar. A movement of those threatened by eviction due to the dam? Ask some of the evictees, many of whom have gotten land through other organizations working for rehabilitation, both in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

There is nothing wrong with going out to organize people, with throwing oneself into a cause or supporting a cause, with rallying world opinion. NBA has succeeded in giving great power to a “no big dam” position and in calling into question the whole issue of “development.” You have every right to support them. But in doing so, please think about one thing: when you go as leaders to people in the valley, or when you represent people in the valley to the world outside, what are the consequences for them of the arguments you make? What does it mean when you put your own arguments, either explicitly or implicitly, in their mouths? Are you so sure your sweeping opposition to big dams is in their best interest, or that you are democratically representing their real feelings on the matter?

**Talking about Alternatives**

The NBA has begun to talk of “alternative development.” But they have not been much interested in alternatives that depart from their particular line.

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"...'people of both sides should sit down and talk it over.' 'People'—not the government, not just the organization leaders. People like themselves, from both sides." (Anti-dam activist. Credit: Venu Govindu.)
There are people working on alternatives—some in southern Maharashtra struggles and campaigns, based in struggles, drawing on popular initiatives and on technological innovations proposed by radical engineers and others in Mumbai and Pune—of various kinds. They use some very simple principles in suggesting alternatives.

The principles are: minimizing the height of dams and the areas to be submerged; ensuring that all of those who will lose lands or livelihood to the projects get compensation, land-for-land wherever possible; and ensuring that all the drought-afflicted who look hopefully for benefits will get access to water. The slogan of “equal water distribution” calls for the widest possible availability of water—and for concrete, technologically viable methods of doing this.

You see, to have a really powerful people’s struggle against unjust dams and the horrors of losing one’s home, you have to build such a wide unity—of the drought-afflicted along with the dam-afflicted, of those in the command area of dams as well as those in the catchment area. Otherwise, the state will simply use the longings of those millions of drought-afflicted against dams in the catchment area. The slo-

gan of “equal water distribution” calls for the widest possible availability of water—and for concrete, technologically viable methods of doing this.

You see, to have a really powerful people’s struggle against unjust dams and the horrors of losing one’s home, you have to build such a wide unity—of the drought-afflicted along with the dam-afflicted, of those in the command area of dams as well as those in the catchment area. Otherwise, the state will simply use the longings of those millions of drought-afflicted against dam evictees; this is their game of divide and rule, and it cannot be defeated simply by the support of middle-class urbanites outside the area of the project, however fervent and idealistic they may be.

An alternative along these lines had been proposed for the Sardar Sarovar Dam. It has been published by Suhas Paranjape and K. J. Joy, in a book entitled Sustainable Technology: Making the Sardar Sarovar Project Viable.\(^1\)

The Paranjape and Joy proposal is based to a large extent on work done by the groups of engineers working with K. R. Dayte of Mumbai and on struggles and experiments in Maharashtra. The themes of this are simple: lower the height of the dam drastically; construct a barrage below the present Sardar Sarovar dam to take water to Saurashtra and Kutch. Instead of storing water year-round in a huge reservoir, most of the water would be distributed to farmers and stored in farmers’ fields—there to be converted into biomass. The biomass can provide not only food, fiber, fodder, etc., but even electricity: instead of a centralized electricity-generating dam, electricity can be generated on a decentralized base using gasifiers and other modern technological devices by the farmers themselves, and sold by the farmers to the central grid.

Such an alternative would not do away with the dam, but it would lower its height and drastically reduce the number of people who would lose their land. It would also unite people, the drought-afflicted, especially in areas such as Saurashtra and Kutch, and the dam-afflicted.

But the alternative was never seriously considered. The government of Gujarat of course was opposed; by now most opinion has hardened and positions have hardened. No change in the dam. Well, we might expect that from the repressive State. But the alternative was also never considered, never taken up, never publicized by NBA either. They may have been upset by the idea of “making the Sardar Sarovar Project viable”—giving a new lease on life, even though in a radically altered form, to something they were trying to totally destroy.

Could we conclude that they are not really interested in alternatives?

Was the NBA not playing into the hands of the State that has systematically and continually tried to divide people, that has built for itself a support base against the farmers of the valley among the millions in Gujarat hoping for water to maintain their livelihood? Isn’t talk of only using rainwater-harvesting a cruel joke on the people in the areas of Saurashtra and Kutch?

**Krishna Valley Alternatives**

Similar issues have come up regarding the dams in the Krishna valley region of Maharashtra. Take Koyna dam. There is one activist, Avinash B. J., a longtime NGO worker, who is considered part of the NBA group, working in the area. I believe he even attended a world conference in Rio and talked about the Koyna and Krishna valley dams. He has little local base. But his position in regard to the farmers of the region who still have some lands around the reservoir itself was that they should not move. The main committee of Koyna evictees has had employment provision as one of its demands. But Avinash B. J.’s position was that the farmers should stay and carry on with their lives near the reservoir. Whether or not it sounds good to say that people should not join the flood going to live in questionable conditions in the big cities, the fact remains that in this particular case the result would be that the landless and land-poor farmers would have no other option but to provide agricultural labor to the bigger landowners.

In the Krishna valley as a whole, the NBA has no support; there is a large people’s movement under the leadership of Naganath Naikaud and Bharat Patankar and others, mainly organized through the Shetmajur Kashtakari Shetkari Sanghatana—sorry to bother you with a lot of long names, my publishers always say it’s bad for readers from abroad, they get confused, and this is quite understandable. Talking only of the NBA and of “no big dams” is much simpler; unfortunately, however, people organize themselves in a multitude of organizations and with a multitude of ideas and aims. Anyway, some of the movements have been of villagers standing to have their lands flooded by construction of dams. In Urmodi (in Saurastra district) people have held a dharna [sit-in] for over two months, stopping construction of the dam because their rehabilitation is not assured; in Azra Taluka of Kolhapur district the construction of the Uchangi dam was halted to give the villagers a chance to present an alternative proposal.

Overall, the movements have taken up the demand to complete the dams in the Krishna valley so that the water allotted to Maharashtra can be used before the deadline set by the Bachwat Award, in May 2000. But, the people are insisting that the government’s method of building dams—top-down, bureaucratic, capitalistic—should be changed to provide a distribution system that will give water to every village and every family in the Krishna valley, not just to create green islands of development in a sea of drought. And they have amassed experiments and data to show that this can be done. A Marathi booklet on this by Bharat Patankar sold 10,000 copies on the day of the conference when it was brought out. (An English translation has not yet been published.) Within this framework of demanding sustainable dam construction, full rehabilitation, and equal water distribution, people of thirteen drought-prone talukas [subdistrict] in five districts of southern Maharashtra have organized themselves. But they are better at communicating in Marathi than in English, and the urban-middle-class component of this particular movement is very weak. The local papers (that is, the local editions of papers) publish news, the government pays attention, but the Bombay and Pune editions do not publish their news. Even when five days of demonstrations by nearly 100,000 people in the area, simultaneous demonstrations by both the dam-afflicted and the
On Bags of Grain and the Meaning of Development

So I ask myself, what kind of movement is this, what kind of movement is the NBA? Whose movement is it anyway?

Answering these questions requires a few comments about the question of development. You are, like many urbanites and many people in Europe and North America who buy food from the market every day, very pessimistic about and even antagonistic toward the idea of Indian farmers getting into “commercialized agriculture.” (Oh yes, starvation in the midst of plenty: I was in Kalahandi, also, in 1996, when I spent a few months at an institute in Bhubaneswar; its problem is not commercialized agriculture, but the total and abysmal lack of any industrial development in the district, along with the fact that 40 percent of forest land is owned by the state.) It somehow seems a destruction of a beautiful, perhaps poor but nevertheless rich in variety and emotion, traditional way of life. You wrote of the “bags of grain” in the farmers’ household, and how they bragged about them.

I would like to say a little bit about bags of grain. I’ve married into a farming family, perhaps not too different from these. We have fifteen acres on the banks of the Krishna, and we have lots of bags of grain, which have sometimes filled even the “living room” of our house after harvest.

But, bags of grain are not worth all that much. Maybe 1,000 rupees a bag, depending on the crop. Farmers don’t make much of a living off of agriculture. They do not do so now, they did not do so either in traditional times. That is, in times before “modern” commercialized agriculture and before all the paraphernalia of contemporary society entered their lives. We can say both good and bad things about the agriculture and industry and society of today—but let’s examine the traditional one a bit.

There is a Marathi saying: “Knowledge in the house of the Brahmans; grain in the house of the Kunbis; songs in the house of the Mahars” (dalits). One meaning of course is that the Mahars, the dalits, are the worst off, they hardly have food to eat. But the other is that both the Mahars and the Kunbi peasants, along with all the vast middle castes who were identified as “shudras,” traditionally were deprived of knowledge and education. Traditionally, they were subsistence producers, growing their own food—except for the surplus eaten up by the Brahmans and the feudalists and merchants. So they had grain. But little else. It was a caste-stratified society. Then, as today, “knowledge” was the most valuable; knowledge could command grain and songs. Kunbis were looked down upon as shudras and servants, dalits were even worse off. Economists have even argued that the average wage for agricultural and basic manual laborers at the time of the Arthashastra represented the same in money terms as the average wage during colonial times; and it has not changed very much in the fifty years of independence.

That is your traditional, non-commercialized society. Do you really think the adivasis, dalits, and shudra, or Rajput farmers of the Narmada valley want to keep that? Are you so convinced that the thousands of dams built since independence have been an unmitigated evil? Or that the goal should not be to restructure and improve them rather than abandon them? Or that the struggle should not be to unite all the rural people aspiring to a life of prosperity and achievement in the modern world, drought-affected and dam-affected—rather than to just take up the cause of the opposition to change?

Development to so many people in India means getting out of the traditional traps of caste hierarchy and of being held in a birth-determined play. It is not simply economic progress, but the capacity to participate in a society in which knowledge, grain, and songs will be available in full measure to everyone. When you so romantically imply that such development is not possible, when you give all publicity and support to anti-development organizations, are you not yourself helping to close such doors?

Hoping to hear from you,

Gail Omvedt
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Notes

An Open Response to Gail Omvedt’s “Open Letter to Arundhati Roy” by Ashish Kothari

Gail Omvedt’s open letter to Arundhati Roy raises a number of issues, some of which need a detailed response, which I attempt below. To put things in perspective, I should state that I was involved with the first detailed critique of the Narmada projects (back in 1983, as part of the environmental group Kalpavriksh), and have since then opposed these dams as being inherently destructive. I have also been involved for some time with environmental assessments of large projects, and would therefore like to bring a third perspective into the debate, which has so far largely focused only on displacement and the benefits of large dams. This third perspective is the environmental one.

Gail Omvedt’s arguments are essentially along two planes: one, that the NBA sustains itself more on middle-class Indian and foreign support rather than a mass local base, and two, that its opposition to large dams as such is ill-founded. Along the way she brings in some other arguments, and fires broadsides at some other people. I will try to respond.

A “Small Local Base”?

The assertion that the NBA [Narmada Bachao Andolan] has a “small local base” is, to say the least, rather strange and ill-informed. Some of us have just returned from the Rally for the Valley. We would had to have been absolutely blind if we were to accept Gail Omvedt’s charge. At Pathrud, one of the villages threatened with submergence by the Maheshwar project, between 8,000 and 10,000 villagers greeted the Rally. At every village and town along the Rally’s route, there were tumultuous welcomes, such that many reporters with us remarked that only in election campaigns had they seen such turnouts in the past. Yet these were not “hired” crowds, as may well happen at election rallies. Gail Omvedt would have done well to come for the Rally, perhaps as an observer, and seen the so-called “small local base” (and its alleged middle-class character) for herself.

This is not a new phenomenon. Anyone who has attended rallies of the NBA in the last fourteen years, would have been impressed at the spontaneously massive response they receive. In
1991, we walked over 200 kilometers through Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, and across the Gujarat border (where a naked display of state power stopped us). There were 3,000 of us, 95 percent local villagers, on this Sangharsh Yatra. Two four- to five-day long dharnas in Delhi, one of them I remember in the scorching heat of summer on the streets in front of the prime minister’s residence, were attended by several thousand villagers. Several hundred of these were adivasis, many of whom had walked three to four days to get to the spot from where transportation was available to bring them to Delhi. Unless Gail Omvedt is alleging that these are all hired hands, or that they are all affected by a mass “false consciousness,” I cannot see how she can call this kind of participation “small.”

Using the name of Waharu Sonavane to raise questions about the nature of the NBA, is illogical and rather strange coming from an academic who should know better than to use single examples to generalize. This kind of logic can easily be countered by naming a dozen tribes who remain steadfast in their opposition to the dam, and are willing to go along with the NBA all the way. I was just last week talking to Lohariyabhai of Jalsindhi, whose hut will be the first to go under the waters if they rise another few feet this monsoon (even as I finish this essay, this submergence may be taking place). Lohariyabhai is resolute in his determination to commit “jal samarpan” [a term meaning to “give one’s life to the waters as they rise around you”], and with him are thousands of other adivasis and non-advasis. Gail Omvedt’s charges against the NBA, at a time when these villagers are struggling to save their lives and livelihoods, their lands and cattle, are not just incorrect, they are rather insensitively and tragically timed.

Gail Omvedt, I would request that you go to Jalsindhi or Dhomkhedi and ask them the questions you have asked Arundhati. You’ll get your response in those adivasi villages. And while you are at it, go also to Pathrad, Anjad, Nisarpur...and go also to the upper pada of Manibeli, already submerged by the Sardar Sarovar dam. Adivasis who resisted the submergence are living there, refusing to vacate their village even now. Ask the adivasis of Manibeli, whose huts were among the first to permanently go under water, who lost their cattle and goats, and yet who stand resolutely with the NBA. It is a mockery of these incredibly brave people to call them a “small local base.”

This is not to assert, in any way, that the NBA’s base in the valley covers the entire affected population. Undoubtedly there are dissenters; there are those who have lost courage and accepted whatever doles the state governments have handed out; there are perhaps even some who would be happy to move out (due to locally exploitative situations, a topic to which I return below). There would also perhaps be those, like Waharu, who have been disillusioned or ignored by NBA. No mass movement is perfect, and no mass movement can claim 100 percent support. But to point to these examples, and negate the clearly evident mass base of the movement, in which I would estimate that at least 30,000 to 40,000 people in the valley alone are involved, is to display a bias and lack of respect for the facts on the ground.

The question of why there is no “top-ranking adivasi leadership in the NBA” is important, and needs to be squarely addressed by the NBA itself. But it is not a question restricted to the NBA, it can be asked of most recent movements in India. Perhaps it has to do with the history of displacement of adivasi identity, perhaps something else. Perhaps it has to do with the way in which the Indian and international media singles out “heroes” they are comfortable with, or who belong to their “class.” What is absolutely clear, however, is that in the decision-making process in the valley itself, both adivasis and non-advasis are highly involved, even though Medha and other “middle-class” activists do often have a stronger say...I have in the past participated in these processes, and will vouch for this. Ask any of the reporters who were with the Rally throughout (barring one or two who were hostile right from the beginning), and they will tell you how they were amazed at the knowledge regarding the dam and its negative impacts, regarding their legal rights, and regarding larger issues of development that “ordinary” villagers (adivasi and non-adivasi) displayed. This kind of in-depth knowledge, and this kind of resolute participation in activities like jal samarpan, cannot be the outcome of a purely or even predominantly urban middle-class movement.

One may raise another issue here. While it is technically, academically correct to label Medha and some other NBA activists urban “middle-class,” is this a valid real-life category for these people anymore? Some of these activists have spent the better part of the last decade and a half living with the villagers and townspeople of the Narmada valley, on monthly stipends that are so low that Gail Omvedt and I would perhaps not survive for more than a couple of days on them. Some of them have no stipends at all. They have braved everything that the villagers have braved, police brutalities, imprisonment, and now the ultimate “sacrifice” of the jal samarpan. To brand them as the “urban elite” is simply to take recourse in tired old academic categories and to avoid facing the fact that these people have given up the trappings of their own past and chosen to live much more difficult lives in order to be one with the dam-affected populations.

Incidentally, it is interesting that Gail Omvedt, after alleging that the NBA has an “urban elite” leadership, lists the following people as leaders of the Maharashtra Rajya Dharrangrastva Prakalgrast Shethkari Parishad, an organization of farmers affected by dams and other projects that she has projected as being the sort of model that the NBA is not: Baba Adhav, Datta Deshmukh, Naganath Naikunda, and Bharat Patankar. Now who among these is adivasi, or for that matter, an ordinary farmer? Can one then ask the same question of her: why is there no “top-ranking adivasi/farmer leadership” in the southern Maharashtra movement? (I am not alleging that there is no such leadership, merely pointing out the fallacy of Gail Omvedt’s argument, based as it is on a biased view of the decision-making process in the NBA.) What gives these people, at least some of them from urban backgrounds, more of a right to “represent” local farmers than the right that NBA activists have?

In a strange interlude, Gail Omvedt also makes a passing reference to Avinash B. J. of Satya Shodh, a nongovernmental organization. Avinash B. J. works with the villagers in the Koyna area of Maharashtra, yet Gail Omvedt claims that this person, a supporter of the NBA, has a “little local base,” and that he is making an unjust demand to let farmers remain around the Koyna reservoir, even though this would condemn them to a state of being only “agricultural labor to the bigger landowners.” Both these claims are gross misrepresentations. In 1996, during the Jungle Jeevan Bachao Yatra, a band of twenty-five to thirty of us (activists, academics, and villagers affected by several national parks and sanctuaries) had traveled to some of the villages in the Koyna Sanctuary, on the eastern side of the reservoir. The response we got was very large, and everywhere, there was one demand: the villagers did not want to be moved. They reiterated
this demand in a recent meeting organized by the Koyna Jeevan Hakka Samrakshana Sanghatana, a mass-based organization that by no stretch of the imagination has a “little local base.” These farmers have their own lands, they are not laborers on other people’s lands, they have intimate ties with the forest. Unless again this is a case of mass “false consciousness.” Gail Omvedt’s allegation that Avinash is falsely representing them is downright wrong. Perhaps she is confusing these with some of the villages on the western side of the reservoir, who are indeed being badly hit by the submergence and the sanctuary, and are asking to be moved out. Again, it is illogical to generalize from these few villages and cast aspersions on another whole set of villagers or an NGO that has been helping to organize them to fight for their rights.

The Question of Middle-Class and Foreign Support

Gail Omvedt states that the NBA is essentially sustaining itself with “considerable money and backing from upper-middle-class people in North America and Europe, not to mention Delhi and Mumbai.” She contrasts this with the movement of the dam-affected in Maharashtra, with which she is associated, and which has not been able to get its mass rallies publicized in the national or international press. I’m sorry, but this sounds like sour grapes to me. To have a “weak middle-class component” is not a qualification to be waved around proudly. Is there something wrong with having such a component, so long as it is built on a strong local base? As I have detailed above, the local base of the NBA is amazingly strong, and the organization started by mobilizing this base.

I should know this, because I was, as stated above, involved with the first critique of the Narmada projects, before the andolan [movement] had started. Our detailed report was published in 1984 and since then, Kalpavriksh has been active in independently updating our assessment of the Narmada projects. If indeed the anti-Narmada movement had been an essentially middle-class urban phenomenon, we would have been world-famous by now! As it has turned out, we are not, and rightly so. The fact is, from the mid-1980s onwards, the mobilization among the people in the valley has been the central plank of the movement, and the middle-class support came later, as sensitive people in cities begin to see a resonance to their own concerns in the brave struggles of the local villagers. And also as it becomes evident that the Narmada projects are not just about some local government deciding to build some dams, but that they are connected to national and global vested interests, including the World Bank and multinational companies like ABB and Siemens. Building national and global alliances to counter this kind of an invasion of human rights and the environment is not to be sneered at...it was done brick by brick, on the foundation of a mass local base, and yes, using messages that were at once both logical/reasoned and emotive. And it was successful in kicking out the World Bank, the Japanese government, and at least some of the multinational companies who were there to support the project...no mean achievement (though Gail Omvedt, given her leanings towards globalization, may not think of these as positive achievements).

Nor has the NBA ever been flush with funds, as implied by Gail Omvedt. Again, I am a personal witness to the first few years of mobilization and the kinds of hardships that both “outside” and “local” activists went through even to make two ends meet while mobilizing affected people, the conditions in which tiny, struggling offices were set up, the way in which everyone had to desperately mobilize funds to make even one rally possible. If indeed the NBA has survived for fourteen years, it is due more to the spontaneous contributions, in kind and otherwise, of the people of the valley...and to characterize the movement as being flush with middle-class money is to once again mock this painstaking approach. Gail Omvedt, in fact, should also be made aware of the fact that the NBA’s agitation has cost Baba Amte’s incredible ashram in Warora—where leprosy patients are living the dignified life of any citizen of this country—to lose many of its donors and to face severe financial difficulties.

That the Narmada struggle has touched a chord among national and global citizens and media, while the Krishna valley one did not, should surely not be counted against the NBA? Indeed, it is because of this networking and alliance that many other struggles of people affected by big dams and other “development” projects in India and elsewhere, have gained inspiration and strength. The struggle has even made many of the urban supporters pause and question their own lifestyles, which are undoubtedly one of the causes of unsustainable and inequitable development processes.

Gail Omvedt’s allegations would have some basis if indeed the NBA was predominantly based among middle-class urbanites and its news was only being published in the national and international press. Neither of these is true, and anyone with an open mind can verify this by going to the valley and by looking at the last few years of “local” newspaper reporting. Go with a closed mind, and you may only see Medha and Alok and Chittarupa among a rally of five thousand villagers and you will only see the reporting in the English-language dailies. Go with an open a mind and you may see the five thousand villagers and the myriad reports in local dailies.

Finally, I wonder what Gail Omvedt would say about the middle-class (including foreign) support that the independence movement in India had, or that the National Fishworkers’ Forum has (the NFF is even part of a global alliance of fisherfolk fighting against the takeover of the seas by global commercial interests), or that the Chilika fisherfolk’s movement against prawn culture has? Incidentally, representatives of some of these other mass movements came to the Rally for the Valley, perhaps because they saw in it a reflection of their own struggles. Actually, it is ironic that Gail Omvedt should have reservations about foreign support, given her leanings toward globalisation and liberalization...ironic indeed, because most of the mass movements in the country today (such as the ones named above) are fighting against the terrible attack on local livelihoods, natural resources, and democratic spaces by today’s brand of globalization and are being helped by sensitive foreign groups in this struggle!

The Question of Big Dams and Alternatives

So now, let me tackle Gail Omvedt’s arguments that big dams are necessary, that they can be built in a more equitable way, and that the NBA is not interested in genuine alternatives.

When I started working on the impacts of large dams, I had no pre-set notions of whether they were necessary or not. I wanted to arrive at a conclusion on the basis of my own assessments, or those of others that I could lay my hands on. I worked for several years on the environmental assessment of the Narmada projects, spent a year looking at the environmental impacts of other big dams and examined the machinery in place today to ensure the “sustainability and viability” of such dams. With
other colleagues I took a brief look at the post-construction performance of three projects: Ukai (Gujarat), Indira Gandhi Canal (Rajasthan), and Hirakud (Orissa). All this work was independent of the NBA. Other friends did painstaking work on Srisailam, Bargi, and Rihand, as well as studies of proposed projects like Suvarnarekha and Koel-Karo. Our conclusion, in today’s context, and at least for the foreseeable future: big dams are ecologically unviable and socially unjustified. And there are real alternatives.

Big dams almost always mean either big displacement of people and/or big submergence of forests or other natural ecosystems. The Narmada projects involve both. In theory, one can resettle and rehabilitate people, and perhaps with the kind of mobilization that Gail Omvedt talks of as having happened in the Krishna valley, this theory can be translated into practice for a few thousand people. But for 200,000 or 300,000 people? Where is the land for resettlement? Gail Omvedt would say “in the command area—take it from the farmers getting irrigation”—but again, this may be politically feasible for a few hundred, perhaps a few thousand, but for a few lakhs? Does anyone really think that so much land is available, or will be possible to obtain? And in the Narmada situation, one is talking of displacing people in Maharashtra and M.P., and giving them lands in the command area in Gujarat, where there is already an incredibly high amount of hostility to “outsiders.” Can anyone predict the kinds of social and political tensions that may erupt, indeed have already come up in some of the resettlement sites? Gail Omvedt may perhaps know of the horrible incident in the Taloda, Maharashtra, when an adivasi woman already resident in the area and defending her customary rights to land that was earmarked for the SSP oustees [persons displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Project] was shot dead by police? Add to this the tens of thousands of farmers affected by the SSP canals (to say nothing of the “project-affected persons”!) in Gujarat itself, and this seems an ideal recipe for social disaster. Such recipes are brewing in most areas where large-scale displacement is proposed.

Gail Omvedt herself advocates a stand of “first the rehabilitation, then the dam.” As I am sure she is aware, NBA itself took this position in its early years. Only when it was convinced that the just rehabilitation of so many people was simply not possible and that there were other critical question marks on the viability of the SSP did the NBA take a “no-dam” position.

The question of viability becomes even more serious when we bring in the environmental angle. Curiously, Gail Omvedt has not dealt with this at all, except the passing remark that Koyna dam “did not submerge significant areas of forest.” I have looked carefully at the environmental record of big dams, and it is not pretty. Even if a large dam can be made to work, as Gail Omvedt says, in a “decentralized” manner as far as its social and political functioning goes, there is no way it can be environmentally decentralized. It inevitably means a large-scale disruption of the river system, with inevitable large-scale impacts upstream, downstream, and at the river mouth. Experience worldwide, as in India, suggests that there is precious little humans can do to reverse the negative impacts. In India, we have already lost 1.5 million hectares of forests and countless other lands and wetlands to dams (no one can replace a natural forest once it is submerged); we have endangered several species of fish and mammals by blocking their migration or drowning their homes (no one can recreate a species once gone); and we have increased salt-water ingress along the coastline as the outflow of river-borne freshwater has decreased. Contrary to popular engineering perception, rivers do not go wastefully into the sea, they perform critical functions of keeping sea-water at bay (literally!), enriching fish spawning grounds with nutrients, and a dozen other functions that we only imperfectly understand. I have not yet come across a single convincing argument that such impacts can be effectively countered. Large dams are, in this sense, a classic reflection of humanity’s hubris, one that makes us believe that we can “tame” nature. And considering that the most advanced country (as far as hubris is concerned), the United States, has recently started decommissioning dams (actually breaking them down), it may be worthwhile for us to pause and take stock.

There are those who say that environmental impacts can be mitigated. Here’s India’s record in this respect. As part of the Government of India’s Committee on Environmental Evaluation of River Valley Projects, we examined the fulfilment of environmental conditions under which 300 large dams were given clearance since 1980. In an astounding 89 percent of these dams, the conditions were being violated....and yet construction had not been halted. In other words, the vast majority of dams in India have been built not just in ways that are not environmentally compatible, but in violation of the laws of the land! This is a scandal of epic proportions, one that would put Bofors and the like to shame. In most cases, compensatory afforestation has not been done; R&R [resettlement and rehabilitation] is severely deficient, wildlife corridors have not been reconstituted, catchment areas have been left to erode, and so on and on. Anyone who says that big dams can be made ecologically viable (since Gail Omvedt has not dealt with this issue, I don’t know if she believes this or not) is living in a fool’s paradise.

Actually, Gail Omvedt has not really put forth many substantial arguments in favor of large dams, except to say that they are necessary for low-rainfall areas. This is also the main emotive argument behind Sardar Sarovar...that it will dispel the des-
perately drought-prone situation in Kutch and Saurashtra. Will SSP actually do this, and are there no alternative ways of bringing water to dry areas? The answer to the former is a firm No...SSP's own official documents reveal that only 10 percent of Kutch and Saurashtra will actually receive the canal water according to current plans, and that, too, only after another two decades! Getting water to additional areas by lifting it from the canals will require several thousand crores of rupees more, none of which are budgeted for in the current cost-benefit analysis of the dam. The real beneficiaries of SSP are not these areas, but rather central Gujarat, where a big farmers' lobby has been extremely influential in pushing for the early completion of the project. Why? Possibly because they want to switch to sugarcane production, extremely lucrative but requiring much more water. I won't get into whether they are justified in this demand or not, but at least let us dispel the notion that the project is going to eradicate drought from Gujarat's northern and northwestern areas. Central Gujarat's farmers will simply hijack much of the water well before it can reach Kutch and Saurashtra... and all the sophisticated computerized network of irrigation channels that the SSP authorities are promising, will come to naught. 3

So is there an alternative? When the NBA and others argue for decentralized water-harvesting structures in Kutch and Saurashtra, are they playing a "cruel joke" on the people of these regions? I will not venture to state with any finality that such an alternative is indeed possible for these areas, as I am not very familiar with them. But I do know of another region, also desperately dry, where indeed decentralized water-harvesting has been the answer. This is in Alwar district of Rajasthan, in a region of at least 200 villages with an average rainfall of about 600 mm. Over this region, johads [small checkdams] and bandhs [small dam] built by local villagers with help from nongovernmental organizations (and some government assistance) have transformed a "dark" (severely deficient in groundwater) zone into a "white" one (surplus in groundwater). Some 3,000 small water-harvesting structures have achieved this transformation, in the space of a little over a decade. Along with this has come major mobilization of the villagers on issues of forest conservation (one of the villages, Bhaoanta-Kolyala, has the country's first "public wildlife sanctuary"), sustainable agricultural development, common property management, and so forth. No external canal water is involved. If this is possible here, why not elsewhere? And indeed, what of the many similar experiments reported from Kutch and Saurashtra? I have only read passing references to them, but they appear promising... provided the government allows it. Rechristening a reality that is immensely complex and not amenable to academic, and not in a debate like this. The first mistake is generalizing a reality that is immensely complex and not amenable to generalizations. The second mistake is comparing a "no-dam" situation with an "after-dam" one... ignoring the third possibility of a "no-dam but alternative projects" situation.

The first mistake is made perhaps both by Gail Omvedt and by Arundhati. India's villages are indeed full of severe social and economic exploitation... but this is not so everywhere, and the degrees and kinds vary considerably. Surely Gail Omvedt knows far better than I that many parts of adivasi India do not display the kinds of caste exploitation that non-adivasi India does. And that in case after case where such adivasis have been forced off their lands and out of their villages, they have ended up as industrial or urban labor, as servants, as child labor, as sex workers, as faceless nameless workers who are exploited more brutally than any exploitation they would have traditionally seen?

I just came back from Dhomkedi and Jalsindhi, adivasi villages in the submergence zone. Life there is not easy, it is not worth romanticizing. But people have things to eat, when their crops fail, they have forests to fall back upon. They have flowing water to use. They have productive lands to cultivate. And they have their cultures, their relationships, their gods, to take shelter in. Uprooted for a dam of dubious benefit, even with the most "generous" R&R package, will they really get all this? And indeed they are facing problems (such as health and nutritional de-
... anyone with an open mind can verify [that the NBA is not a middle-class urbanite movement] by going to the valley and by looking at the last few years of ‘local’ newspaper reporting...” (Villagers and student activists confront plain-clothed police outside of the village of Domkhedi. Credit: International Rivers Network/August 1999.)

Incredibly evocative version of our national anthem that was sung by adivasis and non-­adivasis and middle-class activists together on 4 August, at Domkhedi, a song that speaks of having control over one’s destiny and one’s natural and social resources, a song that accompanied the unfurling of a flag that stated simply: “hamare gaon mein hamara raj” [meaning “our rule (or our government) in our village”].

And in any case, can anyone make a convincing case that big dams in India have been a major force in reducing exploitation and poverty, more than, say, small-scale water-harvesting structures? Gail Omvedt says that “big dams can be sustainable and work in a decentralized manner.” Can she give a few examples where this has indeed happened (not just on paper, but on the ground), as documented by independent observers? Perhaps it has happened, but it would be useful to get some evidence. When we did the study of Hirakud, Ukai, and IGNP, we inquired from various agencies whether there was a single case of an assessment that comprehensively looked at the environmental, social, and economic impacts of a big dam. The sad truth is...there is no such assessment.

One last word. I, like many other supporters of the NBA and critics of big dams, am not starry-eyed about the ability of movements like the NBA to solve all the ills plaguing our society. The NBA has failings, as we all do. They must be offered firm but constructive criticism, criticism that helps them to evaluate themselves...just as we must be able to evaluate ourselves based on questions they are asking. But to denigrate them with sweeping statements and biased generalizations, and to do so when their members are in the midst of a desperate struggle against drowning, is not only insensitive, but it plays right into the hands of the repressive state that Gail Omvedt otherwise so rightly criticizes. That is the tragedy of the content and timing of her “open letter.”

(11 August 1999)

Notes
2. For a more detailed exposé of the environmental impacts of the SSP, see the Kalpavriksh booklet “Environmental Aspects of the Sardar Sarovar Project.” For a detailed report of the decommissioning of dams, see The Asian Ecologist, special issue on large dams, September-­October 1998 (Vol. 6, No. 5).
3. For a more detailed critique, see Kalpavriksh’s booklet “Muddy Waters.” See address above.

To Ashish:
I support keeping the height of the dam low—something like the Paranjape-Joy proposal, which would have reduced submer-
gence by 70 percent and the number of evictees by 90 percent—and some kind of arrangement that will bring water to Saurashtra, Kutch, and north Gujarat on a priority basis. I support the maximum possible decentralization, local management of water, and reliance on locally produced inputs. I support what has been called LEISA—"low external input sustainable agriculture." I support combining the best traditional knowledge and methods with modern science and technology.

This is not the position of the NBA. The NBA not only defends the right of adivasi and non-adivasi farmers of the valley to stay where they are, it goes further and says that no big dams should be built, that big dams are all destructive. It not only says that the Sardar Sarovar project as it now stands will not give water to Saurashtra and Kutch, it says that no alternative restructur ing will be able to do that either, and that the people of these areas must content themselves with catching the rain that falls on their lands and storing and using it to the best of their ability. It says that there should be no external inputs at all for agriculture.

If this is a misrepresentation of the NBA’s position, then why doesn’t it question Arundhati when she says that the dam will lead to people growing two crops where there was one before, that this will be harmful to the ecological balance, that irrigating land in this way is like a human getting hooked on steroids?

I oppose these positions, on principle. I think it is not only romantic, but suicidal to say that Indians should carry on their agriculture just as they did a few hundred years ago, with only water-harvesting at the village level. It is suicidal because while such methods could more or less feed a population of 200 million, they are totally inadequate for one billion. It also distorts Indian tradition; even in pre-British times there were projects carried on at the above-village level, built by kings and state-sponsored engineers and artisans; there were big dams and large reservoirs.

Why Raise the Issue Now?

You do not think I should raise these issues now, “at a time of struggle.” I have heard this from other friends who are supporters of the NBA, as if questioning their basic position is a kind of betrayal. This kind of position is objectionable. The idea seems to be that you should discuss differences only within the movement and keep quiet once decisions are made and a campaign has been launched. Something like democratic centralism. But the NBA is not an army; I am not giving away secrets of strategy. A democratic movement, I would think, can only benefit from the widest possible discussion. Otherwise, the only positions available for public debate will be the extremes: the die-hard supporters of the dam versus the die-hard opponents. And this has only led to disaster up to now. Real alternatives have to be brought forward, discussion and controversies have to be wide open and public. I am raising the issue now because the NBA has brought it before the people of India and the world now; because they have put forward their “no big dam” and “no Green Revolution agriculture” position now. It has to be discussed now.

Otherwise the NBA will only face defeat again. Because nobody should delude themselves that the Gujarati government will bend before a popular movement outside its borders as long as it has the support, on this issue, of the majority of people inside Gujarat; as long as it can depict the opponents as extremists. It will be a lot harder for them to argue against proposals for re-structuring of the dam, particularly when they promise to bring water to the drought-prone areas of Gujarat, particularly when the government is in fact short of money. I have raised questions now because I think it is in the interests of the people of the valley as well as those of Gujarat.

“A Small Local Base”?

You are upset, Ashish, that I have said that the NBA only has a small local base. However, I hold to this. It does indeed have mass support, some enthusiastic and fervent mass support. Activists have worked hard for this. However, this mass support is not enough—not when it is from only one section and has nothing to say to the much larger section of people in Gujarat looking for water. (And if I find it highly objectionable when Krishna Iyer calls them “kulaks”—a word Stalin used to justify murder—and when you see only the interests of wealthy farmers: why not fight for the poor farmers of Gujarat?) The NBA’s mass support is small in relation to what it is trying to do.

For that matter, 30,000 to 40,000 is not really so large, not in India. Perhaps I have been “spoiled” by being involved in the farmers’ movement, or dalit movement, whose rallies are counted as failures when they are less than a lakh. The joint campaign of drought-afflicted and dam-afflicted farmers last November in Kolhapur, Sangli, and Satara districts also involved a total of a lakh demonstrating for three days simultaneously in separate areas.

Krishna, Koyna, and Bali Raja

You argue that “almost all” big dams involve either tremendous submersion of forest or unacceptable displacement of people, or both. (In the Hindi-language version of your article you dropped the “almost.”) I brought up the issue of Koyna because it is at least one case I am familiar with that involves neither.

The Koyna dam, in the Sahyadris in Satara district, on one of the major tributaries of the Krishna river, is a big dam, a “major irrigation project,” in the terminology of the Indian government. Its reservoir has a storage capacity of 98 TMC of water, and the dam generates over 900 megawatts of electricity. When lift-irrigation schemes on the Krishna are completed, nearly 250,000 hectares of now drought-prone land in eastern Sangli district will be irrigated. The reservoir has submerged ninety-eight villages, affecting slightly over 9,000 people. Of these, 8,203 are officially classified as “project-affected persons.” Though the dam was completed in 1956-59, only about 4,000 of those displaced had received compensation land by 1989, when the Koyna Dharanagrat Sangram Sanghatana was formed. (This is a component of the Maharashtra Rajya Dharanagrat va Prakal­ grat Shetkari Parishad.) After that some 2,000 more received compensatory land; to date, then, 6,372 project-affected people have received 7,524 hectares of land in five districts of Mahara­ashtra.

Many people, officially evictees, continue to live in villages in the reserved forest around the Koyna reservoir. Most of these also have and use the land given them in compensation; many spend money on bus fare to go as far as Solapur district to work on that land also. Their staying in their original home is not a matter of ideology but a practical matter, making the most of their situation, “walking on two legs.” Few have enough production from their lands in the reservoir to maintain themselves; most depend also on remittances from Mumbai. The Koyna Dharanagrat Sangram Sanghatana also makes demands for these villages, including roads that will make health and other services available, training in horticulture, water allocation from the reservoir to irrigate their fields, and demarcation of their agricul­
tural lands from the forest areas, and building of fences to protect them from the wild animals of the forest.

Up to now Koyna has functioned mainly to provide electricity. But two lift-irrigation schemes are being built taking water released from the Koyna reservoir to eastern Sangli district. One tehsil [subdistrict] to receive this water is Khanapur, where the struggle to build the Bali Raja Memorial Dam was carried out. This struggle was under the leadership of Mukti Sangarsh; farmers and their supporters fought to get rights to use sand from the dried-up riverbed of the Yerala river to build a small dam that irrigates 900 hectares of two villages and distributes the water on the basis of “equal water distribution,” providing that all families, even the landless, should get water. Seeing the resistance encountered in the fight for a very small dam made it clear that it would take more than thousands of people to change a project as gigantic as the Sardar Sarovar!

However, it is also clear that the benefits of small dams like the Bali Raja cannot solve the problems of the whole tehsil since the Yerala river continues to have water for only a month every year and reaches very few of its villages. Any number of small dams on it will not help. The farmers and agricultural laborers of the tehsil, like those in most of the Krishna valley, scratch out their living on dry lands or try industries like poultry; and most families send out sons who work in the textile industry or in informal occupations in Mumbai or find niches elsewhere. All of these are ecological refugees. The total number of such is immense, more than that of dam or project evictees. For these reasons, the people in the villages supplied by the Bali Raja Memorial Dam have joined a campaign, with morchas [a type of demonstration] and road-blockings, to restructure the lift-irrigation scheme using Koyna water. The government proposal would have “centralized” the water, providing full water to only about eight villages and partial water to twenty-three villages of the tehsil. An alternative plan done on the basis of agricultural experiments and Bali Raja dam building, with the help of engineers like K. R. Datye and Paranjape, proposes to provide enough water on an equitable and water-saving basis to irrigate all the 106 villages of the tehsil.

From the same perspective, the people and activists have joined those in thirteen tehsils of the Krishna valley who are agitating, not against big dams, but for the completion of the dams so that Maharashtra can get its share of Krishna waters, according to the Bachawat Award. At the same time they are fighting the state government for the completion and restructuring of canals and other distribution schemes so that every family in the valley can get irrigation water.

Who Are the “Leaders”?
The leaders of the Krishna valley dam struggles are all local farmers. They have been involved in fights of both drought-afflicted and dam-afflicted people. I brought up the question of leadership because I think it does make a difference: experience of living on a farm myself for almost twenty years now has taught me something that would not have come from simply participating in movements, however heroic. I think Kancha Ilaiyah has a point when he talks about “productive castes.” Most dalits and bahujans know the meaning of water-for-land. Most of those organizing agricultural laborers also know the significance of irrigation water: the people they organize want not only higher wages but land of their own, means of production; and they want to grow not only for their own subsistence but in order to earn an income. Irrigation, credit, technical help with crops are crucial to them.

You ask who are the “leaders” of the Krishna valley struggles. The four people I mentioned are all “bahujan” (Marathi-Kunbi by caste) and all come from farming families in western Maharashtra. Most are quite familiar to Maharashtrians. Of these Baba Adhav is the only one who is not himself involved in managing a farm at present. He has been working with trade unions of haci, rickshaw drivers, and other unorganized sector workers, and has long organized social movements in the tradition of Phule, such as the “one village-one well” movement. Datta Deshmukh (now deceased) was a leader of the Lal Nishan party; an engineer by training, a union organizer—mostly of unions of the rural poor—by vocation, but also known as a progressive farmer, a pioneer in grape growing. The fifty acres of land of his joint [extended] family that he managed would apparently put him in the big farmer category, but when he was young the family was poor enough without irrigation that his mother had to work as an agricultural laborer. Naganath Naikaudi’s twenty-five acres of land at Walwa is now divided among his three sons. Bharat Patankar’s family has fifteen acres of land near the Krishna river in Walwa taluka (also supporting a joint family; five in his own name); of these, ten are irrigated, some five to six in sugarcane, the most secure cash crop; the rest is jawar and a few other things. Milk also provides both nutrition and income. We do not eat less growing sugarcane; vegetable production in the area is also growing.

What Does Research Show?
Finally, I’ve gone over the report of your research in Economic and Political Weekly (7 February 1998) and its data are scanty and ten years old. It does not provide evidence to confirm your accusations against big dams. For one thing, you do not have “before and after” data—what was the production in the command areas of the Ukai-Khakrapur project, for instance, before and after the dam. You only show “proportion of CCA [comprehensive command area] envisaged” and “annual production envisaged” and “actual production.” This is rather different; it gives no idea about how much gain in production and productivity has come from the dams. Most of the data are current only up to 1989. (Incidentally most of the waterlogging and salination problems in our area in Sangli are near rivers and do not come from dams, but from unscientific and excessive use of water). And there is no data matching acreage and production for the Ukai-Khakrapur area. Showing production only, in tons, is highly misleading because crops have different weights: sugarcane production is usually measured in tons per hectare; food production in kilogram per hectare—a very different matter! If we take average productivities in 1989 (Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy [CMIE], Basic Statistics, Vol. 1) of 60.6 tons per hectare for sugarcane and 1,688 kilograms for rice—though I’m sure the production in Surat district is higher than that—this would imply that the 7,366,000 tons of actual cane production in 1989 was produced on about 122,000 hectares, while the 258,890 tons of paddy was produced on about 160,000 hectares. But this doesn’t match your “proportion of CCA developed.” I’m puzzled. Further, paddy production is more than expected; wheat production is only slightly less, and vegetable production is much more. All in all, it looks as if the people of the area are eating better than before. As far as Hirakud goes, paddy production is overwhelming; hardly a non-food crop.
Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar (on the ground) and other activists are forcibly dragged away from a protest site in Domkhedi, 21 September 1999. (Credit: Harikrishna and Deepa Jali.)

None of this backs up Arundhati’s claim that “cash crops are replacing food” or that water for sugarcane causes waterlogging. That is simply not true. And somehow she has turned 60 percent from your (questionable figures) into 75 percent. And yet people have praised the fact that her article is full of statistics.

If you want to bring large irrigation projects to court, you’ll have to provide better evidence than this.

Alternatives

Finally, you say that the Paranjape-Joy proposal merits “close consideration.” Others involved with the NBA have told me that it has already been studied. Has it or hasn’t it? You ask whether it would have been proposed if not for the NBA’s organizing. Probably; since all those involved with this proposal, including K. R. Datye, have been involved with various types of restructuring alternatives and with agriculture and engineering experiments for a long time. Paranjape and Joy have been activists with the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti. Most important, the evictees of Narmada valley would have organized themselves in one form or another, if not under the NBA.

I would repeat, the kind of alternative that involves only village-level water-harvesting, that NGOs can carry on them­selves, is insufficient. Irrigation schemes can be decentralized, can and should include innumerable small projects and local management by water-user societies. But the state has a necessary role in coordinating these, building larger dams, and funding them. A real alternative must take seriously the needs of both drought-affected and dam-affected—as well as the demands of equity and social justice—and the requirements of feeding the nation.

You question whether large-scale irrigation projects can ever be “environmentally decentralized.” No. But innumerable small projects also have large-scale effects, and carrying on pro-

The Storm over Big Dams in India

The latest round of debate on the Sardar Sarovar project and big dams in India started with publication of Arundhati Roy’s essay as cover stories in India’s national magazines Outlook and Frontline. That essay gave rise to many, many responses. One of them was by Gail Omvedt, which appeared as an open letter to Arundhati Roy on the Internet and also as a number of newspaper articles. These, in turn, elicited many responses. Only a few of them are listed below. Many more responses have appeared in the media across India and elsewhere and on the Internet. The list below contains URL addresses of the responses and contact information for the various documents.

—compiled by Himanshu Thakkar

“On Gail’s Closed-Headed Open Letter to Arundhati,” 22 July 1999 by Dr. Jitendra Shah of the Indian Institute of Technology (Bombay), can be obtained from Dr. Shah at <jiten@vsnl.com>.

Nalini Nayak, Internet response, August 1999, copy can be obtained from <cwaterp@del3.vsnl.net.in>.


Two-part article (“Sardar Sarovar and Bomb” and “Large Dams as Bombs”) by Himanshu Thakkar of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (dated September 1999) can be obtained from him at <cwaterp@del3.vsnl.net.in>.

Following correspondence on this subject between Dr. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt of Burdwan University, West Bengal, Shri Ramaswamy Iyer (responses to and from Shri Iyer, former secretary of Union Ministry of Water Resources, Government of India, were through Dr. Dutt), and Gail Omvedt can be obtained from Dr. Dutt (<ovimanyu@dtc.vsnl.net.in>) or from Shri Ramaswamy Iyer (<ramaswamya@vsnl.net.in>) or from <cwaterp@del3.vsnl.net.in>.

—Dr. Dutt to Gail Omvedt, 5 October 1999
—Omvedt to Dutt, 10 October 1999
—Shri Ramaswamy Iyer to Omvedt, 14 October 1999
—Omvedt’s first response to Iyer, 22 October 1999
—Omvedt’s second response to Iyer, 4 November 1999
—Iyer to Omvedt, 7 November 1999
duction as before with a growing population on the land also has a very large-scale environmental impact. The environmental disasters of not having development can be just as destructive as misdevelopment. With billions of people living on the earth, we are responsible for these impacts and have to safeguard the environment. But the poor of the world need development, sustainable development.

For the struggle,
Gail Omvedt
2 September 1999

To Gail:

While I continue to maintain that all options (including that proposed by Paranjape-Joy) must be seriously considered, it seems to me that you have either misunderstood some of my positions, or ignored them. Very briefly:

¶ You continue to maintain that big dams are necessary to feed India's growing populations, as rainwater harvesting is not enough. Yet not once do you challenge the example I gave to the contrary, namely, that several hundred villages have become self-sufficient in irrigation and drinking water in the arid region of Alwar district, Rajasthan, based exclusively on decentralized rainwater harvesting, forest regeneration, and efficient usage. This is not an isolated example, but one of several across India.

¶ My point about the timing of your open letter has been completely misunderstood. I was not suggesting that open criticism is wrong, indeed I agree with you that it is essential. My point was that in attacking the NBA in the monsoons, when hundreds of tribals and non-tribals were facing the threat of submergence, when their defenses were down, you are unwittingly hitting below the belt, and naively playing into the hands of an ever-eager Gujarat government. It was also strange that much of your open letter to Arundhati in fact attacked not her, but the NBA. At any other point in the year, or indeed during any of the preceding fourteen years, you could have raised these issues without being accused of such bad timing.

¶ On the issue of whether the NBA has a small or large base, I am afraid that it is a rather poor defense to say that the NBA is small compared to the "much larger section of people in Gujarat," and in rather poor taste to say that 30,000 to 40,000 is small compared to the numbers you yourself are used to. This is hardly a numbers game. If it were, perhaps the NBA's support base could be counted in the millions, considering, for instance, that several mass movements such as the National Fishworkers' Forum (several million traditional fishworkers are its members), have been its supporters. But that would be getting into a rather petty line of argument.

¶ Your allegation that the NBA never tried to address the Gujarati public is untrue. I have myself witnessed attempts to organize meetings with a cross-section of Gujarat's people in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the atmosphere of hostility generated by five decades of brainwashing and one-sided media coverage (my own letters to the editors of Gujarati papers have never been published), fully backed by brute State force, did not allow them to gain much of a foothold. NBA supporters in Gujarat continue to get harassed, intimidated, and beaten. The casual nature of your criticism of the NBA on this count displays a lack of appreciation regarding the violent and deep-rooted nature of Gujarat's support for the dam, and the fact that building up a strong resistance in the valley was itself a full-time task.

¶ You support your stand on big dams by giving the example of Koyna. I have not studied this project in depth, so I will reserve my comments to only raising doubts. First, the number of affected people, according to your estimates, was 8,203. It is surprising that you use the "official" figure, knowing full well that these figures are usually underestimates. Indeed, a study commissioned by the Planning Commission soon after the dam was built, and carried out by eminent academic Dr. Irawati Karve ("A Survey of People Displaced through the Koyna Dam," Deccan College, Poona, 1969) put the figure of affected people at 30,000. It also pointed out the awful failures in the rehabilitation process, largely stemming from fundamental faults in the R&R planning itself. This is hardly a small amount of social disruption. Many villages continue to suffer thirty years later (though this is also partly because of a rather insensitively planned wildlife sanctuary). Second, while figures on forest loss are not available, it seems that at least about 8,000 hectares (approximately 21,000 acres) were under shifting cultivation, and were presumably under some kind of vegetative growth when not under the plough. Local villagers recount that some very good patches of forest were submerged. There appear to be no baseline studies on the biodiversity of the area, but what is clear from similar valleys in the region is that there is a high degree of endemicity and occurrence of localized species (a characteristic of the Western Ghats, one of the world's eighteen biodiversity "hotspots"). Can anyone say with certainty that the forest loss was insignificant, that no endemic localized species was rendered extinct? Third, many experts maintain (there are those who disagree, of course) that the heightened seismic activity in the area (including a devastating earthquake that flattened Koyna town) was reservoir-induced. I am not aware of other environmental impacts, perhaps you can point me to some studies on this. But I maintain, big dams mean either major social disruption and/or major environmental loss, and if Koyna is to be shown to contradict this assertion, someone will have to come up with more convincing arguments supported by appropriate baseline and monitoring information.

¶ The lack of such solid information, ironically, becomes a tool for you to criticize our study of Ukai, Hirakud, and Indira Gandhi projects. My colleague Pranab Mukhopadhyay and I did not pretend to put a nail in the coffin of big dams in that study at all. Rather, we simply gave information and analysis that raised serious doubts about the tall claims made by each of the project authorities regarding the benefits of the projects. For you to say that "it does not provide evidence to confirm your accusations against big dams," is to criticize what we have not claimed!

¶ Finally, your assertion that no development can be as disastrous as misdevelopment is certainly valid in several circumstances. Why you throw this (and your concluding sentence about the poor needing sustainable development) at me is not clear. Did I not give examples where decentralized water and land management have indeed helped to achieve sustainable development? Why fall into the trap, which many of SSP's supporters also fall into, of comparing only a big-dam vs. no-big-dam scenario, ignoring the tremendous success of decentralized alternatives in the most arid of conditions?

Ashish Kothari
2 December 1999
Review Essay
The Rich, the Poor, and the Hungry: Gender Discourses on Development and the Distribution of Power, Property, and Privilege in Asia

by Leonora C. Angeles


Studies on class structures and relations in Asian societies have mainly examined the “three great classes” of peasants, workers, and landed capitalists. The 1950s-1960s saw the initial explosion in Asian peasant and labor studies, because of the rural insurrections, and later, a focus on rural development by international financial agencies. The then understudied dominant classes in Asia, and elsewhere, led Paul Baran to stress the need to understand “the economic and social status, internal differentiation and political aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the extent of its tie-up with foreign interests and the degree of monopoly prevailing in its national business, the closeness of its connection with the landowning interests and the measure of its participation in existing government.” Asianist scholars took up the challenge and produced volumes of materials on the role of the bourgeoisie in development, such that by the early 1980s, there was a resurgence of research on domestic capitalists in East Asia, explaining their role in the “economic miracle.” Similar research developed in the early 1990s to examine the “state penetration,” “crony capitalism,” and “neo-patrimonialism” of domestic elite families in the booming Southeast Asian economies. Most of these East and Southeast Asian studies focused on the internal structure of the domestic capitalist class, interlocking directorates, kinship relations and family connections in huge corporations, and the relationship between family connections and states, transnational elites, and foreign capital. A parallel body of literature also emerged on the “new rich” middle classes, their consumption and investment habits, and their role in emerging discourses on human rights, liberalism, good governance, and democracy. Meanwhile, women scholars in Asia were developing a parallel body of literature on “women and development” beginning in 1978, after an eight-year lull in women’s studies scholarship since the publication of Ester Boserup’s landmark Women’s Role in Economic Development in 1970. We know little about processes and discursive practices involved when Asian women and gender analysis are considered by international development agencies and national bureaucracies in the course of their program delivery, despite new scholarship on this topic. And while we now know more about the plight of Asian women farmers and workers, the differential impact of development processes on women and men and the resistance strategies of poor, peasant, and working women in inter-class and family relations, we still know little about the role of women and gender relations in intra-class relations, internal class structures, and kinship politics.

Recent historiographies on the familial and generational continuity of political and economic power in the Philippines, for example, have mainly focused on “big bosses” and their “big booties” without making reference to this gendered exercise of power. My own study of political entrepreneurship and resilience of landed oligarchic families in the Philippines did not adequately taken into account gendered dimensions of elite structures and elite strategies in accessing, exercising, and maintaining power, especially considering my earlier studies on women’s political discourses. Other than a few sporadic references (in endnotes!) to the crucial role of women’s entrepreneurial skills to family- and kin-based wealth accumulation, particularly their strategic thinking on land acquisitions (in some cases, by using their deadly feminine charms), I did not analyze gender as an organizing factor in the six strategies of political resilience highlighted in the study.

It is in this context that I frame my review of these four books, which provide a necessary corrective to the gender-blindness of previous studies on Asian class structures and to the lack of attention given by feminist scholars to the centrality of gender
in kinship, intra-class relations, and discourses on development, affluence, poverty, and hunger. These books collectively contribute to the ongoing project by Asianist feminists to re-examine our ways of thinking about Asia, for example, the current financial crisis, peasantry, mode of production and accumulation, poverty and hunger, globalization, the "Asian values" debate, affluence, poverty, and hunger. These books collectively contribute to the ongoing project by Asianist feminists to re-examine our ways of thinking about Asia, for example, the current financial crisis, peasantry, mode of production and accumulation, poverty and hunger, globalization, the "Asian values" debate, in kinship, intra-class relations, and discourses on development, affluence, poverty, and hunger. These books collectively contribute to the ongoing project by Asianist feminists to re-examine our ways of thinking about Asia, for example, the current financial crisis, peasantry, mode of production and accumulation, poverty and hunger, globalization, the "Asian values" debate, international development, and kinship and state politics.

Gender Dimensions of Power, Property, and Privilege

Contributors to the anthology Gender and Power in Affluent Asia point to the complex reworking of gender relations, the private/public spheres, the ideology of the family and domesticity, and the impact of the family and domesticity on women in the workplace—all so central to the making of the consumer class, the middle class, modernity, and globality in the region (3). Indeed, scholars have failed to consider how gender figures in the Confucian culture/strong state-magic of the market trilogy that has often been used to explain the phenomenal growth rates in Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In her introduction to the book, Maila Stivens suggests that at the core of this trilogy—of Asian values, market triumphalism, and state instrumentalism—is the reproduction of identities and gender roles (whether cast as modern or traditional) that depend either on the manipulation and reinterpretation, or on the modification of notions of wom-anhood, manhood, femininities, and masculinities. Stivens and her colleagues argue that the reassertion of Asian values underlying the reinvention of the essentialized and universalized Confucianism, Islamic revivalism, Christian fundamentalism, and "Chinese cultural revivalism," are not only sentimental expressions of an anti-Western homogenizing modernity in an era of globalization. They also suggest anxieties over putative threats to (1) social discipline, order, and respect toward authorities, in order to cement class, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and gender divisions and hierarchies, and (2) the reconstituted "Asian family," in order to fix challenges to the sexual division of labor, particularly women's traditional roles organized around the ideology of domesticity and the dominance of the father or husband as provider and protector of his women and children. These anxieties, in my view, are based upon an exercise in relativization, i.e., an examination and assertion of what is central and fundamental to Asianess relative to other non-Asian societies. As Stivens and Nirmala PuruShotam (151) explain in their respective essays, the meaning of "Asianess" derives not as much from what it is but from what it is not. Anxieties over "Westoxification" are expressed in gendered forms of thinking and behavior that tend to, on the one hand, undermine the modest gains in gender equality and women's empowerment in the region and, on the other, create spaces for women, especially organized women, to both question their own positionality within the family, community and nation and formulate their own hybrid version of Asian feminism.

Three essays—Maila Stivens, "Sex, gender, and the making of the new Malay classes," Krishna Sen, "Indonesian women at work: Reframing the subject," and Nirmala PuruShotam, "Women and the middle class in Singapore"—explore the construction of middle-class identities based on the elaboration of ideologies of femininities and masculinities, especially the production of woman as consumer/wife/mother/worker. In her examination of the replacement of the housewife by the "working woman" as the new female subject in Indonesia, Sen makes a distinction between "working-class women" and "working women" of the middle and affluent classes who are not women of leisure (35-38), but are nevertheless privileged enough to hire women servants to look after physical arrangements of their homes. In these homes, Sen argues that "housework cannot be described as unpaid appropriation of women's labor...[as in Western societies], but as appropriation of working-class women's labor" (45; emphasis in the original). This dependence of Asian professional women, including feminists, on domestic helpers is rarely explored as an important aspect of "middle-class" construction, which Stiven considers as a largely cultural phenomenon or project. Cultural contests on who is "modern, Malay and Muslim" in contemporary Malaysia rely upon gendered images of the "Asian family" and the roles of women, mothers, and wives in the cultural production of modern urban culture and middle-classness, so essential to the reproduction of a global capitalist consumer culture (103-11). According to PuruShotam, the hiring of domestic helpers in Singapore (as well as in Hong Kong) takes on both a transnational dimension (as women from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and India fill this need in middle-class households) and a racist/xenophobic element (as foreign domestic helpers are slotted into a racial hierarchy, based on their perceived "ability") and subjected to a variety of state regulations (140). The "middle-class" way of life, requiring multiple careers, time-saving technologies, and household helpers, is largely reproduced.
through negotiations and shared knowledge about the range of (limited) choices and (moral) possibilities, based on a “fear of falling” from the largely invented dominant “normal family” ideology that rests on a dual sex/gender system, heterosexuality, and assumptions of the natural and moral superiority of men over women (127-36).

“Flower vase and housewife: Women and consumerism in post-Mao China,” by Beverley Hooper, “Chinese cultural revivalism: Changing constructions in the Yangtze River Delta,” by Anne McLaren, and “Vietnam’s women in the renovation era,” by Stephanie Fahey speak of the state, global capital, politics, and culture in the changing construction of gender, women’s beauty, and domesticity in the socialist transition to market reforms. Their analysis of the changing portrayal of women in advertising and other consumer-oriented images (Hooper), the state-led resurgence of ritual revivalism seen in wedding and funeral lamentations (McLaren), and the domestic and sexual themes in gendered consumption patterns under the period of renovation in Vietnam (Fahey) highlight the contradictions and paradoxes of cultural heterogeneity and hybridity brought about by local manifestations of the global and the blending of Eastern/Western impulses and socialist/capitalist ideologies.

As a whole, the book offers incredibly rich insights that require a longer review than can be accommodated here. It is unique not only in bringing interdisciplinary perspectives and cross-cutting themes from a good sample of Asian countries but also in generating hard questions for Asian feminist activists, particularly on their positionality. In her essay “Dutiful daughters, estranged sisters” Nerida Cook examines the roles played by Thailand’s middle-class women in public debates and policies around prostitution and the rights of prostitutes as workers. Cook echoes the pre-occupation in other Asian countries with representations of conditions in their countries, a point well-articulated by Stivens in her critique of Malaysian feminist writers who tend to overlook their own elite positions (pp. 20, 90).

Had the book been written after the devastating currency devaluation in 1997 and the financial crisis that followed, the contributors would certainly have captured not only the gender-related impact of the economic crisis, but also how gender roles, identities, and relations are being reconfigured and negotiated within the family, workplace, and economy in the aftermath of the crisis, i.e., when the “fear of falling” takes on a new (economic) meaning for the upwardly mobile classes. Still, there are other topics that an anthology like this could accommodate in its few parallel studies on the hotel and restaurant workers, clerical work force, engineers, technicians, and other professionals. Kathryn Robinson’s essay “Love and sex in an Indonesia mining town” deals with this topic, but mainly in the context of how the presence of a foreign-owned mining company affects changes in local conceptions of romantic love, premarital practices, choice of marital partners, modern contraceptive methods, and sexual division of labor based upon the “domestication of women.”

There is also an obvious lack of any contribution that deals with a more systematic study of how new information and communication technologies, as well as new industrial technologies used in female-dominated occupations, are transforming gender identities and women’s working conditions. While there is a plethora of Western literature on gender and new technologies (ICTs, bio-technology, new reproductive technologies), there are only piecemeal works on how these technologies are affecting gender identities and relations, and how they are being acquired, viewed, and used by Asian women.

The essay by Mina Roces, “The gendering of Philippine post-war politics,” is based on her book Women, Power and Kinship Politics, which provides a much needed, incisive analysis of the intersection between gender, state, and kinship politics. Roces engages mainstream political analysis in their silence on the gendered exercise of Philippine kinship politics and power, such as the absence of any female warlord, and the unofficial power wielded by wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and mistresses of male politicians. She defines political power, tied to kinship politics, as “the means by which a person can obtain special privileges...to create an advantaged and favored business empire for his or her kinship alliance group” (9). Women in positions of official and unofficial power utilize a combination of kinship-based politics and forms of feminine manipulation in order to run for political office, to get male politicians to support their bills and projects, or simply to access state resources.

Roces bases her chapters on the four types of power exercised by women in post-war Philippines: unofficial power (best represented by Imelda Marcos and Baby Arenas, alleged mistress of former president Fidel Ramos), official power (e.g., former president Cory Aquino and other elected women politicians on the national and local levels), moral power (best represented by the militant nuns), and rebel power (e.g., political activists within the Communist Party of the Philippines, and the National Democratic and Social Democratic movements). Women may use more than one type of power, for example, Cory Aquino and the militant nuns became woman-as-moral-guardian symbols during the 1986 EDSA uprising, yet Cory held a position of official power, and some militant nuns joined the political activist movement. Likewise, Leticia Ramos-Shahani had both official power, as an elected senator, and unofficial power, as sister of former president Ramos.

Roces’s eye for detail shows in her choice of photographs and anecdotal quips from interviews as illustrations of how Filipino women, especially politicians, capitalize on their feminine attributes and manipulate existing gender constructions within the political culture. Roces analyzes the link between beauty and power in the Philippines and the varied meanings attached to the word magandang (beautiful), particularly its association with not just physical beauty but also with socially pleasing conduct. Senator Miriam Santiago, for example, was transformed from a “gunwielding graft-buster” to a “beauty queen in scarlet dresses” (177), President Aquino did not need to be “reinvented as ‘beautiful’ de-
spite holding the most powerful position in the country" (169), and the fair, pretty actress Vilma Santos had to play the militant nun (the main character) in the movie "Sister Stella L." (179). We could also explore why many former beauty queens easily become politicians, or the wives and mistresses of politicians.

Had her research been extended to the presidency of former movie star Erap Estrada, well-known for his sexist jokes and womanizing, Roces would certainly have had more grist for her gender-analytical-mill. 

Taking her cue from President Estrada's proclivities, Roces's analysis of the gendered exercise of power could have been enriched by a closer examination of how men and male politicos in the Philippines view female politicians and women in general (beyond "wine, women, and song" stories, of course) to help explain why Filipino women's power within the domestic sphere, and their being malakas (strong) within the kinship alliance sphere, are not readily translated into official power in the public sphere. Roces perhaps views this question as irrelevant when she asks women "to decide whether real or actual power is more important than the invented institutional symbols of office" (192). She continues:

Is official power the best option for women in the Philippines? Shouldn't actual power, whether unofficial, or official, be the goal of women who genuinely seek full empowerment? After all, official power is not worth much if not used. The contrast between President Cory Aquino, who was timid in her use of official power, and Mrs. Imelda Marcos, who abused her exercise of unofficial power demonstrates that the road to women's empowerment does not necessarily imply a cry for official power exclusively. (192; emphasis in the original)

What is clearly lost in Roces's analysis is the need to pay equal attention, not just to the limitations of official power and maximization of the potentials and strengths of unofficial power, but also to the possibilities and constraints in the use of official power, especially by feminist politicians (both women and men) for the empowerment of less privileged women. Roces could ask the pertinent question of what Cory and Imelda—as president and as virtual president, respectively—have done to improve the plight of Filipino women in all spheres of life? What difference did a woman president make? What difference do female politicians and state feminists...in the Philippines make? (Has this Ifugao woman benefited from having female politicians and state feminists? Credit: Lynn M. Kwiatkowski.)

In her conclusion and in the chapter entitled "Women in Radical Politics," it becomes clear that Roces's initial engagement with mainstream political analysts such as Benedict Anderson and Alfred McCoy was only preliminary to tackling her real nemeses: Filipino feminists and the Philippine left. Filipino feminists, according to Roces, have yet to question the paradigms and premises of both "First World" and "Third World" feminisms because they "have made no allowance for unofficial power" (192). A la Camille Paglia, she faults Filipino feminists for associating female sexuality and beauty with "objectification, subjugation or victimization" and not with female power (127). And with a tinge of maternal feminism, perhaps unaware of Filipino women suffragists' discourses in the 1910-1930s, Roces gives feminist nuns credit for being "the first to view the woman question from the perspective of a contemporary Filipino cultural narrative that is oppressive to women" and simultaneously criticizes Filipino feminists for failing "to investigate the dynamics of how prestige structures favor men over women" and "to give prestige to domestic duties," save for Helena Benitez's giving academic recognition and legitimacy to home economics (127).

Roces criticizes left political movements, especially the Communist Party and the Social Democrats, for marginalizing women's issues and women within these organizations, claiming that they are "even more marginalized from power than they would have been under traditional politics" (192). However, while Roces does not explicitly deny the negative effects of kinship-based politics in Philippine political culture, she easily falls into the danger of privileging, uncritically accepting, and thus conserving, the dark side of kinship politics when she argues that "while traditional kinship politics discouraged women from gaining official power, at least women could be malakas as members of the kinship alliance group," whereas in radical organizations that are critical of kinship politics "women were marginalized from both official and unofficial power" (192; emphasis in the original).

The weakness in Roces's conclusions about the desirability of kinship politics in maintaining women's exercise of unofficial power lies in her (1) failure to distinguish between the different ends for which kinship relations could be used, i.e., as a mechanism for the formation of social capital useful in building horizontal networks of trust and cooperation within a community, or the formation of political capital useful for building vertical relations of patronage, and gaining a foothold in the state; (2) inability to capture how parallel use of kinship politics is exercised not just by women in the privileged classes, but also by Filipino women peasants and other underprivileged classes. Lindo-McGovern's book, for example, captures the use of kinship relations by a mass or—
ganization of peasant women in Mindoro as a form of social capital to recruit members, initiate resistance politics, and implement collective efforts for sustainable agriculture (82-112). Likewise, Kwiatkowski talks of how lower-class Ifugao women and men utilize their kinship and friendship networks to access food resources during seasonal restrictions on food cultivation and cash shortfalls (301). Given her analytical lenses, Roces could not help but remain silent on how state-based kinship politics works to the cultivation of patron-clientelism, cronynism, and nepotism, which all assist in the reproduction of hunger and poverty in the Philippines.

The Politics of Hunger and Poverty

The books by Lynn Kwiatkowski and Ligaya Lindio-McGovern focus on different topics and case studies, yet they reach parallel conclusions on the complexities and contradictions of class and gender relations in rural societies in the context of national restructuring and global integration. Through their long associations with the communities they studied (Kwiatkowski worked as a Peace Corps volunteer and later returned as a graduate student researcher in Ifugao; Lindio-McGovern is a Filipina activist who grew up in a peasant household and worked with the Philippine Peasant Institute), both writers became "observing participants," to use Lindio-McGovern's term, not mere participant observers. In their Geertzian "thick description" of everyday life and discourse in Philippine villages, they capture the nuances and complexities of unequal power relations that underpin hunger, malnutrition, militarization, and poverty.

Kwiatkowski uses a critical-interpretive theoretical orientation in medical anthropology to investigate poverty and hunger in the Philippines, weaving together several strands of analysis: (1) the position of the Philippines within the global economy; (2) the articulation of global forces with national and local social and cultural structures and processes, particularly the impact of structural adjustment on health-care programs; (3) the cultural meanings attached by Ifugao people to conceptions of hunger, food, illness, malnutrition, health, and their bodies; (4) the effects of political violence generated by militarization from both the state and the underground guerrilla movement; and (5) the role of the state and processes of power differentiation within gender, political, religious, and medical relations, particularly comparing the strategies of healing and combating disease and malnutrition by government health agencies, UNICEF, community-based health groups, Christian religious organizations, and the left.

Critical of the failure of the bio-medical approach that operates through ideologies on the superiority of scientific-technical knowledge and "technological fixes" (e.g., high-yielding rice varieties, cash crops, electricity, food supplements, health surveys) in development planning, to solve malnutrition and raise women's status in Ifugao, Kwiatkowski argues "against the inclusion of women in international development programs in light of their ineffectiveness and, in some cases, adverse effects on peoples they intended to benefit" (1). She concludes that these programs tend to localize the causes of social and health problems and only serve to support structures of class, gender, and global inequalities and to deflect people's disaffection and collective action away from more fundamental social change (301).

Influenced by Foucault's and Escobar's power-knowledge nexus, and their perspectives on radical political economy, Kwiatkowski paints a grim picture of international development discourses and practices that only serve as strategies in the representation of Western hegemonic power and the "social management of underdevelopment" (16). She approvingly quotes St. Hilaire's earlier study on how internationally funded health projects result in the greater social manageability of women as they simultaneously become objects to be acted upon and subjects capable of self-management according to the terms of development agencies (22). For example, while the introduction of a Western-style bio-medical approach to malnutrition by UNICEF and government bio-medical personnel has helped identify children suffering from nutritional deficiencies, it has also posed problems of interpretation and understanding of the term "malnutrition" among the local people, particularly poor women who were often confused and frustrated over their inability, despite their best attempts, to raise the nutritional status of their children (181, 223). Although women are aware that their children's poor health is due to their families' lack of access to food and other resources, they feel blamed by doctors, nurses, and other health workers for this problem that can not be solved without improving their families' access to resources and better-paid work opportunities (301).

Kwiatkowski's analytical frame locates hunger and malnutrition within unequal social class and gender relations, manifested in (1) Ifugao's traditional inheritance patterns based on progeny, (2) sharecropping practices, (3) usury, (4) lack of a genuine agrarian reform program, (5) structural adjustment programs that result in higher commodity prices, restrictions on wage increases, and dwindling employment opportunities, (6) women's low position within the household and community, and (7) the lack of men's attentiveness and participation in caring for the nutritional needs of their children and in sharing household duties (201-2). These factors, exacerbated by the ongoing armed conflict in Ifugao, combine with the denigration of indigenous Ifugao knowledge and practices by bio-medical personnel and proselytizing fundamentalist Christian organizations to produce a community that is losing its traditions and collective confidence in determining its own future.

Lindio-McGovern's book showcases a similar activist commitment to addressing local, national, and global structures of inequalities in power and in the distribution of land and wealth within social class, gender, and political relations in Mindoro. Using the framework of Marxist political economy, she documents the dynamics of class exploitation, state repression and gender subordination in peasant women's lives. However, gender subordination within the peasantry is not given as much attention as class and state politics, except in mentioning that peasant women feel they have no identity separate from their husbands—exemplified best in that land titles show only the husbands' names (122). Apart from this patrilineal practice in property ownership, Lindio-McGovern does not document other forms of gender-specific inequalities and oppression, such as the prevalence of domestic violence, spousal abuse, trafficking in women and girls, prostitution, and control of women's reproductive rights. Therefore, her analysis of gender relations in intra-class relations is not as well developed as Kwiatkowski's and tends to follow a more traditional Marxist approach that sees gender inequalities as rooted in unequal class and economic structures, claiming that "(p)easant women experience double oppression as gender hierarchies intersect with these coexisting modes of production" (78).
The main contributions of Lindio-McGovern, in my view, are two: her examination of the articulation of modes of production in Mindoro and its effect on women’s resource access and roles in agricultural production, and her “thick description” of the strategies of political resistance exercised by Mindoro’s peasant women, who are viewed not just as victims, but also as agents of change and “invisible participants” in the maintenance of the system of repression and underdevelopment. Lindio-McGovern positions herself within the Left debates on the articulation of modes of production by arguing that the semi-feudal system [manifested in the treatment of seasonal workers, the usury system, the local barter system, the performance of domestic service as debt-payment, the use and abuse of labor-exchanges] demonstrates the fact that the penetration of capitalism (wage economy) into agricultural development did not entirely transform the feudal economy, but instead modified it in such a way that it would serve merchant capital. (S1)

Such articulation of capitalist and feudal forms of exploitation frames the efforts of organized peasant women in developing locally relevant ways of resisting landlessness through land occupations, eliminating farm labor exploitation by setting restrictions in the labor exchange (suyuan) system and demanding wage increases, creating credit cooperatives to avoid the entrapment of usury, creating marketing cooperatives to challenge local monopolies in rice trading, developing more sustainable farm practices to reduce dependence on the Green Revolution technology, and developing alternative health care, livelihood, and day care projects. The demands of these women, which may be encapsulated as “jobs, joy, and justice,” “land, leisure, and liberation,” reflect the need to focus not only on political economic issues, but also on the assumed elasticity of women’s labor that leaves them with little time for leisure and self-actualization.

Kwiatkowski and Lindio-McGovern diverge in their conceptions of the word “development.” Whereas Kwiatkowski sees nothing but evil, greed, and malice in the content and intent of international development, Lindio-McGovern sees the possibility of reclaiming and redefining “development” to mean the “political empowerment” of women through the Freirian process of “conscientization” (21-22). Here, Lindio-McGovern echoes the hopes and optimism of activists working in the area of participatory development who insist on people-centered alternatives and the use of participatory methodologies in community-responsive planning to build local capacities in analyzing problems confronting their communities and in developing solutions to these problems. Kwiatkowski recognizes this trend only in her last paragraph (303).

Asian Studies and the Politics of Feminism and Gender Research

Reading these four books has forced me to re-examine the current state of gender research within Asian Studies and the larger politics of international development work that is partly driving its explosion. Despite the recent explosion in feminist scholarship in Asian Studies, many feminist scholars within the mainstream disciplines often complain of their rather sad and solitary existence within their home departments. Afraid to be typecast, feminist scholars in Asian studies want (and need) to know mainstream works in order to put gender analysis within the larger context of scholarship and to enable them to speak to a larger audience about their works. However, there is no parallel compulsion on the part of their mainstream (mostly male) Asianist colleagues to know what feminists are doing. This tends to reinforce problems in mainstream gender scholarship.

I do not think that this has to do with feminist scholarship still needing to gain respectability and credibility as a field. This has more to do with (1) the incentives given to specialization within the university that make some scholars behave like ants; (and 2) to the scarcity of venues within the universities for scholars to become more familiar with the works of their colleagues, the first step toward doing collaborative work and creating a vibrant community of interdisciplinary scholars. Here I am reminded of earlier debates surrounding the gulf that exists between the humanities and the social sciences (pure and applied). The wall between them still exists, but cracks are evident and it might not be long before its bricks end up like Berlin’s.

I believe that there is an even higher wall of misunderstanding, if not prejudice, between those who do basic research and those who do policy-oriented research, and another parallel wall between gender-oriented research in the humanities and social sciences, on the one hand, and mainstream policy-oriented and politically driven research on the other. Such misunderstanding and suspicion seem to be mutual. Policy-driven researchers, including those working on gender issues, have to adjust to government bureaucracies and to leadership successions, understand changes in policy regimes, race against time, and pay attention to the media because of the nature of their enterprise. Thus they are often accused by others of sacrificing academic rigor for immediate responsiveness and political expediency. On the other hand, social science researchers, including gender scholars, are accused by policy-oriented researchers of being too slow to act, of venerating rigor and missing the opportunity to make a difference in the “real world.”

There are, however, strong indications that researchers on both sides are beginning to realize that real world problems do not respect disciplinary boundaries and turfs guided by the politics and culture of research within and outside the academy. This realization is partly brought about by factors such as the current knowledge-based economy that enables researchers to use new information technologies in networking and the sharing of results; the push for interdisciplinary scholarship and more collaborative research within and outside universities; and the use of
carrot-and-stick measures by research and international development agencies in order to better connect researchers to research end-users, or to make basic research speak to information needs of policy-makers and nongovernmental organizations; integrate gender considerations in the research agenda; and create an alternative development agenda that would address multiple demands from governments, local and national interest groups, and global civil society forces. This is most clearly seen in the stress placed by development agencies, from CIDA to the World Bank and OECD, on programs and projects that integrate concepts of gender, good governance, social capital, participatory development, human rights, and democracy, all of which are so prominent in academic discourse.19

Future Research

What lies ahead? In her appendix, “Frontiers in Feminist Inquiry,” Lindio-McGovern provides a good list of areas for further research in the Philippines that have relevance for other Asian countries (198-99). The eleven sets of research questions suggested deal mainly with how the dimensions and manifestations of globalization and economic restructuring, e.g., farmland conversion, feminization of migrant labor, GATT policies, and national development plans, are affecting women, men, children and their communities. To these items, I add the need to better understand the contradictory location of state feminists (femocrats) and the varieties of state feminism (femocracies) in Asian countries. How are they assisting, for example, in the understanding of the gender question in Asian societies? How do they view gender in the first place? How do they relate to the growing anxiety among some feminists in the region around the issue of whether the new preoccupation around gender and gender equality has diluted or sidestepped the focus on women’s participation and women’s empowerment?

How can feminist advocates, mostly middle-class professionals and academics, adequately speak and act on behalf of and along with their less privileged sisters, their subalterns? What is the glue (or lubricant?) that holds women’s groups and their communities together? Can rich women and poor women work together toward an understanding of their own societies, so that they can act collectively toward emancipatory planning and problem-solving?

I also add the need to better understand how the cumulative consequences of globalization-induced tensions between the market, civil society, and social stability are affecting social cohesion,20 including the cohesion of women’s groups and movements, especially in the face of the popularity of gender integration in international development work and the current economic restructuring in Asia. Twenty-five years after the start of women’s integration in development, since the passage of the Percy Amendment in 1973, which allocated U.S. development assistance to women’s program, we are learning more about the limits, perils, and possibilities of gender mainstreaming.21 We have seen the collapse of trust and cooperation within and among women’s NGOs in the face of this push for gender integration, in the face of the availability of national and foreign funding and the necessity to access these funds in order to create a revenue base for their organizations.22 We still lack an understanding of how feminists engage in a “politics of maneuver,” to use a Gramscian term, and how sisterhood, gender relations, and identities are renegotiated in the face of globalization’s effects on international feminist solidarity.

In deeply divided class societies in Asia, feminists are facing an even greater challenge in confronting gender inequalities that are rooted, not only in varying degrees of social inequality and expressions of consolidated and subtle patriarchies, but also in repulsive forms of state repression and transnational capitalist extraction. Assuming that there is an emerging Asian feminist discourse around this project of integrated class and gender emancipation, framed either within the conceptual matrices of human rights, eco-feminist, or sustainable development, several questions still face feminist activists in the region. How can feminist advocates, mostly middle-class professionals and academics, adequately speak and act on behalf of and along with their less privileged sisters, their subalterns? What is the glue (or lubricant?) that holds women’s groups and their communities together? Can rich women and poor women work together toward an understanding of their own societies, so that they can act collectively toward emancipatory planning and problem-solving? To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, can rich women save their poor sisters and also save themselves? Can rich women become allies of poor women in their fight against hunger and poverty? Is sisterhood more powerful than class greed?

Asianists and feminists within and outside the academe, as self-reflective people, are realizing their own positionalities in doing research—who is the audience for our interdisciplinary and policy-driven research? Why are we doing this and for whose benefit? What voices do we privilege, ignore, or marginalize in our research? How do we relate to our sources of information? Should we create permanent alliances with others beyond collaborative research efforts? The four books under review do not have the space to address all of these questions, but they do show a self-reflexivity and critical awareness that was lacking in earlier Asian women’s studies scholarship. New courses being developed in the areas of gender and globalization, women in Philippine political economy, and international development would greatly benefit from these books. They should become must-reading for Asian feminist researchers and Asianists who wish to mainstream gender literature.

Notes


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itics: The Bureaucratic Quagmire (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997) both contain articles on Asian women’s relationships with development bureaucracies.


9. The following six strategies of political resilience employed by oligarchic families are gendered and could be enriched by feminist analysis: (1) the kinship network is maintained through internarrage and fictive kinship ties, e.g., compadrazgo; (2) diversification into non-agricultural economic interests; (3) the control of political parties and state patronage machinery; (4) the use of political power to obstruct progressive legislation, particularly on land reform and taxation; (5) the exploitation of political symbols or issues (e.g., nationalism, land reform), movements (peasants, cooperatives, NGOs and private foundations), and foreign aid from international development agencies for their political objectives; and (6) the astute management of political violence (see Angeles, “The Survival of Privilege,” pp. 20-28).

10. McVey, Southeast Asian Capitalists.


14. For a closer look at Joseph Estrada, see Aprodicio Laquian and Eleonor Laquian, The Centennial President (Vancouver: Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia, and Quezon City: University of the Philippines, College of Public Administration, 1998).


17. Anisur Rahman, for example, remarked, “Must we abandon valuable words [like development] because they are abused? What do we do then with words like democracy, cooperation, socialism, all of which are being abused?” in Grassroots Horizons: Connecting Participatory Initia-

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CCAS Statement of Purpose

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed 28-30 March 1969, Boston
Review Essay

Women’s Labor under Capitalism and Marx


by Paresh Chattopadhyay

Based on field research and published data on the working conditions of laboring women in the three countries of Asia—Bangladesh, India, and Japan—this important book focuses on the role of women in today’s accumulation process in these countries. In this connection the author summarizes, along with an account of women’s struggles against patriarchy, the feminist debates over the last many decades on the nature of women’s domestic and non-domestic labor. In the process he argues the relevance of the “Marxist concepts,” which refer not only to the work of Marx but also to the work of those claiming to be Marx’s followers. At the same time, sharing the views of other critics of Marx, the author points to what he considers as the shortcomings of the “Marxist” approach on the question of women’s labor.

The book is concerned with several themes: women’s labor in the garment industry in West Bengal and Bangladesh as well as in Bangladesh’s agricultural sector, labor management methods of the Japanese industrial bourgeoisie and, finally, the mode of employment of the women laborers in Japanese industry. The author also reviews the investigations on women laborers in the lace industry of India’s Andhra Pradesh authored by the German feminist, Maria Mies. Custers shows that conditions are not the same for women laborers working in the garment sector in two parts of Bengal. In West Bengal they work mostly in their homes as subcontractors and are paid piece wage. In Bangladesh they are paid time wages as workers in factories where their bosses violate the factory legislation regarding both working hours and overtime pay. In both the regions the waged women carry the double laboring burden—in the house and outside. Custers also shows the process of pauperization of peasant women in agriculture in Bangladesh through the extraction of surplus by the “commercial elite.” In both cases the author stresses the relevance of the Marxian analysis of the original accumulation of capital and absolute surplus value. On the other hand, according to him “classical Marxism” has ignored women’s domestic labor, which the feminists have emphasized. Hence the need for combining Marxism with feminism for a full understanding of the reality of women’s labor.

Turning to Japan, Custers finds the relevance of Marx’s concept of “turnover time of capital” for the Japanese methods of management. “Toyotism,” like American Fordism, tries to shorten capital’s turnover time by various devices. As regards Japanese women wage laborers, Custers finds the relevance of Marx’s analysis of the “reserve army of labor.” However, as to women’s domestic labor, his Marx-critique, as well as the relevance of feminism, hold for the same reason as given earlier, necessitating a synthesis between them.

The author summarizes very usefully the twentieth-century debates on women’s labor in view of their relevance for the laboring experiences of the Asian women. He shows the significance of the great German proletarian women’s movement representing the “first wave” of feminism headed by the outstanding Marxist Clara Zetkin, with her remarkable journal Gleichheit (Equality), and Rosa Luxemburg combating male chauvinism in the German Social Democratic Party (as well as in the Second International). He then refers to the “second wave” of feminism in which the Italian women had a major role—developing in the late sixties and early seventies.

The theoretical part of Capital Accumulation is the really challenging part of the book underlying the whole of the author’s empirical analysis. While stressing the relevance of the “Marxist” approach, he also shares the views of critics concerning Marx’s “shortcomings”—basically Marx’s “patriarchal bias.” Hence he aims at combining the best of both approaches in the construction of a new synthesis.

We find the book’s empirical part excellent and its discussion of the feminist debates highly interesting. We have nothing much to add to these well-done areas. We have significant reservations, however, concerning his analysis and critique of “Marxist theory.” Accordingly, what follows basically concerns our “anti-critique.” In this we shall leave aside the “post-Marx Marxists” and exclusively draw on Marx’s own texts.

Marx’s “Patriarchal Bias”

Let us start with the author’s allegation that in common with his precursors in value theory Marx had a “deep bias against women” and that Marx overlooks the sexual division of labor, considering it as “natural” and fixed (1848).

Ed. Because of the complexity of the bibliographical references in this text the footnote system has been left in in the original. Notes and References format to facilitate ease of access to the sources. All the non-English texts of Marx cited in this paper are given in the reviewer’s translation. Simple numbers within parentheses in the text refer to the page numbers of Custers’s book.
Now the author's severe statement about "Marx's deep bias against women" seems to contradict his remark almost grudgingly made in passing that Marx (only) "in the footsteps of Fourier" held that the "degree of female emancipation forms the natural measure of the emancipation in a given society" (32). We submit that his first statement is simply an assertion and has no textual evidence in Marx to support it (and the author has not offered any) whereas his passing remark on Marx’s position on women's emancipation has plenty of textual evidence to support it and, in fact, was Marx’s fundamental position throughout his life. In his third Parisian manuscript of 1844, Marx, after remarking that in the capitalist society “marriage” is surely a form of “exclusive private property” (for man), goes on to affirm that in the behavior toward women as the prey and servant of the social lust [Wollust], is expressed the infinite degradation in regard to himself. The immediate, natural, necessary relation of the human to the human is the behavior of man to the woman. In this is shown to what extent the natural behavior of man has become human....From this behavior one can judge the whole stage of human development. (1966: 98, 99; emphasis in the text)

One year later, after qualifying the "general situation of the woman in today’s society" as "inhuman," Marx admiringly refers to Fourier’s “masterly characterization” of marriage in connection with which Fourier had emphasized that “the degree of the female emancipation is the natural measure of the universal emancipation” (Marx 1972: 207, 208). In the immediately succeeding work Marx finds “the first form of the germ of unequal distribution—quantitatively and qualitatively—of labor and property” in the “family where the women and children are man’s slaves” (1973: 32; emphasis in the text).

About two decades later, in the "detached footnotes" (1863-1865) Marx wrote that under the form of private property based on the expropriation of the immediate producers from the conditions of production "the slavery of the family members by the head of the family—who purely and simply [rein] uses and exploits them—is at least implied" (1988: 134; the term "slavery" is underlined in the manuscript). A little later, in a letter to Kugelman (12 December 1868) Marx noted "great progress" in the recently held Congress of the American Labor Union in that the female workers were "treated with full parity" with the male workers, while regretting that such treatment was still lacking in English and French trade unions. He then added: “Anyone who knows something about history knows also that great social upheavals (Umwälzungen) are impossible without the feminine ferment. Social progress is exactly measured by the social status of the beautiful sex (the ugly ones included).” In the same letter he proudly informed his friend that a woman (Mrs. Law) had been nominated to the International’s highest body—the General Council (1973c: 582-83). Marx sent the young Elizabeth Dimitrieva to Paris to organize the women’s section of the International. Elizabeth became one of the leading Communards and was responsible for lucid socialist formulations on behalf of the “Union des femmes” (see Dunayevskaya 1991: 107, and Schukkind 1974: 171). This also shows how much Marx valued the necessity of the existence of women’s independent organization to defend their specific rights.

Toward the end of his life, Marx, as is seen in his excerpts from L.H. Morgan, continues his “feminist” position: “The modern family contains in germ not only slavery, but also serv-
tion). In a slightly earlier manuscript, referring to the primitive stage of human evolution, Marx had written: “Initially the free gifts of nature are rich or at least easy to appropriate. From the beginning [von vornherein] there is a spontaneously grown [naturwüchsig] association (family) and the division of labor and cooperation corresponding to it” (1953: 506). Indeed, in the very same work, while holding that the original division of labor was sexual and that “slavery is already latent in the spontaneously grown [naturwüchsig] division of labor in the family” at a stage of human development when the division of labor is “very little developed,” Marx could, without at all contradicting himself, qualify the “separation between the town and the countryside” as the “greatest division of material and intellectual labor” (1973: 22, 50). In the same way, some two decades later, in the same chapter in Capital I, Marx writes: “within the family arises a spontaneously grown [naturwüchsig] division of labor from the differences of sex and age, that is, on purely physical differences,” and, then, a few paragraphs later: “the foundation of the division of labor which is developed and mediated by commodity exchange is the separation between the town and the countryside” (1962a: 372, 373; 1965: 894; emphasis in the French version).

Regarding Marx’s idea of the “fixity” of the gender division of labor, it would indeed be strange that while deriding Proudhon’s idea of division of labor as an “eternal abstract category,” Marx himself would hold the idea of an unchanging, “fixed” division of labor within the family. In fact, for Marx, the sexual division of labor involving “women’s (and children’s) slavery” is no more “natural” or “fixed” than the human slavery tout court (including wage slavery). Rather, originally, it “grew spontaneously,” based fundamentally on sex and age differences (as we noted above). That Marx did not consider division of labor within family as given once and for all, is very clear from Marx’s Ethnological Notebooks (1880-81-82) as well as from his earlier works. Particularly in these “Notebooks” Marx notes the change of matriarchy—which had made “women rather than men the center of the family”—into patriarchy in the evolution of humankind, emphasizing its “pernicious character for the position and rights” of women (we cited this earlier). Here “position and rights” obviously includes gender division of labor. Far from treating patriarchy as normal and “natural” as an institution, Marx noted in his Morgan excerpts that the patriarchal families, as they evolved among the Hebrews, the Romans, and the Greeks constituted an “exception in human experience,” and he further noted that the family under the “paternal power” was characterized by the incorporation of numbers in servile and dependent relations,” which was “unknown before that time” (Kra­der 1974: 119; underlined in manuscript). In his Maine excerpts, commenting on Thomas Strange’s affirmation that the “fee of a Hindu wife was anomalous,” Marx remarks that “this ‘anomaly’ is the survival of the old normal rule which was based on descent of gens in the female line… which long ago was transformed into [übergegangen] descent in male line” (Kra­der 1974: 324-25; emphasis in manuscript). It goes without saying that the “transformation” in question meant also change in sexual division of labor. Paraphrasing and commenting on Morgan, Marx noted that “with the development of the monogamian character of the family the authority of the father increased,” and wrote: “The monogamian family must advance as society advances and change as society changes even as it has done in the past. It is the creature of the social system… [It] must be supposable that it is capable of still further improvement until the equality of the sexes is attained” (Krader: 124; emphasis in manuscript).

Sex-based Differential Exploitation

Associated with this criticism, there is another criticism directed against Marx by Custers. The author alleges that the domestic economy, its transformation along with the growth of capital, did not constitute an intrinsic part of Marx’s economic analysis, and that Marx failed to elucidate how in his time the capitalists made use of the gender division of labor in order to enhance their profits (18, 49). Let us examine these (undemonstrated) assertions in the light of Marx’s (own) texts.

One year before composing his Proudhon-critique (1847) Marx wrote

one cannot speak of “the” family. Historically, the bourgeoisie imprints on the family the character of the bourgeois family. To its sordid existence corresponds the holy concept in the official phraseology and general hypocrisy. The existence [Dasein] of the family is rendered necessary by its connection with the mode of production, independently of the will of the bourgeois society. (1973b: 164; emphasis ours)

One year after the Proudhon-critique, the Communist Manifesto (section 2) would deride the hypocritical bourgeois discourse on “family values,” inasmuch as the “big industry destroys all family ties for the proletariat and turns women into mere instruments of production.” Later, in his master work he wrote: “the big industry by dissolving the foundation of the traditional family [alien Familienwesens] and the corresponding family labor has also dissolved the traditional family ties themselves” (1962a: 513; emphasis ours). Far from holding the family division of labor as an institution “fixed” for ever, Marx emphasizes that “it is naturally as absurd to hold the Christian-Germanic form of the family as absolute as it is to hold the old Roman, the old Greek or the old Oriental form of the family as absolute.” Indeed, capital has become the “radical dissolvant of the hitherto existing worker family” (1962a: 514; 1965: 994). Needless to add, it was not “family” in general, and certainly not the bourgeoisie family that interested Marx, it was the working class family under the sway of capital that constituted, contrary to Custers’s assertion, an “intrinsic part” of Marx’s “critique of political economy.”

Contrary to the author’s different assertions—and they are largely unproven assertions—Marx very much shows how the situation of working class families—including their “domestic economy”—was undergoing transformation under the rule of capital, how, far from (in Custer’s phrase) “viewing women’s position as wage laborers as equal to men’s,” Marx underlines how capital was using women’s (and children’s) labor in special ways to enrich itself. As regards the first, we cited above Marx’s statement that capitalist big industry was acting as a “radical dissolvant” of the working class family and of the corresponding “domestic labor” [Familienarbeit]. Indeed, the big industry had taken the working class women (and children of both sexes) out of the household sphere and assigned them to the socially organized (capitalist) process of production (1962a: 514). Marx notes that with the introduction of machines, making the use of sheer human muscle power for production superfluous, capital went after women and children and “bent all the members of the family, without distinction of age or sex, under its truncheon.” Capital, for its self-valorization, “confiscated the mother of the family” and “usurped the labor that was necessary for consump-
tion within the family” (1962a: 416-417; 1965: 939-940, 941). Speaking of the “direct exploitation of women and children who themselves have to earn their wage,” Marx writes in an early 1860s manuscript that whereas earlier the man’s wage had to be sufficient for the upkeep of the family, now “women and children reproduce not only the equivalent of their consumption, but also a surplus value at the same time” (1982: 2024, 2052).

Second, to reproach Marx for holding that there was no difference between the situations of men and women as wage laborers, in other words, reproaching Marx’s failure to elucidate “how capital used the gender division of labor in order to enhance its own enrichment” (Custers: 18, 49), is, to say the least, to completely ignore Marx’s (own) texts to the contrary where we find Marx underlining capital’s differential treatment of the sexes for “enriching itself.” Thus, in his discussion of the working day Marx focuses on labor in those industrial branches where no legal limits to the working day existed at the time and precisely where the labor of women and children dominated. In connection with needlework Marx cites a London hospital physician to drive the point home: “With needlewomen of all kinds, including milliners, dressmakers, and ordinary seamstresses, there are three miseries—overwork, deficient air and either deficient food or deficient digestion....Needlework is infinitely better adapted to women than to men” (1962a: 269; the citation from the article, which is in English, is given in 1954: 243). As regards modern manufacture (as opposed to the factory system) Marx observes that here women’s and children’s bodies are “abandoned in the most unscrupulous way to the influence of the poisonous substances.” Particularly in bookbinding the “labor’s excesses” borne by its “victims, women and children,” reached such heights that they seemed to be working in “slaughter houses.” Marx mentions the sorting of rags, where “by preference young girls and women were employed,” as one of the “most infamous, most dirty and worst paid of occupations” (1962a: 486-87). Marx observes that even after the industry dominated by women’s and children’s labor came under factory legislation (in England), the situation of female laborers remained in reality much inferior to that of the male laborers. In the silk industry for example where females outnumbered males and worked under “atrocious sanitary circumstances” (according to the official sanitary report) death rates (due to lung diseases) were much higher among women than among men (1992: 141-42; the expression within quotation marks appears in English and is underlined in the manuscript). Again, turning to the “monstrosities” (Ungeheuerlichkeiten) of modern domestic industry, Marx mentions the case of lace-making where the overwhelming majority of workers consisted of women, young persons, and children of both sexes and where, according to medical reports, tubercular death rates were steadily rising over a decade (1962a: 489-90). Marx adds (in the French version) that even under the regime of Factory Acts the “big industry” has (specially) made the “exploitation of women and children an economic necessity” (1965: 994: our emphasis). Examples of such sex-based differential exploitation pinpointed by Marx could easily be multiplied. Indeed, if Marx had thought that male and female laborers were treated equally and exploited in the same way by capital, why, right in the “Preface” to Capital, did he specifically praise the English factory inspectors and Commissioners of Inquiry for their “impartial and irreverent [rücksichtslose]” reports on the “exploitation of women and children” (1962a: 15). Why did he find it necessary to insert a specific clause in the Program of the French Worker’s Party (1880) on the “equality of wage for equal labor for workers of both sexes” (1965: 1735)?

**Commodity Production and Social Labor**

Custers cites Marx: “A man who produces an article for his immediate use, who consumes it himself, creates a product, but not a commodity;” he performs only “labor,” but not “social labor.” Custers then asserts that “Marx grants the label ‘social labor’ only to commodity production” (87). We submit that Custers’s argument constitutes a non sequitur. Now, it should be obvious that a “self-sustaining” individual who does not at all depend on anybody else in society for any producing material and does not contribute anything toward the use by anybody else of the produced product, by definition has “nothing to do with society,” even though the individual is performing (useful) labor. Naturally the individual’s product is not a commodity. On the other hand, the labor producing commodity is social labor, inasmuch as this labor, subordinated to the division of labor in society, is socially determined average labor (time), that is, “socially necessary labor (time),” and destined to satisfy a certain social want. Also, the (commodity) producers enter into social contact, one with the other, only through commodity exchange. However, it does not follow that commodity-producing labor is the only labor that is social. The only labor that would be completely non-social labor by definition would be purely individual labor in the sense given above. To suggest that only the commodity-producing labor is social labor would imply that labor cannot have a social character outside the commodity-capitalist world, in any other social formation—a proposition patently absurd from Marx’s point of view. Marx, on the contrary, holds that the commodity-producing labor is social labor only in a specific sense of sociality. “The conditions of labor positing exchange value are social determinants of labor or determinants of social labor; but social not in a general [schlechter] way. This is a specific kind of sociality.” It is a situation in which “each one labors for oneself and the particular labor has to appear as its opposite, abstract general labor,” and “in this form social labor.” It has this “specific social character only within the limits of exchange” (1958: 24; 1959: 525; 1962a: 87; emphasis in text).

On the other hand, in a non-commodity society (human) labor could also be social labor, but this sociality is of an opposite kind. Thus, in the rural-patriarchial industry of a peasant family that produces corn, yarn, linen, and clothes for its own needs, the different labors producing them are “in their natural form social functions” without being commodities. The products are “social products and labors producing them are social labors within the limits of the family.” Similarly, in a communitarian (socialist) society, individual labor does not have to take the abstract form of generality in order to have a social character. Here the community preposing production makes individual labor appear as a direct function of a member of the social organism. Here the labor of the individual is from the very beginning posited as social labor” (1953: 88; 1958: 27; 1962a: 92; emphasis in text). Here we have direct sociality of labor as opposed to its inverted sociality in commodity production.

In fact, contrary to the classical (and “vulgar”) political economy, Marx holds that the exchange value producing labor is “abstract” labor, while the use value producing labor is “concrete” labor. Far from denigrating use values and the “concrete” labor producing them, Marx considers that only the latter kind of
labor is "useful productive activity" and hence is "real labor" (reale Arbeit). That is, the process of producing new use values with (existing) use values by useful (concrete labor) is the "real labor process" (wirkliche Arbeits-process) (Marx 1958: 49, 56; 1988: 57; emphasis in the manuscript).2

It should thus be clear that far from denigrating use values and labor, producing use values—"real labor"—Marx in fact prized them. So to what extent are Marx's critics, as represented by Custers, justified in asserting that "Marx ignored domestic labor...performed by women at home" (279-80)—that is, precisely the labor-producing use values, or the "real labor"? As a general proposition this is simply not true. Fully aware of the gender-division of labor that evolved to the detriment of women and where started the germ of "unequal distribution of labor and property" involving "slavery" of women and their "exploitation" by men (regarding which we cited the relevant texts earlier), Marx obviously did not "neglect women's labor." This also comes out clearly in Marx's discussion of changes that capital has wrought on (working class) women's domestic labor. As he emphasizes in his different texts, whereas the "mothers of the family" before they become wage laborers had ordinarily performed the "labor necessary for family consumption," whereas this "domestic labor had economically sustained the family way of life" (where, let us add, the adult male members were already wage laborers), whereas "the woman worked for the house" and man's wage had to be sufficient to sustain the family (economically), capital has now usurped that "free labor for family sustenance" by "confiscating the mothers" and turning them into wage slaves in order to increase the total surplus value from the family (1962a: 416; 1965: 940, 941; 1982: 2052). Needless to add, in the eyes of Marx, the woman was performing earlier household functions as the "slave" of the male "head of the family" (as we saw earlier).

While taking full account of the domestic labor (mostly performed by women) as necessary for the sustenance of the family, Marx, it is true, left it aside while considering the determinants of the production and reproduction of labor power (of the wage earning individual, man or woman) as a commodity. (We should note that it concerns domestic labor as such producing use values, whether it is performed by woman or man). We shall try to resolve this apparent paradox when we come to the question of wage determination in Marx's analysis. We prepare the way by first going into the thorny problem of productive/unproductive labor as Marx analyses it.

Productive and Unproductive Labor

Connected with the foregoing discussion is another criticism by Custers echoing feminist criticisms of Marx, about the characterization of "domestic labor" as "unproductive" by "traditional Marxists" (98). We leave aside, again, the so-called Marxists and focus on Marx's own texts to analyze this criticism.

Now, insofar as the labor process results in the production of articles as use values, the labor process, as Marx says, is "real labor process" involving concrete or "real labor" (we saw this earlier), and as Marx emphasizes, "the labor itself is productive labor" (1962a: 196, 531; 1965: 1001, emphasis in the French version). The labor process in question is "simple labor process," and the concerned activity is a physical necessity of human life and consequently is independent of any particular social form and is common to all social forms. However, this determination of labor as productive labor becomes "totally insufficient for capitalist production" (1962a: 196).3 Under capital the concept of productive labor is in no way confined to a simple relation between the activity and its useful effect, between the laborer and the labor product, but includes, above all, a specific social, historically arisen, relation of production "stamps the laborer as the direct material for the valorization of capital." Therefore, "to be a productive laborer (under capital) is no luck, it is a misfortune" (1962a: 196, 532, our emphasis). Productive and unproductive labor under capital is "always considered not from the standpoint of the laborer, but from the standpoint of the possessor of money, the capitalist." Here the use values incorporating productive labor could be of the "most futile kind"). There is no question of a "moral standpoint" (1956: 127, 134; emphasis in text). Thus in a capitalist regime an individual (a woman or a man) doing purely domestic labor and not functioning as the "direct material for capital's valorization" is, by definition, an unproductive laborer. From the point of view of capitalist production only the wage labor that through its exchange against the variable part of capital not only reproduces this part but also produces surplus value for the capitalist, is "productive labor." In short, "only the wage labor, which produces capital, is productive" (1956: 115).

It is not only the unpaid domestic labor producing use values that is considered unproductive, a lot of paid labor performed outside home would also qualify as unproductive under capital. This is the case with such services as those rendered by the activities of cooking, sewing, gardening, the activities of the menial servants in general, the activities of the state servants, advocates, doctors, scholars (many of them involving men)—all paid with money—that are simply "personal services exchanged against income" and as such the labor involved is unproductive labor under a capitalist regime. "All these laborers, from the lowest to the highest, obtain, through their services—often under compulsion—a part of the surplus product, of the capitalist's income" (1953: 372). The money that its possessor exchanges against living labor in such cases is not capital, but income, money as simple means of circulation in order to obtain use values in which the form of value is posited as something that disappears. This is not the money that through the purchase of labor (power) aims at conserving itself and valorizing itself as such. The exchange of money as revenue, as a simple means of circulation against living labor, can never posit money as capital and thereby wage labor in the economic sense. (1953: 370-71, 372)

And only wage labor "in the strictly economic sense," producing capital, is productive labor. Thus labor to be "productive" in this world of "universal alienation" must correspond to the logic of capital. In other words, only that labor is recognized as productive that produces surplus value and, thereby, capital. This logic comes out very clearly in the classical political economy—the "science of the bourgeoisie" (as Marx would call it), reaching its most representative expression in Ricardo—as Marx observes in different places of his work. As the young Marx had already observed while referring to Ricardo's work, "the cynicism is in the things and not in the words which express them" (1965: 26). It is well known that Marx's projected future society—in which humankind starts its (real) "history," leaving its "pre-history" behind—will have nothing to do either with commodity or with capital (wage labor). If only the exchange-value and thereby, capital-producing labor is productive labor in the yes of Marx, then, in what he conceives as the post-capitalist

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Labor Value and the Value of Labor Power

Relying almost exclusively on his reading of Marx’s Proudhon-critique, Custers concludes that like Ricardo Marx also held that “exchangeable value is determined by the quantity of labor embodied in the commodity,” which could signify that Marx’s theory of value (like the classics’) “carried a deep patriarchal prejudice” (46, 89, 91). Surprising though it is to see a definitive enunciation of Marx-Ricardo relation on value theory almost exclusively on the basis of the reading of a particular (early) text by Marx, let us for the moment meet Custers on his own ground.

Now, for Marx, by affirming the determination of exchange value by (the quantity of) labor time, Ricardo was only “exposing scientifically the theory of the bourgeois society” and was “rigorously and ruthlessly [impitoyablement] summing up the whole English bourgeoisie” (1965: 21; our emphasis). So, it was in the nature of things that “Ricardo and his school” stressed “only one side of the antinomy between the utility and the exchange value,” namely, the “exchange value” (1965: 22; emphasis in text). Hence, given that Ricardo was exclusively concerned with exchange value, reflecting only the bourgeois reality, Ricardo’s statement was “scientifically correct” (as Marx would say in his 1860s manuscripts). Having said this, could we maintain, like Custers, that Marx agreed with the value formulation of Ricardo even in this early text? As first sight, and reading rather superficially Marx’s polemic against Proudhon’s value formulation, it would appear that Marx was a Ricardian after all. Here he seems to not only uphold Ricardo’s formulation but also to support Ricardo’s critique of Adam Smith’s ambiguity on this question. However, if one reads the (whole) book carefully, it becomes clear that Marx is far from traveling the whole value-road with Ricardo. Already, as opposed to Ricardo’s assumption of the “natural” character of exchange value, Marx affirms (without naming Ricardo) that the “form of the exchange of products corresponds to the form of production. The mode of exchanging products is governed by the mode of production.... The individual exchange corresponds also to a definite mode of production,” and that the “economic categories” as the “theoretical expressions of the social relations of production are as little everlasting as the relations which they express; these are historical and transitory products” (1965: 50, 78, 79; emphasis in text). Ricardo like his bourgeois precursors took the categories of “commodity” and “capital” as “natural” and valid for all societies. We have to emphasize that in this early text Marx had not yet distinguished between “concrete” and “abstract” labor (absent by and large in the classical tradition) nor between value and exchange value—the value form (unknown in the classical tradition)—which would constitute a veritable rupture between the classics—the spokespersons of the bourgeoisie, and Marx, the spokesperson of the latter’s “grave diggers.”

It is not clear from Custers’s argument how the value formulation (either in the classics or in Marx) in and for itself signifies “patriarchal prejudice” on the part of its author(s). Let us at first take the “pure” case of value determination of a commodity, which is not the product of capital. For the classics (most clearly expressed in Ricardo) it is the quantity of (minimum) labor time necessary to produce a commodity—past labor time added to present labor time—that determines its value. There is nothing in the proposition that specifies the gender-source of this labor. Irrespective of its origin, what is needed in this connection is a particular quantity of labor, male or female or both (in conjunction). Even when Adam Smith, in this connection, speaks of the “toil and trouble of the man” (1937: 30), he obviously means thereby what Ricardo means by the “exertion of human industry” (and not “male” industry) (1951: 13).

As to Marx, even though his value formulation is qualitatively different from that of the classics (Marx does not, in contrast with the classics, speak simply of the quantity of labor determining value, he speaks of quantity of abstract labor, with revolutionary implications, a point neglected by Custers), as regards the point at issue, there is also nothing gender-specific in his value formulation. Throughout the discussion of value determination by the quantity of abstract labor time going into a commodity, Marx refers to “human [menschliche] labor, and not male [männliche] labor.” In other words, commodity-producing (abstract) labor, for Marx, is gender-neutral. Imagine a “pure” case of commodity production. Assume that the units of production are independent families, each owning the conditions of production, members neither hiring nor being hired as laborers, and that each family produces by joint female-male labor specific articles not for its own use but for sale in order to buy from other similarly situated families specific articles that, again, are products of joint female-male labor. In this case of (non-capitalist) commodity production, it is the quantity of (abstract) joint family labor of both genders going into the production of the commodity that would determine the magnitude of exchange value. Exactly the same logic applies in the case of either exclusively male or exclusively female labor (just as exclusively female or male labor could be producing pure use values in the domestic sphere). There is no question of “patriarchal prejudice” here.

Value Creation

Custers also tries to show Marx’s “deep bias against women” by referring to what he calls Marx’s “formula on value creation,” and comparing it with Smith’s. Here Custers relies exclusively on Rosa Luxemburg’s presentation and interpretation of the matter (and not on Marx’s own texts). InterpretingLuxemburg’s interpretation, he says: “The difference between the classical theory of value and its Marxist counterpart is reflected in two different formulae” (89). He then refers to Smith’s formula (in Marx’s terminology) as \( v + s \) —where “\( v \)" stands for "variable capital," that is, capital laid out in laborer’s wage, and “\( S \)" stands for “surplus value.” He opposes this to Marx’s formula \((c + v + s)\), where “\( c \)" refers to “constant capital,” the non-wage part of capital employed in production. Marx faults Smith for leaving out constant capital in his value calculation. Custers then asserts that independently of the merit of Marx’s formulation as opposed to Smith’s, both the formulae carry “deep patriarchal bias.” He tries to prove his case by going over immediately from what he considers as Marx’s value formulation as such to Marx’s formulation (as it appears to him) of value of labor power. We submit that his demonstration is not without problems.

First, in which context does Marx develop this Smith critique? The whole context is capitalist production (and its reproduction), not commodity production in and for itself. It is only when commodity is the outcome of the capitalist production process, its value formula is \((c + v + s)\), and it is in this context that Marx faults Smith (as well as Ricardo) for ignoring the constant part of capital-value. However, when it is a question of value as
such, of commodity not subject to capital—the “pure” case—that is, when the commodity producer is also the possessor/proprietor of the means of production, and labor power is not a commodity, there is no extraction of surplus value either, and the constant and the variable parts of capital do not have exactly the same meaning. “When the laborer,” says Marx, “possesses (also) the conditions of production, the laborer must subtract from the value of the annual product the value of the conditions of production in order to replace them. What the producer annually consumes would be equal to that part of the value of the product which is equal to the new labor added to the constant capital during the year.” In this case obviously there is no surplus value extracted. “In this case it would not be capitalist production” (1956: 125; here “constant capital” simply refers to the “conditions of production”). Thus here the appropriate formula for the value of the (annual) product would be \( v + c \) (in capitalist terms) and not \( c \cdot v \cdot s \). Custers seems to have overlooked what Luxemburg herself entirely correctly says in her “clear headed” presentation. According to her this is a case (she was referring to Marx’s critique of Smith, the point at issue here) where “the producer does not produce simple [bloss] commodities, but capital [and], before everything, must produce surplus value.” From this standpoint “to the value composition of every commodity capitally manufactured [kapitalistisch hergestellten Ware] corresponds normally the formula \( c \cdot v \cdot s \)” (1966: 7; our emphasis). Luxemburg’s baker, serving as illustration in this case (cited also by Custers), works specifically under capitalist conditions (1966: 31). If the (male) baker were a “simple commodity” producer owning his conditions of production, then, his labor would simply replace the value consumed—productively and personally—by an equivalent, even if he had sold his product to a capitalist. In this case money would not be transformed into capital (Marx 1956: 125). On the other hand, either of these formulae would equally apply if the baker were a woman and not a man. Thus Custers’s contention of the classical-Marx “difference” in “value theory” is misleading. He is conflating value-as-such and capital-value. On the other hand, his argument does not prove Marx’s “deep patriarchal bias.”

Another difficulty with Custers’s argument concerns his rather facile extension of the Smith case for the entire “classical theory.” On the contrary, Marx himself shows that Smith’s error is not shared by the physiocrats (particularly Quesnay). Marx credits the physiocrats with the “first systematic formulation of the capitalist production” where—particularly for Quesnay—the “reappearance of the value of constant capital in a new form” constitutes an “important moment of the reproduction of capital,” and Marx notes in this connection Smith’s “regression in the analysis of the reproduction process” (1973a: 360, 362; our emphasis). Similarly Marx credits Ramsay—who would still be said to be working “in the line of (classical) political economy”—for having emphasized—unlike Smith and Ricardo—the importance of the “constant” part of capital (1956: 70; 1962b: 323, 324; 1973a: 389).

Custers, in his eagerness to “overhaul Marx’s labor theory of value” (90) has unfortunately left aside what in fact constitutes the decisive and fundamental difference between the classical approach and Marx’s approach to value (this has no relation to the gender question). According to Custers, following Ricardo, Marx (also) thought that “exchange value is determined by the quantity of labor embodied in the commodities” (91). Now, the quantity of labor that is supposed to determine exchange value is not the same labor in the two approaches. In the classical case, “as with Smith, Ricardo, etc., it is the simple analysis of labor ‘sans phrase’,” as Marx puts it in a letter to Engels, 8 January 1868 (in 1972b: 158). In Marx, it is specifically “abstract” labor (in this case “socially necessary labor” in the special sense of sociality) that is relevant. The consequence of the classical assumption is that commodity is a natural and everlasting characteristic of product created by human labor. Contrariwise, commodity as the product created by abstract labor (as it is with Marx) makes it at once historical, and specific to a particular kind of society. Marx emphasizes that the “double character of labor” (that is, concrete and abstract labor) represented in a commodity, “first critically demonstrated by me”, is the “pivotal point [Sprungpunkt] around which the understanding of political economy turns,” and constitutes in fact “the whole secret of the critical conception” (1962a: 56; 1972b: 158). Related to this is the non-recognition by the classics of the “value form” of the product of labor (apart from its “value”), discovered, again, by Marx. “The commodity form of the product of labor or the value form of the commodity,” writes Marx, constitutes the “cell-form of the bourgeois society.” Indeed, the “human spirit” has been “vainly trying for more than two thousand years to penetrate the secret of the value form of which money form is the finished configuration” (1962a: 11-12). The “failure of the classical political economy” to discover, in their analysis of commodity, the form of value under which value becomes exchange value, constitutes one of its “fundamental defects” (Grundmängel). “The analysis of value as a magnitude has wholly absorbed their attention” The value or the commodity form of the product of labor—which belongs to a social formation in which “the individual, instead of dominating the process of production, is dominated by it—appears to the bourgeois consciousness [of these economists] as a self-understood natural necessity like the productive labor itself” (1962a: 95-96).

Finally, we come to the question of determination of the value of labor power as a commodity in which, again, according to Custers, Marx “supported Ricardo’s view,” neglected the role of domestic labor in sustaining laboring strength and thus showed his “patriarchal bias” (46, 47, 88). We saw earlier that Marx clearly recognized how women, before they were “confiscated by capital,” were performing the labor “necessary for family consumption” and “economically sustaining the family way of life” while men were the wage earners. What critics of Marx—as represented by Custers—seem to neglect is that in his formulation of wage determination Marx was not offering any prescriptive formula, far less his own desideratum in this regard. He was only rigorously showing how wage determination arose from the reality of capitalism itself. It is capital (and not Marx) that has separated the laborers from the conditions of labor. As a consequence, it is only in capitalist production that labor power is separated as a commodity from the laborer—the uniqueness of this particular commodity being that its use value contributes a greater value than what it costs to produce and reproduce it. And once labor power becomes a commodity, the value of this specific commodity is determined basically in the same way as the value of any other commodity (with the sole proviso that the value determination of this unique commodity also involves a “historical and moral element”). It follows that the value of labor power (as a commodity) is determined by the labor time necessary to produce and reproduce it. Insofar as it is value, labor power itself represents a definite quantum of the objectified so-
cially average labor. The labor time necessary to produce labor power as a commodity boils down to the socially average labor time necessary to produce the subsistence of the possessor of the labor power. Thus the “value of labor power is the value of the subsistence” necessary for maintaining its possessor, or the “value of labor power includes the value of commodities which are necessary for the reproduction of the laborer or the propagation [Fortpflanzung] of the laboring class” (1962a: 184, 281; our emphasis). Obviously the “value of subsistence” is determined by the socially necessary labor time. Now, the articles produced at home for sustaining the family are use values having no commodity form and the domestic labor—man’s or woman’s—producing them is not socially determined average labor, not abstract labor: but concrete labor. This is, indeed, “subsistence labor which consists of production of use values for day-to-day consumption,” as the German feminists seem to hold (as summarized by Custers [258]). Hence, by definition, this domestic labor—that is, “real labor,” as Marx would call it—does not enter into the determination of the commodity labor power (of the wage earner). The point is this. Simply a certain quantity of labor time producing a useful object will not turn the object into a commodity. “Wheat possesses the same use value whether it is produced by the slaves, serfs or free laborers and will not lose its use value even if it falls from the sky, like snow.” In order to be transformed into commodity this “use value has to be the bearer [Träger] of exchange value” (Marx 1953: 763). In the production of labor power as a commodity only those use values are taken into consideration that are at the same time “bearers of exchange value,” having been produced by the socially necessary labor time. Correspondingly, shall be considered only that labor which has gone into production of items having exchange value. This is the way a commodity-capitalist society works. Is this also not true of capitalism’s (mis)treatment of nature, its complete disregard of nature’s immense contribution to the production and reproduction of humankind (including, of course, the wage laborer)? There is, however, nothing specifically “sexist” or “patriarchal” in Marx’s wage determination formulation (arising out of the reality of capital itself). The same (capitalist) logic would apply with equal force if the gender roles were reversed—if, instead of women, men had the charge of pure household labor and women were exclusively wage earners—which might very well have been the case if patriarchy and not patriarchy had prevailed.

How far, then, could we accept Custers’s contention that “Marx did not fundamentally diverge from Ricardo” regarding wage determination (46)? Custers seems to ignore Marx’s long discussion of the Ricardian position and its contradictions particularly in his 1861–63 manuscripts. Let us put the matter very briefly. Marx shows in his different texts (including Capital) that the classics (including Ricardo) were wrong in supposing that labor has a value or price. Marx approvingly cites the economist Bailey showing the “absurd tautology” of the logic of deriving the “value of labor” from the doctrine of labor value—that is, the determination of the value of labor by the quantity of labor employed to produce it (1959: 398; 1962a: 557). Then Marx, goes on to show how Ricardo, while trying to determine the “value of labor,” contradicts his own doctrine of labor value and in fact falls in the same error of Smith as that which he had at first combated. (This concerns the Smithian confusion between “labor-embodied” and “labor-commanded” explanations of value-determination). Marx shows that in order to avoid the “absurd tautology” involved in the determination of the “value of a twelve-hour working day by the twelve hours contained in the working day of twelve hours,” Ricardo had to bring in the “law of supply and demand” reducing the “average price of labor to the means of subsistence necessary for the upkeep of the laborer.” In this way, Ricardo “determines value, in what is one of the bases of the whole system, through supply and demand.” Thus “without any reference to the commodity values,” Ricardo here “takes refuge in the law of supply and demand. He determines the value of labor not by the quantity of labor bestowed upon the force of labor but upon the wages allotted to the laborer, that is, in fact, by the value of money that is paid for it.” Thereby he “literally falls in the inconsistency which he had reprimanded in Smith” (1962a: 557, 1959: 397, 400-401; emphasis in text. The expressions “law of supply and demand” and the entire phrase “bestowed upon...the laborer” appear in English in the manuscript). Surprisingly Custers has ignored this entire Ricardo-critique by Marx.

Conclusion

Let us conclude. While analyzing the Asian women’s labor in the capital accumulation process and showing Marx’s relevance to it, Custers has also striven to combine what he considers as the best in feminism and Marxism. Much of what the feminists say in their criticism of “classical Marxism”—as represented by Custers—would largely apply to “post-Marx Marxism.” Indeed, the latter’s record on the women’s question has been far from enviable. Women’s specific problems have found very little place in their theoretical discourses. As regards practice, patriarchy has dominated the party leaderships of the Second and the Third Internationals. The societies of the “really (non) existing socialism” basically remained patriarchal. Custers has very well analyzed the problem with regard to the Second International (dominated by the German Social Democrats), without, however, extending it to the Third International. However, as we argued above on the basis of Marx’s relevant texts, the criticisms directed against “classical Marxism” do not hold in the case of Marx himself. Throughout his life Marx spoke out against women’s “slavery” and “exploitation,” beginning with the triumph of patriarchy, but, coming to modern times, he also underlined women’s “degradation” and their gender-differentiated exploitation under capital’s “surplus labor” (1962a: 280). Marx does not stop there. He goes even further. True to the principle of “dialectic of negativity”—enunciated in his Parisian manuscripts (1844)—Marx shows that while capital degrades and physically ruins laboring women, along with its act of dissolution of the family itself, it also creates, antagonistically, through the very same process, the elements of a higher form of family along with the elements of a higher form of society as a whole. The dissolution by capital of the old family ties by forcing women and children out of the domestic circle and turning them into “cheap laborers,” Marx observes, is a “horrible and disgusting process.” Similarly, the composition of the combined laboring personnel out of individuals of both sexes is accomplished by capital in its “spontaneously grown brutal form” and is a “pestilential source of corruption and slavery.” However, the integration of women and children in the process of organized production, and their participation in collective labor at the same time, contrariwise, create the “new economic foundation for a higher form of family” and, under “appropriate conditions are necessarily transformed into a source of
humane development” (1962a: 514). As Marx emphasizes, “in history, as in nature, putrefaction is the laboratory of life” (1965: 995, the phrase uniquely appears in the French version and is not reproduced in any German version).

Let us re-emphasize that Capital Accumulation and Women’s Labor in Asian Economies is an important book. Custers’s description of women’s labor under capital in the selected countries of Asia, rightly drawing attention to the relevance of Marx, is excellent. His account of women’s struggles, persistent over decades, against patriarchy, is splendid, as is his account of the lively feminist debates that have taken place over a long period.

For anyone interested in the women’s question or anyone striving for an end to patriarchy and a better world for women, this book should be compulsory reading.

Notes
1. In his Morgan excerpts Marx very positively cites a letter to Morgan written by a missionary who had worked among the Seneca tribe of North America: “Usually the female portion ruled the house... The women were the great power among the clans, as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, to ‘knock off the horns,’ as it was technically called, from the head of a chief, and send him back to the ranks of the warriors. The original nomination of the chiefs also always rested with them” (Krader: 116; emphasis in manuscript.).
2. The charge of neglecting “use value” was already leveled against Marx in his lifetime by, for example, A. Wagner, to whom Marx replied that far from being neglected, “use value in me plays an important role completely different from the one played in hitherto existing (political) economy” (1962c: 371).
3. “Productive labor is simply that labor which produces capital” that is, “only that labor is productive which produces its own opposite” (1953: 212; emphasis in manuscript).
4. As Marx observes, “to be productive labor (under capital), its determination in and for itself has nothing to do with the definite content of the labor, its specific usefulness or the specific use value where it is represented” (1988: 113; emphasis in manuscript). It is a determination of labor which arises from its “specific social form... from the social relations of production in which it is realized” (1956: 120). A school teacher is productive “not because he forms the minds of his students, but because he works for the enrichment of his boss. That the latter has invested his capital in a school factory instead of in a sausage factory does not at all change the relation” (1962a: 532; 1965: 1002).
5. Earlier Marx had noted that “the mediating movement of the exchanging individual is not a human relation. It is the abstract relation of private property to private property, and this abstract relation is value” (1932: 532; our emphasis).
6. Custers apparently has not noticed that according to Rose, “the fundamental difference between the Ricardian and the Marxian labor value theories” lay in Ricardo’s assumption of the “value forming labor as a natural property (Eigenschaft) of human labor” (1966: 33, our emphasis).
7. Emphasizing the difference between Ricardo and himself on the question of value Marx wrote shortly before his death: “Ricardo occupied himself with labor only as a measure of value magnitude and consequently did not find any connection between his value theory and the essence of money” (1962c: 358, emphasis in text).
8. On the question of reproduction of labor power within the family, a well-known Andhra Marxist-feminist has shown a certain circularity of reasoning involved: non-wage earning woman sustaining and reproducing wage-earning man’s labor power enabling him to earn wages by her domestic labor, man sustaining and reproducing woman’s labor power—so that his own labor power could be sustained and reproduced—by providing her with subsistence materials bought with his wages, etc., etc. (Ranganayakamma 1999: 31-32). (To paraphrase Marx, meat can be cooked only when it has been paid for with the wage. 1956:129)
9. As Marx observed in his 1851 “London notebook” on Ricardo: “Bourgeois wealth and the aim of all bourgeois production is exchange value and not use value (Genuss—consumption, enjoyment) (1953:804).
10. In his first manuscript of Capital II, Marx completes Spinoza’s famous phrase “all determination is negation” with “all negation is determination” (1988: 216; this manuscript was not published in Engels’s version).

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Visit the BCAS Website at http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas/
The China Human Development Report is the first National Human Development Report on the Peoples Republic of China. Drafted by an independent UNDP group of eleven international and Chinese experts, the Report offers a comprehensive discussion of the state of human development in China, while putting special focus on the record of poverty alleviation. Taking its cue from the 1997 global Human Development Report, a first attempt is made in this report to rank provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities in China according to the Human Development Index. With a population of 1.23 billion and a GDP that quadrupled between 1978 and 1996, China has a huge impact on the social and economic progress of the world. This Report examines how its spectacular economic growth has correlated with human and social development.

The Report summarizes the history and current status of sustainable human development in China, examines outstanding challenges, and makes a number of broad policy recommendations for tackling these challenges. Although China has an admirable record of promoting some aspects of human development, including poverty alleviation and improvements in health and education, the Report shows how China continues to face enormous human development challenges. Some of these are left over from the past, such as the rigid urban-rural divide; others are newly created or complicated by China's transition from a planned to a market economy, a process that has been unfolding for the past two decades. The Report also explores recent difficulties encountered in China due to the instability of world market forces—for example the Asian financial crisis—and examines China's most serious human development challenges: growing unemployment; rising social and economic inequality; and the absence of a social safety net.

Because this is the first national Human Development Report undertaken for China, it establishes a baseline for all future efforts by discussing a wide spectrum of development issues, including the distribution of income, health care, education and nutrition, population and migration, the status of women, employment, social security provision, the state of the natural environment, and the reform of state enterprises. Highlighting the many causal inter-connections among these various issues, The China Human Development Report is essential reading for all those studying the economic and political development of modern China.
Book Reviews


Reviewed by Norma Field

The two titles under review are welcome additions from Australia to the still modest bibliography of historical studies of Japanese women in English, beginning with Sharon Sievers’s pathbreaking Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Meiji Japan (1983) and including Gail Bernstein’s edited volume, Recreating Japanese Women: 1600-1945 (1991) and E. Patricia Tsurumi’s Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan (1990). Mackie’s and Raddeker’s books, covering much the same period—those extraordinary first decades of the century, characterized by industrial, social, and cultural transformation accompanied by increasing political repression—are complementary and yet quite distinctive endeavors.

Let me begin by raising the question of women’s history. For all the disavowals of linearity and teleology to which we have become habituated in contemporary cultural scholarship, there is nonetheless a tacit sense of progress embedded in that also underacknowledged dominance of fashion. And despite the nonequivalence and overlap among the terms, a certain progression might be traced from studies of women to feminism to gender to sexuality. It is no accident that the words “progress” and “transformation” share so much; categories that mark historical processes can be traced from studies of women to feminism to gender to sexuality.

Mackie helpfully situates the “narrative ... of socialist women around a series of speaking positions, tracing a trajectory from subjection to activism” (169), Mackie’s chapters proceed from “imperial subjects” to “wives” to “mothers” to “workers” to “activists.” It is not surprising that within this structure, Mackie, who has long contributed to the feminist study of women and gender relations in Japan through her own research and her exemplary editorial activity, should have produced a fine intellectual-social-cultural history of that formative period. What a difference gender-consciousness makes to our understanding of the beginnings of socialist thought, to labor activity, to the familiar debates between anarchists and bolsheviks, and to the still more familiar (because too easy to deride) factionalism of the left! This is as true elsewhere as in Japan, and it is to Mackie’s great credit to have taken this broad yet concentrated look at the conjuncture of socialism and feminism. The product of thoroughgoing research with extensive notes pointing to both Japanese and English-language scholarship on Japan and related scholarship whose focus has been directed at other societies, her book can well serve as a basic history of the period and not a secondary one with the added qualifier of “women.” The graphics at the head of each chapter are an education in themselves. Numerous points of interest and continued relevance emerge in this narrative, but I was especially struck by the account of the complex and contradictory process—whereby protection of women’s (and children’s) labor came about. As of April 1999, most protection clauses have been undone in the name of liberalization; legally speaking, Japanese women are now as free as Japanese men to seek long hours and potentially dangerous working conditions, and Japanese men are as available as women as a newly flexible source of labor. Needless to say, Japan is not the only society today wherein freedom and equality are produced in such ironic form.

The risks of constraining protection, of paternalist and or maternalist motivation, and of exposure to exhausting and dangerous labor in the name of liberalization are embedded in the tensions among the overlapping categories of “imperial subjects” (today, citizens), “wives,” “mothers,” and “workers” that comprise the “speaking positions” of Mackie’s chapters. In the history of the study of Japanese women, in Japanese as well as in English, a disproportionate emphasis has been placed on the journal Seito (Bluestocking), first published in 1911. Contemporary journalism was especially drawn to the flamboyant behavior of founding editor Hiratsuka Raicho and her associates, but their catchy designation as “new women” has continued to attract what might be abbreviated as a culturalist attention, even though Seito’s early disposition to focus on individual female creativity in fact shifted to make room for more overtly sociopolitical concerns. Mackie helpfully situates Seito in the context of a variety of women’s activities, which is consistent with her (and many...
feminists’) desire to contest the tendency whereby women, prominent or notorious and otherwise, are reduced to their emotional histories.

Problems

Nevertheless, two problems emerge from this principled stance. The first stems from the fact that women’s lives have been enormously shaped by their erotic attachments (not only heterosexual, of course, though political and scholarly concern has most often been directed toward overemphasis on women’s relationships with men—and here I should add fathers and brothers as well as husbands and lovers, and finally bonds of love but also obligation to sisters and mothers). Bracketing these aspects of reality from consideration is to deprive oneself of the materials with which the subjects under study so often thought and acted. The challenge at hand is not to reduce women to these attachments but to think of them as forces—at once particular and structural—that shaped and were shaped by women’s thought and practice as lovers, wives, mothers, and workers. (This challenge necessarily evokes men’s intellectual histories, or rather, intellectual history that is so often written without gender consciousness.)

The second problem is related to the first. It is not accidental that popular attention should be drawn to love and sexuality; these are handily titillating aspects of life, and the titillation is not merely superficial, that is, bodily and therefore bawdy, but psychological. As Foucault memorably argued, we think we know the innermost person, the truth of that person, when we know his (for Foucault, but we may add “her”) sex life. Put more broadly, we tend to have a special interest in the emotional and especially the erotic life of a person and feel, wrongly and rightly, that it gives us important and satisfying knowledge about the person, some access to their interiority. It is a kind of access that tends not to be provided, certainly not emphasized, about labor activists or socialists, male or female. Ironically, therefore, interiority remains a prerogative of the privileged. Of course, it was a particular problem for women in these roles to be regarded as other than (mere) women. Nevertheless, the erotic is not the only aspect of interiority; as Mackie rightly acknowledges, “imaginative resources” are necessary for “imagining the transformation of society” (21). She refers to and at times describes the literary and artistic endeavors in leftist journals, pointing to the importance not only of the “propositional content” but also the various formal resources in the “construction of new subjectivities” (109). Such references are too brief, however, with but scant quotation from primary materials. The result of the combined effort to respect women’s autonomy and to give a fully contextualized history of their activities makes the topic of the book, the creation of socialist women, curiously distant and abstract. How women who were at once wives, mothers, workers, and activists became so—women who were arrested and executed in connection with the so-called High Treason Incident of 1911. Kaneko, who was rounded up with many Koreans and activists in the scandalous aftermath of the Great Earthquake of 1923, was also condemned to be executed but chose to hang herself after her sentence was commuted. Both women derived part of their notoriety from their association with men: in the case of Kanno Suga, with the anarchist Kotoku Shusui, who was executed at the same time; Kaneko Fumiko, with the Korean Pak Yeol, who was also sentenced, commuted, and lived on. Both women reflected on their lives in writing while in prison. Restricting herself to these two figures, Raddeker is able to make ample use of their writings as well as to consider their lives in some depth. With respect to points raised earlier, I have two quibbles: first, given that both women left behind poetry as part of their prison reflections, it would have been interesting to have some consideration of this choice, particularly since Raddeker is interested in the variety of ways in which these women’s “representations of death-life were strategies of self-empowerment” (35). It may go without saying that poetry was still ready-to-hand for the expression of heightened emotions for this generation; but the use of such conventional forms by “rebels” remains worthy of speculation. The second quibble has to do with the relationship of sexuality to the conditions of possibility for these women. Raddeker refers to an extraordinary photograph taken by a judge of Kaneko and Pak “in the courtroom—Fumiko sitting on Pak’s lap, his left hand resting on her breast” (25; emphasis in the original). This detail appears in an interesting discussion of paternalism and Japanese judicial emphasis on confession, which, however, seems an inadequate framework for the specificities at hand.

Raddeker devotes a chapter to methodology. She, too, is concerned to avoid a linear, teleological narrative whereby her subjects’ end—their dramatic deaths—is made to render coherent the rest of their lives. To this end she provides a narrative of their lives only in the final section, after a discussion of their engagement with their own deaths and a comparative intellectual history of nihilism and death and dying. One aspect of Raddeker’s self-consciousness about methodology is refreshingly, even startlingly, commonsensical. It is a refusal to be locked into
fruitless either-or positions: e.g., women as victims or resisters or constructivism vs. intentionalism or psychologism (17). This approach allows for a lucid recognition of the productivity of life's ambivalences, as well as of the fact that were it not for the request by that "punitive and loving father," Judge Tatematsu, that Fumiko write her life, nothing would have remained of her (26). In considering Suga's life, she shows how commentators have tended to allow "Suga the anarcho-terrorist of 1908-1911" to overshadow the earlier "moral reformer, Christian 'pacifist,' and nationalist" (emphasis in the original). Raddeker's avoidance of teleology in interpreting Suga's life and death is also productive in giving us a vivid sense of the dynamic of opposition movements in this period of Japanese history. Surely the contradiictions and overlaps among positions that we see in Suga's life characterized broader movements inasmuch as their agents compromised and contested as they struggled to understand their changing experiences.

Raddeker's interpretive passion is most forcefully directed at Fumiko's life and death. It would have been tempting to locate this remarkable, self-educated woman in the discourse of post-coloniality; Fumiko spent wretchedly formative years in colonial Korea, which clearly led to the affinity she felt for the Korean "malcontents" with whom she associated in adulthood, Pak being first and foremost among them. Yet she was insistent in refusing to align herself with a nationalist-based independence movement. What was Fumiko for, then? Raddeker treats her nihilism with utmost respect, exploring its intellectual sources in Europe and Japan, endorsing neither a facile universalism nor a cultural exceptionalism.

In this exploration, Fumiko emerges neither as a feminist nor, for that matter, as a social liberal (she became critical of the "sonomolent masses" [229]), yet it seems appropriate to call Raddeker's scrupulous examination of her views and practice, her very refusal to recuperate her for worthy causes, feminist. Nevertheless, Fumiko's nihilism remains dauntingly opaque, at least to this reader. And the unanswerable and absurd yet nonetheless useful question poses itself: what would Fumiko have become had she chosen to live?

Partly as a consequence of Raddeker's thoughtful study of these figures, the terms patriarchy and patrician prevalent in the book's subtitle come to seem inadequate for grasping Suga's and Fumiko's lives. This sense of excess, the outstripping of concepts by the material they are meant to seize, is in fact testimony to the importance of the subjects of both titles under review. Let us hope that they inspire work by others and let us look forward as well to these authors' future endeavors.

Notes


3. Ibid., vol. 21, p. 39; translated in Hane, Reflections, p. 129, but awkwardly.


Reviewed by Vijay Prashad

The New Press has done the academic community an immense service. The two volumes under review provide ample documentation and analysis of the seamy connections between the research factories and the powers that be. Naïve academics may express surprise at the vinculum between academia and profit and power, but the rest of us will find confirmation in these two books of the ways in which profit and power have structured the institutions and the epistemologies with which we work. Both volumes show us how this nexus has produced intellectual work committed to the status quo rather than to social change, how the point of thought has been reduced to the protection of privilege. Certainly some intellectuals have refused to toe the line and many faced the institutional gibbet as a result. (As Richard Lewontin puts it in CW&U, the crackdown on the left was not part of state action, but was produced by "the opportunism and cowardice of boards of trustees and university administrators.")

Most intellectuals, however, have shared in an illiberal prosperity that has allowed them "academic freedom" and the resources to conduct research as long as the research did not turn toward subjects such as class struggle and exploitation. Interest in the wretched of the earth remained a cottage industry and any renewal of pique occurred mainly as a result of sustained student protest from the 1960s and because of the Vietnam War rather than as a result of intellectual courage (as Immanuel Wallerstein explains in his contribution in CW&U).

As the principle avenue of dissent in the first half of this century, Marxism has not had an easy career in the United States (this despite the courage of the early Marxists recorded in Paul Buhle's 1987 Marxism in the USA). From the 1919 anti-radical laws to the 1950s, Marxism did have something of a presence in the cultural world (as shown in Michael Denning's magisterial 1996 The Cultural Front). Marxism "disappeared from the academy" from the 1950s onwards, Richard Ohmann notes in CW&U, and "the tradition dried up." Those interested in political economy took refuge in the Monthly Review group or in the moth-eaten Communist Party (with Paul Baran and Victor Perlo being their respective Marxist economists).

With the removal of Marxism from the academy, epistemologies that promoted social stability and order took center stage. The Weberianism of Edward Shils and Talcott Parsons reigned supreme and, as Ira Katznelson shows us in CW&U, political science in general suggested that it would be better "for the excluded to remain apolitical than challenge the dirty secrets of the regime." In the introduction to U&E, Simpson calls this relationship between power and knowledge the "paradigm of domination, one in which social scientists studied the experience of power and hegemonic relations in order to rationalize the exercise of that power—that is, to improve its efficiency and effec-
tiveness.” The bulk of the academics, in Ohmann’s words, “went along unthinkingly with the ideology of the Free World, through no racing of the blood—after all, the Soviets were no threat to our freedom.”

Sustained resistance to the emergent consensus came from the sciences (Chomsky, Lewontin, and Sleeer argue in CW&U) since most administrators saw their faculty as technocrats without an interest in the creation of political morality. This was, of course, hardly the case as the scientists provided an important bulwark against the insolence of illiberalism. These books, however, do not offer as much on the sciences as I would have liked, especially since there is so little literature on the sciences and politics in the United States. Instead, we are given detailed studies of Project Camelot (Nader in CW&U and Herman in U&E), Project Troy (Needell in U&E), and other such examples of governmental interventions in the social sciences. Few of the scholars mentioned in the articles actually “spied” for the government, but most of them did create epistemological models that fit governmental interests. In U&E, we find a 1919 letter to The Nation from Franz Boas in which he chastises his colleagues for espionage. Our problem eight decades later is not with evidence of direct spying, but with the abstract domination of the state in the types of models that still hold sway in certain of the social sciences (behavioralism, positivism, structural-functionalism). These models prevent us from thinking about social change and protest in creative ways so as to facilitate the progressive transformation of our societies. Instead, they generally stand sentinel around the status quo (as is nicely shown by Gendzier in U&E and Katznelson in CW&U).

Bruce Cumings, in an essay that appeared first in these pages, provides the best overview of our crisis, one that “is not our past, however, but our present—one that will be with us for a long time” (in U&E). “The source of power,” he argues, “had shifted in the 1990s from the state’s concern with the maintenance of Cold War boundary security to transnational corporations that, as the organized expression of the market, saw no geographical limit on their interests.” Incidentally, the U.S. government’s strategic shift from the Congress of Cultural Freedom to the National Endowment of Democracy is an important example of this transition (as Prakash Karat and I show in People’s Democracy, New Delhi, 18 April 1999). U&E, unlike CW&U, is not retrospective in its coverage; rather it commits itself to an analysis of the dynamic of power and knowledge. Therefore, we have a short and smart essay by Lawrence Soley entitled “The corporate yen for scholarship” that traces the imbroglio we face as a result of corporate finance of scholarship. A remarkable document from April 1954 by W. W. Rostow and Max F. Millikan (prepared for Allan Dulles of the C.I.A. with the title “Notes on Foreign Economic Policy”) shows us how the economic dynamics was a subtext of the earlier impact on scholarship. “If we mean business,” these two scholars wrote, “we must do business.” What is of interest in that document (despite being written by U.S. mandarins of power) is that it is closer to the import-substitution world of the 1950s than to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment world of the 1990s. Rostow and Millikan make two suggestions that would strike today’s neo-liberal economics faculty as socialistic. First, that “each society must find that form of growth appropriate to its own traditions, values and aspirations,” and not, therefore, be hostage to IMF blueprints. Second, that the world needs “a new type of international institution capable of providing equity capital for private projects which lie outside the competence of existing private capital markets,” so that countries are left unable to finance important non-profitable infrastructure programs. Such views today are anathema within the fraternity of policy analysts and advisors (those code words for academics who have given themselves over to the corporate selection of ideas).

“The Cold War experience of universities needs to be reviewed,” David Montgomery notes in CW&U, “not only to teach us how the human imagination has been contained, but also how it has broken through the veils of secrecy and deception.” The conscience of the academy was reawakened by a combination of student and faculty distress over U.S. imperialism’s vulgarity in Vietnam and by the civil rights protests. Area Studies became part of the focus of attack, as was demonstrated three decades ago in the San Francisco area during the “Third World Strike.” Some students and faculty at that time felt that Area Studies was a mode of imperialist control of the formerly colonized world, even though it was the main institutional site to study people of color within the academy. The “bottom-up” fight for Ethnic Studies was dialectically anti-imperialist and anti-racist, as Immanuel Wallerstein notes. The creative impulses of the anti-war movement and the anti-racist struggles came together to provide novel ways to study all manner of peoples and our social projects. Kevin Gaines (in U&E) shows us how the state responded by trying to narrow the vision of Black intellectuals toward the domestic civil liberties struggle rather than to the wider anti-imperialist struggle joined by many Black expatriates (notably Julian Mayfield). The struggles of students across the country to extend Ethnic Studies, to abolish sweatshops, and to prevent the privatization of scholarship show us that some students are unhappy with the routine capitulation of academicians to the logic of state and capital. Such initiatives as the Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice (SAWSJ) enable us to entertain the hope that our scholarship may one day be a part of a lively and creative democratic movement rather than remain smothered in the caustrophobia of money and privilege.

EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION: Average number of copies of each issue published during the preceding twelve months:

(A) total number of copies printed, 1200; (B.1) paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on form 3541, 900; (B.2) paid in-county subscriptions, 0; (B.3) sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales, 40; (B.4) other classes mailed through the USPS, 0; (C) total paid and/or requested circulation, 940; (D) samples, complimentary, and other free copies distributed by mail, 25; (E) free distribution outside the mail, 40; (F) total free distribution (sum of D & E), 65; (G) total distribution (sum of C & F), 1005; (H.1) copies not distributed, 195; (I) total, 1200. Percent paid and/or requested circulation, 94.53. Actual number of copies of a single issue published nearest to filing date: (A) total number of copies printed, 1208; (B.1) paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on form 3541, 803; (B.2) paid in-county subscriptions, 0; (B.3) sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales, 39; (B.4) other classes mailed through the USPS, 0; (C) total paid and/or requested circulation, 922; (D) samples, complimentary, and other free copies distributed by mail, 23; (E) free distribution outside the mail, 40; (F) total free distribution (sum of D & E), 63; (G) total distribution (sum of C & F), 985; (H.1) copies not distributed, 223; (I) total, 1208. Percent paid and/or requested circulation, 93.6.
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CCAS Statement of Purpose

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed 28-30 March 1969, Boston