

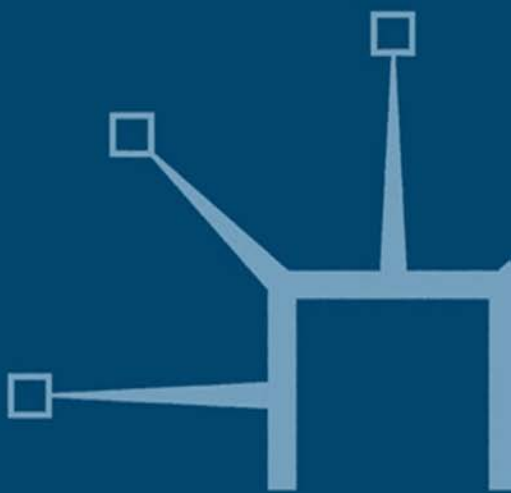
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Engaging Colonial Knowledge

Reading European Archives in
World History

Ricardo Roque

Kim A. Wagner



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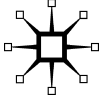
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*Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner
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Introduction: Engaging Colonial Knowledge

Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner

My day is done: I'm quitting Europe. Sea air will scorch my lungs: lost climates will tan me. To swim, trample the grass, hunt, above all smoke: drink hard liquors like boiling metals – as those dear ancestors did round the fire. I'll return with iron limbs; dark skin, a furious look: from my mask I'll be judged as of mighty race.

Jean-Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell* (1873)¹

Quitting Europe

In the long history of European overseas expansion, an immense and diverse collection of texts, images, drawings, and maps has been produced and accumulated, part of which survives today in archives and libraries around the world. As a legacy of colonization and empire-building, the 'knowledge' embodied in this diverse material has been identified with projects of imperialist or colonialist domination, and as such simply labelled as 'colonial'. This designation, however, hides considerable complexity. As we enter these archives, we enter a heterogeneous documental world, spanning distinct languages, literary and artistic genres or conventions, historical moments, geographical settings, varied human purposes and agendas. Along the way a proliferation of subjects, objects, categories, stories, events, personal and collective dramas, either experienced or imagined, is brought into being. This is not a neat and orderly world infused with transparent and unambiguous meaning. It constitutes a tensional, discontinuous, and uncertain formation of documents, categories, stories, and images. In their very dispersion and unevenness, these may be seen, as Michel Foucault observed, as productive political 'fields of force' that selectively make

visible a variety of specific historical actions and entities, whilst also excluding other actions and entities from emerging.²

How to make sense of these complex discursive fields and archival legacies of the imperial expansion of Europe is the central theme of this volume. Regardless of affiliation to imperial history, ethnohistory, historical anthropology, or critical literary and postcolonial studies, no academic would contest the significance of this archival realm for the construction of scholarly arguments. Without engaging this material, no authoritative statement or stance concerning imperialist activities, colonial discourse, or past indigenous societies would ever be possible. In a practical sense, scholars of colonialism (including its critics) are firm believers in, and (re)producers of, the factuality of colonial knowledge and furthermore rely on its existence as a bounded fieldwork site and as a resource for historical narration. This shared reliance on the archives, however, has also been accompanied by strong disagreement as regards the epistemological value of colonial accounts, and the kind of claims about colonialism, indigenous realities, and past events that they allow us to make. Scholars might recognize the significance of colonial knowledge, but they use it in a variety of different ways to guide them through very different worlds. The question of how we relate to the epistemic legacy of European imperialism, and what constructive use to make of its fragments, is in fact critical to contemporary historical and anthropological practice. It is also the main concern of the essays collected in this book.

The volume addresses issues of colonial knowledge from both historical and anthropological perspectives in a variety of periods and settings, covering African, Asian, and American topics and the history of British, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish colonial encounters, from the 1500s to the twentieth century. The earlier colonies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, established mainly for the purpose of trade and the extraction of precious metals, are thus represented in studies of the Spanish in Mexico (Caroline Dodds Pennock) and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka (Alan Strathern). The exploration of the Pacific by the British in the eighteenth century is examined through James Cook's second voyage, and the imagery of 'discovery' (Nicholas Thomas). During the early part of the nineteenth century, colonies were firmly established on the South Asian subcontinent by a number of European powers, which is described in the context of the small Danish settlement on the Coromandel Coast (Niels Brimnes), and the rather better-known possessions of the British East India Company (Leigh Denault and Kim A. Wagner). New forms of colonial administration

and interaction between colonizers and colonized emerged through the later part of the nineteenth century, as described in the context of the Portuguese on Timor (Ricardo Roque) and the Dutch on Sumatra (Ann Laura Stoler). The 'Scramble for Africa' towards the end of the century remains perhaps the most emblematic phase of Western imperialism and its ramifications are explored through the British in Nigeria (Pauline von Hellermann) and the Germans in Tanzania (Andrew Zimmerman). Finally, the waning years of formal European imperialism, accompanied by the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, are represented by French Indochina in the twentieth century (Susan Bayly).

Our chronological and geographical scope is deliberately wide-reaching in order to reflect the diversity and similarity, the specificity and continuity, of various stages of the colonial encounter in world history. Rather than trying to offer a complete coverage of European imperialism, however, this volume presents a set of rich case-studies that demonstrates particularly fruitful approaches to the study of colonial knowledge. *Engaging Colonial Knowledge* thus seeks to explore novel and productive ways of reading and interpreting colonial records. In collecting the essays that constitute this volume, we have worked on the assumption that colonial accounts constitute embodied artefacts that, through careful examination of their relative potential and limitations, can offer important insights into the colonial phenomenon and into European as well as indigenous actions and cultures in the past. Approached as a productive condition of possibility, and not as a harmful obstacle to historical understanding, colonial knowledge enables, rather than deters, the writing of history of other cultures and events. Colonial knowledge was usually more than just the application of pre-conceived notions. Many colonial accounts emerged from situated bodily encounters that were unforeseen and unpredictable; encounters that mattered for the internal contents of colonial descriptions. Different literary conventions concerning appropriate forms of writing, and different ideas of truth and objectivity, allowed direct and eyewitness encounters varied degrees of visibility and authority inside the texts. Medieval and Early Modern accounts, for instance, might incorporate the words and imageries of Classical texts, due to the influence of the rules of *imitatio* in cultural creation, and to the detriment of the authority of direct experience. Shaped by the significance attributed to eyewitness observations, on the other hand, later accounts might offer wider conditions of possibility for reporting what was seen and experienced *in loco*.³ Accordingly, it is necessary to historicize accounts in relation to the different historical models of truth and knowledge production in

the context of which they were generated. Colonial knowledge should furthermore not be approached simply as a 'pure' reflection of 'purely' European conceptions. Colonial knowledge, we suggest, was the expression of worlds and visions brought into contact; a formation of stories and words that, rather than simply coalescing, could bind indigenous and European images and understandings to each other.

Rather than starting with an attitude of dismissal of the epistemological value of colonialism's legacy, we thus propose a constructive attitude of critical engagement with the knowledge produced by European colonization in world history. The essays collected in this volume each suggest distinct reading and writing strategies for developing this constructive approach, which is further elaborated in the following. Not every contributor may agree, for instance, on the extent to which indigenous voices and meanings can be recovered from the analysis of colonial sources. Yet they all share a similar spirit of inquiry, a willingness to engage. 'Engaging colonial knowledge' thus captures the commitment towards an understanding of colonialism, and its manifold dynamics, through critical attention paid to the political and epistemic productivity of its archival traces. This is a *tensional* commitment driven simultaneously by the determination to bind historical narratives to archival materials, *and* by the effort to maintain a critical distance from this very same material. We thus acknowledge the emotional unease, ethical discomfort, and political tensions that might accompany our historiographical encounters with the archives of colonialism. Yet in order to study colonialism and its consequences, it is a central argument of this volume that we must work *with* rather than *against* the contents of colonial accounts. Our approach draws attention to the fact that, in tying our narratives to colonialism's epistemic products, we must work towards a reflexive and inclusive understanding of the signs, cultures, and social and material circumstances associated with their production and circulation. As such, 'engaging colonial knowledge' represents a commitment to generating new historical, anthropological, and sociological insights about human phenomena from older archival traces; insights, for example, about the nature of cross-cultural interactions, indigenous social life, land tenure, political authority, marginalized activities, epistemologies of governance, or rites of power.

One of the basic arguments of this volume is that the diverse constituents of colonial knowledge must be approached as *artefacts*, which entail particular epistemologies, imaginaries, political strategies, and cultural conventions, as well as being the product of specific material circumstances, bodily experiences, and sensory engagements with a

concrete world. Colonial discourses are not disembodied. They comprise an array of documents and accounts rooted in concrete spaces, architectures, institutions, technologies, bodies, objects, and practical activities. They are also not innocuous in the relations they maintain with the physical world. Regardless of their more or less fictitious character, colonial accounts constitute a material force of varying degrees, a potential to act upon the world. Colonial knowledge, however uncertain, had very tangible consequences and impacted dramatically and violently upon the bodies of indigenous people, to mention but one significant example.⁴ Accordingly, colonial archives are not approached here as collections of incorporeal ideas, vacuous fantasies, and intra-textual phenomena. Instead, they are read as epistemic traces mediated by bodily actions and enmeshed in the materiality of colonial situations. We must take into account the contexts of *production* and the *encounters* from which colonial accounts originated, as well as the manifold effects that might derive from their reading and *circulation* as intellectual artefacts. Colonial knowledge, in this sense, is the real remains of a real engagement with a real world. It suggests a way to go 'beyond the trace' and offers the possibility of understanding what those encounters and circulations were like in the past – and how they shaped, and were shaped by, the discourses and imaginaries of colonialism.

In thus referring to *more* than mirror-images of the West, and to *more* than textual events, colonial accounts can constitute a figurative pathway towards Jean-Arthur Rimbaud's redemptive poetic ideal of 'quitting Europe', and returning transformed with new understandings.⁵ Rimbaud's vision in the epigraph entails an imagined otherness of indigenous worlds and colonial spaces. In the late nineteenth century, these kinds of images (denounced by postcolonial critiques as racist, exotic, and biased) nourished the literary imagination of Europeans and inspired people to seek adventure and engage in travel, economic exploitation, military conquest, or evangelization in the tropics.⁶ Still, we see in Rimbaud's vision a productive metaphor of the potential for quitting Europe entailed in colonial archives. As the product of meaningful corporeal contact with other people and landscapes, European visions and imageries do not simply remain the same. They are transformed and return reconfigured. In travelling into, and with, colonial accounts, then, we aspire to unravel these epistemic transformations, thereby evading the self-assurances of 'European civilization'. Engaging colonial knowledge is a way to quit Europe. This is not a straightforward endeavour. But, as Rimbaud suggested, it is hardly one that will simply take us back to the point of departure unchanged.

In the following we discuss the notion of colonial knowledge that informs this volume within the context of the wider historiography. We begin with a critical consideration of colonial knowledge in imperial history and postcolonial studies. Our purpose is here to isolate some of the strengths and limitations of postcolonial critiques as pertaining to the significance of colonial knowledge as a ground of heterogeneities and cultural entanglement. Finally, we discuss the notion of ‘engaging colonial knowledge’, and conclude with an exploration of the distinct reading strategies adopted in the individual essays, thus examining what their respective approaches might tell us about the varied modalities of European colonial knowledge in world history.

Colonial knowledge and postcolonial studies

Colonial representations of foreign people, their cultures and practices, made a claim to knowledge, a claim that a reality was being apprehended and described, either scientifically or simply as the outcome of lived experience. Within the conventional historiographical tradition, based on the legal paradigm of evidence-based truth, this claim has often been taken for granted. Colonial knowledge was treated as a ‘historical source’, and as such considered a valid representation and evidence of the past. This mode of relating to colonial knowledge has been predicated on a positive valuing of its factual quality as representing events located in the past and in external realities outside the text. It has also been, implicitly at least, characterized by the assumption that archives and their contents were politically neutral spaces that could be approached with little or no regard for the circumstances of their origins or the manner in which they acted upon the world. Since at least the nineteenth century, the documental legacy of colonialism has been used in this instrumental manner by successive generations of historians of imperial economy, policy, administration, systems of law, social structure, resistance movements, and so on.

The current situation, however, is very different and the conventional historiographical tradition has been profoundly challenged. In recent years issues of knowledge have attained an unprecedented significance in imperial history and postcolonial studies. But, paradoxically, never before has the epistemic value and credibility of colonial accounts been so deeply distrusted. During the last three decades ‘knowledge’ – under distinct conceptual terminologies such as ‘discourse’, ‘culture’, ‘text’, ‘information’, or ‘archive’ to name but a few – has come to the forefront of inquiries of the colonial; it has been posited as *the* central feature

of colonialism. Underlying this is the assumption that colonial knowledge is distinctive for its highly political, 'power-saturated', condition. If power and knowledge are intrinsically related, as Foucault originally argued, knowledge necessarily becomes of chief concern to the study of colonialism. In his foreword to Bernard Cohn's influential *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Nicholas B. Dirks summed up this position. 'Colonial knowledge', Dirks asserted, 'both enabled conquest and was produced by it; in certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about.'⁷ Foucault's elaborations on discourse and its power-knowledge nexus; Cohn's investigations of colonial categories as a cultural project of control; Said's critique of the Western academic representations of the Orient; Bhabha's Derridian reassessment of the hybrid 'in-betweenness' of colonial stereotypes; the Subaltern Studies Group's concern with accessing subaltern agencies in colonial accounts, and especially Spivak's radical deconstructive take on the absence of subaltern 'voices' in colonial records, are generally considered the seminal moments of this discourse-centred critical postcolonial tradition.⁸ These new approaches have each in their own way emphasized the dominance of knowledge in colonial processes – but also the dominance of colonial power in the forms and contents of processes of knowledge. Colonial knowledge was embedded in the projects of colonial power, or trapped within Western constructs and categories, which tended to present indigenous peoples and cultures as distinct and inferior. This perception has led to a finer understanding of the discursive fabrication of colonialism, and has added to a more critical awareness of the political dimensions of knowledge. At the same time that its value as a research object has been emphasized, however, colonial knowledge has been recast as an embodiment of Eurocentric discourse alone.

If earlier readings tended to approach the colonial archives as undistorted depictions of other times, places, and cultures, recent criticism has reduced them to a matter of textual constructions, epistemic violence, and misrepresentations. The postcolonial approach has far too often been tantamount to a moralizing critique of colonialism as a negative historical phenomenon through which the West violently imposed its ways, institutions, and categories upon the non-Western world. Accordingly, the centrality conceded to colonial knowledge by postcolonial critiques has been often accompanied by an *a priori* devaluation of its epistemological value as a valid description of realities exterior to European discourses and texts in-themselves. As regards indigenous cultures and historical events, it is implied, colonialism has left us only with *mis*representations, rather than with representations,

and with accounts that cannot serve as evidence of other 'peoples and customs' because they are prejudiced *per se*.

This development is perhaps most closely (though not exclusively) associated with the impact of Edward Said's seminal book, *Orientalism*, of 1978. According to Said, Western accounts of other cultures (regardless of their claims of accuracy or scientific rigour) have constituted a self-referential knowledge system that 'misrepresented' the 'other' for the sake of colonial domination. Said's concept and critique of 'Orientalism' is by his own admission not concerned 'with any correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient'.⁹ Colonial knowledge amounts to a game of mirrors, if not to a sequence of mischievous distortions of 'reality', defined by a will to power. From this viewpoint, the concept of cannibalism, to take one prominent example, no longer refers to the alleged cultural customs of certain inhabitants of Central Africa or Polynesia, but is rather seen as the very definition of Eurocentric misrepresentations of non-Western people – and as just another moment of Western myths and fears.¹⁰ *European* discourse, indeed, is all that we can retrieve from colonial documents. Colonial knowledge stands for Western culture and politics of representation; it stands for the imageries, fantasies, and conventions of a distinctly Euro-American identity. As another influential scholar, Stephen Greenblatt, argued in *Marvellous Possessions*, 'We can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation.'¹¹ In a similar vein, the effort to escape the legacy of European categories and scholarly languages appears as a central project for much postcolonial scholarship, which perceives itself as trapped within a European and colonial 'genealogy of thought'.¹² It would seem, therefore, that the reading of Western accounts of exotic journeys and encounters with strange people and customs does not take us further than our point of departure. No matter how seriously we engage colonial knowledge, we can never leave Europe.

If the conventional historiography largely ignored the political dimensions of colonial knowledge in relation to Western dominance, recent critiques have done little different by constructing a two-dimensional landscape over-saturated with power and discourse. One problem is that the centrality of knowledge processes to colonial projects can grow to macrocephalous proportions. In some instances, colonial knowledge has been transformed from a valued resource, a means to an end,

into an end in itself. In her ethnographic critique of the postcolonial emphasis on resistance, Sherry Ortner observes how this type of analysis reduces the political complexities of colonial contact to a binary field in which (Western) dominators oppose (indigenous) resisters.¹³ As such, some criticisms of colonial discourse – for instance, Spivak’s denunciation of a strategy of domination in British representations of *sati* (widow burning in India) as a ‘barbaric’ practice – run the risk of subscribing to the very claims for supremacy and domination expressed in the views of colonial administrators.¹⁴

Notwithstanding the centrality of knowledge to colonialism, a straightforward correlation between knowledge and power cannot be taken for granted. Some colonial texts and images had very limited circulation and were read by very few contemporaries; regardless of the epistemic violence and racist prejudices that they may have contained, they might never have been used by colonial administrators, and survived obscurely in libraries and archives. The affective impact of such ‘marginal’ and ‘forgotten’ colonial accounts was far less than the mere deciphering of their contents might suggest.¹⁵ Again, other types of colonial knowledge were conducive of panic and thus counterproductive as far as governance and the maintenance of imperial control was concerned. European colonialism is *not* a totalizing and hegemonic structure without space for subversion and vulnerability. Similarly, colonial knowledge is a fissured political and emotional terrain in which the presumption of superiority explains only a small part of power–knowledge dynamics. Anxieties and panic played an important role in colonial practice and were often the prime mover behind colonial efforts to record ‘other customs’ and seek information about the ‘natives’.¹⁶ ‘Information panics’, as C. A. Bayly originally argued, had a profound impact in shaping British intelligence-gathering in nineteenth-century India; the production of knowledge, then as now, was a direct response to perceived threat of indigenous insurrections, treachery, and criminality.¹⁷ In other instances, what amounted to a delirious imagination, rather than information, was the driving force behind the violence of colonialism. In late nineteenth-century Colombia, as Taussig has argued, the fears and images of the Indian as wild man and cannibal led white planters and colonial officers to commit terrible atrocities on the bodies of indigenous people.¹⁸

Finally, another important problem with the emphasis on knowledge as being over-saturated with power is that the fixation on denouncing the epistemic violence of colonialism can hinder the possibility of grasping the epistemic productivity of colonial accounts – including the

possibility, for example, of deciphering in the records worlds beyond European preconceptions. If knowledge is made to stand for colonialism, what is left to be said about colonialism as a historical process? If power (and bias) is all we can read in colonial accounts, what else that is described in colonial accounts do we leave out of view? In many instances, 'Western' representations are the only tools available with which to approach the history of 'non-Western' cultures. Do colonial accounts of noble and ignoble savages, assassins, cannibals, Thugs, headhunters, pirates, scheming eunuchs, and debauched sultans carry no further meaning beyond the confirmation of our preconceived notions of the biased nature of Western ideologies? What use can we make of this repertoire that is limited neither to a simplistic positivism nor to the rejection of its value as historical evidence?

These questions are at the heart of this volume; they have been largely left unanswered by approaches focussing exclusively on colonial discourse. By equating empire-building and power to discourse and language, discourse analysis tends to treat knowledge as a self-sufficient object of historical investigation, on the basis of which assertions about the essence of colonialism as a *purely* 'Western' or 'European' phenomenon can be made without reference to whatever might be located beyond (European) language. Postcolonial criticism, in its less subtle and more textualist variations, has led some scholars to reductively equate colonialism with texts and linguistic phenomena, as if the works on the material life of empires by economic, military, and social historians count for nothing. Knowledge processes are certainly a critical part of the colonial picture – but they are *not* the whole picture. As Benita Parry, Rosalind O'Hanlon, David Washbrook, and others have remarked, to accept the centrality of knowledge and classification processes in colonial praxis cannot discount the fact that there was *more* to colonialism and its forms of violence than stereotypes, idealizations, images, or literary fantasies.¹⁹ Colonialism was a heterogeneous phenomenon and a practice that operated at the interface of knowledge and materiality; it cannot be reduced to deconstructionist language games. It is in this respect paradoxical that, as Robert J. Young observed, postcolonial discourse analysis has misconstrued Foucault's view on discourse, namely the priority that he conceded to the physicality of discursive effects and consequently his insistent appeal to analyse discourses in relation to their varied inscriptions onto materiality – spaces, objects, bodies. 'Colonial discourse never just consisted of a set of ideological (mis)representations: its enunciations', Young remarked, 'always operated as historical acts, generating specific material effects.'²⁰ In this

regard, imperial history and postcolonial studies have yet to fully incorporate the challenging reflections that, since the 1980s–90s, scholars of science, technology, and medicine have been offering about scientific knowledge as a material practice embroiled in the physicality of the relationships amongst people, things, animals, and technologies.²¹ Some of the contributions in this volume seek to rectify this. Written from a historian of science's perspective, Andrew Zimmerman's essay explores the material violence that was constitutive of the anthropological collections and collecting practices of German anthropologists in Africa. In following a reading strategy (to which we will refer below in greater detail) that emphasizes colonial knowledge as embedded in actual, physical, *encounters*, other essays indicate the fecundity of including in our analysis the material and corporeal nature of the interactions that are at the origins of colonial accounts.

In taking knowledge as a research object, therefore, it is here suggested that we have to move beyond linguistic analysis. It is necessary to examine how colonial narrations, images, and classifications generated, and were generated by, material situations and bodily practices. Regardless of the extent of their preconceptions and pre-acquired knowledge, even the most well-read Europeans would in many instances have been unprepared for what awaited them. 'Although he may have consulted any number of popular illustrated accounts of the New World,' writes Rebecca Parker Brienen, on her valuable study of a Dutch painter in seventeenth-century colonial Brazil, 'little would have prepared Eckhout for the sensual overload of his first encounter with the Brazilian landscape and its unfamiliar smells, flavours, textures, and sounds.'²² It is furthermore necessary to consider how these same colonial narrations, images, and classifications were embedded in actual cross-cultural encounters and in composite formations of European and indigenous meanings. In this regard, the approach of ethnohistorians and historical anthropologists concerned with the reconstruction of indigenous experiences may well be far more sensitive and productive than the obsessive focus on self-referential Western imaginaries in literary postcolonial studies. Notwithstanding, or in some instances even because of, its limitations, colonial accounts and their 'prejudices' can offer fertile ground for recovering the tensional webs of European and indigenous meanings and practices.²³ 'Identified, deciphered and critically compared', the historian Bronwen Douglas suggests, 'such prejudices can aid, rather than debar the ethnohistorical exploitation of colonial texts.'²⁴ The anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, for instance, has made perceptive use of Portuguese missionaries' obsessive

references to the 'inconstancy' of the Amerindians' 'savage soul' in order to explore how indigenous people themselves engaged, on their own cultural terms, with the missionary efforts to conversion during the early years of colonial contact.²⁵

The well-known debate between the anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere, who have taken the Cook-as-Lono controversy to great polemic heights, provides another example of the manner in which Western accounts can be explored productively.²⁶ The Sahlins–Obeyesekere debate evolved around different interpretations of 'how natives think', and is as such distinctly different from the purely discursive concerns of many postcolonial critics to whom the historical specificity of the colonial encounter, as well as the encounter itself, is of little significance. Though hardly in need of reiteration, the bone of contention was whether Hawaiians truly believed Cook to be the god Lono, an unfortunate case of mistaken identity that eventually led to his untimely death on 14 February 1779; or whether the British explorers, in a typical expression of Western arrogance, simply ascribed this belief to Hawaiians. As is often the case, we only have Western accounts of these events, or at best native accounts later recorded by Westerners, and any examination of the death of Captain Cook is therefore shaped by the very nature of the source-material. Unlikely bed-fellows though they may be, Sahlins and Obeyesekere both work on the implicit assumption that it is possible (to some extent at least) to reconstruct what happened when Cook met Kalaniopu'u, and that this encounter is relevant to our understanding of Hawaiian beliefs, and not just Western constructions of those beliefs. Even when Obeyesekere argues that the apotheosis of the White explorer is a recurrent Western trope, similar in some ways to Said's 'Orientalism', he does so on the basis of a close and critical reading of Western sources. In fact, Obeyesekere argues for the existence of 'practical rationality' among Hawaiians, whom he suggests would have been fully capable of recognizing Cook for what he really was. Obeyesekere thus makes a statement about the Hawaiian way of thinking based on what effectively amounts to colonial knowledge. In this case, Western accounts, however distorted or misleading, have been used by both Sahlins and Obeyesekere to make qualified statements about non-Western people and cultures. The two anthropologists furthermore acknowledge Hawaiian agency in the shaping and interpretation of the colonial encounter – an acknowledgement entirely absent from most postcolonial work. Regardless of the virtues of Sahlins and Obeyesekere's respective arguments, their work and debate provides a strong challenge to those who read in Western accounts little more

than Western stereotypes. Their contrasting approaches and conflicting readings notwithstanding, they provide us with an example of how it is possible to 'engage colonial knowledge'.

Engaging colonial knowledge

In focussing on the overseas expansion of the West and moved by the idea of quitting Europe, the notion of colonial knowledge that informs this volume is both broad in its coverage and specific in its research objectives. Its application thus requires some initial explanation. Our use of the term 'knowledge' in this volume should not be regarded as a qualitative assessment of Western representations of the non-Western world. It does not presume an epistemological claim about their intrinsic value, nor does it presuppose any special level of understanding, insight, truthfulness, accuracy (or, conversely, lack thereof) in colonial records. Truth or credibility, as Ann Stoler and Louise White have both suggested, are not constitutive properties of accounts themselves, but a variable condition of documents, stories and of their authors and readers.²⁷ Within the political field of colonial knowledge claims to authenticity and accuracy were often contested, while truth or falsity in literary or artistic representations could be strongly disputed by historical actors. The emergence and categorization of 'colonial knowledge' as credible or untrustworthy, as real or fictional, as established fact or unconfirmed rumour, is an unstable, tensional, and contingent event, a historical artefact of colonial actions that must be taken as an object of analysis in its own right. To simply assume that colonial knowledge is 'fictitious' or that, on the contrary, it is 'factual', not only narrows the field of inquiry, but also ignores the constructed nature of veracity and fictionality within the archival field. Moreover, to aim at simply separating 'fact' from 'fiction' is a futile historiographical project that ignores the elemental generative force of colonial knowledge. Colonial documents, Stoler recently argued, are to be approached as 'active, generative substances with histories', even, or especially, when they refer to 'non-events', as 'records of things that never happened'.²⁸ Uncertainty, mythology, and fantasy in colonial tales, as Michael Taussig has described, do not make colonial knowledge less 'real' in its contents and consequences; it can in fact amplify its imaginative power to produce violence and terror in the material world. 'The meticulous historian', Taussig wrote, 'might seize upon the stories and fragments of stories, such as they are, to winnow out truth from distortion, reality from illusion, fact from myth. [...] Alternatively we can listen to these

stories neither as fiction nor as disguised signs of truth, but as real.²⁹ Therefore, to engage colonial knowledge is not about drawing lines between fact and fiction with a view to expose bias and distortion, or accuracy and truth. It is about reading colonial documents and the stories they contain as actual historical events that, however implausible, murky, or uncertain, entail a potential to generate actions, forge ontologies, and shape relations that belong to the real world.

'Knowledge' is furthermore used as a shorthand for the composite realm of inquiry which, in historical and postcolonial studies, has been described under such disparate headings as 'discourse', 'information', 'culture', 'categories', or 'archive'. With this broad conceptual lens we cover a wide empirical field. This significantly expands the reductive equation of knowledge with texts, and of colonial knowledge with the tools of state administration. In this volume, colonial knowledge refers not only to reports, ethnographies, statistics, censuses, and revenue assessments that were produced as part of the administration of colonial rule, but includes personal memoirs, scientific texts, novels and paintings, and other types of material with a much less direct instrumental relationship to governance. That is not to say, however, that all Western accounts constitute an undifferentiated body of work expressive of a single hegemonic colonial discourse across different genres. We emphasize the necessity of historicizing the colonial categories, distinguishing between different accounts and focussing on the documents' distinct histories and itineraries, which confer to each individual account its peculiar historical *specificity* and biographical identity.³⁰ Recent work on the ethnography of archives and the circulation of colonial documentation has demonstrated that addressing colonial accounts in their biographical specificity, as things with singular trajectories, is a fruitful line of inquiry in the study of colonial knowledge.³¹

Similarly, we use the qualification 'colonial' in a broad sense, but with a specific reference to knowledge processes connected with a singular historical event in world history: the European political and economic expansion into Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas since the sixteenth century. By exploring colonial records related to these geographically wide-ranging settings, it is our intention to emphasize their potential to fulfil our aspiration 'to quit Europe', allowing the historical imagination to expand its horizon beyond a European mindset itself. Yet, we are aware that such 'generic colonialism' and the use of the term 'colonial', as Frederick Cooper observed, can involve a number of conceptual difficulties.³² Certain aspects of colonialism, for instance, are not exclusive to extra-European contexts and colonialism

as a chronological period cannot simply be located in the past as if it has no legacies in the present.³³ Power and violence, too, do not make the epistemic life of colonialism exceptional as regards other political regimes and historical events. Accordingly, we do not see 'colonial' as an unproblematic attribute that can be attached uncritically to records per anticipation. 'Coloniality' is a contingent condition that varies according to each account's distinct origin in colonial situations, practices, and imageries, as well as to its subsequent historical itinerary as a material open to varied interpretations and appropriations by different users and readers.³⁴

This requires that we approach colonial knowledge not as an isolated or exceptional phenomenon in world history, but as a type of epistemic practice that articulates histories of colonial expansionism outside the West with histories that concern metropolitan and transnational processes, at distinct historical and geographical scales. Some studies – including, for instance, Wagner's essay in this volume – reveal the significance of approaching colonial knowledge through analogies with the work and methodologies of scholars working with the archives of power in very different contexts and periods. The most inspirational of these is perhaps Carlo Ginzburg's admirable analysis of witchcraft in early modern Europe, based on the records of the Inquisition.³⁵ Historians of the medieval and early modern periods, including Carlo Ginzburg, Peter Burke, Robert Darnton, and Natalie Zemon Davis to name but a few, have thus made extensive use of archives and official knowledge that was, if anything, saturated by power.³⁶ Our knowledge of Martin Guerre or a certain Italian miller, as well as many other denizens of the European past, however, would have been rather impoverished had these scholars simply confined themselves to exploring the hegemonic discourse of the authorities identified within the existent records. It makes little sense indeed to dismiss colonial knowledge as being of inferior empirical value compared to, say, metropolitan documents produced in relation to subaltern populations of European extraction. This is especially true of official records relating to groups, categories, or classes (such as poor, destitute, convicts, mentally ill, and women) who, in the metropole or in the colony, were consistently relegated to the margins as '*others* within' – in many respects approximating indigenous '*savages*' as far as social and symbolic classification was concerned.³⁷ Finally, the meaningful application of the notion of colonial knowledge is not limited to the geographical locality of 'the colony', or even to the exchanges between colony and metropole. Susan Bayly's contribution in this volume, for example, makes clear

that often the form and content of colonial knowledge – in her case, French anthropological descriptions of Indochina – are to be understood in relation to metropolitan connections. In a comparable vein, von Hellermann's chapter brings out the wider metropolitan and transnational networks that made local colonial forest science possible and meaningful in the local context. Thus, to understand 'colonial knowledge' implies a consideration of knowledge as a transnational or a global web of connections and circulations. This web can bring together not only colony and metropole in the context of one empire or one nation-state, but also previously unconnected ideas and agents that cut across the boundaries of different nations and empires, and of different times and different cultural worlds.³⁸ Knowledge then is to be seen as an event within these networks and circulations. Cross-cultural interactions in colonial encounters are elementary to such wider circuits. As Kapil Raj recently argued, modern forms of 'Western' science and knowledge cannot be understood without the local input of intercultural colonial encounters.³⁹

The correlation between colonization, empire-building, and knowledge is self-evidently not merely an aspect of the history of European expansion with which we are mainly concerned. Recordkeeping and the collection of documents in archives are, possibly, as old as the history of writing and government in human civilization. Since at least the late medieval period, systematic recordkeeping and the care of documents in separate institutional settings became a vital ingredient in the construction of bureaucratic regimes, of centralized states and, more generally, of modernity in Europe.⁴⁰ Formalized knowledge has thus been paramount to the creation of the geopolitical landscape of modern Europe as we know it. But the origins and significance of knowledge to the building of states and empires extend well beyond the Western world. Accordingly we do not pretend to cover all manifestations of colonial knowledge in world history. Information-production and information-storage systems have been essential to centralized governments and territorial empires in a wide range of geographical settings, chronological periods, and societal forms.⁴¹ Empires as large and effective as the Ottoman, the Chinese, or the Mughal empires relied on significant systems of information and intelligence.⁴² In fact, as many colonialists realized in their travels and interactions, the societies encountered by the Europeans were already the holders of varied and sophisticated forms of knowledge and systems of information – some of which Europeans would come to consider or, even, incorporate into their own modes of 'colonial knowledge'.

Reading strategies

This volume has been structured along three main themes which we believe reflect key aspects of the respective essays – though by no means the only ones. Part I: ‘Epistemic Fissures’, with essays by Ann Laura Stoler, Leigh Denault, and Pauline von Hellermann, explores various aspects of the heterogeneous, historical, and material character of European colonial archives. Part II: ‘Indigenous Voices and Colonial Records’, with chapters by Caroline Dodds Pennock, Kim A. Wagner, Niels Brimnes, and Susan Bayly, examines the role and involvement of ‘natives’ in the production of colonial knowledge. Finally, Part III: ‘Archives of Entanglement’, with contributions by Alan Strathern, Nicholas Thomas, Ricardo Roque, and Andrew Zimmerman, discusses the importance of the specific contexts and encounters in which colonial knowledge was produced at different times and places. We have already referred to some of the ways in which these essays point towards this volume’s vision of ‘engaging colonial knowledge’. In the following we intend to explore the manner in which the essays allow us to (re-)read colonialism in colonial accounts, whilst suggesting distinct reading strategies to deal with knowledge as an event in the archival records of the colonial expansion of Europe.

Although connected by a willingness to engage with colonial knowledge, the essays develop distinct ‘reading strategies’ – to borrow a methodological phrase conveniently employed by Ann Stoler (this volume). Consistent with the principles of our general approach, three main reading strategies can be distinguished in the essays. Alternative or complementary as these reading strategies might be, together they indicate three productive directions in our engagements with colonial materials in historical practice. These reading strategies differ principally by the extent to which they place varying emphasis on the possibility of using colonial records to access historical realities, events, or encounters beyond colonial accounts and their discursive fields.

The first reading strategy deals principally with colonial knowledge as a political regime of truth and a field of historically constituted affects, mismanagements, and anxieties. This ethnography of archives looks primarily at the *colonial* interpretations, agendas, writing practices, and rhetorical and reading strategies that were developed by European (government) agents on the ground, and to the tensions, uncertainties, and problems that they contained or could generate. Part I of this book gives special visibility to this approach, which Stoler in particular has elaborated extensively in her most recent work.⁴³

'Reading / along/, rather than /against/ the archival grain,' Stoler explains in the introduction of her essay, 'it asks what we might learn about the nature of imperial rule and the dispositions it engendered from the writerly forms through which it was (mis)managed, how attentions were trained, and selectively cast.' Stoler's minute attention to the trajectories of specific colonial documents throughout the archive stands as an example of how to read colonial knowledge 'along the grain', articulating the reading strategies of historians with the reading strategies of colonial contemporaries. Though not primarily concerned with tracing accounts *beyond* the politics of the epistemic regimes in which they circulate (either back to 'original' socio-cultural interactions or to 'pre-colonial' realities), this form of reading nevertheless offers a fertile pathway for understanding the workings of knowledge and governance inside the archival field, including critical attention to its failures and inefficiencies.

The second strategy reads colonial documents against the grain, with a view to identify in colonial accounts the words, visions, and agency of indigenous people. This approach recognizes in the diverse world of colonial documents – including not only institutional records of administration, but also religious, travel, literary, and artistic accounts or images – the remnants of valuable information about *other*, non-European cultures. This may be seen as a development of preoccupations central to the concept of ethnohistory, conventionally devoted to the use of documentary (but also oral and archaeological) sources to study indigenous societies of the past.⁴⁴ Rather than privileging descriptions of the affective and epistemic politics of the archival field of governance, this reading strategy is mainly concerned with the indigenous events, social life, and cultural perspectives that lie beyond the records and, sometimes, even beyond colonial encounters themselves. Colonial texts do not contain and do not speak in just one single voice – they are *multivocal*. As Brown and Vibert have suggested with regard to the study of indigenous history, colonial records can include many or different meanings of approximate validity; in reading them 'beyond words', historians may retrieve not only European but also indigenous meanings and experiences.⁴⁵

The essays collated in Part II of this volume explore the potential of this reading strategy. Without in any way discounting the reflexive consideration of the European presence in these accounts, they examine the role and involvement of 'natives' and native words in the production of colonial knowledge. Dodds Pennock's essay on Spanish records of the Aztecs presents what is probably the most far-reaching argument in this

respect, claiming as she does that it is possible to 'access pre-conquest ideologies' and even 'discern directly the voices of women'. Her contribution speaks directly to the heart of ethnohistory. Her claim, however provocative, must be seen in the context of a historiography that has been struggling to recover even the most fleeting glimpse of women's experience and lives. In turn, Kim A. Wagner's essay on the use of native informants in British India discusses the notion of ventriloquism and suggests that both colonial interlocutors and native informants contributed to the production of colonial knowledge. By exploring the interviews of pardoned criminals by British authorities in their attempts to eradicate Thuggee, Wagner shows how even in extreme situations of power disparity the colonizers failed to completely impose their own views. The British were unable to fully control the utterances of native informants, which were recorded and came to constitute part of the colonial archive. The significance of recognizing the voices of indigenous actors and informants, however, also appears in other essays. In her study on colonial forest science in Nigeria, Pauline von Hellermann shows just how much early twentieth-century British colonial foresters relied on the help, guidance, and words of indigenous people to gain knowledge about forests and timber species. Leigh Denault, in turn, argues that the Indian sepoy 'are not entirely voiceless in the archive', even when their lives do not appear central to the concerns of colonial governance.

Finally, a third reading strategy that may be identified in this volume, is concerned with the exploration of the actual cross-cultural encounters and material practices in which colonial knowledge is grounded and embedded. Rather than representing windows through which to access the tensional world of colonial epistemologies, or the indigenous societies in the past, this strategy explores colonial accounts as a means of gaining access to historical *encounters*. It emphasizes the extent to which colonial texts and images are neither simply a reflection of European conceptions, nor simply a sign of indigenous meanings. Rooted in complex cross-cultural interactions, colonial knowledge can entail the possibility of accounting for both indigenous and colonial worlds as an entwined reality. In this sense, colonial accounts represent intercultural objects and a variety of effective interactions and encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans in the field, from peaceful exchanges to violent confrontations. This reading strategy stems from developments in historical anthropology that, since the 1980–90s, have utilized colonial knowledge – particularly narratives of travel and exploration – to approach the *mutuality* of understandings implicated in the

encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans. Focusing mostly on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European accounts of exploration voyages, this line of inquiry is closely associated with the works of Pacific scholars – most notably, Greg Dening, Marshall Sahlins, Bronwen Douglas, and Nicholas Thomas (the later represented in this volume).⁴⁶

The essays in Part III of this volume explore the ways in which colonial archives can be read as archives of entanglement. Alan Strathern's contribution suggests that Portuguese stereotypes of Sri Lankan 'treachery' can be understood as a function of the Portuguese interaction and engagement with the volatile condition of the indigenous political system, marked by intense power struggle and the fragmentation of authority. Roque's essay on Portuguese ethnographies of headhunting in East Timor presents a comparable argument, but in a later period. In describing something as exotic as headhunting rituals, Roque examines how colonial officers were effectively describing rituals they had themselves participated in – thus turning the notion of the colonial gaze on its head. Roque further argues that ethnographies of headhunting emerged from mutually significant and mutually dependent relations of violence and as such constituted a form of ritual life shared by the Europeans and indigenous. Nicholas Thomas' detailed examination of images produced during the exploration of the Pacific in the eighteenth century, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the European experience. Yet, as Thomas argues, even as these representations followed Western conventions, a close reading of the images reveals how they were shaped by actual encounters and interaction with 'natives'. The final essay by Andrew Zimmerman on German colonialism in East Africa highlights the importance of confrontational interactions and the material significance of field encounters to the constitution of colonial anthropological knowledge. Scientific anthropology, Zimmerman argues, cannot be dissociated from the relational dynamics of counterinsurgency in which German anthropologists, military officers, and Africans were reciprocally involved.

Reading colonialism

Our critical engagement with the colonial archive entails a reconsideration of some commonly held views of what colonialism, power, and knowledge signify. In this volume, as observed above, we work with a notion of 'colonial' as an open category, the contours of which require empirical specification. What is 'colonial' about 'colonial knowledge',

we believe, is an issue to be assessed empirically in the context of each investigation. Yet, this volume also seeks to convey a set of general ideas about how to make 'colonial' a productive starting point in the study of knowledge processes, in different institutional contexts – from administrative settings, to academic, artistic, or scientific endeavours.

The essays suggest that reading the 'colonial' in these varied forms of knowledge implies a vision of colonial knowledge as a fissured epistemic terrain that involves complex relations of power. This productive use of *colonial* knowledge encompasses four important points, as well as the qualification of some reductionist simplifications often associated with the concepts of 'colonial' and 'colonialism', to which we would like to draw attention.

The first point regards the negative implications of describing knowledge as 'colonial'. Perhaps an immediate and important consequence of adding 'colonial' to 'knowledge' derives from the moral judgements implied, and which we intend to circumvent. European colonialism is often regarded as the 'dark side of modernity', as a historical moment of violence against which ethically superior, contemporary, post- or non-colonial worlds are frequently defined. This sometimes results in an inherently biased consideration of colonial knowledge as being epistemologically invalid and furthermore corrupted by its entanglement with the symbolic impurity of power and violence. The prefix 'colonial' usually has a pejorative meaning – a meaning that this book seeks to avoid. There is nothing intrinsic to colonial knowledge, we suggest, which makes it less self-critical or less capable of containing empathic readings of local cultures. In fact, colonial information gathering often produced unexpected and incidental results, which today offer surprising glimpses of a past that rarely leaves any traces in the archives.

The essays collected here all approach colonial knowledge as a means of understanding that can include empathy towards other cultural expressions, as well as the conditions for their own self-critique. Antipathy and empathy can be found in colonial accounts, depending on a number of historical circumstances and contingencies associated with the author, the accounts, or the experiences in the field. Antipathy, as Dodds Pennock notes in her contribution, characterized the first Spanish accounts of the Aztecs following the conquest; gradually, however, this gave way to more sympathetic and positive attitudes, expressed in creative and well-informed textual production. As several essays further demonstrate, colonial knowledge could at times even constitute a critique of colonialism, either explicit or implicit. Ann Stoler's Dutch official Valck, for instance, was deeply critical of the

planters' practices on Sumatra, while Pauline von Hellermann's foresters in Nigeria contested official policies when communicating amongst each other. The same point is also brought out in Susan Bayly's essay on anthropologists' critique of French colonial policies. Finally, colonial accounts could be sympathetic or even potentially 'accurate', according to current standards, in their description of non-Western societies, people, and practices as suggested here by Bayly, von Hellermann, and Dodds Pennock in various contexts. Consequently, we believe it is possible, and even desirable, to be critical of colonial knowledge without being judgemental. This is not to negate the basic importance of power in colonial relations but rather to avoid its derogatory consequences in our engagement with colonial knowledge.

Secondly, in employing the term 'colonial', the essays in this volume do not project the vision of a homogenous system or of a consensual world. The records of colonial knowledge, as stated above, are heterogeneous and fragmented. Multiple and conflicting projects, agendas, and interests break them into many different epistemic forms over time. Colonial knowledge did not constitute a single hegemonic discourse on events and encounters, subject people and their societies. Tension and disjuncture between the different interests of different colonial institutions, groups, agents, or levels of the administration abound. Moreover, the historicity and specificities of the different genres, archival records, and forms of communication also need to be taken into account. Accordingly, colonial knowledge is here not addressed as a unified reality and a monolithic entity. In the different case-studies, it emerges as a temporally dynamic world composed of a variety of colonial *knowledges*. Just like colonialism, therefore, it needs to be understood as a plural phenomenon.

The fact that colonial knowledge was historically and socially fractured and contingent, and did not reflect a hegemonic and internally consistent discourse, is amply borne out by the papers in this volume. Part I of this book in particular seeks to highlight this perspective. Stoler's (by now classical) study of colonial rumours and panic, 'In Cold Blood', provides one of the most complex and inspiring explorations of the 'tensions' and dissonances that may be identified in the archives. Examining the different interpretations of the murder of a plantation family in Dutch Sumatra, the essay presents in great detail the conflicts amongst colonial officials over the establishment of truthful and credible accounts of the events. By skilfully demonstrating how colonial accounts were fraught with tension and at times entirely discrepant, Stoler effectively explodes the notion of a colonial discursive hegemony.

In a similar vein, Denault's essay on official policies and native domestic spaces in colonial India reveals the diversity, historicity, and varied nature of the colonial archive, which was rife with inconsistencies. Denault's contribution is also an important demonstration of how the archives of colonial governance, however fractured and evolving, are not just a void of silences. When read in the context of their historical specificity, varying types of records of indigenous houses and domestic life allows for valuable interpretations of Indian social history. Pauline von Hellermann's chapter on British colonial forestry and science in Africa likewise brings out the conflicts within the colonial administration and the various discursive spaces within which dissent and discrepancies could be voiced. The fact that the colonial archive is a historical entity, with different time phases, that was constantly evolving – a point Denault's and Hellermann's essays clearly bring out – is furthermore of crucial significance. Colonial knowledge, just like colonialism, was never static in time. This calls attention to the significance of emphasizing the *historicity* embedded in the records. Different encounters produced different accounts, and each one of these accounts entails different conditions of possibility for historical interpretation.

The third point that we want to emphasize concerns the *impurity* of the expression *colonial* in colonial knowledge. 'Colonial' does not simply mean *European*; it implies indigenous involvement, exchanges, and interferences. Parts II and III of this volume explore this hypothesis in different directions. We thus wish to highlight the extent to which colonial knowledge was not – perhaps ever – a purely 'colonial' product. Indigenous agents often contributed to the archives of colonialism supplying important data, translating cultural information, or producing certain accounts of which they were themselves the authors. Although the creation of colonial images and texts have involved a good deal of destruction and transformation of local data – the process of 'transforming Indian knowledge into European information', in the words of Cohn⁴⁷ – indigenous knowledge and agency in many cases continued to be present in the internal constitution of colonial stories and categories.

The development of certain prominent 'colonial categories' and their effective impact upon everyday life – conceptions of caste in India, for example, as argued by Susan Bayly – would not have been possible without the active participation of indigenous conceptions and indigenous actors. Thus Orientalist knowledge and categories, some scholars have argued, can also to some extent be regarded as an indigenous product.⁴⁸ In her contribution to this volume, for instance, Bayly emphasizes the

similarities rather than differences between the colonizers and the colonized, as expressed in French anthropology in Indochina. Bayly shows how different types of Orientalism coexisted and how even 'Orientals' could become 'Orientalists'. Denault also demonstrates how, at least up until the 1830s, the British in India continued pre-colonial practices of administration (an aspect also evident from Brimnes's essay). This makes an absolute distinction between Western and indigenous categories and modes of governance greatly problematic.

The pivotal role of 'native informants' in the creation of colonial archives and discourses – not infrequently according to their own local, indigenous, agendas – and the ways through which colonial knowledge itself was built upon pre-existent indigenous concepts and traditions, has been persuasively argued by a number of scholars.⁴⁹ In a recent volume, Schaffer, Roberts, Raj, and Delbourgo have argued that the global history of knowledge (between 1770 and 1820) must be approached as a history of the 'go-betweens', as a history of the agents – European or non-European – who effectively moved and translated between cultural worlds and traditions as translators, negotiators, brokers, spies, messengers, etc.⁵⁰ Thus acting either as informants, authors, collaborators, contradictors or as more or less elusive characters and voices in these accounts, indigenous people and their worldviews cannot simply be denied a presence or participation in the construction of colonial knowledge. In this volume, Alan Strathern's account of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka illustrates just how difficult it can be to distinguish between colonial and indigenous spheres of knowledge and power, especially during earlier phases of European expansion and before more clear-cut cultural and racial segregation became the norm. Still, this sort of intertwinements of European and indigenous conceptions, and the importance of a 'brokered world' of knowledge even in later periods of empire-building, cannot be ignored.⁵¹

A number of essays in this volume actually speak to the presence of this kind of impurity inside colonial accounts, and to the weight that needs to be accorded to the mediation of local or indigenous agents, both prior to and beyond the mid-nineteenth century. Dodds Pennock's and Roque's contributions can serve as two examples. Caroline Dodds Pennock explores the 'mestizo nature' (borrowing an insight from Serge Gruzinski)⁵² of sixteenth-century Spanish accounts on the Aztecs, in order to retrieve from these documents the words and visions of the Aztec elders that might aid our understanding of the pre-colonial indigenous world. Inspired by Nicholas Thomas' notion of 'entangled objects', Roque's analysis of the Portuguese ethnographies of Timorese

headhunting, at the turn of the twentieth century, reveals colonial knowledge as a construct in which indigenous as well as European cultures and involvements with violence can be recognized. Therefore, if colonial knowledge is approached simply as synonymous with Western agency, constructs of political supremacy, one fails to understand its basic dynamic. One also fails to account for the peculiar European–indigenous epistemic impurity in which colonial knowledge often developed.

Finally, colonial does not signify a one-way relationship of domination. If we take ‘colonial’ to merely signify a relation of Western hegemony, absolute domination, or oppression over non-Western subjects, we effectively ignore the countless fine negotiations, exchanges, entanglements, and mutual accommodations at the heart of many of the interactions between European and indigenous cultures and societies. The constellations of power in the colonial context were often far more complex than most studies of colonial discourse allow for, and colonial knowledge is not only the product of an asymmetrical power-relationship. Colonial accounts, as a number of authors have shown and most of the essays in this volume also demonstrate, resulted from a diversity of encounters and interactions, in which the distribution of power varied significantly.

Wagner’s chapter on the British and Brimnes’s on the Danish in India, and Strathern’s and Roque’s essays on the Portuguese in Asia, offer further evidence in this direction. In considering the colonial stereotypes of native ‘treachery’, Strathern’s essay points to the significance of addressing these stereotypes as the product of Portuguese–Sri Lankan encounters, as artefacts that represented the close entwining of European and indigenous concepts and notions of identity. Brimnes’s analysis of the interaction between the Danish colonial authorities and their Indian subjects in the early nineteenth century provides a reassessment of the indigenous imprint on the constellations of colonial power and knowledge. By emphasizing how colonial officers could take the place of ‘native kings’, Brimnes suggests that indigenous conceptions could come to ‘dominate’ colonial views and discourses. In a similar vein, Roque’s analysis of the participation of Portuguese officers in Timorese ritual violence suggests that colonizers could become part of indigenous social and cultural forms of life, even if the ultimate aim was to gain advantages during warfare. Accordingly, colonized people were rarely just the passive dupes of the colonizers. They could use and manipulate the presence of Europeans and the contents of colonial perceptions to their own advantage – to the extent that colonialism at times

became profoundly rooted in indigenous social, political, and cultural constructions. Even in situations of power inequality, the indigenous perception could leave important traces in European representations of the indigenous world. This is a point that comes out strongly in the essay by Wagner, in his reassessment of colonial understandings of Thuggee in early nineteenth-century India. Even under the tense and controlled circumstances of judicial interviews, Wagner argues, the idiosyncratic views of local informants were expressed and, more importantly, scrupulously recorded. In spite of the power-dynamic intrinsic to interrogations, views and perspectives that were inherently incompatible with colonial ideologies still left an imprint in the colonial archive.

The focus on knowledge processes in the context of the Western expansion has in important ways become definitional of current imperial history and postcolonial studies. In recent decades, much of what has come to pass as postcolonial studies has involved a strong, sometimes radical, criticism of *European* colonialism and its forms of knowledge. This has led to a tendency to see colonial accounts as little more than a sign of the West and its ways of dominating and representing the world. *Engaging Colonial Knowledge* stands for an alternative methodological attitude. We realize that much of what we have said to characterize colonial knowledge has been couched in negative terms. By doing so, however, we hope to have freed up the subject for re-evaluation. The essays that follow offer solid case-studies on the production and circulation of a variety of archival records and forms of knowledge, in distinct historical periods and geographical settings. During various moments and different varieties of colonialism, European colonial knowledge found its expression through a multitude of genres and cadences of which the essays in this volume have mentioned a few: history, ethnography and anthropology, architecture and urban planning, visual imagery, or governance. Together, these essays represent a direction in the study of European colonial accounts that goes beyond both conventional positivist historiography and postcolonial literary approaches. Together, they engage colonial knowledge as a way to quit Europe. It is our hope that readers may experience at least something of Rimbaud's call for transformation.

Notes

1. Jean-Arthur Rimbaud, 'Bad Blood', *A Season in Hell* (1873), trans. A. S. Kline, published online http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Rimbaud3.htm#_Toc202003791, date accessed 15 August 2010.

2. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; trans. A. M. S. Smith London: Tavistock, 1972).
3. See Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).
4. For an inspiring analysis of the force of stories in the creation of a culture of terror in colonial practice, see Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Compare with another (yet rather distinct) classical exploration of the political force of colonial medicine in the creation of Indian bodies: David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
5. See Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 295. See also Lynda D. McNeil, 'Rimbaud: The Dialectical Play of Presence and Absence', *Boundary 2*, 12, 1 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 187–211.
6. See for example: Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"', *Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977), pp. 782–94; and Charles Nicholl, *Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa 1880–91* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
7. Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Foreword' to Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. xi. Also: Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Introduction', in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 1–26. The impact of this argument has been especially strong in South Asian Studies. For evaluations and reviews of colonial knowledge-power in Asia see Saloni Mathur, 'History and Anthropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29 (2000), pp. 89–106; Tony Ballantyne, 'Archive, State, Discipline: Power and Knowledge in South Asian Historiography', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 3, 1 (2001), pp. 87–105; Tony Ballantyne, 'Knowledge and European Empire-Building in Asia', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 6, 2 (2004), pp. 5–11.
8. See Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980); Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–315; Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV. Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 330–363. But for another critical evaluation of Subaltern Studies, and the impact of colonial discourse on its developments, see Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994), pp. 1475–90.
9. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 5. An important development of Said's argument may be found in Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The work of Said, including his argument that Orientalism is

- a self-contained knowledge-power system, has been exhaustively criticized by a number of scholars, see for instance James Clifford, 'On *Orientalism*', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 255–76; Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990); John Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); D. A. Washbrook, 'Orients and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire', in Wm. Roger Louis and Robin W. Winks (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume 5: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 596–610; C. A. Bayly, 'The Orient: British Historical Writing about Asia since 1890', in Peter Burke (ed.), *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 88–119.
10. See for instance Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
 11. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 7.
 12. An influential and sophisticated discussion of this theme is Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
 13. Sherry B. Ortner, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37, 1 (1995), pp. 173–93.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
 15. For a case study that develops this point in relation to a Portuguese Orientalist text, see Ricardo Roque, *Antropologia e Império: Fonseca Cardoso e a expedição à Índia em 1895* (Lisboa: ICS, 2001).
 16. On the importance of including affect and anxiety in colonial studies see, for example, Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
 17. 'British assessments of crime, religion and native lethargy', Bayly wrote, 'were more often reflections of the weakness and ignorance of the colonisers than a gauge of hegemony.' C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 143. See also D. K. Lahiri Choudhury, 'Sinews of Panic and the Nerves of Empire: The Imagined State's Entanglement with Information Panic, India c. 1880–1912', *Modern Asian Studies*, 38 (2004), pp. 965–1002; and Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Oxford: Peter Lang Oxford, 2010).
 18. See Taussig, *Shamanism*.
 19. Important criticisms of textualist reductionism and disavowals of material issues in postcolonial studies include Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXXIV, 1 (1992), pp. 141–67; Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also Thomas's criticism of the homogenizing and monolithic image of colonialism entailed in colonial discourse analysis: Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

20. Such Foucauldian colonial discourse analysis, as Young argues, is still largely to be undertaken, and would indeed look very different from current approaches. Chance (*hazard*), discontinuity, and *materiality*, Foucault exemplarily suggested in one of his writings, are critical elements in the analysis of discourses. See Robert J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 408–10. Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, p. 61. See also (with regard to comparable misuses of discourse analysis): Derek Hook, 'Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis', *Theory and Psychology*, 11, 4 (2001), pp. 521–47.
21. Key works calling attention to the significance of 'scientific knowledge' in relation to the materialities of practice and the activity of objects and technologies include Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn 1986); Andrew Pickering (ed.), *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
22. Eckhout created life-size paintings of Amerindians, Africans, and Brazilians of mixed race in support of the Dutch governor's project to document the people and natural history of the colony, see Rebecca Parker Brienen, *Visions of Savage Paradise. Albert Eckhout, Court Painter in Colonial Dutch Brazil, 1637–1644* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p. 11.
23. Influential in this direction has been the anthropological and historical exploration of missionary accounts. Nicholas Thomas's and Bronwen Douglas's work on the Pacific; or John Monteiro's work on indigenous cultures in colonial Brazil are examples of how history and anthropology can meet productively and insightfully with colonial knowledge. See Nicholas Thomas, *Out of Time: History and Evolution in Anthropological Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2nd edn, 1996), [chapter 6](#); Bronwen Douglas, 'Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Narratives on Melanesians', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43 (2001), pp. 37–64; John M. Monteiro, 'Tupis, Tapuias e Historiadores: Estudos de História Indígena e do Indigenismo' (Tese de Livre-Docência, Dept. of Anthropology, IFCH-Unicamp, 2001), published online <http://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ihb/estudos.htm>.
24. Bronwen Douglas, *Across the Great Divide: Journeys in History and Anthropology* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 124.
25. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'O Mármore e a Murta: Sobre a Inconstância da Alma Selvagem', in *A Inconstância da Alma Selvagem e Outros Ensaios de Antropologia* (Rio de Janeiro: Cosaic & Naify, 2002), pp. 181–264.
26. See Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Marshall Sahlins, *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For developments of the debate see Robert Borofsky, 'Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins', *Current Anthropology*, 38, 2 (1997), pp. 255–282; Scott Ashley, 'How Navigators Think: The Death of Captain Cook Revisited', *Past & Present*, 194, 1 (2007), pp. 107–137.

27. See Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood": Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives' (this volume); Louise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
28. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 1, 5.
29. Taussig, *Shamanism*, p. 75 see also pp. 121–23.
30. Seminal works that have called attention to the necessity of historicizing the colonial categories have been Ann Laura Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), pp. 134–161; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in A. L. Stoler and F. Cooper (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1–56.
31. See Nicholas Dirks, 'Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History', in B. K. Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 47–65; Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Ricardo Roque, *Headhunting and Colonialism: Anthropology and the Circulation of Human Skulls in the Portuguese Empire, 1870–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
32. Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
33. An example of a critical revisionist argument about 'colonial studies' from the perspective of historians of Europe is Jean-Frédéric Schaub, 'La catégorie "études coloniales" est-elle indispensable?', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 3 (2008), pp. 625–47.
34. Reading practices, as much as field practices and cabinet writing practices, are thus an important dimension of the colonial identity of knowledge. See Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, 'Introduction: Five Theses on Ethnography as Colonial Practice', *History of Anthropology*, 8, 1–4 (1994), pp. 1–34; Ricardo Roque, 'Equivocal Connections: Fonseca Cardoso and the Origins of Portuguese Colonial Anthropology', *Portuguese Studies*, 19 (2003), pp. 80–109.
35. John and Jean Comaroff have already called attention to the close affinities between postcolonial studies, micro-history, and cultural history (namely the work of Ginzburg) as regards the problem of recovering subaltern agency through ethnographic description. John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 16–18. See also Bruce Holsinger, 'Medieval Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and the Genealogies of Critique', *Speculum*, 77, 4 (2002), pp. 1195–227.
36. See for instance Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Peter Burke *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1983). More recent examples are John

- Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); and Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
37. On subaltern whites in colonial contexts, see for example Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Low and Licentious Europeans': *Race, Class and White Subalternity in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2009).
 38. For two insightful works that innovatively discuss the global and transnational nature of colonial knowledge, compare Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). See also Stoler and Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda'.
 39. Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
 40. This argument may be originally found in Max Weber's theories of modernity and the development of bureaucracy. But Michel Foucault's work has taken these linkages between government and knowledge to new theoretical heights. Compare, for example, Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, reed. 1991); Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (vol. II, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population (Lectures at the Collège de France)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a discussion of ancient forms of recordkeeping see Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).
 41. The literature is extensive but see H. A. Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (eds), *Imperial Formations* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Peter Fibiger Band and C.A. Bayly (eds), *Tributary Empires in Global History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
 42. For the Ottoman Empire see: Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali, 1541–1600* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004). For the Mughal Empire see: Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Bayly, *Empire and Information*, pp. 10–55. For Imperial China (Qing) see: Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990).

43. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.
44. See Shepard Krech III, 'The State of Ethnohistory', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 20 (1991), 345–75.
45. See Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (eds), *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996). See also Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (ed.), *História dos Índios no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992).
46. See Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1980); Sahlins, *Islands of History*; Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Douglas, *Across the Great Divide*. See also note 23 in this chapter. But for a volume that generally reassesses the state of historical anthropology, see Axel (ed.), *From the Margins*.
47. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, p. 51.
48. See for instance Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*; Peter B. Wagoner, 'Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45, 4 (2003), pp. 783–814; and Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
49. For a recent study that argues for the indigenous origins of colonial knowledge of Hinduism, see Raf Gelders, 'Genealogy of Colonial Discourse: Hindu Traditions and the Limits of European Representation', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51, 3 (2009), pp. 563–89.
50. See Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj and James Delbourgo (eds), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, Mass.: Science History Publications, 2009).
51. For an example of the importance of indigenous agency and intellectual traditions in the constitution of colonial knowledge in an African colonial setting, in the twentieth century, see Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, "'Colonial' Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and the Making of an Archive on the "Transvaal Ndebele", 1930–1989', *Journal of African History*, 50 (2009), pp. 61–80.
52. See Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Part I

Epistemic Fissures

1

'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives

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This essay is part of a broader project to explore the logos and pathos of empire. It invites the reader to attend closely to the political content in colonialism's archival forms. Reading /along/, rather than /against/ the archival grain, it asks what we might learn about the nature of imperial rule and the dispositions it engendered from the writerly forms through which it was (mis)managed, how attentions were trained, and selectively cast. It argues that the grids of intelligibility in which colonial agents operated were neither clear nor shared. Their perceptions and practices were fashioned from piecemeal and uncertain knowledge; disquiet and anxieties disrupt rote reports when the prevailing conventions of colonial common sense failed them and when what they thought they knew, they found they did not. Wedged within these documents is epistemic, ethical, and political unease, the unsure movements of persons who could be ousted from their jobs for knowing too little – or too much. By attending closely to tone, temper, and 'epistemological detail', we can learn about the conceptual and political perturbations on the rough interior ridges of governance that opens to displaced histories folded within them.

Some 20 years ago, I had come across a 30-page, handwritten letter dated 28 October 1876 by a certain Frans Carl Valck, who was then *Assistant-Resident* on Sumatra's East Coast.¹ It was written in the even, steady hand of one well accustomed to wielding a pen for long hours, remaining clear and legible to the end. Its salutation was vaguely familiar but respectful, to 'My esteemed Levysohn' with whom the writer evidently had an ongoing correspondence (Valck thanks him for his advice in a previous letter). Levysohn might have been a family friend

(greetings go to Valck's 'sweetest wife') and influential enough that he might pass on troubling observations to the powers that be. Henry Norman Levyssohn Norman, I learned much later, was a former law school classmate in Leiden, now a prominent member of the *Raad van Indie*, the Advisory Council to the Governor-General.²

It was a misplaced missive and a displaced document, removed from the archival shelter of adornments – annexes, commentary, prior documents, and cross-references – in which official exchanges would usually reside. Catalogued as a single, spare dossier in the personal documentation centre of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology in Leiden was a letter that stood alone, not to the person in whose file it was placed. I had spent a year and half in North Sumatra, 'Deli' in Valck's time, tracing the colonial lineaments of the contemporary plantation industry and thought myself well-versed in the French, Dutch, English, and Indonesian language histories of the region (there were not that many). None had mentioned his name.³

But the 'prick' of the letter was less in its misplaced location than in its untimely content and desperate tone. It was written 11 days after what subsequent official and newspaper accounts were to refer to as one of the 'most horrendous' multiple murders of Europeans in Deli's plantation history. The wife and two young children of the planter Luhmann had been knifed and dismembered by workers formerly employed on his estate.⁴ Valck's letter was arresting precisely because it was *not* about the horror of these mutilations. Instead it indicted Luhmann as one in a 'gang of Cartouche' – eighteenth-century Paris's most notoriously prosperous highway robber. It named names, giving detailed testimony to the atrocities perpetrated by those Valck indignantly called the 'so-called pioneers of civilization'. In tenor, it was foreboding, tempered, and pleading. What he learned he feared would not be believed.

Valck's letter, as it turned out, was the stray in a dense corpus of correspondence and official missives about the Luhmann family murder that circulated in 1876 and 1877 between Valck, his immediate superior, Locker de Bruijne, military commanders, and high officials in Batavia and The Hague. It also represented one variation in a series of accounts he gave of the murder. Three were composed in late October, one in December 1876. In each, he provided an altered sense of what he knew and how he could know about the outrageous conditions into which he was plunged. Read against one another, his accounts open to the protean terms in which evidence was construed, to what kinds of stories could be told about violence, the sorts of cultural knowledge on which those stories were based, and the 'storeyed' levels through which

those accounts were written and could be read. His narratives trace a compressed time of successive reassessment in which his understanding rapidly shifted as Deli's subject population exploited European confusions about the attacks and what their violences meant.

Valck's letters disable colonial fictions at many registers. In place of an omniscient colonial apparatus, he provides privy to a nascent, disjointed, and perplexed one. In place of an assured narrative of what violence meant, he recounted one peopled by agents whose imaginings propelled their actions, whose 'evidence' derived from their fantasies, and whose fantasies promoted the harsh measures they deemed appropriate to counter the threatening conditions they had produced.

Within a period of several months, Valck and other Dutch civil servants, military personnel, and European planters partook in hundreds of official exchanges, expressing their own versions of what was causing arson, robbery, and murder on Sumatra's East Coast. Their discrepant accounts stand in relief against their common sources. Was the Luhmann murder an isolated incident or, as Valck contended, part of a patterned response to European abuse? The identity of the assailants was far from clear. Were they ethnic Gayo woodcutters or Javanese estate workers, were they estate workers set on revenge against their employer or guerilla supporters of the ongoing Acehese war to the North? Was Luhmann the object of their wrath or the hapless victim of a random assault on 'planters' or on 'Europeans?'

In the confused space of Valck's readings of the situation, interpretive strategies come into question, strategies which can be neither merely pragmatic nor benign. New questions are forced to the forefront, 'contexts' are destabilized, the outlines of 'events' appear less clearly bound, causal assumptions are on the line. How should narrative inconsistencies be read? Would a dense agreement of versions be 'proof' of shared cultural assumptions and a common standard of reliability? Would that agreement cancel out those accounts not in sync with them? How – and how much – can we know about what Valck and other colonial agents really knew about what was going on?

With his contrary letters in hand, I sought to find out how much his reconstructions were at odds with other official versions, how deeply his renderings went along – or bristled against – their grain. His reports read alongside others raise interpretive quandaries. Genealogies of the murder varied as did the physical settings and psychological motivations in which different versions were cast. Some related the killings to the Aceh war (some hundred miles to the north). Others personalized its origins in a planter's abusive character. Narratives slipped between

visual and verbal evidence, appealing to rumour to buttress one version or dismiss a counterclaim.

Paradoxically, what they held in common – a loosely standardized logic of blame – only underscored what set them apart, as individual planters and officials appropriated that logic differently to interpret what some had never seen but thought or claimed they knew. A stylized convention of dichotomies ordered their plots. Personal acts of revenge were set in contrast to collective political acts, criminality was set off from subversion, the order of the plantations was contrasted to the disorder of the hinterland, ‘war’ proper in Aceh stood apart from Deli’s labour ‘disturbances’. Not least, loyal subjects stood distinct from enemies of the state. But these stories contested each other in their uneven adherence to and suspicion of those very dichotomies on which they drew. Honed categories did not always serve them well. Some dichotomies crumbled in the face of acts that were both personal *and* political. Some cut across the ethnic distinctions which Dutch authorities encouraged and the primordial loyalties to which they so confidently prescribed.

Such compelling discrepancies undermine some obvious interpretive options. To seek out the most appropriate social context in which to cast ‘the event’ – a practice that for many historians defines their craft – would overwrite a critical feature of this moment: the fact that contextualization itself was precisely in question and politically charged at the time. To smooth out incompatible versions would be to ignore the different frames in which events were understood, reported, and played out. To imagine a specific set of stories intentionally crafted to obscure ‘what really happened’ would be to miss the frenzied scramble to know what happened and the conditions that sabotaged those efforts again and again. Finally, to assume that if we as historians were only privy to the ‘crucial facts’ the story would unfold is to miss a key feature of colonial governance: partial understandings, epistemic confusion, and undigested bits of cultural ‘information’ made up the *modus vivendi* of high and low civil servants across the Indies: of those traipsing through Deli plantations, isolated in Bali outposts, cloistered in the bowels of the state’s archives in Batavia and even those sheltered in the Governor-General’s palatial dwelling in Buitenzorg, encased in botanical grounds.

Here I take another tack: from the premise that these discrepant stories provide ethnographic entry into the messier space in which people lived, to the fragmented and incomplete knowledge on which they relied, and to the ill-informed and inept responses that knowledge

engendered. Coherence is seductive for convincing narrative form but disparities are ethnographically more compelling and powerful. It is the latter that opens to, what I call here, competing 'hierarchies of credibility' about what and whose evidence could be trusted and how violence could be read.

Disparate reconstructions of the murder often drew on a shared vocabulary but not shared sources of knowledge. Each was filtered through distinct local channels for learning what was transpiring on Deli's estates. Valck's knowledge was limited in multiple ways: by his recent arrival in the region, by the planters' hostility to his task, and not least by different groups within Sumatra's subject population who themselves played European fears and rumours of revenge back on their authors. In the fractious social and political environment that characterized Deli's 'pioneering' years, rumour carried uneven weight – sometimes dismissed as everything the 'facts' were not, at other moments the best sources of them. Workers, in turn, further amplified Europeans' stories of native violence, interrupting official efforts to identify its sources and perpetrators.

As importantly, European knowledge was shaped by Gayo, Javanese, Malay, and Chinese assailants, who, in writing their own acts in such ambiguous ways, *assured that those acts rarely could be easily and neatly read*. Subalterns 'speak' throughout the European accounts only in muted reference, reported clipped words, distorted speech. But such ventriloquisms have a power of their own. The uncertain meanings of their seemingly straightforward deeds of theft and arson repeatedly cut through official reason with forms of subversions that called upon rumour to stoke fears of impending violence. In Deli subalterns tapped into the uncertainties, anxieties, and fantasies of Europeans by playing them back to planters and officials for their own political purposes.

The confused and incomplete knowledge of Valck and his comrades in the civil service did not deter them from telling stories. Rather, it enhanced the formulaic quality of their accounts, their dependence on shared refrains and on what they assumed to already know. Gaps in their knowledge were filled with culturally reasonable conjectures that made their reports persuasive, relevant, and racially plausible to immediate superiors and high officials whom they knew or imagined would be their readers in Batavia and the Hague. Plantation 'unrest' had a hydraulic lexicon of its own: 'coolie outbursts' were 'instinctual responses' of revenge or orchestrated actions by 'outside agitators' imposed on a duped and otherwise passive population. As such, not all accounts made their way to the top. Some dropped out as reports

were edited and pared down. Others were embellished with detail as they were cribbed and sifted for superiors. It was this 'cribbing' process that determined which readings of events became part of the evidential package.

Not least important to the credibility of these accounts were shared beliefs about the psychological and physical vulnerabilities of whites in the tropics, beliefs that called more on Lamarckian notions of acquired character than on the biological surety of race. Europeans were susceptible to cultural and moral contamination by those degraded whites within their midst and by those they were there to manage and rule. Such explanations were selectively used to different political ends. Thus, when the performance of Valck's superior, the Resident Locker de Bruijne was criticized by the Director of the Civil Service (in whose good favour Locker de Bruijne stood), his transgressions were forgiven on the argument that his lapses were due to 'his association solely with native heads [from whom] he has taken over some of their inertia'.⁵ What worked to protect Valck's superior was not to work for Valck.

This chapter wrestles with both the reading strategies we bring to such texts and the rhetorical strategies of these sources. To stay within the allusive, muddy register of what colonial agents thought they knew is to retain and remain with their incoherencies – not to overwrite them with a neater story that might read more smoothly and work better to tell. Sorting through multiple motives and effects is an opening of sorts: to the dim clarity of conditions in which events were investigated, recorded, and constituted as evidence. These were the 'historiographic operations' that set the terms for new repressions, subsequent violences, and renewed commitment to retaliating what were perceived as counterinsurgent acts. Here rumour is a key form of cultural knowledge. In Deli, it shaped what people thought they knew, blurring the boundaries between events 'witnessed' and those envisioned, between performed brutality and the potential for it.

Valck's reading and reading Valck

Valck's letter to Levyssohn is urgent with moral disgust. He directly charges the Deli's planters with maltreatment, murder, and torture of Asian workers. His argument is self-consciously styled, tentative, and bold, with carefully chosen examples and a cautious effort to avoid the sensational. The narrative is one of inversions: colonizers rather than the colonized are condemned for their violence; 'delinquents' are not recalcitrant workers as for the planters, but Europeans instead. Standards

of 'barbarism' are turned on their head. In Valck's hands, rumour is a viable source, representing reasonable conjecture, a legitimate, if still dubious, measure of the publicly denied and unspeakable 'facts' of life and labour on Sumatra's East Coast.

But it is the gratuitous nature of the torture on which he insists, on the non-exceptional forms of violence, on the nonchalance of a planter who never thought to deny the torture, only his own misinformation about who had carried it out. The name of Luhmann whose wife and children were murdered, emerges at mid-stream in his list, one of many for whom abuses were unexceptional and everyday:

Just recently I heard a rumor about a certain European who prided himself on having hung a Chinese only having cut him down after the coolie had turned entirely blue (people say that it was probably a bluff, but this sort of bluff is the same as committing the act). The brave one who is thought to have done this was Heer Luhmann: I mentioned this sample of humanitarianism to a planter who responded: 'no, I heard this about someone else.' Who this other one is I don't know, but I do know, that such unheard of things occur or at least have occurred.

Valck charges the planters with more than brutalities. He accuses them of participation in a conspiracy of silence, deceit, and terror in which their reports 'contain some truth but more often are filled with unashamed lies'. His accusations are not only aimed at subordinate European 'no goods'. They are aimed higher and more dangerously at the 'gentlemen' of the most established plantation companies with their 'blood-stained hands'. Valck is shocked by what the planters willingly admit, but more so by the lengths they will go to conceal their actions:

Be assured my friend, that there are several among them who would not consider it a heinous wrong to do away with a government official who would dare to reveal their crimes! But I better leave it at this, for you might start to accuse me of exaggeration, and that I don't want. 'To go beyond the point is to miss it', as the song so rightfully says.⁶

His personal letter and official reports confirm what some historians have surmised from other sources; that sustained violence and a complicity of silence marked colonial capitalism in one of the most lucrative and rapidly expanding plantation regions of the Netherlands Indies, from its

formative period through its later expansion.⁷ Jan Breman has estimated that at least one-fourth of the coolie population (then still primarily Chinese) must have been killed or died on Deli's estates at the turn of the century. By Valck's account 25 years earlier, workers died in derelict and overcrowded prisons, barracks and hospitals, where the sickly were often discharged and left on roadsides to die of disease and hunger, or to scavenge in the forests on their own. Valck gives no figures, but after five months in Deli, he is outraged at 'heaven knows how many Chinese are murdered.' As he aptly put it: 'People make such a great to do over the enormous development of this region, but [it] is as thin as cat-ice.'

What explains that silence is less clear. Breman contends that government officials systematically covered up what they knew about the Deli situation.⁸ I have argued that the planters saw themselves pitted against state authorities, secreting what they construed as their 'private' affairs from public scrutiny to keep disciplinary measures in their own hands. But Valck's letter alludes to a rarely noted twist in the story, more ominous still: that planter violence and acts of murder could turn the planters against government agents themselves.

What was happening on Sumatra's East Coast in 1876? Framings make sense of events, but what constituted 'context' varied by observer. What Valck was cognizant of during his brief assignment in Deli was not the 'context' that military officials offered in subsequent reports based on later reconnoitres in the villages and forests abutting the estates. Nor was it the same context offered by Major Demmami, the region's military commander, whose focus and fears were riveted on the spread of insurgency from the Aceh war. Different perspectives yield more than different stories and causal arguments. They redefine the very parameters of what constitutes an 'event'.

Deli's plantation belt had been 'opened' for just over ten years on Sumatra's northeastern coastal plain when Valck arrived in mid-July 1876. It was not his first post. He was not new to the Indies, nor to life in the Indies outside of the Javanese heartland. He had spent the four preceding years in relative isolation in the opium entrepot of a Dutch outpost on Bali's still loosely subjugated northwest coast. Nor was he new to the fact of corruption between local rulers and Dutch officials. Early in his career he had helped expose just such collusion and was rewarded with a promotion for that initiative. What was new to him was the vociferous nature of the planters and the extremes they would go to protect their profits.

The Indies civil service apparatus in Java was firmly in place in the 1870s. That was not so for Sumatra where it was minimally manned

and badly short of officers. Deli's first Assistant-Resident, Hallewijn, had just been installed three years earlier. By the time Valck arrived 'to clean things up' as he thought, 40 plantations were already in operation with just over 7500 coolies employed (excluding those imprisoned and deserters.)⁹ The expansion was swift and the colonial bureaucracy could barely keep up. No surprise that the state apparatus was barely functional: Valck's young predecessor had deferred to the planters, turning a blind-eye toward their methods of control, excesses of punishment, and corrupt financial arrangements with local rulers.

Valck's position as Assistant-Resident, usually an easy stepping stone to higher office, hide an administrative nightmare in disguise – and a virtually impossible range of tasks. With the Resident stationed a week's trip to the south, Valck was charged with overseeing the prison and a bare boned local police force. He also presided over a rudimentary court. It was he who was responsible for negotiating land lease contracts with local Malay rulers and for providing reliable reports – first-hand accounts if necessary – concerning breaches of justice against 'non-natives' (overseas Chinese employed as coolies), protection of planters, and security problems on the estates. To make matters worse the Governor-General's mandate to bring 'order' to Deli and its planters was to be carried out while he was largely dependent for lodging, estate surveillance, discipline of the tobacco workers, comradeship, and information on the very planters whose excesses he was charged to check.

Their reception must have been lukewarm at best. With close connections to authorities in Batavia among the largest plantation holders, there is little doubt they knew why his predecessor had been replaced and why Valck was now there. His unfamiliarity with the region, the land lease arrangements, the system of labour recruitment, and those over whom he was suppose to exercise authority was not uncommon in the colonial civil service. What he did not know was how much those in Batavia who had sent him already knew about the situation. Matters were made worse by the planters' suspicion. Expressly included from their confidences, he turned to the reliability of rumour about what they were said to have done and said.

The European planters, for their part, saw a prize opportunity for profit in the 1870s stymied by a lack of labour to do the work. The thinly populated region made up of Malay fishermen and farmers under local sultanates, swidden cultivators of ethnic Batak origin could neither be coerced nor cajoled to work as coolies for the estates. Batak and Malay farmers, for their part, were confronted with a sudden invasion of money-hungry foreigners promising high wages for short-term

contract work (for road-building, forest clearing and construction of tobacco sheds). Sometimes those promises were honoured: more often planters did not make good on what they agreed in advance to pay. On the plantations themselves, recruitment, discipline and retention of labour was ad hoc and still unregulated by the state. The first tobacco workers, Chinese lured through 'coolie brokers' in Penang, Singapore and southern China, were slowly supplemented with recruitment from Java.

The year Valck arrived, Deli's recruitment practices were already infamous across the Straits; so much so that so that British and Chinese authorities from China and Penang had threatened to prohibit shipments of workers from their ports.¹⁰ What was specifically heated when Valck arrived were the measures that so barely distinguished the terms of indenture under 'contract' work from slavery, i.e., the conditions under which a coolie could be compelled to remain at his place of work and the punishment that could be meted out for breach of contract.¹¹ Valck's predecessor, Hallewijn, had sided with the planters in arguing that Deli was an 'exceptional' situation in the Indies and that the industry's viability demanded that strict punitive measures for recalcitrant, runaway coolies be enforced.

Some higher officials in Batavia were unconvinced. Contrary to planter opposition, an 1876 ruling forbade the *forced* return of workers to those estates upon breach of their contracts. Valck, siding with his uncle Otto van Rees on the Indies Advisory Board, who ruled that the penal sanctions favoured the planters, did more than support the new ruling (that pitted him openly against the major company heads). More to his detriment, he interpreted it very differently than most officials and planters had ever intended. By Valck's reading, runaways were no longer legally bound to return to their estates at all, thereby releasing them from repaying the three-month advances by which they were recruited.

As subsequent government reports made clear, Valck's interpretation was deemed impolitic, foolhardy, and too 'generous'. That workers could not be *forced* back to their estates was never to suggest that they should not be brought back by other means.¹² According to Valck's severest critic, Director Henny of the Civil Service, Valck was incompetent and dangerous. It was his overly lenient reading of the law (and not the planters' abuses,) that had encouraged increased vagabondage among the region's ex-coolies.¹³ By allowing workers to choose 12 days in prison in lieu of repaying their advances or working the full duration of their contracts, Valck had (inadvertently?) undercut an unspoken principle of

the indenture system: no easy way out or quick exit from the onerous contracts and debt peonage that kept workers on the estates. But Valck's misinterpretation of the ruling does not explain why Deli was overrun with clandestine forest encampments and who was in them, nor the fact that many of them had been there for years prior to his arrival. What was the relationship between the estate enclaves and the rural hinterland? Or is it anachronistic to speak of such a clear distinction at all? Why was there such a large roaming population of unemployed men?

Valck was caught in several lines of fire: the planters were intent to recruit workers in increasing numbers but to curtail their mobility through their own coercive or state-endorsed measures. A growing population of migrant workers with weak ties to the estates and minimal possibilities for redress, still refused to submit to penal sanctions. Moreover, the public secret was out: Indies authorities were forced to reckon with and reform a labour system that the Indies, Singapore and European press insisted was blatantly abusive.

But that was not all. Those sharp divisions between ethnic groups so familiar in descriptions of late colonial Indonesia – where Batak was pitted against Javanese, Gayo against Malay, Chinese against Javanese – were proving to be less clear-cut on the ground. When military agents 'discovered' jungle encampments on the plantation peripheries, they found refuges that were not limited to ex-Chinese coolies in one place and Gayo resistant fighters in another. Instead they came upon encampments with material traces (utensils, clothing, letters) of hundreds of Gayos, Malays, Chinese, and Javanese hiding out together in makeshift shelters. To account for these, Valck had no ready categories on which he could draw. This 'vagabond' population refused to work *for* the estates, but instead lived *off* them, carrying out night raids in search of food, weapons, clothing and cash. 'Vagabondage' was an administrative misnomer for an unrecognizable social space – one occupied by a diverse Sumatran underclass made up of those rejected from the estates, who fled the estates, or who chose to maintain equivocal, temporary or predatory ties to them.

The fact of no trace of these encampments in the colonial historiography of Sumatra's East Coast – or in more recent histories – merits reflection. Colonial historiography arguably followed the administrative maps that demarcated Aceh from Deli and that distinguished an 'Islamic stronghold' from a region of intensive capitalist venture. But distinctions of governance were not those in practice. In working from this sharply differentiated administrative and cognitive map, Valck found certain kinds of relations among these groups at once logically

inconsistent and inadmissible as he sought to piece together the events leading up to and subsequent to, the Luhmann family murders.

Deli's 'labour problem' was then but one context for these stories. The Aceh War was another. In 1873, after years of treaty negotiations between the British, Dutch, and Acehnese over the terms under which Aceh and the principalities to the south – the future plantation belt – would be made accessible to British trade while subject to Dutch sovereignty, Dutch authorities mounted a military aggression against Aceh that was to last for some 30 years and to be considered one of the most destructive colonial wars.¹⁴ Southern Aceh, abutting the Langkat district in the northern plantation belt where Luhmann's plantation lay, was the corridor through which an increasing number of men moved south to seek estate work as more trading activities were cut off by Dutch blockades.¹⁵ Among these were members of the Gayo, a highland tribal group that despite its long subjection to Acehnese influence, had remained neutral in the war.

By the mid-1870s, as Dutch troops moved closer to their homelands, more Gayo faced the choice of submitting to Acehnese authority, surrendering to Dutch rule, or fleeing into the forests from both.¹⁶ Whether the Gayos that worked for the planter Luhmann were partisans of the war or pacifist refugees is unclear. Valck and his contemporaries appear to have had only the vaguest notions of where these Gayos came from and with whom they allied. In official missives, the terms 'Gayo' and 'Acehnese' were distinguished in some accounts, used interchangeably in others. How did Valck and his fellow reporters know how to tell a Gayo thief in the night from an Acehnese dissident? As we shall see, these terms often served to mark not ethnic identity but the degree of threat to this new colonial enterprise, those whose actions were to be classified as 'common criminal' or 'insurgent rebel'.

Valck's uneasy readers

Valck writes to Levyssohn with frustration, despair and indignation. But each of those sentiments is tempered by his ambivalence about how much he wants the 'facts' about European atrocities communicated and to whom. Aware that his observations and actions would leave him open to criticism, he worries that his story would be deemed suspect and not believed. His assessment is not off the mark. He boldly contradicted the most cherished claim of the trading companies, plantation firms and government authorities: that Deli was flourishing, that plantation profits were secure despite the Aceh war, and that both planters

and coolies were 'in hand'. But it was his unmistakable if oblique reference to 'leniency pursued for years towards the planters' that sealed his fate. Valck was accusing government officials – high and low – of looking away and condoning the planters' acts. This was indeed the major issue that would arise after his 'honourable' dismissal two years later when a Dutch parliamentarian questioned whether the Governor-General and the Minister of Colonies could really not have known as they claimed, what European atrocities were taking place on the Deli estates.¹⁷ As Valck wrote Levyssohn:

If you think I paint a darker picture of the situation, that I exaggerate, I repeat that the situation is as bad as it can be and this is *due to a policy of leniency pursued for years toward the planters*. ... Believe me, Levyssohn! I don't see the situation blacker than it is...

It was one thing to condemn the practices of low ranking civil servants. But his loyalty to Dutch authority at this point still remained intact. As he wrote Levyssohn, he desired only that 'his excellence the Governor-General and Van Rees [vice-chair of the *Raad van Indie* and his 'uncle' married to Valck's first wife's aunt) to know the real situation here'. He was forthright in criticizing his predecessor Hallewijn for complicity in the planters' silence and 'government people in Batavia [who] have painted the situation entirely the color of roses, however incorrectly'. Convinced that he would be opposed for his actions by planters and government agents in their service, he believed the Governor General would commend him and not share in this condemnation. His declaration is righteous and sincere:

The situation is untenable. Change must come and has started to come. It will take a great deal of my effort to bring this about. I will be thwarted, duped and slandered from all sides. But I will not move from the honorable post given me by the Governor-General... it may be necessary, I consider it very necessary, that the real situation becomes better known by the highest placed people in the Netherlands Indies.

What happened to Valck and his letter? He was not destined for long in the civil service. Less than a year after his appointment in Deli, he was transferred (in February 1877) to Ambarawa while an official investigation of his 'serious misconduct' continued after his departure. The following year he was honourably dismissed from the civil service with a meagre pension and placed on the retired list at the relatively young

age of 43.¹⁸ The Resident Locker de Bruijne, reprimanded for allocating too much responsibility to Valck and for blaming the latter for his own mistakes, emerged from the inquiry with his character, though not his position, intact.¹⁹

What did Levyssohn do with Valck's letter? None of the communications dealing with Valck's reprimand suggest that his concerns were passed on to the Governor-General; nor that Levyssohn alerted his fellow Council members to Valck's warnings about European excesses and the scope of their crimes. Instead, Levyssohn drew selectively on Valck's letter to defend his *person* – but not the validity of Valck's accusations of torture and corruption. When Henny recommended Valck's immediate dismissal, Levyssohn (along with Van Rees) refused to endorse it. Instead, Levyssohn appended a separate defence of Valck's conduct, outlining the 'mitigating circumstances'.²⁰ He argued that Valck's loyalties were never in question; unfairly overburdened, he inherited a neglected administrative situation, and received no guidance from his immediate superior, Locker de Bruijne. 'His shortcomings' had to be 'seen in light of a course of events which apparently made his mood oversensitive' (an 'agitation' that we already noted, Valck denied). On August 13, 1877, the Governor-General accorded Valck 'a second chance', on an argument borrowed word for word from Levyssohn's addendum. Neither Levyssohn nor Van Rees, nor the Governor-General refer to what Valck deemed sadistic torture and inhumane about the situation in Deli, the government cover-up and the conduct of Deli's Europeans.

Anatomy of a murder: revenge and blame

On the night of 17 October 1876, Valck learned that several members of the Luhmann family were murdered. He immediately telegraphed the Consul General in Singapore, asking him to forward his message to the Governor-General in Buitenzorg, presumably the quickest way to get his communication through. He stated only the following;

offenders four Gayos though mostly *kampong* [Malay village] people. *Appears to be private retaliation* in the affair, Malayan kicked by Luhmann. Also issue about clearing forest. *As for political motive, There seems to be none.*²¹

His brief report of five days later to the Resident Locker de Bruijne again stressed Luhmann's actions, promising more detailed information in his next mailing: 'It appeared that by his own confession Mr. Luhmann

had once kicked a Malay and was told the next day that this could have serious consequences for him.²² Here, too, Valck notes that the attackers were mostly 'from the neighboring villages and that only four Gayos and a few Bataks were among them'. In all, he had 30 suspects arrested 'who were in possession of bloody weapons and clothing. Many of them were recognized by Mr. Luhmann's daughter and a few by [his brother-in-law] Mr. Revening'.

With these synoptic statements Valck conveys several messages: (1) Luhmann was responsible for what happened to him (2) more Malays were involved in the attack, with some Gayos among the assailants and (3) the assault was an act of 'private revenge', not 'political', and should be viewed neither as an assault instigated by anti-Dutch partisans of the Aceh War nor as a collective aggression on all Europeans.

Valck was versed in the official vernacular of 'unrest' but chose not to abide by its common and proper use. To classify an assault as a private matter was a well-honed convention for dismissing an assailant's broader claims. Thus, in the Deli Tobacco Company's 1925 commemorative volume, it could note that in the repeated assaults on Europeans of 50 years earlier 'people were constantly uncertain as to whether an assault should be considered as 'hostile' or indeed *only* as 'rapacious' and 'cut-throat' though in fact people lost goods and lives in both cases'.²³ Valck, on the contrary, was unwilling to relegate the violence to '*only*' personal revenge. He saw a *pattern* and his subsequent report told a story of violent retaliation extending beyond the particulars of the Luhmann family murder alone.

But a week later, Valck's account of the murder took on a different cast.²⁴ Here he provides a careful description of the attack, with the first blow inflicted by 'a Gayo, thick-set, dark and with a mustache who was employed at the estate as a woodcutter'. It is here that he provides details of the specific mutilations of each of the Luhmann family members as told to him by Luhmann's brother-in-law:

Mr. Browne walked around the house and found his sister lying on the ground. She was slashed in her neck, head, chest, stomach and both legs ... In the rather wide passage that formed some sort of indoor veranda, lay the body of the eldest child Johny about nine years of age. With one cut, the head had been severed from the body. Next to him lay the corpse of little Marthe, about five years of age. The right arm had been severed almost completely from the body by a slash that had opened the chest ... The fifteen month old youngest child who slept there was left unharmed ... This gentleman, after helping to bring his sister inside, went to get Mr. Revening, who was lying

on the front indoor veranda and whose wounds he bound up as well as possible. There were no less than fourteen, with one above both brows, one over the chest and one over the stomach seeming the most serious. The right hand was severed at the wrist. This man was in a complete bloodbath. Later, little Clara said that the criminals put her in a crate and hit her several times on her neck with the flat side of a weapon and threatened to kill her if she did not tell them immediately where the money was kept. As soon as did the criminals forced the strongbox open and she ran away.

His description is gruesome. The grim details provided by Luhmann's brother-in-law, contrast the tone of his own commentary that followed:

According to Mr. Luhmann and Mr. Browne the attackers only injured the former in order to scare off he and his family so they would leave the house to allow [the assailants] free play in ransacking the house, which seems to me rather unlikely. According to them, Mr. Revening had been injured so terribly because he defended himself, while Mrs. Luhmann and Johny were killed because they knew many of the attackers, and they [the assailants] feared that later they would point them out as the offenders. [my emphasis, Als]

Valck rejects this analysis outright and offers a more damning hypothesis, one to which he had alluded in his letter to Levyssohn:

However, the question then arises, why little Marthe, who was only five years old, was killed and her three year old sister, who, as later became evident, knew almost all of the criminals, had been spared? I feel that once blood had flowed, the tiger-[like] nature [*tijgernatuur*] characteristic of the Malay emerged and bloodthirstyness [*bloeddorst*] should be seen as the cause of the crime. By the manner in which it was committed, in a state of excitement, it is easier to excuse than the horrors [*gruwelen*] that are said to be done in cold blood by so-called civilized Europeans on their plantations to the helpless Chinese coolies, horrors that cannot be unknown to the Malay because they were committed over such a long period of time.

Valck's account here is both ambiguous and contradictory. He frames a scene of premeditated action and sensible revenge but attributes the crime and its viciousness to the atavistic nature of uncivilized Malays. But why were the 'bloodthirsty' Malays out for revenge when it was Chinese workers who were being victimized by the planters, here 'helpless'

and barred from leaving their dwellings with 'traps' set by the assailants? Racialized emotions structure his argument; hot-blooded native rage contrasts with cold-blooded and calculated murder by Europeans. Native excesses are explicable and 'excusable' within a frame that *expects* their expression in bursts of passion, in contrast to the long range reasoning on which he saw more insidious European violence to rest. Valck deploys this racial logic to turn the prevailing explanation of violence on its head and to make his central point: that the killing 'in cold blood' done by Europeans was the 'the horror' (*gruwel*) that preceded all other violence and allowed for it.

Valck's grisly report on the murders was not an end in itself. His graphic narrative prepares the reader for his bolder claim: the interpretations offered by Luhmann and his brother-in-law were incorrect. The assault could not be reduced to a bungled theft because 'a watch on the table was untouched'. It must have been directed at Luhmann because such excessive violence could only be a response to the violences perpetrated by Luhmann himself. Or as he more tersely put it: 'cruelty breeds cruelty'. While the military reports emphasized the Gayos' role in the attack, Valck placed the cause squarely on the plantations, as a response to abusive work conditions of a longer duree. He reports having received two communications: a telegram from the director of the powerful Deli Plantation Company about the Luhmann assault, and a letter from Commander Demmemi, citing Gayos as the perpetrators. Valck reports that he immediately left for the Soengei Diski estate but was prevented by flooded roads and ill-repaired bridges from getting any further than the neighboring Kloempang estate. This he presents as a fortuitous mishap that gave him the opportunity to learn from 'Count van Benthem Tecklenburg Rheda several facts that later appeared to be of importance in tracking down the criminals'.

Reference to the planter's titled, full family name may have served to give these 'facts' additional authority. But it is the reliability of his own judgment he seeks to affirm, justifying his prudent decision not to leave directly for the crime scene, but to stay at Van Benthem's for an extra day.²⁵ Valck keeps his readers in suspense and refrains from divulging what he learned. Instead, he describes *his* arrival at Soengei Diski the next morning where, armed with these 'facts' he confronts Luhmann. Interlacing his own account with the planter's narrative, he enhances his own credibility by exposing Luhmann's implausible explanation:

...I asked Mr. Luhmann what the reason could have been for the attack on his plantation and for the murders of his family. He

answered that there could not have been any reason because he and his subordinates always treated his Chinese, Battaks, Gayo and Malays with the utmost humanity [*de meeste menschlievendheid*]. The previous day he had even given money to some on the occasion of the end of the Mohammedan fast. Then I said to him that so far all the planters whose plantations had been attacked had given me the same assurance, except Mr. Droop who admitted having insulted a Gayo headman, that there were rumors [*geruchten*], however, about things that had happened on each of those plantations that in the eyes of uncivilized people would motivate retaliation, that I had to rely on those statements (*verklaringen*) and had to take measures accordingly; that those measures might have been wrong because of false information, and that the misery that struck them might have been prevented if the other planters would have told the truth; that I also heard (*gehoord*) something about him, Mr. Luhmann, that could have caused the attack at his estate, because people had told me that he had kicked a Malay or hit him with a slipper, a fact that I had heard from a reliable person, who, in turn could point out the people who had told him.

Rumors here are transformed into actionable evidence by a slight of hand. Valck underscores his argument by quoting his own words in conversation with Luhmann. He recounts how he reprimands Luhmann for withholding information, and with him all the planters. He blames them for forcing him to take these rumors as facts because the 'facts' *they* report are clearly lies. And, while directing his accusations at Europeans, he invokes the 'uncivilized' instincts motivating native retaliation – affirming the very distinctions and racial principles of Dutch (and his own) authority.

In response to Valck and in self-defence Luhmann recounts the following:

that a certain Djamal from the Kloempang village who was labor crew leader of seven Battaks came to him on September 11th to talk about the job of cutting some wood. Djamal had already received an advance to hire woodcutters. When he came to talk about the matter, more people were with him as well as the Battaks. They too wanted a similar contract. Luhmann was willing to pay thirty dollars per square but Djamal wanted thirty-five although the wood was small and easy to handle. Mr. Luhmann refused to pay the extra sum but finally gave in; *then they refused to work at all*. Having paid the advance

Mr. Luhmann got mad and said: 'you think you can fool me? If you refuse to work I'll send you to jail'. Then one of the Malays laughed at Mr. Luhmann who then kicked him, but as he states, without hitting him. According to a Malay version ... the Malay was kicked down the stairs. Angered, the man ran off, and Djamal said to Mr. Luhmann: '*kenapa toean bikin begitoe ini boekan toean poenja orang, kalau dia bikin salah saja jang boleh poekoel*' [Why did you do that, sir, he's not your man, if he did something wrong it's I who has the right to hit him]. The next day Djamal returned to say that the man had complained to Mr. van Benthem under whose protection he put himself, and that Mr. Luhmann should expect trouble (*soesah*).

Luhmann's actions have everything about them of the ordinary and everyday. They seem not dissimilar to the pitiful motives of George Orwell's district officer in 'Shooting an Elephant': both feared to look the fool and responded with violence to defend their own tenuous standing and that of their European compatriots.²⁶ In Orwell's story that fear prompted the pointless shooting of an elephant; in Luhmann's case, his family were the victims of his violent own deeds. But in Valck's recounting, it is difficult to know where his story begins and Luhmann's ends. Valck never grants Luhmann a first person voice. Instead he tells his story for him, referring throughout to 'Mr. Luhmann' and 'this gentleman'. In contrast Djamal, the Malay foreman, speaks in his own – albeit carefully excerpted – words. It is one of the few Malay language entries in Valck's narrative (or for that matter in any other of the reports).

Why does Luhmann report Djamal's words in Malay and why does Valck chose to repeat them? Perhaps because it supported both of their claims. Djamal's voice authenticates two principles of plantation protocol: (1) according to Luhmann, that physical beatings of coolies were acceptable and carried out by Asian overseers, thereby justifying his own non-exceptional behaviour and (2) according to Valck, that Luhmann transgressed a basic prescription for labor control, one codified in handbooks for new estate supervisors decades later: that estate managers should neither reprimand nor *directly* give orders to native workers – and that if they did so they would surely pay.

Valck's narrative continues with his day of enquiry, taking up first Van Benthem's story and then returning to Luhmann's account:

Later Mr. van Benthem told me that indeed some Malays did come complaining that Mr. Luhmann had kicked one of them and that he advised them to go to Laboean, to the district officer, and that he

could be sure that if that gentleman was wrong he would be punished, *even if he (the Malay) would not be aware of it*. A few days later, he [van Benthem] met one of the plaintiffs and asked whether the abused person had gone to Laboan, and was told that he first wanted to complain to the village head of Hamperan Perak. Among those who attacked the Luhmann plantation were only four Gayoes. Those men were employed with him since August 22 and no fault was found with their behavior except that they worked slowly. Together with twelve Bataks and three Malays they belonged to the crew controlled by the foremen Deli and Saman, both from Kloempang. Finally Mr. Luhmann told me that a certain Datoe Gembang^[27], head of the nearby village of Sala Moeda, might have had a share in the attack on his estate.

Van Bantem's advice was at best naive, and given the planters' power and the rudimentary judicial system in Deli, absurd. How could a labourer leave work and travel at least two days round trip to complain to a Dutch officer about a 'kick'? Or does this exchange suggest that what was everyday fare for immigrant estate workers with nowhere to vent their grievances was *not* for those Malays from surrounding villages and with more tenuous ties to the estates.

The names of the foremen Saman and Deli do not surface again for another month. Luhmann's story refocuses the causes of the murder around the disgruntled Datoe Gembang, to whom Luhmann twice refused to extend a cash loan needed to harvest tobacco that he planted at his own expense. By Luhmann's account, after Datoe Gembang made unsuccessful efforts to sell his tobacco at several other estates, he disappeared to Langkat for sometime. Within a few days of his return, the attack took place. Whether Valck is quoting Luhmann is again difficult to tell, only signalled by a temporal shift as the narrative returns to the day of his enquiry and his own story:

In the late afternoon [of October 18, 1876] the Radja Moeda of Deli arrived with a few Chinese policemen from the Sultan. Datoe Gembang was sent for immediately and came, with seven followers armed with swords. He declared that he knew nothing of the affair (as he told Major Demmeni the previous day) and very much regretted that it happened... While still questioning him, one of my men noticed a small bloodstain on the sword scabbard of one of Datoe Gembang's followers and took it from him. After close inspection all the weapons or clothes of Datoe Gembang's seven followers appeared

to have traces of blood and they were thus arrested. From Kloempang [Deli's constable] brought a certain Djamal whom he strongly suspected of having taken part in the attack. All those who had been employed by Mr. Luhmann and that lived nearby were arrested and on most of them traces of blood were found on their weapons and clothing. *It was curious that nobody seemed to have bothered to cover up the traces of the murder.*

This 'curiosity' could be read as the punch line in Valck's story. No one covered up the murder because they did not *want* to. They intended for some people to know (other workers, other villagers, other planters?) who did it and why. Or perhaps it framed another plot. There was no cover-up because there was no *need* for one. The assailants were strong in number and well backed by a broader anti-planter sentiment. They simply had no fear of recrimination. Valck reads their blood-stained weapons one way. Other district officers, military personnel and some planters were to read it another.

Valck's earlier account seemed to convincingly capture a plausible story: Luhmann deserved what he got, revenge not 'political' motivation was at issue, and Luhmann was hiding the 'facts'. But as Valck's narrative develops, the introduction of new actors makes the casting of blame more problematic. What connected the Chinese coolies working on the estate (said to have played no part in this assault), Datoe Gembang from the village of Sala [Sialang] Moeda, those assailants allegedly from Kloempang, and the four Gayos? Were there 19 assailants from Kloempang, as Van Banthem's informant counted, only 7 from Sialang Moeda, or more than 30, the number Valck arrested? How did so many men of such diverse origin, domicile and estate engagement come together and under whom, and then dare *not* to hide their crime? Valck concludes with the 'well-founded remark' of the Malay man with whom he spoke,

that it could not have been the assailants' intention to rob, because if so, it would have been much easier for them to attack and overpower one of the convoys transporting money for the estates and traveling under small escort than to first do hard labor for sometime and only then attack the estate. Therefore, I still feel that revenge [*wraak*] was the cause of every one of the committed crimes.

Several categories begin to collide. Unlike for the planters, Valck's schema stages robbery as retribution for justified grievance. His effort to flesh

out the context of retaliation shapes both the chronology and logic of his argument. His adherence to the prevailing understanding of the 'political' – actions of direct threat to government authority – remains largely intact. Still, his belief in a collective threat to European security, based on *patterned* revenge, falls somewhere between the personal and political, anticipating his failed challenge to those categories.

A genealogy of the murder: patterns of protest

Valck's interpretation of the Luhmann family murder was in keeping with his more general thesis; the planters were attributing estate assaults to external Aceh influence to deflect attention from internal tensions in their own affairs. He first articulated this position a month earlier in September, when other government, military and estate personnel were blaming a series of attacks on the Droop, Peyer, and Baay estates on Gayo gangs in league with Aceh resistance fighters.

On September 6, 1876 Valck reported that Droop, the administrator of the Van Sluijs estate on the Babalan river, was physically assaulted by Gayos and much of the estate property was destroyed. Droop had recently hired a certain Panglima Laoet who, with his 27 men, had come to seek work.²⁸ Droop engaged them and paid an advance to build a road. Several days later another 14 Gayos lead by a certain Radjah Petambiang were also engaged under similar terms. 'The trouble began' when Panglima Laoet asked for a personal loan of several dollars. Hearing about this, Radjah Petambiang demanded that Droop give the same to every Gayo. The planter explained that it was a personal loan, refused and turned back to his house. When Radja Petambiang attempted to follow, Droop turned around, calling him a '*Radja Mawas*' (monkey prince). Valck implies that the insult was not taken lightly. Droop was warned by an Acehnese living on the estate to beware of the Gayos and not to go out unarmed because Petambiang was out to kill him. Valck wrote:

The Gayos appeared that night and began cutting through the plaited roofing when Droop fired his pistol at them four times. Several Gayo were wounded and he was cut by a sabre across the hand... According to Droop the Gayos attacked him while calling '*Labilloellah*,' the common Muslim war-cry and it was clear from this that they were in contact with the Acehnese and had come with the purpose of murdering him, a European. *This last part seemed strange to me right away, because if this was their intent it certainly would not have been necessary to first work for many days in row, they could have just killed him ...*

This final sentence offers the same reasoning expressed in the 'well-founded remark' by the Malay informant, quoted by Valck in the Luhmann murder. In both cases, Valck used it to confirm the sound reasoning of his own claims. In the meantime, Resident Locker de Bruine, *without* Valck's report in hand, sent the following communiqué to the Governor-General:

From private information, but from a very reliable source, I was informed that on one of the Langkat plantations, disturbances took place during which a European administrator was wounded and some damage was done to personal property. According to my informant, the offenders were some of the Gayos working on the estates, who because of injudicious action by the administrator took bitter revenge on him and who afterwards disappeared to their own region without creating further disturbances. It seems to me, therefore, that *this fact has no political significance whatsoever ... I have not yet received a report from the Assistant-Resident of Deli.* [Valck]²⁹

Locker de Bruijne pretends to a knowledge that barely masks his unfamiliarity with the circumstances of the assault. He unambiguously blames Valck for not filing a report sooner, although Valck's preliminary report is actually written four days before de Bruijne's. Valck's second lengthy report on the Droop assault – only five days before he reports the Luhmann story, and four days before he writes Levyssohn – makes his case against the planters again. He categorically dismisses the report by the military commander, Vogel, who both 'suspects instigation from Acehnese quarters' and argues that the assaults on the Baay estate included 'four Atjehnese [who] took employ with the purpose of sedition'.³⁰ Vogel notes that he had heard from 'various quarters' that Peyer badly treated his workers, whereas Baay did not, further 'proof' that political instigation and not personal revenge explained the events.³¹ Major Demmemi makes a similar if more equivocal case. In an October 28th communiqué with his Commander-in-Chief, 11 days after the Luhmann murder, he claims to present only 'the facts and rumors because there are such discrepant interpretations of the events'.³²

Both Demmemi's and Valck's accounts make a curious and unremarked omission. Both fail to note that the planters' fears are *not* fuelled by the assaults per se, but by the numerous 'friendly natives' who repeatedly warn them of possible dangers. Demmemi reports that the planter Cremer is 'warned twice that he should not leave his estate because of the danger outside'. The planter August is 'advised by a Batak not to go

out a night without a bayonet'; and Droop 'is warned by an Acehese living on the estate to beware of the Gayos'. Demmeni attributes these fears to 'exaggeration in all this news' and calls a meeting with Malay authorities who tell him pointedly that the villages of Salah Moeda and Kloempang 'are not to be trusted'. But when he asks who was leading the 'unruliness', they answer, 'No one from Deli, the influences comes from outside.'³³ Fears here are mobile and in active motion, but who is playing off whose violence and trepidations of it goes unaddressed. Demmeni questions whether the assaults should be seen as part of a larger conspiratorial effort or as perpetrated by 'common thieves as occurs elsewhere'. Though unsure, based on rumors of possible insurrection, he requests 128 reinforcements for the 90 armed soldiers already stationed in Deli to protect the planters.

Valck still resists casting the assaults as expressions of subversion. Instead he represents the Gayos as avengers not thieves. Specific Europeans are targeted for assault, while others are informed in advance that they will go unharmed: 'Mr Thompson [of the Ayer Ham estate] later told me repeatedly that an *inlander* not belonging on his estate had told him that same day that he had nothing to fear since nobody had anything against him.' Here again, Valck insists that the attacks were strategically directed and planned. He makes no comment, however, on a more unsettling implication: that many more people from Sumatra's subject populations knew in advance about the assaults than those who actively participated in them.

By now, Valck is more exasperated with the invocation of Aceh influence and reiterates his own conclusion in no uncertain terms:

I feel that no one with a trace of commonsense, after being informed of the above, will believe that Atjeh influence is behind those attacks and that everyone must agree that they have resulted from personal feuds. Only the interested parties at the attacked plantations feel differently, unpleasant as it must be to find the blame put back on themselves or their subordinates. The truth of the matter later will become evident.

Valck's 'commonsense' is not that of others. His interpretation of 'personal feuds' implicates and jeopardizes Deli's Europeans. The danger is real he asserts but not because of the Aceh war:

After all the above, it need not be said that when it comes to retaliation no one is safe, even if one were surrounded by a complete

battalion... We only agreed to leave a detachment with planters in the Langkat lowlands who were most afraid. This was merely done to calm the feelings of these gentlemen. No government, no matter how well organized, no police force, no matter how diligent, no troops, no matter how numerous are capable of securing the planters from attacks like those which have taken place. Fairness and justice toward their subordinates will always be the best weapons against them.

The Luhmann family murder stood out from other similar attacks because the victims were 'innocents', a woman and children, but this is not Valck's primary concern. Focused on Luhmann's guilt, his interpretation invokes the exigencies of a situation that went beyond what he learned from the 'facts' of that case alone.

From accounts of preceding and subsequent assaults, two kinds of stories of white murder emerge that hold fast to stylized plots. Attacks were considered 'personal' or 'political', 'criminal' or 'subversive', with these conceived as mutually exclusive categories. Within this frame, the assaults could be understood in only one of these two ways: either as retaliations against an individual who *happened* to be European, or expressions of an orchestrated assault on Europeans *tout court*. Valck's accounts succumbed to neither. Instead it cut across both categories with another scenario. This was one in which the personal could transform into the political. Outrage at planter abuses – be they physical, financial, moral or psychological – were differently experienced by Deli's ethnically distinct colonial subjects. Not surprisingly they met the affronts of the estate economy by challenging its order in varied ways.

The categories available to most colonial officials constrained what they could envision as a possible plot. Bracketing these dichotomies suggests the possibility that rumour, arson, murder, and theft made up a gradient of responses that subverted the simpler logic on which planter assumptions were based. These range of responses most often made little dent, nor was this necessarily their 'real' intent. Suspending these dichotomies makes room for a more complex set of social and labor relations in which people more likely lived; not a world divided neatly between plantation and hinterland, personal and political acts, or criminal and revolutionary motives. People who identified themselves as Gayo, Javanese, Malay and Batak were alternately attracted and repelled by the plantations' demands for labor, land and services. Drawn by this pull of power and opportunity, they enlisted in the plantation economy by varied means and exited with varied degrees of success.

Valck's account fits awkwardly within the then prevalent colonial caricature of suppliant, dog-headed coolies who, in response to what they considered verbal or physical abuse, would vent their frustration by going amok.³⁴ On the contrary, in each case, European planters were pitted against a sophisticated trade network controlled by the sultanates, as well as hard-nosed Batak, Malay and Gayo negotiators, assured what their proper payment should be, self-confident enough to make reasonable demands and even to press *additional* claims. Gayo and Batak woodcutters did more than defend their due on agreed upon piecework. They *redefined* what their due was in mid-process, when the work was already in progress.

Murder was in the air. Even before the Luhmann assault, a Javanese informant told Demmeni that 'the Gayos plan to kill the Europeans as well as the Javanese in league with them'.³⁵ But his Gayo informant, Ga, from Kampong Gala, insisted on the opposite: that the Gayo 'had nothing against the Europeans, they were good; the Gayos only wanted to return to their own region with money in hand'.³⁶

On storytelling and colonial credibilities

Native assaults on European plantation personnel and property continued to be debated to the end of Dutch rule in similar terms: distinctions between 'personal' and 'political', 'criminals' and 'insurgents' remained right through the national revolution of 1945. These were not old-fashioned categories of intelligibility but ones with sustaining power and weight. In the 1930s they remained viable 'modern' categories, relevant and wholly unreliable. But in 1876 and 1877, the terror of a European slaughter was never realized in Deli nor, as far as any sources indicate, ever really tried.

Despite the relative detail of these accounts, it is still not clear whether Valck was unusually inept or an anti-hero that never happened. The evidence of Valck's bureaucratic carelessness was strong. When his successor Faber took over his job, he reported a disarray of prison ledgers in which he could find no records of the number of people in the prison, few dossiers detailing the length of their sentences, no listings of their crimes. Valck's predecessor Hallewijn may never have kept a register but Valck never took it upon himself (or had the time) to start one. Among the few dossiers Faber did find was one of a prisoner given a four month sentence but interned for over 11 months. On such negligence, Levyssohn came to Valck's defence, arguing that his many tasks would have made it impossible, for even an efficient civil servant to handle

management of the court, prisons, concessions and administration all at the same time. Considering the sheer quantity of reports that Valck filed in a matter of days (the letter to Levyssohn alone remember was 30 handwritten pages), it is difficult to imagine how he had time to travel to far flung estates by horseback, do detailed interviews, write his lengthy reports, while making sure he did not leave unattended prison ledgers, court proceedings and the rest of his tasks on any single day.

The more serious charge against him by the Director Henny of the Civil Service, that he 'totally misjudged his relationship to the resident, either keeping him completely in the dark about the most important matters that occurred in his district or notifying him too late' was more complicated in motive than Henny's condemnation professed. Valck's assessments of what was happening on the East Coast did not conform to what his superior, the Resident, thought fitting to report. The latter's reputation rested on his ability to keep his residency in '*rust en orde*' whether he knew what going on and whether he was present or not. Assaults caused by personal feuds or outside Acehnese agitation were disturbances that did not necessarily reflect badly on him. But Valck's accusation that the violence was selective, and that state complicity and leniency towards the planters was its cause touched closer to issues about which Locker de Bruijne should have known and had in hand. Valck may not have 'misjudged' his relationship to the Resident at all but rather realized how much they were at loggerheads, and therefore how much evidence he had to muster to back his contrary claims.

No references were made to Valck's personal life and earlier career in evaluations of his conduct in Deli, though both may well have been coloured his unofficial 'trial' and the 'crimes' with which he was charged.³⁷ Bad bookkeeping, backlogged cases, delayed reports, and inept management were among those most clearly placed in the ledger. But, the most serious accusation was directed at his indiscriminate and persistent harassment of the planters and for that he was considered to have been guilty of two reprehensible acts. The first was to carry out his administrative and juridical duties in ways which consistently favoured the coolies, 'for ill-advisedly taking the Chinese coolies, the scum of Singapore and Penang under his protection', when he should have been supporting the disciplinary actions of Europeans. The second was to neglect a key feature of his job, currying favour with local rulers whose co-operation and collaboration (in both annexing and policing the plantation belt) were critical to the region's security and the estate industry's growth. Finally, he had misinterpreted the letter of the law concerning breach of coolie contracts. In this regard, the Director of the Civil Service charged

him with 'misreading' the Procureur-General's edict and with single-handedly abetting the increase of vagrant ex-coolies and the roving bands they joined to plunder the estates.

Fiction in the colonial archives

These are not the luxuriant pardon tales of *Fiction in the Archives* from which Natalie Davis so finely drew out the cultural nuances of sixteenth-century France. They are drier, formulaic documents – administrative epistles, curt exchanges and lengthy monthly reports. They are the product of a state in expansion and of bureaucrats eager to be viewed favourably by their superiors, on whose judgment their salaries, positions and pensions would depend. They are careful to deflect attention from their own faults, find small flourishes that affirm their loyalties, pen again and again their investment in Dutch policy and its methods of rule. Unlike the pardon tales, these stories categorically deny the voices of those they feared. Thus, the Luhmann family's Gayo assailants could only be spoken for, by 'trustworthy natives' whose allegiance to Dutch authority was thought to be secure. It is not the Gayos who are privileged in these accounts but a representation of them as geographically and cognitively caught between the Aceh war and the muggings in Deli, economically attracted to the estate but independent of them, politically labile and possibly dangerous.

These storied reports were fashioned cultural accounts *with political effects* that precluded some conclusions and encouraged others. Exploring what made some more relevant and reasonable to their authors and audience opens to an ethnographic space of jumbled perceptions and agentive forms that could not be contained and tempered by coherent colonial narratives. Communications that depended on footsteps, horses, small boats, ships, and telegrams produced a colonizing world that moved and responded with uneven and different pace.

The disorder of these stories and the reworking of their contexts push against historiographic convention. Students of colonialisms are adept at challenging colonial representations of authority by pinning their inventions, authenticities, and mannerisms to specific time and place. Our stance is often ironic, knowing and safely removed from the racial categories to which they were bound, to the sentiments they expressed, to the racial fears in which they operated. Such readings presume more than we should about the schooled dispositions that their positions encouraged. Valck invites us to think harder about ethical distance, torture that is blamed on the bottom man rather than those at the top,

and how much the history of what counts as credible is also a history of affective states. The official mannerisms and manoeuvres around the Luhmann murder should make it no surprise how unevenly the conventions of categories were reworked on the ground. Sometimes political grammars constrained what colonial agents thought, sometimes they delimited the political idioms in which people talked, indicating not what they thought but only what they said.

Anthropologists and their kin have long produced exemplary readings of ethnography as text. These 'storeyed' narratives come layered with thick reflection about ways of knowing, about how anxieties and uncertainties figured in colonial epistemologies. What matters are the details of ethnography: who spoke to whom, who heard and repeated what or chose not to; who imagined what when and where. The accent is on the immediate and its juxtaposition with a colonial apparatus that was spare in Deli and still far away. The clues are in the objects of the everyday – how letters written in German find their way to a forest encampment where they cannot be read, a watch that remains untouched on a dresser while a child is slain.

Then there are the words of Valck, buried and emergent between the reported accounts of others, pleading and plaintive despite a genre of official writing that professes to militate for reason and not more impassioned states. It is a genre that leaves room for small mistakes, that lets slip desperation but that refuses to witness the pathos of excess, of remorse, blatant outrage, ethical wavering, divided allegiances, the expressed entreaty that one has been wrongly dishonoured, intentionally silenced and blamed. It is these moments that prick the seal of colonial convention as they dislodge standards of protocol. It is these suspensions from the common sense that make room for subaltern inflections in stories retold in disquieted European voices, tangled by multiple meanings that fold awkwardly into the order of things. Then – as now – they could not be easily read.

Notes

1. An *assistent-resident* was a coveted post for a young man making his way up the ranks of the Dutch colonial civil service. Depending on the region, he might preside over the governance of a sub-region and thus several districts in a residency. In this case, because the *Resident* was stationed a long distance from Deli, and because the East Coast of Sumatra residency covered nearly 10,000 square kilometres, Valck was largely left on his own to manage Deli. Valck's letter was originally filed in the Verbeek Collection which had been given to the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) in the

1920s. Verbeek was a prominent geologist in the investigation of the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883. In the early 1980s, an archivist came across Valck's letter; having found that Verbeek had no experience or contacts in Deli, and that the letter made no reference to Verbeek, it was re-filed in a separate dossier (KITLV, H 1122/Valck.. No other correspondence with, or reference to, Valck had been found.

2. *Stamboeken Indische Ambtenaren*, Part M-330,523; *Album Studiosorum Lugdunum Batavorum*, folio 1362/1363. For these references and most of the documents cited here, I thank Mr. M.G.H.A. de Graff and Ms. F.van Anrooij, both of the Second Section of the Algemeen Rijksarchief who both generously helped me track down Valck's personal and professional trajectory and the correspondence on the Luhmann family murders.
3. Valck is never referred to by name, but the disruptive situation in Deli in 1876 in which he found himself overburdened and without sufficient police reinforcements is referenced by R. Broersma, *Oostkust van Sumatra* (Batavia, 1919); H. Blink, Sumatra's 'Oostkust in Hare Opkomst en Ontwikkeling als Economische Gewest', *Tijdschrift voor Economische Geographie* (1918), pp. 55–156; and W. Schadee, *Geschiedenis van Sumatra's Oostkust*, 2 Vols (Amsterdam: Oostkust van Sumatra Instituut, 1918–19) among others. As he was the most senior local government official in Deli [the Resident still being seated in Bengkalis, a week's travel to the south] all comments on inept management, and backlogged judicial cases, were, in fact, direct references to him.
4. Anonymous, *Deli-Batavia Maatschappij 1875–1925* (Amsterdam: Deli-Batavia Maatschappij, 1925), 12. Also see Schadee (1918–19), 16–17.
5. AR, Mr.6281, urgent, confidential, Director of the Colonial Civil Service to Governor-General, June 18, 1877.
6. KITLV, H 1122/Valck.
7. See Ann Laura Stoler, 'Perceptions of Protest: Defining the Dangerous in Colonial Sumatra', *American Ethnologist*, 12, 4 (1985), pp. 642–58; and Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).
8. Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast*.
9. Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast*, pp. 24, 29. The 1877 Government Almanac lists 176 Europeans in the Residency of the East Coast of Sumatra, 60, 545 Chinese, and 250 'others'. Among government agents were counted thirteen Europeans, *Regeringsalmanak 1877*, p. 214.
10. See R. Broersma, *Oostkust van Sumatra: De Ontluiting van Deli* (Batavia, 1919); and *Oostkust van Sumatra: De Ontwikkeling van het Gewest* (Deventer, 1921), p. 85.
11. This debate went on for years, culminating in the landmark 1880 Coolie Ordinance, the first of many government regulations to harness workers for the development of the expanding mining and the estate industries. Ostensibly for the protection of indentured workers, the ordinance lengthened the contract period to three years, instituted an 'anti-kidnapping' clause to protect planters from 'theft' of their workers by others estates, and in the end did little more than 'legalize the coercive measures already in use'. See Breman's discussion of this ordinance in *Taming the Coolie Beast*, pp. 38–44.

12. AR, Mr.518, Director of Civil Service to the Governor-General, 18 June 1877.
13. Ibid.
14. See Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra: Acheh, the Netherlands and Britain, 1858–1898* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford, 1969).
15. See John Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History 1900–1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). On the repercussions of the blockade, see Reid, *The Contest*, pp. 71–118.
16. Reid, *The Contest*, p. 153.
17. Geen Planter (No Planter), Open Brief aan den Heer H. A. Insinger over zijn aanvallen in the Tweede Kamer tegen de Indische 'Planters' (Amsterdam: M. M. Olivier, 1879).
18. The discussion of Valck's qualifications and the decision concerning his misconduct, transfer, and dismissal appear in the decision of the Governor-General of August 13, 1877, No. 2. The Director of the Civil Service's report 'On the capability of Resident Locker de Bruijne and other civil servants on the East Coast' (AN, mr.6281 dated June 18, 1877) mentioned in this decision is located at the Arsip Nasional in Jakarta. Levyssohn's addendum to the advice of the Director of the Colonial Civil Service (Ag.404/77/geheim) was classified with the Governor-General's decision.
19. AN, Mr. 6281, Locker de Bruijne is also dismissed for his ineptitude in keeping tabs on Valck, for his actions not his beliefs.
20. AR , Mr. 741 , 13 August 1877 Van Rees and Norman Levyssohn to the Governor-General.
21. AR, Mr. 741.
22. AR, Mr. 837, 22 October 1876
23. Anonymous, *Deli-Batavia Maatschappij 1875–1925* (Amsterdam: Deli-Batavia Maatschappij, 1925), 11, my emphasis.
24. AR, Mr. 920, From Assistent-Resident Valck to Resident Locker de Bruine, 29 October 1876.
25. His concerns are well-founded; a year later he is criticized precisely for that delay.
26. George Orwell, 'Shooting and Elephant', in *Collected Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), pp. 154–62.
27. *Datoe* is the term for a Malay village head.
28. John Bowen has suggested to me that the 'Petambiang' cited in this report may have been the Raja Petiam[b]ang, one of the *Gayo kejurun*, which would 'fit' with what Valck reports, See Bowen (1991), p. 62.
29. AR, Mr.741, September 10, 1876.
30. AR, Mr. 844, Report of the Commander of the expeditionary column in Langkat, 21 September 1876.
31. Ibid.
32. AR, Mr. 916, Confidential report of Commander of the East Coast of Sumatra, Demmeni to Commander-in-Chief of the Department of War, 28 October 1876.
33. Ibid.
34. On 'coolie rows' see Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 47–92.

35. AR, Mr. 880, Demmemei to the Chief of Staff, 8 October 1876,
36. AR, Mr. 880, Journal extract from Demmemei, 6–19 October 1876.
37. The cold reception Valck received for accusations against the Deli planters may have had to do with his own past whistle-blowing in the administrative scandal in North Bali (only four years prior to the Luhmann murder). On Valck's father's reputation and Valck's prior career as a civil servant see chapter six of my *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

2

North Indian Lives in the Archives of the Colonial State

Leigh Denault

Introduction: household and family in the colonial archive

The 'colonial archive' of India is famous for its elisions and silences, particularly where the 'domestic' is concerned. If even textual evidence for women's lives or the details of everyday household life is scarce and fragmentary, then surely there would be nothing more difficult than searching for physical traces of a vanished world in an archive whose architects professed a policy of indifference to the domestic lives of their subjects. Yet this is far from the case. As part of a larger project to reassess textual constructions of family and household by comparing these with records of material culture and domestic space, I found myself engaged in just such a search. I wanted to compare new uses of space and material culture to new ideas about private and public lives in colonial north India, to see whether textual rhetoric and visual representations told the same stories.

Part of the problem with the 'colonial archive' as a sole source of information about India's past is that the multitude of information within it seems to be a self-proclaimed, self-contained mirror of reality. As historians we sometimes approach the archive as part of a single project of governmentality, rather than a continually evolving and incomplete body of information which itself reflected ruptures and debates. Even where alternative views, dissenting voices, and unusual perspectives abound, they tend to ultimately be drowned out in historical accounts by official consensus, or to linger on only as tantalizing 'fragments'.

Colonial perceptions of Indian domestic life shaped policy decisions and interactions with Indian society at all levels, but piecing together detailed records of Indian communities from the colonial archive is

a notoriously difficult task. Antoinette Burton, among others, has maintained that in order to access this type of material it is necessary to abandon the traditional archive altogether, to expand our definition of historical evidence and to seek out alternative source material.¹ Proponents of the extreme 'Orientalist' perspective have argued that records of Imperial rule can never reliably be used to gain information about colonized societies because of the biases inherent in European perceptions of the 'other'.² Subaltern studies scholars embraced the idea of reading the colonial archive 'against the grain', expanding on Louis Althusser's concept of 'symptomatic reading' and employing strategies of interpretation that seek out marginalized subtexts, but later worried that reading strategies alone cannot compensate for archival silences, absences and biases.

I would suggest that the depth and variety of archival materials has been underestimated in some of these discussions, and that the colonial archive itself provides some of the tools required to critique lapses, inequalities and prejudice within official records. As Clifford Geertz suggested, a 'thicker' social history must rely on data from a multiplicity of sources to build up a deeper understanding of lived experience in the past. The colonial archive, as a historically constructed entity internally riven by a multitude of perspectives and false starts, disastrous encounters as well as substantive exchanges, cannot be overlooked in building such a history.

As this essay is part of a larger project to re-address notions of archival 'truths' and 'official' histories, I am considering the 'colonial archive' as the sum of the records assembled by the British colonial government for the purposes of administration. This in and of itself represents a vast store of material, housed chiefly in state archives across India, and in the British Library's India Office collection. While many postcolonial scholars have justly suggested an expansion of this notion of the archive for colonial history in India, I will consider this 'official' collection exclusively here in order to suggest that surprisingly rich sources may have been overlooked within the archives of governance.

The prejudices of colonial information projects do negate the importance of these records as a source for social history in India – indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, Indian social and economic history could scarcely operate entirely without them. Diagrams and plans of houses and towns can be found in a number of different sources within the colonial archive, revealing the multifarious engagements of the colonial state with local social institutions. Colonial administrators drew up plans for ideal cantonments for Indian soldiers that were then contrasted

with existing Indian villages. Revenue officers collected information on household composition and material culture in their attempts to survey Indian society as well as Indian economic structures. Sanitation reports from the mid-nineteenth century eclipsed wide variation within Indian domestic architecture by insisting on the existence of 'typical' elite or ordinary houses. By the later nineteenth century, famine commission inquiries, income and house tax surveys, and local censuses also gave rise to attempts to create typologies, each laying claim to hegemony over knowledge about Indian society. All of these information gathering efforts, however, provided new and novel information about Indian homes from the perspective of a unique inquiry. The multitude of sources, ranging from famine relief to industrial development to sanitary engineering, led to different kinds of bias and produced distinctive data which provide, from within the archive, alternative perspectives on Indian social history.

This essay will examine several different types of records which describe, define and prescribe Indian domestic space: correspondence from the 1830s on housing for Indian regiments; debates and prescriptive texts from the mid to late nineteenth-century about domestic hygiene and public health produced by officials in the North-Western Provinces; and records of an urban housing project undertaken by the United Provinces government in 1907 to build affordable, sanitary housing blocks for workers and their families. By examining records of material culture alongside texts from a range of sources within officialdom, I hope to suggest new ways of interpreting the colonial project, and to consider how the archive itself was continually evolving.

The company army and cantonment life in early colonial India

The East India Company based its initial claims to hegemony on its ability to assume the obligations of the Mughal state, both militarily and in supporting dependant aristocratic households, government servants and soldiers – thereby becoming instantly embroiled in the minutiae of the lives of its pensioners. The Company Army often acted as an intermediary institution in such exchanges, and indeed the only means through which the British could exercise control of Indian social spaces. How the British imagined Indian domestic life was, as Betty Joseph has argued, instrumental in the development of later 'Orientalized' rule, and in the construction of the entire fabric of British interaction with Indian society.³ As the Company first learned about the domestic lives

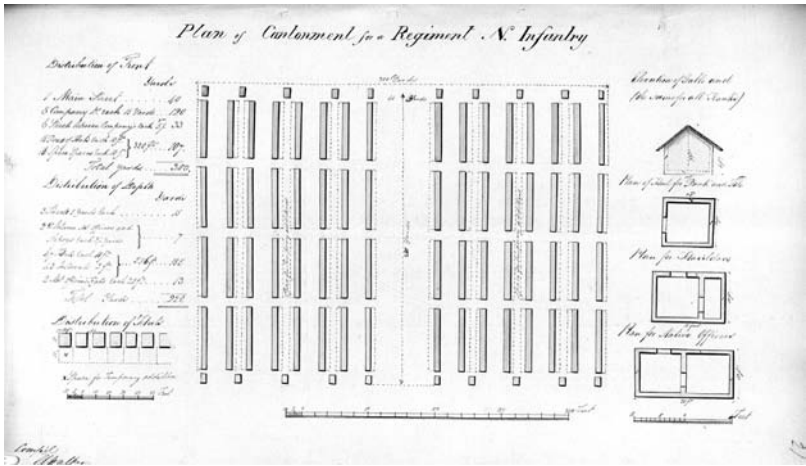


Figure 2.1 Cantonment plan, from Board's Collections, IOR/F/4/1465/57591, April 1833–March 1834. Reproduced with permission from the British Library Oriental and India Office Collection.

of ordinary Indians in the context of the Indian army cantonments and barracks, it seems crucial to return to the rich army records devoted to these early encounters.⁴

The army was a mobile city, complete with its own artisans, merchants and bazaars.⁵ After the Company's successes in 1815 and 1818, regiments began to be stationed in semi-permanent locations throughout the presidencies, and the necessity for plans for housing, sanitary provisions, and hospitals for the soldiers became pressing. According to Lt. Col. E. Hardy, the Quarter Master General to the Bombay Army:

The great change that has taken place of late years in the more settled state of the British dominions in this quarter of India renders the expediency of adopting a more permanent description of quarters...for the native army much less questionable than formerly, on general grounds, and it cannot be doubted that giving them suitable substantial dwellings would increase their attachment to the service besides tending to its benefit otherwise by improving their efficiency through diminished strikings and more body strength.⁶

Earlier, the men had been given hutting allowances, and married men were expected to accommodate their families and organize the construction of a barracks town using cheap local materials. A series of

devastating fires and equally devastating epidemics, however, had convinced the army that brick or stone buildings laid out on a grid of wide streets would be worth the expense. The correspondents set out to redress the ills they perceived in Indian village planning, emphasizing parallel, wide streets, ventilation (often one side of the house was to be left open), and drainage.⁷

The Quarter Master General of the Army was in favour of providing 'pendals', i.e. open tiled sheds constructed of timber frames, instead of granting hutting money. The privates, or sipahis, would then be responsible for putting up temporary partitions for themselves with a partial allowance. The Commander-in-Chief, however, thought that the government should bear the expense of building 'a separate tiled hut for each individual or family'.⁸ This plan would allow the Army to control the materials, house plans, and overall layout of the cantonment. One major general in the 1826 report suggested that allowing the Indian sipahis to construct their own cantonments would enable them to preserve 'their own customs', and incidentally, preserve the army from being forced to take responsibility for policing those customs.⁹ As regiments became increasingly 'settled' into their towns and villages, the government began to consider the benefits of providing fire-proof, permanent structures to its army which would in and of themselves serve as reminders of a substantial military presence in the countryside. Regiments at several stations had already paid out of pocket for tiled roofs, which was taken as proof of their willingness to move to more permanent quarters.

A uniform plan and elevation was drawn up which could be modified for use by the different stations of the corps. An entire regiment could be accommodated within a 300 by 220 yard lot, including space for wide streets laid out on a grid. Huts would be built from wood frames, with brick walls, tile roofs and interior floors raised one foot from ground level. The details of the floor plans, materials and outlay were carefully graded and adjusted for each of the different ranks.¹⁰ The sipahis would still complete their own houses and be responsible for repairs, but under the direction of the regiment's chief engineer. This system was also credited with instilling a sense of individualism and ownership among the sipahis:

The great proportion of sepoy families renders entire privacy greatly valued, besides the effectual separation of castes afforded by the distinct huts: which being also more clearly individual property, their due repair as well as first erection is effected with far greater

convenience by the possessors, and that essential object much more to be depended upon from them, than where it becomes divided among several neighbours.¹¹

It was thus a concern for regulating the 'family life' of the sipahis that made huts more desirable.

Each of the presidency armies implemented similar cantonment plans, which would result in the construction of permanent quarters for Indian regiments in principal towns and villages across India.¹² These model towns became idealized Indian villages regulated and contained within government space. Regimental commanding officers were made responsible for reporting annually on the condition of the cantonment buildings and on authorizing repairs or additions. Most officers responded positively to the idea of permanent cantonments for their troops, putting forward medical and sanitary arguments in favour of the plan. Interestingly, officers felt that rows of open sheds would be preferable to individual huts 'for the sake of regularity and appearance', but it was felt that a grid-plan cantonment would meet these requirements and have the additional benefit of allowing the sipahis control over their ritual practice and purity.

The sheer bulk of the Military Consultations in the colonial archive support the primacy of the Company Army in the production of colonial knowledge and power.¹³ The ideal home for the sipahi was decided after garnering opinions from army administrators, high government officials, European and Indian officers. Indian 'traditions', in this case caste customs and domestic practices, are seamlessly meshed with the newest directives from the army's engineers on sanitation and town planning. Maintaining the ritual status and autonomy of the sipahis was a stated priority for the Company, but the free-standing huts apparently required to maintain caste are integrated into a plan of gridded streets and yards consistent with British ideas of orderly town planning.

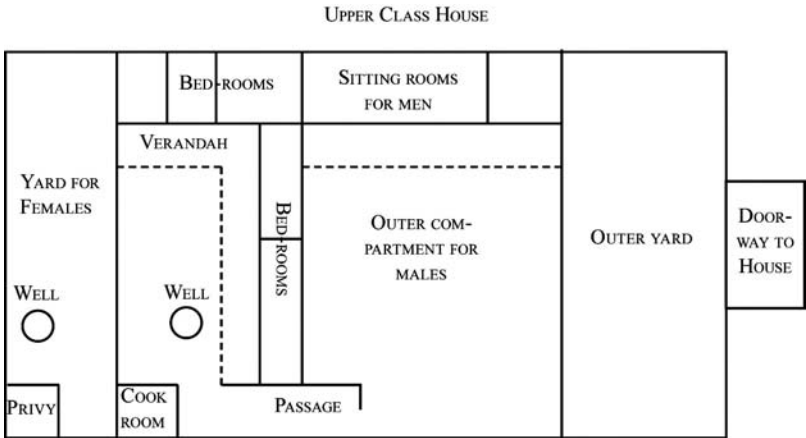
In detailing the conditions which led to the necessity for more permanent quarters for sipahis, the file reveals a great deal about the army's living conditions. In this case, information about the villages constructed using hutting allowances by sipahis and their dependents is conveyed even though it is not the focus of the report. The sipahis themselves are mentioned merely as objects of the proposal, their assent tacitly assumed through anecdotal evidence. The sipahis are not entirely voiceless in the archive,¹⁴ but in this case details about their lives, before and after the new housing programs are put into place,

are incidental to the central theme of their physical placement within a new colonial order. The cantonment plan projects military unity and modernity, and allotments of space based on rank provide daily visual markers of the army's hierarchical power structures. The plan was in effect a visual representation of the perfect sipahi, as well as a perfected Indian village.

Civic administration and reform in Indian municipalities

Presidency governments became more involved in the organization and administration of Indian town and village life over the course of the nineteenth century. Whereas in the early years sipahi regiments and military cantonments had represented the bulk of official British interaction with Indian society, after the 1857 uprising the colonial government increasingly concerned itself with local surveillance and information gathering projects, municipal government, health and sanitation projects and public works.¹⁵ Archival records of these undertakings show a government struggling to document sweeping social changes, simultaneous to promoting its own reformist agendas.

The colonial archive provides evidence of some of these fundamental changes in Indian social organization, particularly when the colonial state felt compelled to more closely regulate Indian localities. By the late Mughal period, residential quarters of north Indian cities had developed a unique culture around the relationship of a household to its mohulla or immediate neighbourhood. Mohullas were separated by gates which in the early to mid-nineteenth century would be closed in the evening, creating a series of nested communities within the city. Outside of one's own household, one's *phatak* or 'gate' marked the next level of intimacy in urban space. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, gates would be closed at night and watchmen were paid to patrol the neighbourhood. Some have argued that the history of north Indian cities is more properly seen as the history of the construction of these collective activities and community spaces.¹⁶ Households within a gate might be composed of groups related by blood, trade, or worship, but by the nineteenth century the inhabitants were increasingly heterogenous as the cities expanded and the influx of new tenants began to outnumber original residents.¹⁷ In 1832, when Prinsep was conducting his population survey of Banaras, he spoke of the mohulla gates being closed only 'in former days', and the Banaras



LOWER-CLASS HOUSE

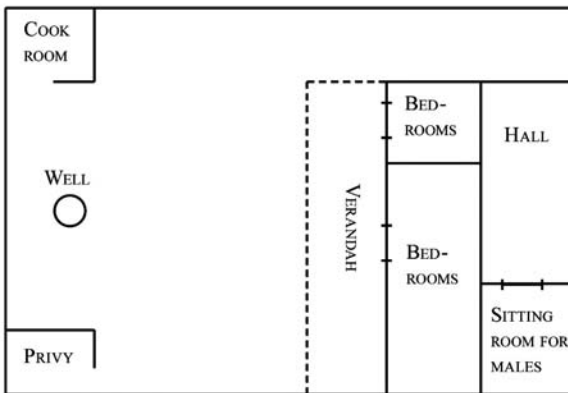


Figure 2.2 Sketches of houses from 1891 Allahabad Sanitation Dept Report, Allahabad Sanitation Dept Proceedings, NWP and Oudh Sept 1891, Nos 1-134, UPSA. Reproduced from photocopy with permission of the UP State Archives, Lucknow.

mohullas were 'not arranged according to any system'.¹⁸ Mohullas remained as units of municipal organization in Lucknow until 1857, when 'rebel' families were punished, their property confiscated and the original character of these mohulla-haveli complexes destroyed. In

its place, British officials rewrote the text of the city, taking over the great households which had been sites of fierce resistance to British troops as government offices.¹⁹

It was in part the breakdown of this mohalla system of municipal governance that had prompted the provincial colonial governments to pass a series of acts between 1842 and 1856 intended to place responsibility for maintaining civic order on urban Indian elites, but this in practice proved a dead letter. After 1857 more wide-ranging policies for municipal administration and sanitation were put into place. In May of 1859, a Royal Commission was appointed to assess the sanitary condition of the army in India. In order to do so, the Commission also surveyed the Indian towns and villages in which army cantonments and barracks were situated, and the report, published in May 1863, painted a grim picture of the state of public health and sanitation in Indian localities.²⁰ The ensuing public health panic among colonial and metropolitan politicians resulted in the creation of sanitary commissions and municipal committees as part of an overall project to survey, reform and control the development of Indian urban space. By the late 1860s, Lucknow (1864), Panjab (1867), and the North-Western Provinces (1868) had major Acts passed reforming municipal administration.²¹ These Acts restructured social, economic and cultural networks in north Indian cities, but they were also in part reactive, responding to the problems stemming from decades of laissez-faire urban development and population movement into the towns.

Sanitation, town planning and the 'typical' Indian house

Images and floorplans of Indian houses were produced to illustrate a variety of official reports and publications. In an earlier period, pension reports demonstrate a preference for a collection of separate buildings loosely organized around a central space among Indian elites. Apart from buildings dedicated to food preparation and animal shelter, uses of space were flexible and the uses of particular rooms varied according to the season, the presence of guests, or during the celebration of a religious festival or ceremony.²² In government sanitation and urban planning records however officials interested in describing typical house types and in prescribing an idealized form for urban families privileged a particular style of building: the rectangular courtyard house arranged around a central open space. Within

this space, officials documented zones of strict segregation (women's quarters, rooms for prayer).

During the latter half of the nineteenth-century the focus of government sanitation and urban redevelopment initiatives shifted to domestic space and practices. In a document accompanying the 1891 report, titled 'Practical Hints for the Sanitary Improvement of the Smaller Municipal Towns in India', it was suggested that attention to 'domestic cleanliness' and protection of clean water sources was the key to preventing epidemics in all municipalities. In larger cities and towns with their own engineers and health officers, sanitary improvements would be based on domestic sewerage and drainage works, water supply brought from distance, surface levelling, paving and cleaning, and surface drainage. Along with the creation of wider roads, tree planting and improved house construction should be encouraged in order to prevent outbreaks of disease and to improve public health.

Sanitary officers found Indian domestic architecture objectionable on several grounds, describing houses as dark and airless.²³ Officials worried that without an accompanying system of domestic surveillance, expensive public works would not be effective because contaminated private wells, privies and courtyards would continue to drain into the public water supply. An 1891 report on sanitation in the towns and villages of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh called for a systematic survey of villages to assess sanitary provisions in place, and to reconsider methods of enforcement for sanitary regulations.²⁴ But house-to-house inspections were also unpopular, (associated as they were with tax reassessments) and so the 1891 report recommended that Indian Municipal Commissioners should take steps independently to ensure that private sanitation drives were carried out. These new regulations also often called for the widening and raising of streets to install paving stones and covered drains, a process which involved 'clearing' sections of the city and relocating the shops and houses which had crowded over the older narrow *galis*. This was also obviously controversial, and the amount of compensation offered to the families and businesses forced to move became another bone of contention. By engaging Indian elites in these efforts, the colonial government hoped to both tap into local information networks and to relieve itself of the bulk of the burden of municipal administration.

Two model house plans accompanied the report in order to illustrate the problems inherent in Indian vernacular architecture (Figure 2.2). Both were reproduced from a manual on Bengali village sanitation. The diagrams emphasize the compartmentalization of Indian homes,

showing separate courtyards and sleeping quarters for men and women and rooms designated for particular activities. The 'typical' lower-class home was a slightly scaled-down model of the elite house, differing in degree but not in kind. In particular, there was still a distinction made between men's space and women's space.

The 1891 report diagrams represent an official consensus on what constituted 'Indian' (now synonymous with 'Hindu') domestic architecture and practice which emerged from a half-century of increasing involvement in local planning and administration. While this consensus is problematic, the sources assembled by the colonial government en route contest this colonial certainty. Ethnographies, vernacular advice manuals and social-realist novels were absorbed into an information-hungry local bureaucracy.

Ishuree Dass, for example, a government official working in the North-Western Provinces, published a book in 1860 with the explicit aim of producing a more local ethnography of Hindu domestic 'manners' in the North-Western Provinces.²⁵ He intended to correct misconceptions about local practice which he believed were hampering government education and reform programs, and his work was encouraged and sponsored by the local government. While Dass described in great detail the wide variations in what comprised a 'family home' and 'domestic practice', he also described a particular elite urban Hindu plan which British officials would subsequently promote as representative of all Indian domestic architecture: 'Wealthy Hindoos living in large cities have great buildings made of stone and baked bricks. These buildings are two or three stories high with rooms all around and an open court in the middle. The roofs of these houses are made in such a flat and smooth way that people can sleep on them at night in the hot season.'²⁶

Dass's ethnography was published just before a boom in official interest in local domestic spaces. From the late 1860s, a raft of publications aimed at policing or reforming local practices began to appear both in Indian vernaculars and in English. As the so-called 'native presses' were more tightly regulated in the post-1857 period, all publications (in theory, and in practice certainly any wishing to apply for government sponsorship) were required to register titles with their presidency government under the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867.²⁷ The North-Western Provinces Government conducted reviews of the published material, censoring some publications while promoting books (via contests with substantial cash prizes) encouraging 'progress' and education. From cooking manuals to advice for new mothers, household

budgets and letter-writers, such books demonstrate that while the self-professed disinterest of the colonial government in Indian domestic space may have been a convenient argument for British politicians, in fact government projects were reaching deep into the fabric of everyday life, and leaving an archival trail of these interactions.²⁸

Matthew Kempson, a particularly active Director of Public Instruction who single-handedly promoted government-sanctioned genres of social reform novels and pamphlets, published an annotated 1884 English translation of *The Repentance of Nussooh*, an Urdu novel by Azir Ahmad first published in 1874.²⁹ Opening with an account of a terrible cholera epidemic in Delhi, the foresighted and progressive Nussooh 'had his cooking vessels re-tinned, and impressed the duty of cleanliness on his household'.³⁰ Describing the further precautions, Ahmad detailed the stock of medicine and expertise, both English and Indian, available to a household trying to protect itself from disease. Nussooh's near-death from cholera, and a dream in which he is called to account by a divine tribunal for his religious and social failings, forces him to reconsider how his household has been run. Every relationship and activity comes under his scrutiny as he struggles with his relatives and dependents to reform their conduct.

In the original 1884 translation, Kempson reproduced a floor plan of a typical North-Western Provinces house 'of the better sort' to illustrate the novel's major setting, Nussooh's Delhi home.³¹ While Kempson bemoaned the lack of ventilation, light and drainage inherent in the house's design in a note, the multi-storied, spacious haveli floor plan which Kempson supplied had little in common with the 'typical' house plans circulated by the sanitation department beyond the clear distinction made between *mardana* (men's quarters or public space) and *zenana* (women's quarters or private space). The illustration preserves the particularity of Muslim elite architecture in Delhi, with multi-functional reception rooms arranged in an elaborate design around multiple courtyards and lattice-work carvings protecting upper floor windows. Yet Kempson could not resist the urge to generalize either, and stated in his note that his illustration 'conveys a general idea of the arrangement of native houses of the better sort in the towns of the N.W. Provinces'.

Just a few years prior to the North-Western Provinces village sanitation report, in 1887–88, there had been an all-India government inquiry into the general health and nutrition levels of India's lower classes. The goal of the inquiry was to determine whether most of India's rural poor were in 'daily want of food', and also whether the condition of the population had in general been improving.³² Titled 'An Inquiry into the

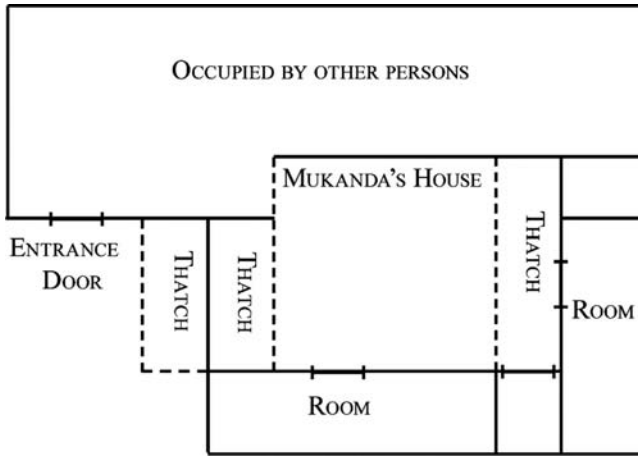


Figure 2.3 Household of Makunda, a Chamar in the Etah District. From Dufferin Report, p. 135. Reproduced with permission from the UP State Archives, Lucknow.

condition of the lower classes of the population' and popularly known as the 'Dufferin Report' after the Governor-General who instituted it, this report marked a break with previous information gathering practices. Rather than collect vague statements, the circular order called for selected officers 'of experience and judgment' to provide 'a full picture of the daily lives of agricultural and labouring classes'. It was particularly urged that the reports not be 'merely statistical' in nature. Officers were given discretion to collect data as they saw fit, although some guidelines were suggested in the report. Some officers chose to collect detailed oral histories in lieu of following survey questionnaires. The interview transcripts recorded by an official in Panjab, several pages long for each household, present a rare glimpse of affect in the colonial archive.³³ Childhood experiences, sibling relationships, hardships, education and apprenticeship and other key events are narrated by heads of household.

William Crooke, then collector for the Etah district, was among those district officers who surveyed rural labourers and landowners, small-scale moneylenders and merchants.³⁴ He conducted oral history interviews to try to gauge levels of migration and general causes of morbidity, as well as changes in occupation. He also made inventories of household property and drew up lists of the household's diet throughout the year. The picture that emerges from Crooke's report and other

similar surveys contradicts the 'typical' house plans published in the 1891 sanitation report and elsewhere, suggesting that uses of space, allocation of resources and property and even the patrilineal-virilocal system were being superimposed over a much more complicated network of relationships.

The house plans which Crooke diagrammed often depicted a group of unrelated families sharing a single compound, only loosely arranged around a central open courtyard space. Judicial records on property and rent disputes in urban areas also suggest that quite often mohullas and compounds were occupied by families unrelated by blood who were for some purposes still considered 'family'. In Crooke's diagrams, rooms were largely multi-functional and men and women shared the same space. Interviews with heads of household revealed that many families had settled in the same village or even compound where the wife's natal family lived, or had travelled from village to village until a local zamindar recruited the family as artisans, labourers or farmers on his estate. Ordinary families, in contradiction to the 'unchanging village India' portrayed in some reports, including Crooke's own later publications, seem to have been by necessity relatively mobile. It was not just during famine years that families took to the road.

The amount and extent of data collected for the inquiry reflects the importance placed on this particular information gathering project by the colonial government. A series of devastating famines from the 1860s through the 1880s had sparked a firestorm of external and internal criticisms of government policy in India, leading to an 'information panic:' beyond census statistics, how could the government actually understand the condition of India's agrarian and labouring classes? The way that the information collected was used offers an interesting example of how detailed local intelligence could be reshaped by the needs of the central government. In the précis of reports compiled to accompany the complete volume,³⁵ the debt-laden condition of Indian farmers is attributed to 'extravagant' expenditure on marriages, rather than the systematic failure of the colonial agrarian economy which the detailed reports suggest. While every report submitted from the localities stated that weavers and other artisans had been forced out of their occupations after facing competition from mechanized factory production and foreign imports, the précis noted optimistically that this fact should not cause anxiety as most had found new employment as wage labourers. Most striking of all, the précis and high-level reports dismissed as overly pessimistic the opinions of North-Western Provinces district officers who concluded that the majority of the population was indeed

one bad harvest away from famine conditions.³⁶ The inquiry, the précis concluded, was made after a series of bad seasons, and was thus not representative of ordinary conditions. While the Bengal report, which presented a slightly more optimistic picture of Indian rural subsistence, was eventually published, the detailed report for the North-Western Provinces was not.

Model housing for workers in up

Government interest in town planning and in the development of model villages continued to increase toward the end of the nineteenth century. Inquiries related to famine relief efforts, government-funded public works projects and sanitation programs had resulted in a slew of documents which suggested new urban housing patterns to match new ideas about behaviour, hygiene, and community which the colonial state hoped to impose on Indian society. In 1907 the Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces (hereafter UP) requested the Sanitary Engineer to develop a series of model house designs for working-class families in growing urban centres.³⁷ The UP government planned to build blocks of affordable housing in order to lure labourers out of crowded old bazaars into re-engineered urban space. The building program would also put the municipalities or the local government firmly in control of neighbourhood composition and of the redevelopment of residential and commercial areas of the cities and towns in question.

Government servants contacted four European companies which had established model villages for their employees near their factories, requesting information about building designs, materials, cost, and how the model houses were received by the workers and their families. Letters were sent to the managers of three textile mills in Kanpur and one in Agra, requesting information about their model settlements for their factory employees, in early 1908. The responses demonstrate how the various information gathering projects of the previous century had resulted in something approaching consensus about the ideal Indian dwelling. The managers described neat street plans laid out on a grid, tree-lined streets, public latrines and adequate drainage, brick and tile work, walled courtyards and protected water supplies as attributes highly desirable to their employees.

The village constructed by Cooper and Allen in Kanpur consisted of blocks of brick masonry 'rooms' with tiled roofs laid out on a gridiron with the houses facing east and west and wide streets separating the rows. Out of 3000 employees, however, only 700 had moved into

the village. The Kanpur Woollen Mills had created a workman's settlement laid out on a 'courtyard system' as well, with some houses featuring private courtyards with individual latrines and water supply. The company held a public competition to select the most popular housing scheme, and then consulted with the government sanitary engineer on the designs. The entire settlement was eventually filled. The Woollen Mills also created two rows of shops and allowed their employees to start up local self-government organizations. In reply to an inquiry by the Factory Commission in 1907–08, the company explained that they provided housing for their workers in order to maintain their worker's health, and that death rates, rates of epidemic outbreaks, childhood illness and respiratory illness were lower than those among city dwellers.

After reviewing the factory model towns, the government convened a committee of local Indian elites was convened to examine the plans and estimates of model houses for occupation by inhabitants of cities, consisting of honorary magistrates, a junior secretary to the Board of Revenue and local reformist aristocrats. Agra became the first to carry out the plan in 1909, creating a plan of 'sanitary houses' arranged along streets in a colony for working-class families. In order to make the houses attractive to future occupants, the factory's contractors and then the UP sanitary engineers based their designs on prevailing trends in elite domestic architecture while incorporating wider streets, covered sewers and drainage, and larger house plots to prevent the 'crowding' which British observers deplored in Indian cities. The resulting plans combined new ideas about sanitation and hygiene with Hindu revivalist ideas about the ideal Indian home.

The houses are described in great detail in the file, although the photographs and plans referred to in the correspondence are missing. One significant feature that the more expensive houses shared was the use of iron joists instead of wooden support beams, iron-work doors, and iron or stone window and door frames 'instead of country wood work'. This trend was more significant than the purely aesthetic change which Maffrey focused on in his analysis. Growse's recorded conversation suggests that the shift in architectural style mimics a corresponding effort on the part of Indian elites to withdraw from community space, the space of the mohulla and merchant characterized by the ornamented wooden mansions which dominated the streets and employed dozens of *mistris* or skilled carpenters and wood-carvers, in order to distinguish elite culture from bazaar culture as well as to display allegiance to the ruling power. The model dwellings thus reflected and promoted new conceptions of class and society as well as novel uses of

space. As Saurabh Dube argued in *Untouchable Pasts*, certain symbols and practices of colonial rule were being appropriated and transformed by local elites.³⁸ These deliberations on government-subsidized urban housing suggest that while archival narratives could exert significant influence on Indian realities, the relationship was not one-sided. Some of the compromises seen in the cantonment debate (i.e. to allow for ritual purity in constructing cantonment plans) recur in the housing projects for factory workers, where a 'standard' template of the ritually correct Indian (Hindu) home has been achieved. Indian aesthetics, too, remained important in the final designs, as workers favoured the courtyard house and refused to move to settlements which did not adopt it.

Conclusion

Through these case studies we can trace a progression in both archival and administrative practice. An interest in reshaping inherited Mughal infrastructure and institutions led to some attempts to superimpose British forms on Indian society, which often provoked a redefinition or retrenchment of Indian orthodoxies rather than the reforms that colonizers initially proposed. In the earlier colonial records which included plans for cantonments and government housing, representations of physical space were ungendered and for the most part uninhabited. By superimposing an idealized template onto 'empty' (and therefore malleable) Indian social spaces, administrators hoped to mould the practices and behaviour of inhabitants to their changed environment. Mid-nineteenth century diagrams of domestic space – found in pension reports and sanitation proceedings, government-sponsored novels and social reform literature – display a very different understanding of Indian domestic space, one which suggests a more evenly matched exchange between Indian elites (as well as factory labourers) and British administrators. Labelled rooms gesture toward domestic practices and religious observance. Sections of the house are marked off as women's or private quarters, versus male or public space. These plans were more nuanced than earlier attempts to create new social spaces *tabula rasa*, and the focus shifted instead to minor sanitary reforms. The information collected for the 1887–88 inquiry marks another transition: the plans which district officers diagrammed are accompanied by complete household inventories and life histories of the occupants. The inhabitants, moreover, 'narrate' their own space, explaining how and when they built their present house, their relationships within the local community, and their domestic practices. The urban housing project plans

developed by the United Provinces government in 1908 further suggest that the British have moved toward designing on an Indian model, but also that many innovations in architecture, town planning and sanitation had been adopted and adapted by Indian elites as a part of an indigenous redevelopment of urban spaces.

The archive unarguably presents a diffracted sequence of political encounters and social changes, and the materials collected were deeply influenced by the prejudices of its creators and the inequalities present in the society it attempts to fix and describe, for the purposes of rule. As Tony Ballantyne suggests, a recognition of inequalities and silences in the archive is crucial in that it prompts us to seek out new sources and methods of interpretation.³⁹ But in refusing to accept imperial claims to hegemony, focus might be profitably shifted away from the archive as a Foucauldian project of governmentality toward the dialogic interactions between multifarious groups within colonial society. Applying Mikhail Bakhtin's work on 'dialogic' texts, Eugene Irschick has argued that there were always two-way channels of communication and negotiation between the British and Indian elites.⁴⁰ One might further argue, as Indrani Chatterjee suggests, that the problem is not that women or subalterns are invisible in the colonial archives, but lies rather in the difficulty of discarding twentieth-century assumptions about local and colonial social forms and recordkeeping practices.⁴¹

The archive acted as the memory of the colonial state during its period of rule, recording its changing policies towards and interactions with Indian society,⁴² and its records are plural, containing the 'small voices' of history as well 'official histories'.⁴³ The records contained within it can and must be read as a narrative of efforts to promote the agenda of that state, its ideological and hegemonic performances and self-justifying rhetoric. But just as colonial administrators were ultimately unsuccessful in superimposing change from above, and were forced time and again to negotiate policies with local power-brokers and ordinary people, the archive is ultimately unsuccessful in promoting a straightforward, celebratory narrative of imperial progress. After the Orientalist and deconstructionist challenge to archival systems of knowledge and power, we may approach the archive not as a record of European conquerors bringing progress and social change to a static, 'pre-modern' society, but as a polysemic and disparate collection of texts reflecting the complexity of a colonial encounter.

The depth and breadth of the archives allows the researcher to test the archive against itself by comparing various kinds of data and inquiry. To borrow Roland Barthes' categories, while the colonial

archive might lay claim to being a 'readerly' or closed text which offers only one possible line of interpretation, we should instead regard the archive as a 'writerly' or open text which contains within its vast and complex records a multitude of possible 'readings'.⁴⁴ While colonial administrators were confined by the resources allocated by the state, and by their own preconceptions, these reductions and omissions do not necessarily render their records invalid. Often bias is most evident in reports summarizing large quantities of detailed local data, or in high-level statistics. In *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Bernard Cohn argues that the British consistently applied a logic of reduction and objectification, 'essentializing' or collapsing complex processes into a few 'metonyms'.⁴⁵ Thus detailed local information was synthesized and politicized as it approached an imperial centre, but initial inquiries preceding the essentializing drive still exist, administrative dead-ends but scholarly gold-mines.

Notes

1. See for example Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Susie J. Tharu and K. Lalita, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, 2 vols (London: Pandora, 1993).
2. John M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
3. Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender*, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson, *Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Ch. 3, esp. pp. 92–96.
4. This argument is indebted to Seema Alavi's interpretation of the Company Army and its relationship with Indian society. See Seema Alavi, 'The Company Army and Rural Society: The Invalid Thanah 1780–1830', *Modern Asian Studies* 27, 1 (1993), pp. 147–78; Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India 1770–1831* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
5. See for example the detailed descriptions of the Company army in Thomas Duer Broughton, *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp During the Year 1809: Descriptive of the Character, Manners, Domestic Habits, and Religious Ceremonies, of the Mahrattas*, A new ed / ed., *Constable's Oriental Miscellany of Original and Selected Publications; Vol. Iv* (Westminster [London]: A. Constable and company, 1892).
6. No. 674 From Lt. Col E Hardy, Quarter Master General, to the Chiefs Secretary to Government, dated 16 Dec 1833, in Board's Collections, IOR/F/4/1465/57591, April 1833–March 1834, India Office Library [hereafter IOL].
7. Mil Letter from Bombay, dated 5th March 1834 No 20, in Board's Collections, IOR/F/4/1465/57591, April 1833–March 1834, IOL.
8. Extract Mil Letter to Bombay, dated 10th Apr 1833 No 26, in *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*

10. Ibid. para. 16: 'Privates 10 by 10 ft, 11 rupees; Havildars 10 by 15 ft, 17 rupees; Native officers 10 by 20 feet; 23 rupees; Walls: 1 foot thick 6 ft high; Gable ends: 9 ditto; Floor: 1 ft raised within; Total estimate for a complete regiment: 8792 rupees.'
11. Ibid. para. 18.
12. The Bengal Government instituted an inquiry for a report on the housing requirements of Indian regiments in 1832.
13. For the importance of the military in colonial information gathering projects in India, see Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
14. See Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India 1770–1831*, Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Evolution of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications; No.43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Sitaram, *From Sepoy to Subedar: Being the Life and Adventures of a Native Officer of the Bengal Army Written and Related by Himself*, ed. Douglas Craven Phillott, trans. Lieutenant-Colonel Norgate (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1911; reprint, 3rd).
15. Indu Banga (ed.), *The City in Indian History: Urban Demography, Society, and Politics* (New Delhi: South Asia, 1991); Narayani Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires 1803–1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981); Siddhartha Raychaudhuri, 'Indian Elites, Urban Space and the Restructuring of Ahmedabad City' (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1997).
16. See Sandra Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 25.
17. James Prinsep, 'Census of the Population of the City of Benares', *Asiatic Researches*, 1 (1832), p. 475.
18. Ibid.
19. Ubbas Alli, *The Lucknow Album. Containing a Series of Fifty Photographic Views of Lucknow and Its Environs: Together with A ... Plan of the City Executed by Darogha Ubbas Alli, Etc.* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1874).
20. The Commission's chief recommendations included the appointment of a sanitary commission in each of the presidencies, and contained detailed instructions on the selection of sites for new barracks and hospitals and the modification of existing buildings according to the sanitary principles laid out in the report.
21. See [chapter 1](#), 'Historical Perspective of Urban Local Government in India', Debidas Nanda, *Municipal Administration in India* (Varanasi: Ganga Kaveri Publishing House, 1998).
22. See for example 'Erection of a New Dwelling House for Prince Muzaffar Bakht at Fatehgarh.' Apr–Jul 1817, Board's Collections, IOR/F/4/603/14493, IOL.
23. No 318/XX1, dated 5th April 1888 From FS Growse, Collector Farukhabad, to Commissioner Agra Division. In Allahabad Sanitation Dept Proceedings, NWP and Oudh Sept 1891, Nos 1–134, UPSA.
24. Allahabad Sanitation Dept Proceedings, NWP and Oudh Sept 1891, Nos 1–134, UPSA.

25. Ishuree Dass, *Domestic Manners and Customs of the Hindoos of Northern India, or, More Strictly Speaking, of the North-West Provinces of India* (Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1860), pp. 118–19.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 118–19.
27. In the preceding period, local officials compiled lists of books published in each presidency on a quarterly basis.
28. These manuals and stories have been explored in the work of Gail Minault and Charu Gupta in North India, and Judith Walsh on Bengali domestic manuals. Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 2nd ed., *Comparative Feminist Studies* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali, *Voices of Silence: Hali's Majalis Un-Nissa and Chup Ki Dad*, trans. Gail Minault (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986), Gail Minault, 'Other Voices, Other Rooms: The View from the Zenana', in *Women as Subjects: South Asian Histories*, ed. Nita Kumar (New Delhi: Stree, 1994), Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Judith E. Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), Judith E. Walsh, ed., *How to Be the Goddess of Your Home: An Anthology of Bengali Domestic Manuals* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2005).
29. Nazir Ahmad, *The Repentance of Nussooh, Taubat-Al-Nasu^h, the Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago*, ed. C.M. Naim, trans. M. Kempson (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
31. Nazir Ahmad, *The Repentance of Nussooh, Translated from the Original Hindustani by M. Kempson*, trans. M. Kempson (London: 1884).
32. Circular No 44F/8–1, dated Simla, the 17th August 1887. From Sir EC Buck, Secy to the Govt of India, Rev and Agri Dept (Famine) to Secretary to Government, NWP and Oudh. In: A Collection of Papers connected with an inquiry into the condition of the lower classes of the population especially in agricultural tracts in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh instituted in 1887–1888. [Hereafter Dufferin Report.]
33. No 263-S Confidential, dated Simla, 23 July 1888. From HC Fanshawe, Officiating Junior Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, to Secretary to Government of India, Rev and Agri Dept. In: Dufferin Report.
34. 'Note on the food and economical condition of the agricultural and labouring classes in the Etah District', by William Croke Esq. Offg Collector, prepared in accordance with the instructions contained in Govt Circular No. 538/I-16 of 12 Jan 1888. In: Dufferin Report.
35. Appendix A, Precis of the Reports Received on the Inquiry made into the condition of the lower classes of the population, pp. 259–83. In Dufferin Report.
36. The Commissioner of Allahabad, for example, noted that there was little between the poor and starvation. Most other officers in the North-Western Provinces reported that even those populations who did well in ordinary years faced hardship if a single harvest failed. Sir Auckland Colvin noted that without some margin available the failure of the rains could also provoke serious famine.

37. Papers relating to the provision of model dwellings for the inhabitants of cities. Misc. Reports Bundle no. 137 8/1907, UPSA.
38. Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780–1950* (Albany, NY: 1998), pp. 17–8.
39. Tony Ballantyne, 'Archive, Discipline, State: Power and Knowledge in South Asian Historiography', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 3, 1 (2001), pp. 87–105.
40. See Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
41. Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Indrani Chatterjee, 'Testing the Local against the Colonial Archive', *History Workshop Journal [Great Britain]*, 44 (1997); Indrani Chatterjee (ed.), *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
42. For an expansion on this idea, see Katherine Prior, 'The British Regulation of Hinduism in North India, 1780–1900' (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1990). Also: Katherine Prior, 'Making History: The State's Intervention in Urban Religious Disputes in the North-Western Provinces in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1 (1993), pp. 179–203.
43. Ranajit Guha, 'The Small Voice of History', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds), *Subaltern Studies IX, Writings on History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 3–6.
44. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: 1975). Also: Roland Barthes, *Pleasures of Texts*, trans. Richard Miller (London, 1976).
45. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

3

Reading Farm and Forest: Colonial Forest Science and Policy in Southern Nigeria

Pauline von Hellermann

Introduction

When examining the records of colonial foresters in Southern Nigeria today, one is struck by the diversity of their views on forest ecology, and in particular on the impact of farming on forests. On the one hand, foresters repeatedly describe the destruction caused by shifting cultivation, so widely condemned in colonial circles at the time. On the other hand, they also reveal a notable appreciation of forest history and of the potentially positive effects of local farming practices, an appreciation that is much more akin to present-day understandings of West African forest dynamics. Insights of this kind, however, had little impact on the forest management policies adopted. How do we explain such discrepancies between different forms of colonial forest knowledge, and between forest knowledge and policy? This chapter seeks to address these questions through a close reading of a range of forestry records produced from the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1950s, carefully considering the context in which different statements were made. In doing so, it draws on and contributes to ongoing discussions about the nature and role of colonial environmental knowledge in Africa that reflect the wider concerns of this volume.

Fairhead and Leach argue that colonial foresters in West Africa fundamentally misread the landscapes they encountered.¹ Foresters assumed that what they declared as the 'forest zone' – a belt of about 150 km in width stretching along the West African coast – would naturally be fully covered in forest if it were not for human presence; they saw the mixed forest and savanna landscapes actually occupying the forest zone as

clear evidence of rapid deforestation and forest degradation caused by shifting cultivation. On the basis of archival and photographic evidence, however, Fairhead and Leach demonstrate that many of the forest islands one finds today are not the last remnants of a once vast forest cover but are the product of careful local management and are growing, rather than shrinking. Indeed, there is today much evidence of a more dynamic West African forest history than previously assumed, with a number of palynological, ecological and historical studies showing that the extent of West African forests fluctuated significantly in recent millennia due to climatic changes as well as human influences.² It has also been repeatedly demonstrated elsewhere that West African farmers have at times enhanced rather than destroyed forests.³ One aspect of this argument, particularly relevant to colonial forestry in Southern Nigeria, is the regeneration of timber trees: as light-demanders many of these regenerate much better in recently farmed land than in closed high forest, and their preponderance in Southern Nigeria at the beginning of the colonial period, as I have suggested elsewhere, was the result of extensive past farming.⁴

Fairhead and Leach acknowledge that similar readings of West African forest dynamics did exist already in the colonial period – in fact they use such observations in support of their own analysis – but they argue that these were gradually marginalized as the dominant negative perception of shifting cultivation became more firmly established in colonial networks, through the transfer of foresters between regions, through forestry journals and conferences, and through exchange between British and French foresters working in West Africa.⁵ Crisis narratives of rapid deforestation then played an instrumental role in justifying colonial intervention in forest management and land expropriation. Similar arguments are made in Leach and Mearns' influential *Lie of the Land*,⁶ which outlines how crisis narratives on desertification, soil erosion and deforestation were generated in the colonial period and played an important role in supporting colonial and postcolonial state intervention. At the same time, its contributors set out to challenge this received wisdom and present alternative, far less catastrophic interpretations of African land use practices and landscape dynamics.

This critical take on colonial environmental knowledge in Africa resonates with wider analyses of colonial knowledge, such as Headrick's Marxist-structuralist interpretation of colonial science as a 'tool of empire', the purpose of which was to strengthen imperial domination and to serve the economic interests of the metropole⁷; with more Foucauldian analyses of how scientific knowledge reinforced colonial

power structures, such as Megan Vaughan's *Curing Their Ills*⁸; and also, of course, with Said's Orientalism's thesis.⁹ In all of these analyses, colonial knowledge is regarded as inherently compromised and of little actual scientific value or interest today because of its inextricable links to empire building.

Whilst such analyses have largely dominated our views of colonial science in recent decades, there are also other, less critical approaches that take more interest in colonial knowledge itself. Richard Grove, for example, explores the emergence of environmental awareness amongst colonial administrators in India, Mauritius and the Caribbean, in which he sees the origins of modern environmentalism and environmental sciences.¹⁰ He also describes how seventeenth-century Dutch botanists learned much from traditional doctors of the Ezhava caste in Malabar, and shows how early European botanical classification systems drew on van Reede's *Hortus malabaricus* which was largely based on Ezhava botanical knowledge.¹¹ In general, attention has focused recently on the production and circulation of knowledge through networks between scientists working in different parts of the empire, rather than solely between the metropole and the periphery. In such 'network' studies colonial knowledge is not necessarily seen as instrumental to policy, or as false.¹²

A more revisionist approach has emerged, too, in relation to colonial environmental knowledge in Africa. Thus, several contributions to Dubow's *Science and Society in Southern Africa* portray individual colonial scientists as showing genuine interest in local people, sometimes actively opposing colonial policies.¹³ Helen Tilley, in her work on the 1938 Africa Survey,¹⁴ describes how a number of colonial agricultural scientists and administrators were highly appreciative of West African farming technologies and had sophisticated understandings of soil and farming ecology. Far from orthodox views being consolidated, she argues that there existed amongst the many advisers of the Africa Survey 'a subtext of criticism, dissent, and debate, which at times challenged the very foundations of British colonial rule in Africa'.¹⁵ And Beinart, Brown, and Gilfoyle recently called for a 'more open curiosity about colonial and post-colonial science', in order to move 'beyond the intellectual inversions so central to anti-colonial and post-colonial analysis'.¹⁶ Studying veterinary scientists in Southern Africa, they claim they were struck 'not [by] the ignorance of colonial scientists, but [by] how much they came to understand and how quickly'.¹⁷ According to these analyses, therefore, colonial science was not always and solely a tool of empire: scientists were often critical of colonial policies, interested in

local knowledge, and producing work that is still of scientific relevance today.

Colonial foresters in Southern Nigeria, too, can be viewed more sympathetically than Fairhead and Leach's analysis allows. They relied on local guides for forest reconnaissance and tree identification, they showed much interest in forest history, and their research into forest ecology is still of value today. Specifically, they found much evidence of the positive effects of local farming practices on tree regeneration, and disparaging views of shifting cultivation did not become established orthodoxies over time, as Fairhead and Leach argued. However, importantly, such views did not disappear, either. On the contrary, continuing warnings against shifting cultivation played an important role in supporting policies, whilst more appreciative understandings of local farming practices were only very partially incorporated into forest policy. By examining the Nigerian forestry records closely, therefore, this chapter shows the extent but also the limits of colonial forest knowledge: it shows both how well – judged by today's standards – colonial foresters at times understood forest and farm dynamics, and yet how little impact these insights had on policy.

At the same time, this chapter seeks to not only describe but also explain the complex dynamics between colonial forest science and policy in Southern Nigeria. Clearly, the relationship between colonial science and policy was not uniform but varied greatly between different phases of imperial expansion and consolidation, between regions and, importantly, between sciences. As Ravi Rajan has pointed out, different colonial sciences had distinct ideological and interventionist traditions,¹⁸ and the generation, circulation and use of colonial knowledge was significantly shaped by these different traditions, as well as by the actual practices of different sciences. Yet so far, this aspect has been rather insufficiently explored in the discussions about the role and value of colonial science outlined above. I here suggest that both the diversity of forest knowledge amongst colonial foresters in Southern Nigeria and the lack of translation of some insights into policy can be explained by the particular traditions and practices of colonial scientific forestry itself. In the following, therefore, I begin with a discussion of colonial scientific forestry, exploring how its aims and practices shaped the production of forest knowledge in Nigeria. I then look in detail at the range of statements on forest ecology foresters made over the course of the colonial period in Southern Nigeria, and examine them in the different contexts in which they were made: forest reconnaissance in the 1900s, forest reservation in the 1920s and 1930s, forest regeneration

in the 1940s and 1950s, and, lastly, outside the direct policy context altogether. Many foresters wrote prolifically in journals such as *Farm and Forest* and *The Nigerian Field*, and it was often here that they displayed an interest in forest history and forest and farm dynamics that is absent elsewhere.

Scientific forestry and forest science

The particular traditions of West African forestry can be highlighted by a brief comparison to agricultural science and policy. Both broadly shared the same goals of natural resource development, and were both, to use Michael Worboys' term, imperial applied sciences,¹⁹ but they were nevertheless very different in outlook. Agricultural policy in West Africa aimed mainly at fostering local production, through a variety of incentives and development schemes. Here, expert knowledge played an important role in the development of better crop varieties or soil preservation techniques, but agriculture itself was to be practiced by local farmers. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that some colonial agricultural scientists developed a keen interest in existing farming practices, and wrote rather positively about some of them.²⁰

Colonial forestry, in contrast, was highly state-centred and practiced by colonial foresters themselves, rather than local farmers. In order to ensure a large and permanent timber supply, forests were to be protected from farming through reservation, and then put under scientifically developed working plans. These principles of scientific forestry originated in seventeenth-century Germany and eighteenth-century France, and had been adopted and developed in nineteenth-century India.²¹ When forest departments were subsequently established in other parts of the British Empire, they were mostly set up by foresters trained in India. From 1895, empire foresters also received training at the Royal Indian Engineering College at Coopers Hill, and from 1905, at the Forestry Institute in Oxford. They were part of a network of professionals who read and wrote in empire forestry journals, and who met at conferences. Forestry was thus a globalized science that rested on an established template of practices implemented throughout the empire. In this context, official interest in local land management practices was either absent or derisory, since the whole point of scientific forestry was the replacement of these practices with scientifically developed, centralized management.

Yet at the same time, scientific forestry involved not only global but also local forest science.²² It was highly practice based, and the different

activities it consisted of – forest assessment and the identification of economic species; demarcation of reserves; scientific experimentation with regeneration schemes; forest enumeration; drawing up of working plans; and the application of scientific regeneration methods – all involved spending time in the forest and gaining local knowledge.²³ In the early years especially, this meant that foresters relied considerably on local help, as they needed guides to direct them through forests and to help them with tree identification. Moreover, foresters' preoccupation with ensuring permanent and growing timber production provided them with a sharp lens on forests, focusing their attention on forest composition and regeneration. It is thus also not surprising that a number of foresters recognized the role of farming in the regeneration of timber species, and generally developed interests in forest history.

These different global and local elements of scientific forestry – the establishment of externally developed management practices but also prolonged *in situ* engagement with forests – resulted in very different statements about forests and farms. At the same time, the fact that many local insights into forest ecology were not translated into policy can also be explained by the particular character of scientific forestry. Scientific forestry was so firmly based on forest reservation and state forest management that it would have been quite unthinkable for foresters to suggest a radically different policy, one through which they would potentially have made themselves redundant. The role of local research was to improve an already largely determined system of centralized management, rather than devise it from scratch; supplementing, not prescribing policy. Moreover, even if foresters recognized that farming had played a role in the regeneration of timber species in the past, their aim was to come up with an improved, rationalized system of forest regeneration that would ensure much higher rates of timber production in the future. Such dynamics between forest knowledge and policy, however, were not constant but played out differently in different phases of forest management, as will be explored in more detail in the following.

The beginnings: learning about the forests of Southern Nigeria

First attempts at logging regulation and forest reservation in Southern Nigeria began in the 1880s in the Lagos Colony and in 1897 in the Niger Coast Protectorate, after the subjugation of the Benin Kingdom and its extensive rubber and mahogany forests.²⁴ But it was in 1903,

with the appointment of H. N. Thompson, who had 12 years of experience in Burma, that proper scientific forestry was introduced. The attitude he took to this task can be ascertained from a speech he gave to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce a year after his appointment:

Luckily for the future inhabitants of Southern Nigeria it has been decided not only that their forests shall be organised and looked after, but also that they shall produce timber and other minor forest produce. [...] My tours through the forests of Southern Nigeria have convinced me of their value to the native communities and ourselves, and of the great future before them if they are systematically organised on Indian lines.²⁵

However, the systematic organization of forests on Indian lines he envisioned – all forests reserved and managed according to carefully designed working plans – required considerable time and preparation. In the first two decades, Thompson's most immediate task was to gain good knowledge of the forests under his charge, so as to identify both forest tracts suitable for reservation and further possible timber species. For both of these purposes, Thompson and his fellow foresters relied heavily on local help and guidance. Thus, for example, foresters were told about useful timbers by local guides, as can be ascertained from the fact that many timber species were known by indigenous names only, before they were given Latin or common names.²⁶ In general, foresters did not inspect forests on their own, but walked through them with local guides whose local knowledge they drew on considerably. At the same time, Thompson brought with him much experience from his many years in Burma, as well as certain ideas about Nigeria's previous forest cover, shifting cultivation and its effects on forests. These different elements are reflected in Thompson's first overall assessment of the forests of Southern Nigeria in the 1906 Nigeria Handbook, which is worth quoting extensively:

Taken as a whole and compared, say, with the forests of eastern tropical Asia, it cannot be stated that Southern Nigeria is at the present time overstocked with high forests, though, undoubtedly, it was once extensively wooded with primeval forest. The wasteful system of farming in vogue in the moist zone, the extensive migrations into it of tribes from the interior, and the constant local shiftings of the inhabited areas, on account of internecine warfare, have resulted in a general transformation of the forests from the primeval type, to which

they once belonged, to the irregular patchy condition in which they are now found. [...] extensive forests like those met with in the moist zone of Burma, through which the forester can wander for days without coming across the traces of human habitation, are practically absent here. [...] The bulk of the vegetation in these evergreen forests consists of secondary growth that has sprung up since the native farms were last abandoned. [...] the majority of the wooded areas consist of a comparatively low dense secondary growth, topped here and there with large trees which have on account of their size and the difficulty in felling been left as 'standards', when the land was cultivated. It will easily be understood that such interference with the growth by man has left the forests in a very irregular condition, and that the well graded age classes so essential for the production of a sustained supply of produce are in the case of the more important economic trees practically absent. The clearing of the land for farms and their subsequent abandonment has in general resulted in giving a favourable start in the struggle for existence to species other than those that happen at the present to be of value to man.²⁷

Through his experience in Burma as well as consultation with local guides, Thompson recognized that the forests of Southern Nigeria were not primeval forests; rather, they were largely secondary forests, and the product of centuries of warfare and population movement. In this respect, his historical understanding of the forests is strikingly similar to that of ecologists today. But whilst he sees that the forests are now secondary, he nevertheless assumes that there was once large-scale primeval forest cover. This has since been degraded and destroyed by 'the wasteful system of farming in vogue in the moist zone', resulting in a very low stock of economic timber species. His very negative perception of shifting cultivation reflects the generally highly dismissive attitude towards shifting cultivation in empire forestry circles, and in particular in Burma, where, in the context of colonial attempts at forest protection for teak production, shifting cultivation was considered to be highly destructive.²⁸ Overall, Thompson assumes that farming degraded the forest, stating again at a later point that 'secondary growth is invariably of a drier character than the original vegetation'.²⁹

However, he had already noted in 1904 that in unexploited, high forest tree regeneration was in fact very poor:

The constitution of the stock, so far as the African 'mahogany', 'cedars' and 'walnuts' are concerned, is very unsatisfactory, and

typical of what usually occurs in an unexploited tropical forest. Instead of there being a regular gradation of plants from the seedlings upwards to the exploitable size, we have seedlings, suppressed saplings, and, comparatively speaking, a large number of trees of exploitable size, the intermediate gradation being practically absent.³⁰

Thompson therefore did actually recognize early on that many timber species – light-demanding in the early stages of growth – were not regenerating well in high forest. Moreover, continuing his forest tours, Thompson repeatedly found evidence that human settlement and farming could have a positive impact on forest composition. In 1907 he visited the Ijaye forest, about 20 miles north of Ibadan.³¹ Here he found that the forest, ‘an area considerably over 100 square miles in extent’, was ‘fairly rich in the more important economic plants usually found in the moist, evergreen forests of Southern Nigeria’. Thompson was very surprised ‘to come across such an extensive patch of evergreen vegetation in the middle of the ‘dry zone’’. He then learnt that

the forest occupies in part an area that was once the site of a very flourishing and important town, known as Ijaye, which was destroyed some sixty years ago, during a period of internecine warfare³²: from historical data, the exact date on which this occurred is known, and consequently the approximate age of the forest that has grown up on the abandoned sites of the town, and its suburbs can be estimated with a fair degree of accuracy.³³

Later, travelling in the area bordering Dahomey, Thompson again noted that forest regrowth on abandoned settlements contained a high proportion of economic species.³⁴ These insights did not lead him to any fundamental reinterpretation of the effects of farming on forest composition. But he did, over time, revise his opinion about shifting cultivation, as this passage in the 1922 Annual Report of the Nigerian Forest Department shows:

To a forester fresh from the Eastern tropics, the most pernicious system of agriculture known: a system generally referred to under the comprehensive title of shifting cultivation. There is no doubt a great deal to be said against this practice of ‘extensive’ cultivation and perhaps some of the most vivid impressions made on such an officer when he first arrives in the country is the appalling and, apparently,

wasteful destruction of Forest Growth that prevails here under that system of agriculture.

As years go by however and more experience is gained of the country the impression gradually changes to one of a more tolerant character as it becomes effected by the recognition [...] that the name 'shifting cultivation' [cannot] with strict accuracy be applied to the system of farming – consisting of a very definite, though short rotation, of consecutive crops, including a leguminous one, followed by a longer period of rest for the recuperation of the soil by the establishment on it of secondary forest growth; a process involving in all rotations of 6 to 9 years – that prevails extensively in the more populated parts of the country. In the absence, especially in the Southern Provinces, of cheap animal manures the rather long fallow period is an absolute necessity and until the people are taught a better system they must per force continue a practice which after all appears to be one of the most suitable under the circumstances.³⁵

Thompson's different statements reflect his many sources of knowledge – his training as a scientific forester, his experience in Burma, and his continuous learning on the ground in Nigeria. Altogether, these meant that he recognized the dynamic history of forests of Southern Nigeria, and although he was highly dismissive of shifting cultivation to begin with, he softened his views over time. This did not alter his approach to forest management, however, which remained firmly committed to 'systematically organizing' forests on Indian lines, as he had promised upon his appointment. Systematic organization required, above all, forest reservation, in the context of which he wrote quite differently about shifting cultivation.

1920s and 1930s: reservation, taungya farming and shifting cultivation

From the 1920s, scientific forest management began to slowly take off in Southern Nigeria. A new generation of properly trained professional foresters arrived, and a first research station was set up at Sapoba in the Benin Division in 1927. These changes were part of an increasing professionalism in both British colonial administrations generally and in empire forestry in particular.³⁶ International empire forestry conferences begun to be held³⁷ and new forestry journals were launched. At the same time, forest reservation, rather sluggish up to then, became a high priority in Southern Nigeria.³⁸ The urgent need for reservation

was therefore stressed again and again in the 1920s and 30s, and the best way to do this was to draw attention to the destruction caused by shifting cultivation. It had already featured prominently in Lord Lugard's Forestry Memo of 1917, which discussed the important Forestry Ordinance of 1916:

[...] Nigeria, at a comparatively recent date, possessed immense forests of extremely valuable trees which have been recklessly destroyed, chiefly by the pernicious system of 'shifting cultivation'. [...] The destruction is yearly proceeding on an immense scale, out of all proportion to the real agricultural needs of the population.³⁹

With the 1916 Forest Ordinance, Lugard had attempted to give the colonial government more sweeping powers to create reserves than ever before. In this context, shifting cultivation is described in the most catastrophic terms possible, as if the large-scale forest reservation the Ordinance called for needed to be justified as much as possible.

Following the Ordinance, the forest department put much effort into the creation of reserves, which were still very few in number. In these years, contrary to his reflections in 1922, Thompson's annual reports state repeatedly that 'thousands of square miles are denuded annually' through farming.⁴⁰ When Thompson retired in 1927, his successor Ainslie took up the same mantra:

In the last year's report attention was drawn to the fact that the high forest area of Nigeria was being destroyed by the axe and fire of the shifting cultivator at a rate of 2,000 square miles a year. The total evergreen high forest area of Nigeria is estimated to be some 60,000 square miles, so that it is obvious that provided this destruction is not checked the forests of Nigeria, excepting the reserves, will in a very few years have become things of memory only. [...] The rapid extension of reserves is the only way in which this menace can be held in check, and in this case it is a race between conservative activities of the Forest Department and the destructive activities of the shifting cultivator.⁴¹

Such evocative statements, and the image of the race between the 'conservative activities of the Forest Department and the destructive activities of the shifting cultivator' may well have helped to spur on forest reservation, which indeed became much more successful in the 1920s and the 1930s. In the Benin Division alone, over 60% of land

was reserved by the mid-1930s.⁴² Once this was achieved, it is noticeable that the evils of shifting cultivation were no longer mentioned in the annual reports of the Nigerian forest department. But in colonial forestry in Africa as a whole these evils remained a powerful image to justify state control over forests. Foresters continued to evoke these even when they and other colonial scientists had gained better knowledge of the effects of local farming practices. This is evident, for example, in E. B. Worthington's *Science in Africa*, published in 1938, which he compiled with the help of different experts.⁴³ In his introduction, he describes how many systems of shifting cultivation developed in Africa were highly successful at combating soil erosion and could not be bettered by science; and this theme is again taken up in the chapters on soil science and botany. But the chapter on forestry, which was partly drafted by foresters, still condemns shifting cultivation and the forest destruction it causes, and calls for further reservation.⁴⁴

However, in the context of trying to find silvicultural methods that would foster the regeneration of economic species, rather different statements were made about shifting cultivation. Thus in his 1924 Annual Report, Thompson quoted the following resolution from the British Empire Forestry Conference held in Canada in 1923:

The practice of shifting cultivation, except when controlled as an integral part of Forest management is a serious menace to the future of certain portions of the Empire. At the same time this Conference recognises that, if strictly controlled shifting cultivation may, under certain conditions, be made to serve a useful and even necessary purpose in Sylvicultural operations, particularly in connection with the formation of plantations. When applied to such useful ends this Conference favours its encouragement under control.⁴⁵

A similar message came from a congress held in Stockholm in 1928, at which it was stated again that uncontrolled shifting cultivation caused extensive damage in tropical and sub-tropical countries. At the same time, attention was drawn to 'the excellent results obtained in certain countries by utilizing the practice of shifting cultivation for the establishment of forest plantations'.⁴⁶ These countries were Kenya and in particular Burma, where such methods were known as the Taungya system.⁴⁷ Nigerian foresters, too, began to experiment with the Taungya system at the Sapoba research station, and from 1935 introduced it in larger scale as part of the Benin Forest Scheme.⁴⁸ Under the Taungya system, one acre plots of reserved land were given to farmers to farm,

whilst foresters planted seedlings of Mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*) and Sapele wood (*Entandrophragma cylindrica*) in between. After a year or two of cultivation, farmers had to abandon the plots so that tree seedlings could grow.

The above statements and the adoption of the Taungya system show that there was a definite recognition of the beneficial effects of farming on the regeneration of economic species. But Taungya did not present a wholehearted endorsement of shifting cultivation, only a highly regulated and state controlled version of it. Moreover, it was applied only on a limited scale and seen more as a measure to reduce land shortages and local resistance to large-scale reservation, rather than as an integral part of forest regeneration. Working plans remained focused on other, more scientific methods.

1940s and 1950s: the height of scientific forest management

Following the Colonial Development Act of 1940, something of a 'second colonial invasion' occurred in the British colonies in Africa.⁴⁹ In preparation for eventual independence, new governmental institutions were established and existing ones extended, involving a large-scale infusion of technical experts. The forest department of Nigeria had more money and more staff than ever before, which allowed, for the first time, large-scale design and application of working plans throughout Nigeria. In Southern Nigeria, these working plans largely focused on the Tropical Shelterwood System (TSS), a natural regeneration system originally developed in Malaysia. Designed in conjunction with regulated logging activities to foster the regeneration of economic timber species, TSS involved five sessions of climber-cutting, two poisonings and two regeneration counts before exploitation, and three sets of climber-cutting, two poisonings and three regeneration counts after exploitation.⁵⁰

TSS was soon applied on a very large scale, much to the satisfaction of the Chief Conservator R. D. Rosevear. However, it soon became evident that despite all these efforts, the results of TSS were at best mediocre and often disappointing. The underlying problem, as Rosevear saw it in 1951, was how

intrinsically poor these so-called rich forests are with less than one useful tree to the acre and a yield that is never more than a twentieth and often as low as a fiftieth of what would be expected from a

European forest [...] [E]ven the 'rich' forests of Benin have less than a tenth of the volume of good timber to the acre that they should have.⁵¹

This remark, in some ways reminiscent of Thompson's earlier assessment, fully conveys Rosevear's frustration with the forests he was trying to manage. This emerges even more from an article he wrote in the *Information Bulletin* a year later:

the fault of the forests is their lengthy history of disuse. There is no orderliness in them and they are rich only in the sense that an uncropped fruit tree in its season is for the moment rich. The mature and often overmature trees of today can be of little or no use to coming ages. They will have rotten or gone. It is they that occupy too much of the forest and the sooner they can be got rid of the sooner can the forest be more fully stocked and brought to a logical regularity.⁵²

In the course of TSS, Rosevear and his colleagues thus came to recognize fully the difficulty of forest regeneration in high, closed forest. Silvicultural treatment like TSS was undertaken with precisely the aim to create more open conditions for economic species, but in contrast to farming it was hugely cumbersome and labour intensive, and produced only mixed results.

At the same time, through the large-scale application of TSS inside reserves, Rosevear also inadvertently gained some insights into tree regeneration outside reserves. In order to secure the co-operation of logging companies in working plans, Rosevear had agreed to a period of so-called 'salvage felling' outside reserves: whilst reserved forests were treated with the first stages of TSS, logging companies had a free hand outside reserves and could cut as much as they liked. This coincided with, or perhaps actually resulted in, a huge timber boom, with so many trees being cut and exported that for the first time in its history the Department was actually in profit. This led Rosevear to reflect:

No one would have supposed twenty years ago that Nigeria's present vast export of timber could be furnished, as it is, very largely by 'salvage' trees. There are doubtless great numbers of useful and valuable trees scattered throughout the forest belt though never in sufficient concentration or covering a sufficient area to make reservation possible.⁵³

Here, Rosevear was presented with clear evidence that the more farmed areas with younger secondary forests in fact contained many economic trees. But he dismisses these, because they are 'never in sufficient concentration or covering a sufficient area to make reservation possible'. As a scientific forester, he cannot abandon the idea that farm and forest are supposed to be quite different spheres, open farmland on the one hand, forest that is reserved and managed, as permanent forest estate, on the other. Consequently, he tries to justify salvage felling as the use of trees that would eventually be felled during farming operation anyway.

At the moment Nigeria is living largely on a wasting capital – trees on farmlands, on lands that are being turned over to cocoa, trees that in the nature of things must disappear before advancing agriculture and can never be replaced.⁵⁴

Rosevear's comments convey strongly what he perceived to be his own role, and that of the Forest Department as a whole: to build up a strong forest estate so that a developing Nigeria, in which food and in particular cash crop farming would inevitably increase, would still have a permanent timber supply to meet both domestic demands and generate exports. In these aims, and the language he employs, he is very much part of not only scientific forestry, but also his generation of colonial administrators who were particularly 'development-oriented'. So although he had perhaps more evidence than anyone else before him that economic trees tended to regenerate better on abandoned farmland than in closed high forest, this in itself was of no real importance to him as a forester. His concern was to create a much larger timber supply than farmland trees could ever furnish in the long run. He and his colleagues in Nigeria and in timber producing areas throughout the tropics continued to aim for a complete transformation of forests through scientifically designed regeneration methods; a transformation that would create more orderly, modern forests, producing large amounts of timber continuously. The way Rosevear wrote about forest regeneration both inside and outside reserves was heavily shaped by this overall project and the frustrations he experienced in the course of it. Outside work, however, he wrote quite differently.

After work: foresters and forest history

Whilst their commitment to the overall project of scientific forest management prevented colonial foresters in Southern Nigeria from

fully developing their insights into forest dynamics in policy documents, they discussed these quite freely when writing outside their work context. Foresters wrote in a range of publications, in particular in journals such as *Farm and Forest*, and *The Nigerian Field*. *Farm and Forest*, originally *The Nigerian Forester*, was a discussion forum for colonial foresters modelled on *The Indian Forester*. *The Nigerian Field* was founded in 1930, with the original intent to encourage ‘interest in the flora and fauna of Nigeria’. It became a forum in which colonial administrators and others who became members of the Nigerian Field Society wrote about the flora and fauna of Nigeria, about curious incidents and adventures they had experienced, and generally about a wide range of things that struck them as interesting about Nigeria. Still published today, there has over the years been a large input from foresters in this journal, in the form of many informal articles on their experiences as forest officers.

Farm and Forest gave foresters and agricultural officers the opportunity to discuss broader questions relating to forest and farm ecology. It published a prolonged and heated discussion on the effects of fire on forest regeneration, titled ‘The Burning Question’, in which quite diverse opinions were voiced, some arguing that burning was not the evil practice it was often perceived to be.⁵⁵ There was also an article by P. A. Allison, then Assistant Conservator of Forests, on natural forest regeneration after farm clearing on local farms. Allison described how he had visited Ajue village in Oluwa Forest Reserve, Ondo Division, and enumerated three plots of seven, fourteen and twenty year old farms. From this he came to the conclusion that

the vegetational type resulting from farming the rain forests shows a definite increase in several quick growing timber species such as *Triplochiton*, *Celtis* and the *Albizzias*.⁵⁶

Articles such as these, though few in number, show that some foresters were more interested in – and appreciative of – local farming practices than forest management itself could accommodate.

Farm and Forest also contains a range of historically oriented articles by the botanist R. W. J. Keay, based at the Ibadan forestry school, on subjects such as the origins of the Sobo Plains, and the vegetation history of Old Oyo.⁵⁷ But it is in *The Nigerian Field* in particular that foresters reveal their wider interests. Thus in 1943, it published an article on Edo botanical knowledge by R. H. Hide, then forest officer in the Benin Division, which demonstrates the extent of his interest in and

engagement with local forest knowledge.⁵⁸ And again, a whole series of articles here is testament to foresters' interest in forest history.⁵⁹ J. F. Redhead, a forester in the Benin area in the 1950s and 60s, describes how in the course of his work he came across many of the *iya* earthworks (moats and walls) that are found throughout the heartland of the former Benin Kingdom.⁶⁰ Discussing the history of the Benin Kingdom as a whole and its gradual decline from the seventeenth century onwards, Redhead speculates that

It is likely that, when the Benin Kingdom went into decline, settlements now marked only by ditch and mound earthworks, began to be abandoned. Existing mature forest, within or near these earthworks, is not likely to be older than the beginning of this period. [...] Historical accounts and tradition, and the presence of many ditches and mounds throughout the forests of Benin Division, point to the former existence of a very large population.⁶¹

Redhead then goes on to discuss the tree composition of a sample plot in Usonigbe Reserve south of Benin City, through which an old *iya* runs. He comes to the conclusion that the forest indeed appears to be about 400 years old, dating from the time when the Benin Kingdom seems to have gone into decline.

D. R. Rosevear was also very interested in forest history. In an article published in *The Nigeria Field* in 1979, he describes how, when he was first stationed at Oban in the East of Southern Nigeria in 1924, the forest seemed imposing and primeval, but he had a very different impression when he came back in 1946.

What I had in my inexperience looked upon as glorious virgin growth, dating from the Flood, quickly revealed itself to my better experienced and disappointed eye as nothing more than secondary growth of moderately good quality.⁶²

He then noted the prevalence of two trees which were much older, and writes:

The forest made it clear to me, like reading a book, that the entire region had once been heavily populated, so densely in fact that the whole, except perhaps for the more inaccessible upper portions of the hills (which I myself never visited) had been intensely farmed, leaving no surplus area of undestroyed forest. What had become of

this population; and why the two untouched species, obviously carefully preserved hangovers from the original forest?⁶³

He suggests that it was slave trade through nearby Calabar port that had depopulated the area. Rosevear published several other articles conveying his interest in forest history and local history generally, including in old stone sculptures he came across in the Cross River forest in the South East of Nigeria.⁶⁴ His interest in forest history is a far cry from his frustration with the 'intrinsically poor' forests of Southern Nigeria in his capacity as Chief Conservator, as discussed earlier.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to contribute to debates about the role and value of colonial environmental knowledge in Africa by exploring the diversity of foresters' knowledge and its complex relationship to policy through a detailed chronological analysis of forestry in Southern Nigeria. In the early twentieth century, scientific forestry was only just beginning to be established, both in Nigeria and in the empire as a whole, and Thompson and other foresters were new to the forests of Southern Nigeria. In this period, one finds both preconceived ideas about the detrimental effects of shifting cultivation but also many detailed descriptions of Thompson's tours on the ground, written in a more open, learning way than in later periods. In the 1920s and 1930s, empire forestry as a whole became professionalized, and first regeneration experiments were started. The adoption of Taungya farming indicates some limited recognition of the benefits of shifting cultivation, but in the course of urging for further reservation, shifting cultivation is condemned more than ever at this time. In the 1940s and 1950s, with forest reserves and working plans finally in place, shifting cultivation as such was no longer on the agenda. Through the large-scale implementation of TSS and the salvage felling outside reserves this entailed, foresters gained plenty of evidence about the relatively poor regeneration of timber species in high forest side reserves, and their relative abundance outside. These insights, however, merely added to the frustrations of Rosevear and his colleagues, increasing the task they perceived before them. It was only outside work that foresters speculated freely on forest history, in forums such as *The Nigerian Field* which were never meant to have an impact on policy.

This analysis, then, agrees with Tilley, Beinart, and others' re-evaluation of colonial environmental knowledge, in that in the course

of their work foresters gained many insights into forest ecology and history that are still of relevance today. However, it also reveals the limited impact of such insights. Foresters in Southern Nigeria never became critics of the chosen course of forest management but remained its main architects, and continued to evoke the negative effects of shifting cultivation when it was expedient to do so. The Nigerian material, therefore, serves as a useful reminder that the relationship between colonial science and policy in Africa was more complex than either Fairhead and Leach et al.'s or Tilley, Beinart et al.'s analysis allows for: here, science was a 'tool' of empire but also generated independent and pertinent insights, whilst scientists developed diverse interests in local knowledge and history but nevertheless remained firmly committed to imperial goals.

This chapter then also sought to *explain* this complex relationship, to a greater extent than has been done in the debates so far. In particular, it focused on showing how the specific aims and practices of scientific forestry shaped the generation and use of different forms of global and local forest knowledge. On the one hand, as already much explored in the literature, scientific forestry involved the global circulation of knowledge through forester's training, conferences and journals, and the global implementation of more or less uniform management practices. On the other hand, as this chapter has demonstrated, colonial scientific forestry was also a very local science: in their initial exploration of Southern Nigerian forests in search of potential timber species foresters relied heavily on local guides and knowledge, and continued to spend many hours working in and observing the forest. These different local and global elements of scientific forestry resulted in very diverse statements about forests, and in discrepancies between forest science and policy. It is not surprising that in their prolonged search for methods of regenerating economic timber species foresters gained sophisticated insights into forest ecology and history, but also that they did not translate these insights directly into policy. Their whole aim was to transform Nigerian forests into highly productive units, and this aim, they believed, would be achieved through modern management practice and not by letting local people farm within the forest as before – even if they recognized that past farming had facilitated to the growth of economic timber species. Ultimately, forest management was concerned not with forest history but with the forests' future, and this future was one of centralized scientific forestry that had little space for past local management practices.

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Part II

Indigenous Voices and Colonial Records

4

Insights from the 'Ancient Word': The Use of Colonial Sources in the Study of Aztec Society

Caroline Dodds Pennock

When the Spanish conquistadors invaded Mexico in 1519, they found themselves confronted with a society who regarded the fundamentals of civilization in an entirely different way. Not only did the Aztecs practice mass human sacrifice but, according to many European commentators, they also lacked many of the markers of a civilized society.¹ Prominent amongst these indicators was writing. According to the arch critic of the Indians, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, 'These people possess neither science nor even an alphabet, nor do they preserve their history except for some obscure paintings, nor do they have written laws, but barbarous institutions and customs.'² In reality, the Aztecs possessed a complex and sophisticated system of recording, but these indigenous 'books' were rarely recognized as 'writing' by their Spanish conquerors.

Lacking an alphabetic language, the Aztecs relied heavily upon oral and visual culture in transmitting their values and histories; lavish pictorial documents combined artistic, phonetic, and symbolic values to record religious, historical, genealogical, mythical, and administrative materials.³ Oral culture was critical to the transmission of knowledge, but this knowledge was also inextricably tied to texts and prominent individuals relied upon detailed documents to help them recall information or 'to sing the pictures of the books' as an indigenous song rather more eloquently expressed it. According to the chronicler Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, who claimed to be the grandson of Moctezuma II, his informants after the conquest could remember songs and texts because 'the ancient men and women, our fathers our mothers...told them, repeated them, had them painted for us also in their books'.⁴ For the Aztecs, writing was a compound act, merging visual, textual, and oral composition.

The great corpus of indigenous documents which was the product of this creativity was devastated by the earliest conquistadors and missionaries. Convinced of the potentially corrupting nature of the Aztec material and fired with religious zeal, they indiscriminately destroyed religious and secular records alike. This sweeping antipathy was particularly characteristic of the first flush of the conquest however, and after this fervour had subsided a number of scholars, particularly missionary friars, began seriously to collect and collate information about pre-conquest societies and to try to understand indigenous beliefs and cultures. This was a time of both confusion and creativity. As the world began to open up, a global process of exchange began and, in this vibrant synthetic and creative environment, the first alphabetic records of Aztec culture were produced. Ironically, the passionate friars who sought to wipe out the 'pagan' rituals and beliefs of the pre-conquest world were also key instruments in their preservation for history. Striving to understand their charges, these religious men created remarkable records of Aztec life. The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs in 1521 was therefore a watershed not only in Mexican history, but also in its historiography, as a fundamental transition from iconographic Aztec script to European alphabetic text brought the very nature of writing into question. The moment of the Spanish invasion caused a rupture with the past, breaking traditions of recording and remembering, and creating a rift which has troubled historians ever since.⁵ The historian who hopes to reach across this divide to discover the Aztec world is faced with the challenge of working primarily from sources which were produced or, in some cases, reproduced under the aegis of European influence.

Amongst historians of the post-conquest period, the interpretation of colonial texts, especially those in Nahuatl (the Aztec language, and a widely spoken lingua franca amongst the Central American peoples), has flourished in recent years and our understanding of Nahua communities has moved on apace as indigenous perspectives have increasingly become the focus of ethnohistorical studies.⁶ As sources for pre-conquest society, however, the colonial alphabetic texts (a term I use to distinguish them from alternative forms of visual and pictographic 'text') have become increasingly unfashionable as fears of Eurocentrism and the absence of incontrovertibly 'indigenous' written testimonies have threatened our ability to trace Aztec attitudes and ideas. Especially in the past three decades, since the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, colonial documents have rightly been problematized as sources for indigenous society. Said's assertion that all documents are 'representations, are embedded first in the language, culture, institutions, and the

political ambience of the representer' is undoubtedly valid here and it is critical to recognize the context of these documents and remain aware of their mestizo nature.⁷

Unfortunately, the consequent challenge to historical 'truth' which has stemmed from such arguments has led to the increasing unpopularity of sixteenth-century texts as sources for pre-conquest society, as texts written in Spanish or under Spanish domination have become inextricably linked with a narrative of subjection and resistance which frequently disregards the indigenous contribution and fails to recognize the agency of conquered peoples. In the past three decades, the belief that colonial texts form only a narrative of colonial concerns has meant the neglect of these unique documents and scholars have turned increasingly to the perceived clarity of archaeology and to the more 'authentic' vision of pictorial sources from contemporaneous Mexican cultures.⁸ The widespread practice of human sacrifice in Aztec culture has made these postcolonial debates more than usually fraught as 'neo-Mexica' groups have attempted to 'reclaim' the indigenous past, maintaining that histories of violent practices are European inventions designed to justify conquest.⁹ But despite the undoubted value of material and artistic evidence and the validity of challenges to uncontested colonial narratives, the alphabetic texts of the colonial period have an important role to play in the study of Aztec society. I cannot agree more strongly with Cecelia Klein when she writes: 'To refrain from trying to understand pre-contact Latin American history so as to avoid Eurocentric misrepresentation of the "other" is ... to foreclose all hope of ever perceiving the full range of human representational practices.'¹⁰

This is not to say that the early alphabetic texts should not be approached with genuine caution. Scholars such as Serge Gruzinski have rightly removed the colonial documents from the simplistic framework of a superimposition or opposition of European forms and indigenous ones, identifying them as products of a unique creativity in their own right. Unfortunately for those of us who hope to access the Aztec world through these texts however, Gruzinski's work also highlights the futility of attempting to reach back to the pre-contact world from such sources, emphasizing the irretrievably mestizo nature of these texts.¹¹ I would argue, however, that by acknowledging the mixed heritage of these documents it is possible to rehabilitate them as sources for pre-conquest Aztec culture. By recognizing and engaging with the complex nature of colonial sources, it is possible to address some of their conceptual and theoretical difficulties and to move towards their greater

comprehension. The explicit acknowledgement of the mestizo nature of these texts, whilst it cannot wipe away the difficulties of colonial corruption, permits us to address underlying Eurocentric preconceptions and hopefully to reintegrate these texts into the study of Aztec society. With careful handling, these sources can provide important insights, insights which cannot be offered through the methods of other disciplines, and in attempting to trace, so far as is possible, the Aztec experience of daily life, it is necessary to return to these documents. Although undoubtedly problematic, these sources offer a unique opportunity to gain insights into the individual and personal perspective and so, while they must certainly be handled with care, they also deserve to be revisited and reinterpreted. In the essentially oral culture of the Valley of Mexico, imagery, ceremony, and ritual activity were vital elements of existence, but language was also essential and, through careful work with the sources, it is even possible to access the words of the Aztec people themselves.

One particularly important set of sources are the records of the *huehuetlahtolli*, the 'ancient word' or 'speeches of the elders' which were collected by early colonial chroniclers and missionaries. These are the great speeches which structured Aztec life, marking key points in both their individual and collective existence and through these ritual discourses we can perhaps hope to hear the voices of the Aztecs and to access the rhetoric, poetry, and song which were so deeply embedded in their culture. The Aztecs were highly expressive people with a sophisticated oral culture. The first words of children were greeted with joy as markers of full entry into the community, and elegant and elaborate speech was taught in the institutions of the comprehensive educational system which embraced all children.¹² The ability to speak eloquently, within the great traditions of Aztec oratory, was a fundamental skill to anyone with aspirations of public office and even ordinary people were expected to be gracious, restrained, and articulate. Speech and text were closely tied together for the Aztecs and, in the priestly *calmecac* schools, youths were taught to read and to write the beautiful codices, to interpret their pictographic, ideographic, and phonetic signs, and to memorize the great histories, myths, and teachings of the nation with the help of the painted books. The *huehuetlahtolli* were vital components in this system for the transmission of ideals and information from generation to generation; these ritual dialogues and formal speeches marked important moments of transition in the lives of Aztecs, from birth and marriage to the investiture of a new *tlatoani* or ruler. The official orations appear frequently in the early alphabetic sources, and offer the

opportunity to hear the words of the Aztecs, albeit in a formal and carefully structured fashion.

The nature of the *huehuetlahtolli* has been the subject of significant debate, and recent work has inclined to the view that the genre, if not in all cases the substance of the discourse, is of pre-Cortesian origin.¹³ The speeches appear in the work of a number of early chroniclers and notable similarities between different transcriptions have helped to corroborate the content of the texts.¹⁴ Not all historians have been convinced, however, and the authenticity of the speeches has frequently been challenged. Based on her analysis of the implicit Christian messages of the recorded *huehuetlahtolli* Louise Burkhart rightly asserted that to assume 'that the texts are... verbatim pre-conquest discourses would be naïve'.¹⁵ Her suspicion is undoubtedly justifiable, and indeed is a precondition for the analysis of these challenging texts, but I would argue that such caution need not necessarily equate to a rejection of these sources as a channel to access pre-conquest ideologies.

It is vital to acknowledge the mestizo context in which these documents were researched and recorded, taking account not only of the curtain of colonialism, but also of the possible indigenous influences and intentions in the construction of these texts. Even if it were possible to remove any colonial misunderstanding, interpretation, corruption, or omission from the early accounts, leaving a 'true' record of the information which the authors received, the possible agendas of the informants inevitably remain obscure. In the volatile environment of sixteenth-century Mexico City, a host of potential motives for dissimulation existed, from a desire to defy the colonial authorities to an attempt to present pre-conquest traditions in the most positive possible light, in what Pierre Bourdieu described as the process of 'regularization' by which colonized people attempt to conform to the ideals of the dominant group.¹⁶ Over and above the possibility of deliberate misdirection, the effects of colonialism on indigenous testimony or colonial recording are extremely difficult to determine. Although Christianizing tendencies are sometimes relatively accessible, it is impossible simply to peel away the other European influences which are present in the sources. The available texts are compound creations, products of the synthesis and syncretism of cultures which occurred in Central Mexico in the sixteenth century. Responding to fresh cultural ideas, absorbing, adapting, and creating, missionary chroniclers, their informants and their assistants produced unique documents which display both continuity and originality.¹⁷

Particularly notable amongst the early chroniclers is the Franciscan friar, Bernardino de Sahagún. A renowned recorder and interpreter of

Aztec culture, Sahagún arrived in New Spain only eight years after the Spanish invasion when he still had access to considerable numbers of indigenous informants with significant memory of pre-conquest practices. Alongside his tireless evangelical and missionary work, Sahagún dedicated his life to investigating, understanding, and recording the culture of the indigenous people he encountered. With the assistance of scores of informants and the youthful indigenous 'trilinguals' who had learned Spanish, Nahuatl, and Latin at the Franciscan college at Tlatelolco, Sahagún produced an impressive corpus of ethnographic material, most notably the 13-volume *Florentine Codex* (or the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* as it is sometimes known). So conscientious and methodical was his approach to the study of Aztec society that it has earned him a reputation as the 'creator of a rigorous methodology for ethnographic research'.¹⁸ A commemorative stone, laid in the cloister of the University of Salamanca on 12 January 1966, describes Sahagún as 'the father of anthropology in the New World' and, although he was not the first of the chroniclers of Aztec culture, the extensive Nahuatl and Spanish texts he produced are certainly the greatest of the sources which have survived.¹⁹ The popularity of this material has wavered over the years as scholars have focused more or less on the corrupting potential of the colonial context in which it was produced.²⁰ Sahagún's dedicated efforts have frequently been the subject of admiration, but the limitations of his viewpoint have been a source of constant concern.

In the case of the *huehuetlahtolli*, the great scholar of the early missionary historians Georges Baudot has suggested that the transcriptions made by Sahagún are particularly accurate; made as they were 'when much of the millenarian dream had been shown to be impossible, [he] did not hesitate to transcribe them literally, just as they were, and therefore with a deep idolatrous resonance'.²¹ The sixth book of the *Florentine Codex*, the book of *Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy*, contains a rich collection of *huehuetlahtolli* which cover a wide range of subjects and circumstances. This, the second-largest book in the codex, records, in broadly chronological order, speeches which were given at significant moments during the lifecycle, from the words addressed to a pregnant woman by her midwife, parents, and other relatives, to the homilies appropriate to the appointment of a new *tlatoani* (ruler), and the cautionary advice given by parents to their children upon the occasion of their coming of age. These ritual orations form an indispensable corpus of information for the examination of social norms, although their usefulness is more apparent as a source for public ideals than private realities. But

although the speeches are certainly an expression of official standards and morals, sensitive consideration of their content and the context of their transmission enables us to flesh out our picture of the personal relationships and experiences of Aztec families and individuals.

One particularly interesting group of discourses in the book of *Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy* is the exhortations of guidance which were made to young Aztec men and women when they reached the 'age of discretion'.²² The exact age meant by this regularly used term is not clear, but in view of context and content, it seems likely to be the age at which young men and women were deemed ready for marriage, the time when they were thought to be reaching maturity and capable of assimilating for themselves the nuances and implications of social behaviour. Combining devout and elaborately poetic language with practical advice and traditional wisdom, the *huehuetlahtolli* instructed young Aztec men and women in their respective roles and responsibilities and helped them to find their place in the world. This small group of speeches exemplifies the issues surrounding the analysis of the early alphabetic texts, illustrating the many challenges and multiple layers of meaning which may be found in these fascinating documents. Methodically presented and formal in tone, these speeches have frequently been used for the analysis of 'official' ideals, but they can also be used to deepen our understanding of individual interactions and personal expectations, demonstrating the many values and complexities of these early colonial texts as sources for pre-conquest Aztec society.

The *Florentine Codex* contains six chapters of *huehuetlahtolli* addressed to children by their parents 'when they had already reached the age of discretion'. Each chapter is prefaced by a brief introduction by Sahagún, who considered the speeches to be 'very good discourse...especially useful for the youths, for the maidens'.²³ This commendation of the moral values transmitted in the *huehuetlahtolli* reveals explicitly the editorial hand behind these texts, which frequently purport to be verbatim transcriptions. This tacit, although at times possibly unintentional, influence must be carefully considered in any analysis of the colonial sources, but an analysis of the content of the speeches does not suggest a significant degree of European textual corruption. Although these discourses certainly urge young people, particularly girls, to discretion and virtue, the overall picture they present is a far cry from the penetratingly patriarchal nature of Spanish social expectations, making it highly unlikely that this depiction of Aztec life was imposed by editorial intent.

Urgings to chastity, decency, and good behaviour were presumably largely responsible for Sahagún's approval of the discourses, but even apparently conventional urgings offer an array of perspectives which permit us to see beyond the formal and conventional. As well as the usual appeals for purity and decency, a considerable degree of self-possession and composure was apparently demanded of every female. In an extremely familiar scene, a mother urged her daughter:

Thou art not to travel in great haste, nor art thou to amble; for [to amble] achieveth pompousness; [haste] meaneth recklessness... But when thou findest it necessary, go swiftly, use discretion. Jump at thy jumping place in order that thou wilt not become a fat one, an inflated one.²⁴

Although women were required to be graceful and unhurried, indolence and obesity were an undesirable quality even for noble ladies. In a world of activity and energy, the occasional necessity to act with haste was acknowledged and, even in the most privileged of households, the luxury and lethargy implied by being overweight were unacceptable. Appealing to her daughter's vanity, the mother betrays an almost modern attitude to female fitness; sadly we have no more information about the 'jumping place' which is so reminiscent of modern attitudes to physical fitness and regular exercise.

In his introductions to the chapters, as well as expressing his approval (or in some cases disapproval) Sahagún reveals one of the most prevalent and problematic propensities of the early sources – the likelihood that they are derived from and biased towards elite informants. Unlike other chapters concerning birth and pregnancy, the forewords to the coming-of-age discourses suggest clearly that the 'exhortations' in question were uttered by members of the nobility, in particular the 'rulers'. In compiling his work, Sahagún regarded the collaboration of his indigenous informants as vital; he saw them as the 'sieve' through which his work was sifted for accuracy. Unfortunately, although perhaps inevitably, the majority of his collaborators were derived from the elite group of indigenous people who had been educated in the traditional *calmecac* schools and were therefore familiar with the history, rhetoric, ritual, law, and religion of their culture. Although undoubtedly an invaluable source of information, the students of these schools were mostly of noble birth, although some talented commoners also attended the *calmecac*, and there is therefore likely to be an unintentional bias towards noble perspectives in the material.

We must therefore remain aware of the possibility that the *huehuetlahtolli* may refer to a limited section of the population, but there is significant evidence which suggests that the precepts laid down in the discourses may legitimately be extended to other sectors of society. While status undoubtedly impacted significantly on individuals' day-to-day experience, Aztec civilization was continually reliant upon community co-operation and interaction and in many ways noble existence differed from others only in economic terms. The underlying responsibilities and obligations of all men and women were remarkably consistent, shared moralities and ideals stretching across boundaries of rank. It was fundamental to the nature of Aztec society that each person was assigned their proper duty and place and the essence of this tenet appears to have been substantially unchanged amongst the elite. The father's speech to his daughter admonishes her to obligations of conscientious industry which seem remarkably similar to those of her common counterparts. She was admonished to hold vigil at night, to offer incense and wash the mouths of the gods, and to sweep the house diligently (both a religious and a household obligation).²⁵ These are the chores and duties of the domestic sphere, the realm of woman, and although her home may have been more luxurious than the average, the lot of a noblewoman was clearly far from indolent. The father's instructions to his son also advocated conscientiousness and industry in his obligations to the gods: 'By night thou art to rise, thou art to pass the night awake... And thou art to turn quickly to the sweeping, thou art to take care as thou art to hold vigil, as thou art to arise, in the offering of incense.'²⁶ Urgings regarding wakefulness and diligence are conspicuously similar for men and women of all classes; religious observance was the responsibility of both sexes at all levels of society. Sweeping, the offering of incense, and the maintaining of vigil were tasks related intrinsically to religious conviction; such practices were common throughout Tenochtitlan and are a ubiquitous element of daily life in the sources. Every individual was responsible for maintaining the beliefs of the community, and the centrality of faith to Aztec life dictated that religious conventions were applied at every level of the social hierarchy. Social proprieties were also expected throughout society and, in a culture where success was dependent on community interaction, the law was used to enforce many of the ideals advocated by parental discourses, revealing their broad relevance. The strict application of the death penalty for adultery is perhaps the most prominent of these enforced ideals.²⁷ Therefore, although there are grounds to suggest that aspects of the early alphabetic sources are derived principally

from noble informants, the material derived from these perspectives should not necessarily be dismissed as purely elitist in its relevance.

Three key interactions are revealed in the six chapters of *huehuetlah-tolli* that were addressed to children at their coming of age: father and son; father and daughter; and mother and daughter. Analysing these texts in a purely structural sense, the absence of a mother–son interaction is perhaps revealing. Many western cultures have made much of the significance of the maternal bond, especially in the modern era with reference to its Freudian connotations. There seems little reason to doubt that a powerful and organic connection existed between mother and child in Aztec culture. Women were the primary carers of unweaned infants and even noble mothers nursed their babies if they were able to.²⁸ Beyond infancy, however, childcare was divided by sex in Aztec culture, and fathers assumed direct responsibility for their male children at an early age. This gendered distribution of education may be responsible for the lack of a mother–son discourse in the *Florentine Codex* as for a mother to resume a formal instructional role at the point of her son reaching maturity would presumably be considered inappropriate. Theorists who argue that parallel childcare was designed to prevent the corruption of ‘pure’ gender identities might also contend that the absence of female influence at such a vital transitional stage is reflective of the more critical nature of purity to, or perhaps the greater susceptibility to corruption of, masculinity.²⁹ The speeches also reflect social preconceptions and practicalities – Sahagún’s informants were mostly (perhaps exclusively) male and, in both European and indigenous eyes, it was rarely fitting for a woman to make any formal public declaration; the vast majority of the *huehuetlah-tolli* were intended to be delivered by men. The nature of the advice also helps to explain why it was more likely to have been delivered by a father than a mother – the advice largely addresses practical issues of male life, which a father would have been better equipped to tackle, and much of it deals with issues of sexuality. It seems unlikely that young men would have been any more willing to accept sexual advice from their mothers in the Aztec world than today!

The dual educational system does not account for the unbalancing presence of a father–daughter discourse, however, and perhaps the most convincing explanation for the absence of a mother–son discourse is a simple one. The father’s exhortations to his daughter appear to have been primarily moral and ideological in nature, whilst the mother was responsible for giving practical advice, as one who knew the conventions and expectations of women in the world. The father gives equiva-

lent pragmatic advice to his son, as seems reasonable and sensible, whilst a second speech provides ethical guidance. The nature of the paternal dialogues with both son and daughter therefore suggest that it was the father's role to convey broader ideological and principled messages in all cases, helping to explain the absence of an 'official' mother-son interaction. Whilst moral responsibilities certainly did not lie outside of women's scope, issues of preservation of familial and ancestral honour (which preoccupy the father's *huehuetlahtolli*) were principally, and certainly publically, the province of men. Women were fully integrated into personal and household rituals honouring the ancestors, but the public maintenance of dignity and lineage was usually a male matter. It was the duty of both men and women to live by the ideals of their ancestors, but whilst women were responsible for the preservation of purity and virtue in the home, it was the men who were chiefly obliged to safeguard such ideals in the public sphere. The absence of any formal motherly discourse to male children is therefore perhaps explicable in the sense that it was deemed unnecessary. Father and mother each gave practical advice to the children of their respective genders, in accordance with the parallel gendered system of upbringing, but it was the obligation of the father to convey ideas of family duty. This is not to say that women were exempt from the transmission of such ideas, but it does not appear to have been considered their function in a formal sense; theirs was primarily rather a collaborative and corroborative role. The mother's supportive role is made even clearer in her words to her daughter, in which she confirmed and upheld her husband's advice, investing his counsel with seemingly irresistible authority. She urged her daughter to heed her father's words, 'Take them, guard them, place them by thy heart, inscribe them on thy heart'.³⁰

The absence of a formal mother-son interaction from the *huehuetlahtolli* is interesting, but perhaps the most intriguing of the relationships exposed by these discourses is that of the mother and daughter. The nineteenth chapter, in which a mother speaks to her daughter, is unusual in this group of exhortations, and amongst early texts in general, because it represents a purely female interaction. Although certainly recorded by men, and therefore potentially corrupted by their mediating perceptions, this passage offers a rare chance to discern the voices of women. Most indigenous records are dominated by male voices, or occasionally by the recording of female words through a male narrator. This chapter is extremely valuable because, at least theoretically, in its original context women were responsible for both its transmission and reception. The chapter technically records a formal oration, but it is also

an account of an intimate and individual moment of communication between mother and daughter. Appealing to her daughter's emotions as a means of engaging her interest, the mother's ostensibly official advice shows warmth and tenderness.

And behold a second word which I give thee, which I say to thee, my child, little one. Look to me, for I am thy mother. I carried thee for so many months. And when they were ended I was lulling [thee] to sleep. I was laying thee in the cradle; I was placing thee on my thigh. And certainly with my milk I gave thee strength.³¹

For many years, the distinctively bloody nature of Aztec culture has tempted history to place them beyond the norms of human social behaviour, accounting for their brutal rituals by removing them from the expectations of civilization. The discourses have been acknowledged as personal interactions, but their compassionate or intimate nature has been diminished and their participants dehumanized, or at least treated somewhat perfunctorily and collectively, reducing their individual and emotive potential. Formal ceremonies and punctilious addresses have been unquestioningly accepted as indicative of the assiduous ordering and restraining of society to bend it to the bureaucratic will.³² Interpretations of the *huehuetlahtolli* have been influenced by this dehumanization; inevitably, the early alphabetic sources lend themselves more obviously to interpretations of official standards. Passages such as the mother's words to her daughter are vital to our understanding of Aztec society. The *huehuetlahtolli* were not sterile recitations, but fluid dialogues infused with human interaction and connection and they repudiate assertions of inhumanity and widen our comprehension of those aspects of life which are the most common, and yet often the hardest to discern. The compassion and closeness in the mother's words are evident, even though they are framed in formal rhetoric.

In the mother's advice to her daughter regarding matters of communication and proper performance in speech, the multiplicity of possible angles from which the early sources may be approached is revealed.

As thou art to go, thou art not to look here and there, not to look from side to side, not constantly to look upward, nor art thou to be a hypocrite. Nor art thou to put hatred in thine eyes; thou art not to put hatred in thy face. Look joyously at everyone. And also, that no one will have occasion to despise thee, put anger in the spirit at the proper time. And behold, never concern thyself with words; let what

is said be said. Do not speak with others; pretend that thou dost not hear it. With thee will the words end.³³

A dense passage of advice, this is a complex picture of the manner in which young women were expected to interact with those they encountered. Beyond the cursory encouragements always to look upon people with joy and to set hatred aside, the mother's words also carry more subtle implications and propositions. Although happiness and openness were important, unwarranted passivity and thoughtless cheerfulness could also be causes for disgust. At the appropriate time, 'anger in the spirit' was a social necessity and a clear expectation. Although rarely involved in warfare, in the military Aztec world women were presumed to possess the capacity for proper strength and rational anger, provided it was experienced for an appropriate reason and in a fitting fashion. In ordinary circumstances, however, young women appear to have been urged to remain aloof and impartial when they were goaded or tempted to anger. The mother exhorted her daughter, not to silence, but to reticence in the face of negative words; she was not counselled against all speech, only damaging words. The tendency to gossip and quarrel was obviously perceived as a potential problem in the communal and cooperative Aztec world.

The father too admonished his son to take care of the disruptive potential of speech, but men's relationship with language was regarded as distinctly different. Whilst the advice, to ignore gossip, is very similar to that of the mother to her daughter, the potential consequences of incautious speech for men reveal a distinctly gendered inference. Whilst girls were exhorted to reticence for principled reasons, injudicious speech for a man appears to have potentially serious consequences: '... if thou lendest a word, if thou speakest among others – on thee it will be laid; ... and thou wilt be taken, thou wilt be seized. And furthermore thou wilt be imprisoned'. In the constantly competitive male arena, a young Aztec had to be aware of the possibility that he might be 'made a fool' and bring injury upon himself.³⁴ Personal interest rather than simple honour appears to have prevailed in the male arena.

The structured and methodological manner in which the texts are organized, excerpted from the more complex realities of life in which they would have been delivered, sometimes serves to obscure the distinction between civic ritual and private interaction, but the diverse layers of meaning in the *huehuetlahtolli* offer us a fascinating window onto the Aztec world. Life in the Aztec capital is frequently portrayed as violent, harsh, and laborious, but the words of a noble father to his

daughter, although certainly making the afflictions of life apparent, also offer a positive and hopeful perspective.

Hear well, O my daughter, O my child, the earth is not a good place. It is not a place of joy, it is not a place of contentment... In order that we may not go weeping forever, may not die of sorrow, it is our merit that our lord gave us laughter, sleep, and our sustenance, our strength, our force, and also carnal knowledge in order that there be peopling.

All make life gay on earth in order that no one go weeping... For there is living on earth; there is one's becoming a lord; there is one's becoming a ruler; there is one's become a nobleman; there is one's becoming an eagle warrior... Who is just yielding to death? For there is the doing of things; there is the providing of livelihood; there is the building of houses; there is labor; there is the seeking of women; there is marriage; there is the marriage of women to men; there is the marriage of men to women.³⁵

The parallel urgings to young men and women by their parents were designed to prepare them for marriage and the father's words to his daughter offered hope that a conjugal life might provide happiness and contentment to alleviate the suffering which was the fate of every Aztec. For women, the future held torment and affliction: there was no uncertainty about this. Unambiguously harsh, the speech nonetheless allows some 'laughter', suggesting the possibility of a productive and contented existence. Indicating the remarkable complexity of the sources, although this homily was addressed to a young woman, the majority of the gifts offered by the gods to ease life's trials appear to be chiefly masculine in nature. Perplexingly, the ruler offered to his daughter as consolation for the tribulations of mortal existence a number of aspects of human life which she was unlikely ever to experience, primarily associated with the military career which was inaccessible to young women. Industrious men were called to public success, whilst diligent women were expected to toil in private. Able to earn pride and fulfilment in martial and political success, Aztec men possessed opportunities for accomplishment beyond the realm of household and community to which women were largely restricted. However, energy and activity were apparently sources of satisfaction for both sexes and, in the catalogue of domestic tasks and desires fundamental to individual existence, marriage seems to have been the culmination and aspiration of personal endeavour, the root of Aztec success and satisfaction. And,

despite urgings to young women of decorum and purity, one apparent source of happiness was to be found in 'carnal knowledge'. Sexuality was a source of joy for both men and women, albeit only within the appropriate forum of marriage.

The content of the *huehuetlahtolli* varies considerably depending on the context, as does their value to the historian. But even a brief study of such a small excerpt from this rich source demonstrates an intriguing range of both explicit and veiled interactions. Despite their potential textual corruptions and omissions, alphabetic texts such as the *huehuetlahtolli* remain one of the most comprehensive and most contemporary sources for Aztec society extant. Although they are a detailed and fascinating source, however, there are obviously considerable difficulties with the texts, not least the mediation of colonial influence which must inevitably affect them. The evangelical agenda of the friars who recorded the *huehuetlahtolli* inevitably led them to promote aspects of indigenous culture which supported the 'humanity' of their charges and their capacity for conversion. The desire to find shared moral authority is clear in Sahagún's explicitly expressed approval for some of these 'very good discourse[s] of admonition'.³⁶ Unfortunately, in the current postcolonial climate, fears of such tacit Eurocentrism have at times led to the failure of scholars to even attempt to peer past the filters of colonialism and perceive the Aztec world. We are right to fear inaccuracy, misapprehension, and presumption – only by recognizing these problems can one hope to make careful and critical use of the documents available. Especially in attempting to reach beyond the public and political to reach the minutiae of private existence and personal life, an abundance of issues obscures and complicates the evidence. The effects of colonialism on indigenous testimony are extremely difficult to determine, but indigenous regularization, complications in communication, and Catholic Spanish perspectives all undoubtedly impact on our sources to a great or lesser degree. But without wishing to overstate the reliability of the early texts, it seems unlikely that the view of Aztec society they present was invented by the Spanish, either by intention or omission, so dissimilar from European realities is the picture they present. Sahagún defended his writings from his detractors and those who claimed his work was fabrication saying 'the inventing of that which is written in this Book is not within the understanding of human beings, nor is there a living man who could invent the language which is in it'.³⁷ The unrelenting efforts of the Spanish authorities to suppress Sahagún's work are testament to his efforts to record accurately the disappearing

Aztec culture. So diligent was the great Franciscan in recording indigenous material that he found himself accused of fostering idolatry.³⁸

The early alphabetic texts are undoubtedly complex and challenging sources for pre-conquest society. Beyond the overt obstacles presented by the context of their production, the Aztec perception of the past fundamentally differed from that of their Spanish conquerors, and the mestizo creativity which is expressed in the early colonial documents is a beguiling blend of indigenous tradition and European narrative conventions. Although this might be troublesome at times, I hope I have demonstrated through this study of the *huehuetlahtolli* that a sympathetic reading of these texts can provide valuable insights into the pre-colonial world, shedding occasional shafts of light onto personal perspectives which are frequently hidden. Although relatively recent, the Aztec world is relegated to the realm of the ancient by the historiographical fracture which occurred at the moment of the Spanish invasion. Paul Wheatley, looking at the sources for the chronologically more ancient but similarly textually remote world of second-millennium BC China, beautifully captures the intricacy and ambiguity of such analysis.

Evaluating such evidence is rather like trying to grasp a fish at the bottom of a deep pool. As the intruding hand shatters the shadowy image, so the irruption of a 20th century mind into the conceptual framework of the ancient world inevitably induces cultural refractions of such magnitude that the image of the quarry at best undergoes distortion, at worst is wholly lost from sight. But recognition of the limitation imposed by this anamorphosis is a condition of entry into the traditional world, and the social scientist who would concern himself with urban genesis must be resigned for the present to seeing his elusive fish disintegrate into a thousand glittering fragments as he reaches toward the bottom of what is a very deep pool indeed.³⁹

As Wheatley implies, there can be no certainty about the understanding of sources which attempt to reach such culturally and textually distant worlds. Every tentative reading leads to countless more interpretative avenues, each with their own possibilities and permutations. But, despite their challenges and complexities, early alphabetic texts such as the *huehuetlahtolli* remain one of the most comprehensive and contemporary sources for Aztec society extant and, with careful handling and sensitive interpretation, they offer us the opportunity to reinvest the Aztecs with a humanity and individuality which they have

frequently been denied. The text can never tell the whole story, but it has an important and distinctive part of the story to tell.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, the term 'Aztec' refers particularly to the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan, a group frequently referred to as the 'Mexica'. I recognize the difficulties and possible anachronisms of the term, but will use it as the most familiar term for a non-specialist audience.
2. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, 'Democrates Alter, sive de justis belli causis apud Indos' in John H. Parry and Robert G. Keith (eds), *New Iberian World: A Documentary History of the Discovery and Settlement of Latin America to the Early 17th Century* (New York: Times Books, 1984), vol. 2, p. 325.
3. There is much controversy regarding the precise nature of Aztec writing and the balance between phonetic and ideogrammatic elements. See especially: Charles E. Dibble, 'Writing in Central Mexico', in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Volume 10, *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, Part 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 322–32; and H. B. Nicholson, 'Phoneticism in the Late Pre-Hispanic Central Mexican Writing System', in Elizabeth P. Benson (ed.), *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: A Conference at Dumbarton Oaks, October 30th and 31st, 1971* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1973), pp. 1–46.
4. Miguel León-Portilla, *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), pp. 4–5.
5. Even before the devastating intervention of the conquistadors, questions of history were inherently confused by the deliberate creation of a sanctioned state account following a 'burning of books' in 1431 during the reign of the *tlatoani* (ruler) Itzcoatl as the elite aimed to support and perpetuate their authority through the creation of an official state narrative. See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson, 12 books in 13 vols, 2nd edn (Santa Fe: School of American Research and University of Utah Press, 1950–82), 10: 29: p. 191. Hereafter *Florentine Codex*. To prevent confusion between different editions and enable cross-referencing to alternative versions, references are given in the form of book: chapter: page number. (Page references are to the revised edition where applicable.)
6. The most significant of this work has come from the research of James Lockhart and the so-called 'Lockhart School'. For a survey of this field, which is increasingly known as the 'New Philology', see Matthew Restall, 'A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History', *Latin American Research Review*, 38.1 (2003), pp. 113–34.
7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 272.
8. No pre-conquest Nahua sources survive, but the work of a number of similar traditions has enabled scholars to access pre-conquest iconic tradition and convention. Valuable works of art and history in their own right, such documents also indicate a continuity of visual conventions into the early colonial period and in recent years the interpretation of such colonial documents

- has advanced significantly. Iconic script has been increasingly identified and interpreted as its possibilities as a channel to access indigenous thought have been recognized. For recent research on pictorial sources see Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Gordon Brotherston, *Painted Books From Mexico: Codices in UK Collections and the World They Represent* (London: British Museum Press, 1995); Frances Karttunen, 'Indigenous Writing as a Vehicle of Postconquest Continuity and Change in Mesoamerica', in Elizabeth Hill Boone and Tom Cummins (eds), *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), pp. 421–47; and Donald Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). For recent archaeological work see, for example, Leonardo López Luján, *The Offerings of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1994); and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *Life and Death in the Templo Mayor* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995).
9. Probably the most prominent exponent of this tradition is Kurly Tlapoyawa. See his 'Did "Mexika Human Sacrifice" Exist?', <http://www.mexika.org/TlapoSac.htm>, accessed 30 November 2007; and his *We Will Rise: Rebuilding the Mexikah Nation* (Victoria: Trafford, 2000).
 10. Cecelia F. Klein, 'Wild Woman in Colonial Mexico: An Encounter of European and Aztec Concepts of the Other', in C. Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 263.
 11. Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2002).
 12. For the celebration of children's first words, see Bernardino de Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, palaeography and trans. Thelma D. Sullivan, completed and revised with additions H. B. Nicholson, Arthur J. O. Anderson, Charles E. Dibble, Eloise Quiñones Keber and Wayne Ruwet (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), p. 89. The Aztec educational system was critical to establishing this highly developed tradition of rhetoric. See Caroline Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 66–88.
 13. For the pre-conquest origins of the *huehuetlahtolli* see, for example, Miguel León-Portilla and Librado Silva Galeana, *Huehuetlahtolli: Testimonios de la Antigua Palabra* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1991), pp. 7–45; Joanne Harwood, *Disguising Ritual: A Re-assessment of Part 3 of the Codex Mendoza* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 2002), pp. 138–40; Birgitta Leander, 'La educación de los jóvenes en la sociedad Azteca, según los huehuetlatolli – "Pláticas de los viejos"', in José Alcina Franch (ed.), *Azteca Mexica: Las culturas del México antiguo* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario and Lunwerg Editores, 1992), pp. 265–69; and Elizabeth Hill Boone, 'Pictorial Documents and Visual Thinking in Postconquest Mexico', in Elizabeth Hill Boone and Tom Cummins (eds), *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), pp. 150–55.
 14. Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), pp. 117–18.

15. Louise Burkhart, 'Gender in Nahuatl Texts of the Early Colonial Period: Native "Tradition" and the Dialogue with Christianity', in Cecelia F. Klein (ed.), *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 12 and 13 October 1996* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), p. 87.
16. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 22.
17. On the mestizo nature of colonial texts see Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2002).
18. Luis Nicolau D' Olwer, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590)* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), p. xiv.
19. In the original, the text is 'el padre de la antropología en el Nuevo Mundo.' See also: M. León-Portilla's *Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002). For detailed information on the earliest chroniclers of Aztec culture, many of whose work is now lost, see Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chronicles of Mexican Civilization, 1520–1569* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995).
20. For more on the varying popularity and perceived reliability of colonial sources see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), especially pp. 60–129.
21. Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chronicles of Mexican Civilization, 1520–1569* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), p. 232.
22. *Florentine Codex*, 6: 17–22: pp. 87–126.
23. *Ibid.*, 6: 19: p. 99.
24. *Ibid.*, 6: 19: p. 100.
25. *Ibid.*, 6: 18: p. 95.
26. *Ibid.*, 6: 22: p. 121.
27. Caroline Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 137–40.
28. Alonso de Zorita, *The Lords of New Spain: The Brief and Summary Relation of the Lords of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Benjamin Keen (London: Phoenix, 1965), p. 135. Inga Clendinnen has argued that suckling and nursing were a fundamental aspect of Aztec ideology, closely associated with conceptions of paradise. See her *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 184–88, 195–97.
29. Cecelia F. Klein, 'None of the Above: Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology', in Cecelia F. Klein (eds), *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), pp. 183–253.
30. *Florentine Codex*, 6: 19: p. 100.
31. *Ibid.*
32. The obvious exception to such rather dehumanizing approaches is Inga Clendinnen's unique *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
33. *Florentine Codex*, 6: 19: p. 101
34. *Ibid.*, 6: 33: p. 122.
35. *Ibid.*, 6: 18: pp. 93–94.
36. *Ibid.*, 6: 17: p. 87. The importance of the debate over the 'humanity of the Indians' in legitimizing the Spanish conquest and the evangelical endeavour

is well known. For one helpful overview of the issues impacting on the religious recorders of the *huehuetlahtolli* see Patricia Seed, 'Are These Not Also Men? The Indians' Humanity and Capacity for Spanish Civilisation', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 25, 3 (1993), pp. 629–52. The agendas of individual chroniclers also affect the text in highly specific ways at times. For example, the writings of the Dominican friar Diego Durán reflect his conviction that the Aztecs were descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel.

37. *Ibid.*, *Introductions*: 6: p. 65.
38. Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chronicles of Mexican Civilization, 1520–1569* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), pp. 491–524; and Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), pp. 199–202, 208–12, 216–20.
39. Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry Into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971), p. xv.

5

‘In Unrestrained Conversation’: Approvers and the Colonial Ethnography of Crime in Nineteenth-Century India

Kim A. Wagner

The following questions, as they happened to suggest themselves, were hastily written at random, to be afterwards answered by Thugs, to be assembled for the purpose. Their answers were all written on the spot, as they fell from the lips of the speakers and being often addressed to each other by the Thugs in unrestrained conversation, they will better show the diabolical nature of their profession and daily avocations.¹

With these lines, the British officer, Captain James Paton, introduced the interviews he conducted with captured Thugs at Lucknow in northern India in 1836, emphasizing the spontaneity of the exchange and authenticity of the responses. The British believed the Thugs to be a sect of prolific murderers who operated in secret along the highways of the subcontinent, guided by a deadly devotion to Hindu goddess-worship. Ostensibly, the purpose of Paton’s conversations was merely to demonstrate the ‘diabolical nature’ of the practice of Thuggee and of the Thugs themselves. Such revelations, however, implicitly provided justification for British rule in India, and the ability of colonial officers to penetrate the secrets of the Indian underworld was regarded as the finest validation of their complete knowledge of the land. From the 1830s onwards, colonial rule in India was in fact precipitated upon the gathering of information about its peoples and customs.² For John Kaye, the in-house historian of the East India Company, the discovery and suppression of Thuggee thus constituted indisputable proof that British

rule in India had progressed from the non-intervention policies of a disinterested armchair administration:

There are secrets buried deep beneath the surface which is the work of time and toil to extricate them from the deceptive clay which clings around them. Institutions, purposely veiled in darkness, of a strange, mysterious, almost incredible character, were likely to have escaped the notice of the European eye. It was long before we suspected the systematic war against life and property which had been carried on for years in almost every part of the country from Oude to the Carnatic. It was long before we could bring ourselves to understand that organized bands of professional and hereditary murderers and depredators, recognized and indeed, to a certain extent tolerated by their fellow-men, were preying upon the uninitiated and unwary sections of society, and committing the most monstrous crimes with as much forethought and ingenuity as though murder were one of the fine arts, and robbery a becoming effort of human skill; nay, indeed, glorying in such achievements, as acts welcome to the deity, and bringing them to perfection with a due observance of all the ceremonial formalities of a cherished religious faith.

But in time we began to understand these things. We obtained a clue and we followed it up, until the hideous mystery was brought out into the clear light of day. There is not an intelligent reader at the present time who does not know what a *Thug* is.³

If the issue was incontrovertible in the nineteenth century, however, even the most intelligent readers today might be excused for being rather less certain in their knowledge of the Thugs. The practice of Thuggee was mainly recorded by the British during their suppression of this elusive phenomenon, and we are thus faced by an acute dearth of primary sources from a hand other than that of the eponymous victor.⁴ British knowledge of the Thugs was deeply entangled in the imperial project and characterized by the need to assert the authority and legitimize the expansion of the burgeoning colonial state of the East India Company. Invariably coloured by Orientalist tropes and stereotypes, the primary sources relating to Thuggee are accordingly extremely dubious and the very existence of a social practice resembling that described by the British has been called into question by later historians.⁵ Even when British officers such as Paton recorded their conversations with Thug informers, or approvers as they were called, the suspicion is still that the informants were merely responding to the questions and expectations

of the colonial interlocutor. Rather than being untainted records of 'truth', these conversations elicited specific information that could easily be made to conform to the official narrative of Thuggee.⁶ An inquiry into the subject of Thuggee is thus largely defined by the very procedures and institutions that produced such knowledge. Given the nature of the evidence, is it at all possible to examine the subject without, in one way or the other, simply reiterating the judgement of the colonial authorities?

In this essay I seek to explore the possibility of recovering more than a single authoritative voice from colonial ethnographies of crime. I focus exclusively on the motif of the dialogue between colonial interlocutor and native informant, and I am not so much interested in reconstructing what might have constituted the phenomenon of Thuggee, as in exploring the possibilities and limitations of the colonial archive.⁷ In one of his methodologically most perceptive articles, Carlo Ginzburg has discussed the analogy between inquisitors and anthropologists 'as well as between defendants and "natives"'.⁸ In the case of Thuggee, the defendants were in fact 'natives', or *vice versa*, and this essay may thus be said to provide a further exploration of the analogy.

Confessions of a Thug

The iconic image of the colonial officer gathering information from a native informant was famously immortalized in Meadows Taylor's successful Anglo-Indian novel *Confessions of a Thug* from 1839.⁹ As the canonically inspired title indicated, *Confessions* was presented as the actual testimony of a Thug approver relating his life and deeds to a British officer, and read as a long monologue only occasionally interrupted by the anonymous 'Sahib' recording it. The protagonist, Ameer Ali, had been adopted by the Thugs who murdered his parents and in due time became a skilful strangler himself before he was eventually caught by the British. With *Confessions*, the general reading public in England was, for the first time, exposed to lengthy and detailed descriptions of the Thugs' deceptions and murders, their elaborate rituals and bizarre religious beliefs. Ameer Ali's occasional acts of chivalry and romantic encounters furthermore made him a likable Thug; a Thug fit for the drawing room even as he was denounced as a deceitful murderer.¹⁰ This allowed the Victorian reader to sympathize with him and the novel's further popularity was ensured through Taylor's extensive use of Orientalist exoticism in the style of *Arabian Nights*.¹¹ At the same time, Taylor repeatedly stressed the authenticity of his material and it is this that lent *Confessions* its ultimate

potency as both a picaresque adventure and a colonial *exposé*. In the Preface to the novel, Taylor claimed that:

The tale of crime which forms the subject of the following pages is alas! almost all true; what there is of fiction has been supplied only to connect the events, and make the adventures of Ameer Ali as interesting as the nature of his horrible profession would permit me.

I became acquainted with this person in 1832. He was one of the approvers or informers who were sent to the Nizam's territories from Saugor, and whose appalling disclosures caused an excitement in the country which can never be forgotten.¹²

The historical Ameer Ali had actually been captured and taken on as an approver by the famous officer, William Henry Sleeman, who was in charge of the operations at Sagar that had been established in 1829.¹³ In the absence of circumstantial evidence, the colonial authorities relied extensively on captured Thugs who were willing to provide information and testify against their accomplices in return for a pardon. In order to be granted a pardon and accepted as a 'king's evidence' according to Regulation VI of 1796, the approver had first to make a full confession, which implicated himself in the crimes of which he had been accused.¹⁴ In subsequent depositions, the approvers would then denounce accomplices and later identify those individuals who were put on trial.¹⁵ Special legislation had been introduced to put an end to what was perceived as an unprecedented threat to colonial authority, and several thousand suspects were tried as Thugs and either hanged or imprisoned on the basis of approver testimonies.¹⁶ The information derived from the approvers thus constituted the very backbone of colonial knowledge of Thuggee. After having served their purpose, however, the approvers were kept in special compounds lest they revert to their former ways and having avoided the gallows, they spent the rest of their lives either restaging their former exploits for thrill-seeking tourists or divulging further information to curious officials.¹⁷ It was within such a setting that the above-mentioned Captain Paton conducted his interviews with Thug approvers at Lucknow.

In 1836, Sleeman published *Ramaseeana, Or a Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language Used by the Thugs*, Which was intended as a sort of manual for the officers of the Thagi Department that had been formally established the previous year.¹⁸ Significantly, the book also contained verbatim transcriptions of the lengthy conversations Sleeman had held with his approvers and upon which the vocabulary of the Thug's slang

was based.¹⁹ 'These conversations,' Sleeman explained, 'were often carried on in the presence of different European gentlemen who happened to call in, and as they seemed to feel a good deal of interest to them, I thought others might possibly feel the same in reading them if committed to paper.'²⁰ There was accordingly an awareness of the inherent fascination that the information divulged by approvers elicited in a Western audience. As the bi-product of his investigation into the criminal slang of the Thugs, the interviews afforded Sleeman the unique opportunity to collect further information on a range of different issues, most of which had never been broached in the strictly legal context of the confession and approver testimony. In other words, the conversations provided the British with the opportunity to elaborate and expand their knowledge *tête-à-tête* with the Thugs. The notion of the inquisitive Western gaze that penetrated and revealed the darkest secrets of the Orient was given full currency in John Kaye's accounts of the operations to suppress Thuggee:

They were mighty secrets – hidden mysteries – dimly guessed at, not at all understood. But now Sleeman and his associates, resolved that this trade of Thuggee should no longer be any more mystery than tailoring or carpentering, began to initiate themselves into all the secrets of the craft, and were soon, in their knowledge of the theory of the profession, little behind the professors themselves. It need not be said that all this information was derived from frequent intercourse with the Thugs themselves. Our officers having apprehended some of these professional stranglers, selected the likeliest of the party, and by holding out to them promises, not only of pardon, but of employment, soon wormed their secrets out of them. In a little time Sleeman and his associates had learnt from these 'approvers' all that was to be learnt from them.²¹

It was this celebratory history of colonial intelligence-gathering that Taylor appropriated by reinventing himself as the 'Sahib' of *Confessions of a Thug*. In his memoirs, Taylor actually claimed to have been deeply involved in the investigations, stating that 'Day after day I recorded tales of murder, which though horribly monotonous, possessed an intense interest; and as fast as new approvers came in, new mysteries were unravelled and new crimes confessed.'²² Further assuring the readers of the accuracy of his novel, Taylor did not hesitate to 'pledge the experience of fifteen year's residence in India, and a constant and intimate association with its inhabitants'.²³ Sleeman had made a career for

himself, through his claims of knowledge about the Thugs, and so too did Taylor's assertion of access to privileged information become the key selling point of his novel.

In fact there is no evidence that Taylor was ever engaged in the collection of evidence against Thugs and his material was largely derived from other sources, most notably Sleeman's *Ramaseena*.²⁴ Based very loosely on a number of historical Thugs, Taylor's Ameer Ali was a composite figure and did not present an authentic native voice. The novel is little more than a dramatization of Sleeman's interviews that leaves out the questions and keeps only the approver's response, which thus appear voluntary and spontaneous. *Confessions of a Thug* was in fact a skilful act of Orientalist ventriloquism, in which the voice of the thoroughly fictionalized Ameer Ali had been completely assimilated to that of the colonial interlocutor.²⁵ The approver was thus made to both express and confirm the colonial representation of Thuggee, while the very trope of the confession at the same time acknowledged the absolute authority of the law.²⁶

By allowing the reader to go native *by proxy*, Ameer Ali also embodied an early colonial fantasy of surveillance. Taylor's approver was really the literary predecessor of Kipling's *Kim* and the emblematic British spy who, with darkened skin and local garb, effortlessly mingled with the natives to expose their treasonous plots – one of the most popular tropes of late nineteenth-century novels of the empire.²⁷ With the deceitful Thug in his many disguises as a trustworthy guide, the British could occupy multiple Indian identities – something they dreamt of but never achieved. *Confessions of a Thug* thus presented a literary panopticism, which promised unmediated access to native society that in practice was denied to the colonial authorities. As such, knowledge of Thuggee also became a symbol of knowledge of India more generally.

In the opening lines of his much-embellished vocabulary, Sleeman asserted the supreme authority of his complete knowledge of Thuggee, claiming that: 'I am satisfied that there is no term, no rite, no ceremony, no opinion, no omen or usage that they have intentionally concealed from me.'²⁸ In Taylor's novel, this guarantee of authenticity is transferred to Ameer Ali in the final words of his confession:

I fear that I have often wearied you by the minute relation of my history; but I have told all, nor concealed from you one thought, one feeling, much less any act which at this distance of time I can remember. Possibly you may have recorded what may prove fearfully interesting to your friends. If it be so, your end is answered; you have

given a faithful portrait of a Thug's life, his ceremonies, and his acts; whilst I am proud that the world will know all the deeds and adventures of Ameer Ali, the Thug.²⁹

While Taylor's indebtedness to Sleeman's work was obvious, he outdid the original on one significant point. Instead of Sleeman assuring the reader of the scope of his knowledge, Taylor's masterstroke was to have Ameer Ali verify the authenticity of the novel. In *Confessions of a Thug* it is thus the approver himself who authenticates the truthfulness of colonial knowledge. And this is perhaps the main reason why Taylor's novel went on to become a bestseller; it confirmed the British perception of India, while posturing as an authentic native account. Although Meadows Taylor wrote several other novels later in life, it was the confessions of Ameer Ali that made him famous and turned the Thugs, and with them their colonial ethnographers, into household names of the Raj.

Deconstructing Thuggee

The manner in which fiction emulates historical accounts, and *vice versa*, has changed the academic study of colonial representations in significant ways. During the past few decades, scholars have mainly approached the colonial archive from a purely literary perspective, which emphasizes the discursive formation of representations. In her book *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600–1800*, Kate Teltcher presents this argument in a very succinct manner:

The many different kinds of texts discussed in this study are considered primarily as representations. That is to say, they are neither evaluated on their supposed accuracy, nor assessed on the extent of knowledge of India which they display. My aim, like that of Natalie Zemon Davis, is not to 'peel away the fictive elements' in texts to 'get to the real facts', but to 'let the 'fictional' aspects of these documents be the center of analysis', meaning by 'fictional' the 'forming, shaping and molding elements: the crafting of the narrative'.[*] To this end, the techniques of textual analysis are used on non-literary as well as literary texts. By concentrating on such aspects as narrative structure, style, images, and tropes, I consider the ways that texts draw on literary models, how they influence and answer one another. In recent years, it is Stephen Greenblatt who has offered the clearest defence of such procedures in his comments on colonial discourse analysis: '[t]he problem is not that there is no truth or that

we are forever doomed to ignorance – though considerable ignorance is certainly inescapable in these matters – but that the discourses of colonialism actually do much of the crucially important work of colonialism'. [**]³⁰

This approach has also been applied to the subject of Thuggee on a number of occasions and may in fact be described as the generally accepted reading of the subject today. In Parama Roy's examination of different colonial representations of Thuggee, for instance, she acknowledges the 'incommensurability in their generic status', but makes no distinction between them as 'there appears to be very little significant difference between one text and another in this collection'.³¹ Roy's aim is 'not to furnish another account of Thuggee', but confines herself to 'examining the performative subjectivity of the Thug, as it is constructed in the discourse of *Thuggee*, as a way of teasing out, extending, and transforming some of the implications of representation, mimicry, and visibility in the colonial context'.³² In yet another study of British representations of India, which directly refers to Teltscher's argument, Amal Chatterjee describes how the British invented Thuggee, which 'so convinced the propagators of the fiction that it began to be recorded everywhere. First came the highway Thugs who used children in their schemes [...] River pirates came next'.³³ Later on, Chatterjee elaborates on the construction of Thuggee at the hand of the colonial authorities:

The British writers took the cult of Thuggee to its limits. It was yet more proof that India needed British rule. One way of proving this was to include all Indians in the practice of Thuggee – so Sleeman and his fellow creators found Muslim Thugs.³⁴

Having read this, one is left with the impression that Thuggee was wholly and thoroughly a product of the British imagination. The same argument appears in several other scholarly works, including that of the late Rajnarayan Chandvarkar, according to whom, 'it was the British attempt to establish their sway over large tracts of mobile and strife-torn countryside which led to the invention of Thuggee in the 1830s'.³⁵

The historian Tom Lloyd has continued this trend by repeatedly stressing the futility in engaging with the colonial archive in order to investigate the reality of Indian banditry, explicitly stating that 'a historical account of Thuggee can only study its representation'.³⁶ In discussing the role of approvers, Lloyd invokes the work of the subalternist Shahid

Amin who has emphasized the instrumental nature of such testimony in the context of the colonial judicial discourse. According to Amin:

It is [...] quite important for any historian of the subaltern classes to investigate the discursive practices within which statements by the police, administrators, judges, and by the accused themselves, are produced. This is required not in order to discern bias, rectify it and thereby arrive at an untainted, proper narrative of things past, unshuffled by the context within which such a narrative was produced: that would be to indulge in a pointless positivist venture. It is necessitated by the fact that most statements about the dominated are produced within well-defined fields of power.³⁷

With reference to Amin's work, Lloyd thus argues that 'analysis of the approver's statements yields insights into the discursive construction of Thuggee' – as opposed to what might have constituted Thuggee as a social practice.³⁸ Lloyd further asserts that the purely discursive reading of Thuggee 'does not compete in the same game of truth' as that of a more empirical approach.³⁹

In this reading of the colonial archive, the native voice is accordingly seen to be entirely subservient to Western discourse. In the absence of an independent native voice, records such as Paton's conversations are thus only recognized as evidence of the colonial construction of Thuggee and, following the argument of Edward Said in *Orientalism*, the colonial archive is merely seen to reveal Western practices of representation and nothing of its 'putative object'.⁴⁰ In his introduction to the 1998-edition of Taylor's novel, Patrick Brantlinger states that '*Confessions* can almost be read as an actual, imperial police dossier rather than as a work of fiction'.⁴¹ The argument advanced by Teltscher, Amin, and others, however, seems to suggest that it is in fact the 'imperial police dossier' that should be read as 'a work of fiction', and not the other way around. In the following, I explore this assumption through a closer 'interrogation' of the conversations in Captain Paton's unpublished manuscript entitled *Collections on Thuggee and Dacoitee*, which may be situated somewhere between Sleeman's *Ramaseeana* and Taylor's *Confessions* – both chronologically and in terms of style and content.⁴²

Interview with a Thug

Similarly to Taylor, Paton modelled his own conversations with approvers on Sleeman's example, stating that he had conducted them '[w]ith

a view to ascertain the nature of the motifs, and feeling under which Thug assassins pursue their dreadful trade of murder; to gain information generally, and also to ascertain whether the Thugs in the Oude Territory form part of the same extensive combination for the destruction of travellers, described by Capt. Sleeman, in his work recently published'.⁴³ Paton thus collected information from his approvers at a time when the stereotype of Thuggee had been firmly established. As the operations became institutionalized during the 1830s, and hundreds of suspects went through the procedure of giving depositions, a sort of self-generating mechanism had come into play by which confessions became standardized. In order to be granted a pardon as an approver, suspects had to acknowledge being Thugs and their confessions had to conform to the established account of Thuggee. The prospect of execution obviously constituted a strong incentive for suspects simply to tell the colonial interrogators what they wanted to hear. Peter Burke has eminently described the dynamic of the interrogation in relation to legal records of early modern Europe – a situation not far removed from that of colonial India:

The historian has access to the clerk's record [...] of a dialogue in which the interrogator, who may have been new to the region, probably spoke a standard form of the vernacular while the accused replied in dialect. The possibilities for misunderstanding were considerable. The interrogator had been through the whole business many times before and knew, all too well, what he was trying to find. The accused did not know what was happening and may well have been searching frantically for cues and clues to what was wanted. The situation was like a parody of the interviews between modern anthropologists and their informants in the field – anthropologists are much concerned about the possibility that the answers they receive may be little more than what they have suggested, unconsciously, to the informant.⁴⁴

The obvious question that poses itself is accordingly whether colonial officers such as Paton could simply have invented Thuggee and, through a lengthy process of leading questions, elicited information from native informers with no actual knowledge of banditry. The question is certainly a valid one but its answer is not to be found in a purely literary reading of a handful of published accounts. To truly engage with colonial knowledge, it is necessary to explore the colonial archive in greater depth and draw upon a wider range of sources, published and unpublished, British as well as Indian.

There are actually a number of factors that allow us to situate Paton's conversations within a broader material context. As early as the seventeenth century, European travellers in India described local robbers who strangled their victims, and several contemporary native accounts corroborate these reports; in 1680, one Indian news-writer thus referred to 'highway robbers known in Hindi as *thags*'.⁴⁵ In 1785, several decades before the official 'discovery' of Thuggee, an Indian traveller similarly told the Englishman James Forbes about:

stranglers, who join passengers frequenting the fair, in bye-roads, or at other seasons convenient for their purpose: under the pretence of travelling the same way, they enter into conversation with the stranger, until an opportunity offers of suddenly throwing a rope round their necks with a slip knot, by which they dexteriously contrive to strangle them on the spot.⁴⁶

And long before Sleeman and the moral panic of the 1830s, Indian officials in 1810 provided detailed accounts of certain border areas where the local landowners were harbouring gangs of Thugs, who functioned as a type of bandit-retainers. The first arrests of robbers, described locally as Thugs or 'Phansigars' (literally 'deceivers' and 'stranglers'), furthermore took place around the same time (1809–10), in the Madras and Bengal presidencies respectively, without any previous official communication on the subject. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, approvers in different parts of India thus supplied practically identical descriptions of a type of banditry known as 'Thuggee' to a range of different British officials under varying circumstances. A key feature of colonial records on Thuggee, and the approver depositions in particular, is that they contained a huge amount of information that went far beyond what would have been necessary to convict suspects. The details and variety of the information, pertaining to aspects that had no bearing on legal procedures, strongly suggests that this was not merely a colonial project to facilitate the control of Indians or legitimize British rule.⁴⁷

Whether those who killed and plundered travellers can appropriately be described as a pan-Indian fraternity of ritual stranglers is obviously doubtful, but we do not have to accept the colonial representation of Thuggee in order to acknowledge the existence of banditry in nineteenth-century India. And unless we are to abandon completely the notion of facts, and surrender to extreme relativism, it has to be conceded that hundreds of bodies were disinterred under the guidance of

approvers during the 1830s, suggesting at the very least that they had some knowledge of what had occurred.⁴⁸ In the present case, the point is not to establish the guilt or innocence of individuals, but simply to determine whether a different reading of the colonial archive is plausible. Paying due attention to the wider context of the colonial archive, my analysis is accordingly based on the assumption that the British did not invent Thuggee from nothing.

Within the confines of the legal proceedings against Thugs, the approvers established a coherent account of their 'crimes' and assigned complicity and guilt to individual suspects; so far Amin's argument regarding the instrumentality of the approver testimonies is valid. The interviews conducted by Paton, however, were significantly different in that they were conducted with already pardoned Thugs, outside the formal setting of the courtroom and, to all appearances, under fairly informal circumstances. The statements of the approvers during the interviews had no legal consequences, either for themselves or for others. As there was no prospect of ever being released, the approvers could neither earn their freedom nor forfeit their pardon and the information they provided did not lead to any arrests or convictions. Accordingly, the interviews cannot be considered as interrogations structurally speaking. The relationship between interlocutor and informant could even be amicable, and Paton was described as having made 'positive pets' of some of his approvers – who might have felt a sense of obligation to reciprocate the attentiveness of their inquisitive jailer and patron.⁴⁹ At times the native guards who were watching the approvers also became involved and made comments or offered specific interpretations of the approvers' statements. In one instance, a guard took over and elaborated on the account of an approver and even added his own anecdote about the sacrifice of goats in Indian temples.⁵⁰ A multitude of voices, and cadences,⁵¹ were thus recorded as part of Paton's interviews – which, however, is *not* to say that this type of record offer unmitigated access to the past, as Carlo Ginzburg warns:

It cannot be claimed, of course, either that these documents are neutral or that they convey to us 'objective' information. They must be read as the product of a peculiar, utterly unbalanced interrelationship. In order to decipher them, we must learn to catch, behind the smooth surface of the text, a subtle interplay of threats and fears, of attacks and withdrawals. We must learn to disentangle the different threads which form the textual fabric of these dialogues.⁵²

Paton's interviews did not necessarily produce more 'truthful' statements, but the specific circumstances under which they were conducted does allow for a more nuanced and critical engagement with the material.

Apart from transcripts of the conversations, Paton's manuscript also contains a number of illustrations, including a series of black-and-white portraits, probably by Paton himself, depicting his approvers as noble, if savage, Orientals – a kind of romanticized mug-shots to go with their sinister revelations. The most interesting ones, however, are the water-colours Paton had prepared by an Indian artist to accompany his manuscript.⁵³ Wily natives in colourful cloth are depicted strangling and disposing of their victims in all manners possible; a traveller on horseback is dramatically pulled from his mount, while a sleeping man is quietly put to eternal rest. The captions assure the readers of the authenticity of the images: 'This sketch was shown by me to three Thug assassin leaders, who all declared it to be a very faithful depiction.'⁵⁴ The illustrations thus functioned as an extension of the conversations and were regarded as factual records in their own right. Noticeably, Paton asked for one of them to be redone – a watercolour entitled 'A gang of Thugs burying their victims' has his comments to the artist written in the margin. The image shows the naked bodies of recently murdered victims being literally hacked to pieces by Thugs wielding curved swords, and is more reminiscent of an Orientalist battle-scene than the secret dealings of stealthy killers it was supposed to be. In his note to the artist, Paton stated that, 'In this plate there are *too many armed men*. Thugs are *rarely armed* – *two* armed men will be quite enough, and to come nearer to the truth and make the subject more *horrible* some of the limbs and hands may be severed [...] with the blood flowing! The countenance of the victims may be made handsome to excite compassion and raise indignation against the assassins.'⁵⁵ Making the victims more handsome in this case entailed giving them a lighter skin colour, contrasted by that of their dusky assailants, thus supposedly increasing the (presumably White) viewer's sense of identification.⁵⁶ The illustrations were accordingly not simply records of the Thugs practices, but clearly designed to elicit a specific response from the intended European readership – as were the conversations.⁵⁷

Catering to a readership accustomed to the gory details of penny dreadfuls, Paton sought especially to elicit information on the more sensational and exotic aspects of Thuggee, their rituals and murders, which was also reflected in his choice of illustrations. As Paton's questions afforded the approvers with the opportunity to impress their

jailor and each other, there was a momentary convergence of interests between the colonial interlocutor and native informants. The approvers were actually keenly aware of the fact that Paton was recording their conversations and when he asked them how long it took to strangle a person, the approver Rumzan replied: 'It is the work of an instant! You are long in writing it – but in reality, it is instantaneous (snapping his finger to show its quickness!) it is like pulling a trigger!'⁵⁸ Yet even as the approver Buhram bragged of having been involved in 931 murders, a claim that later earned him an entry in the Guinness Book of Records, another of Paton's key approvers confessed to just one murder.⁵⁹ And while the approvers claimed that they could kill swiftly and silently, they also recounted the story of a victim who survived being strangled and another instance when they almost strangled an accomplice by mistake, while the victim ran away.⁶⁰ The approvers would claim that only tyros felt pity for their victims, and were plagued by guilt, only later to admit that sometimes they did let victims go out of pity.⁶¹ The image of callous stranglers, who talked of their deadly exploits 'with relish and pleasure', egged on by Paton as it were, was thus contrasted by various revelations that were rather less flattering to the supposed professionalism of these expert assassins. Although the approvers were aware of Paton's agenda, his obvious fascination with the gory details of Thuggee did not simply result in exaggerated boasts and every statement that seemed to confirm the colonial stereotype was followed by another disproving it.

Above all, however, Paton's manuscript was characterized by an aggressively Evangelical zeal and the interviews were interspersed with Biblical quotations and lengthy reflections on the moral depravity of man.⁶² In fact, Paton felt compelled to try and reform the approvers and convince them of the divine punishment that awaited them:

After a portion of the following questions were answered, they were seriously addressed, upon the dreadful nature of their crimes, and the fearful consequences to be anticipated in the next world by murders, and men, who like demons, set at utter defiance the dictates of conscious, and the laws of God and man. They listened apparently with serious attention, and admitted the truth of what was said. One of them, Rumzan (perhaps one of the greatest assassins in the world) who acknowledged to have murdered with his own hands X victims, and to have seen about 700 travellers put to death, replied: 'Had these truths and instructions been given us in our villages, we had never been Thugs!'⁶³

Paton's missionary urge was attended by blatant sensationalism as he effectively claimed to have made 'one of the greatest assassins in the world' acknowledge the error of his ways. If proof of the efficacy of the operations against Thuggee was needed, it was here presented in unequivocal form, as the virtual conversion of the formerly goddess-worshipping ritual stranglers. But if Paton had expected the remainder of his conversations to be a triumphal exercise in proselytizing, he was sorely mistaken and Rumzan's indication of penitence was not repeated. Instead, Paton's inept probing into the religious beliefs of the approvers elicited a rather surprising range of responses, worth reproducing *in extenso*:

Paton: Who is this Bhowany whom you worship? And what is the extent of her powers? Do you suppose that she wards off evil or bestows good upon her worshippers? Do her powers extend beyond the grave? Or are they limited only to this world? Do you suppose that she herself, is happy or miserable?

Sheodeen (a Hindoo): It is God, who kills, but Bhowanee has the name of it. If Bhowanee had her will, she would kill every human being upon the Earth in one day! Blood, is her food.

Futteh Khan: She thirsts for blood!

Sheodeen: God has appointed blood for her food – saying 'Khoon tu Kao! feed thou upon blood!' In my opinion, this is very bad, but what can she do, being ordered to subsist upon blood.

Futteh Khan: We love her (Bhowanee) because she patronizes our trade of Thuggee, and forgives us.

Allayar: Bhowanee must be fed, and since the British Government has been suppressing our trade of murder, Bhowanee has begun with her own hands to devastate the country with disease, and death; men are everywhere propitiating her, people in the villages are dying by twentys and fortys [*sic*], within these last five years of the suppression of Thugs, there certainly has been more disease.

Futteh Khan: This idea of Allayar's is not correct.

Sheodeen: What! Did the few people killed by the Thugs suffice to fill Bhowanee's belly ('pait bhurut ruha?') she requires more extensive food! The day after tomorrow – 12th October – hundreds of thousands of living sacrifices, sheep, goats, & buffalos and swine, will be slain as sacrifices to Bhowanee, in Lucknow, Calcutta, and everywhere.⁶⁴

In this fascinating exegesis of the approvers' beliefs we may recognize the outline of the well-known myth from the *Devi-mahatmaya*, in which the goddess Kali fought the demon Raktabija, and licked up his blood and swallowed the demons that sprang from his wounds.⁶⁵ Rather than being an esoteric ritual, the approvers equated the murder and stabbing of travellers with popular beliefs associated with animal sacrifice at temples dedicated to various manifestations of the Hindu goddess.⁶⁶ Banditry was thus ascribed with a semblance of religious merit and significance – but it is also worth noticing that the approvers were not in agreement on these issues. The Muslim Allayar was the only approver ever to make the rather interesting connection between the suppression of Thuggee and the prevalence of disease. The British made much of the fact that Hindus and Muslims often shared rituals and worshipped at the same temples and shrines, but the syncretism of popular religion in India is too well-established to offer any amazement today. For ordinary people, with the possible exception of the *pandit* and *maulavi*, the distinctions between castes and religions were in reality not rigid, and while some rules were rigorously upheld, others were ignored or subservient to practicalities.⁶⁷ Paton's conversations thus became the occasion for the Muslim approvers to assimilate their faith with Hindu goddess worship, reducing Bhowanee to a subservient spirit obedient to Allah. From this it appears that there was no coherent cosmology and that the approvers' perception of divine sanction depended on the circumstances. To Paton's Muslim approvers, the worship of 'Bhowanee' was exclusively associated with the practice of Thuggee and thus very much functionalized, while they retained their Muslim faith in a single god: 'Bhowanee is only for Thuggee.'⁶⁸ Not only did the approvers provide a highly diffused account of different religious beliefs, they also failed to agree on even simple matters, such as the rationale of their *modus operandi*:

Paton: Why do you stab the dead bodies?

Dhoosoo: That no life may remain.

Futteh Khan: And that Bhowanee may have her blood, she delights in blood.⁶⁹

The motivation behind the evil deeds of the Thugs was of particular concern to the British and in *Confessions of a Thug*, Taylor had Ameer Ali extol the attraction of his profession:

How many of you English are passionately devoted to sporting! Your days and months are passed in excitement. A tiger, a panther, a buffalo, or a hog, rouses your utmost energies for its destruction – you

even risk your lives in its pursuit. How much higher game is a Thug's! His is man: against his fellow-creatures in every degree, from infancy to old age, he has sworn relentless, unerring destruction.⁷⁰

Conversely, when asked by Paton whether they were gloomy or happy when they set out on expeditions, the approvers replied:

Mugdooma: We go readily, because our stomachs must be filled.

Bhugt: We consider it as labour, and not as 'Shekar' (sport).⁷¹

The contrast between the response of the fictional Thug and real approvers could not have been greater and it is indeed difficult to reconcile the colonial stereotype with Paton's conversations. When Sleeman's grandson sought to resurrect his grandfather's reputation in 1933, he claimed that the Thugs were 'no body of amateur assassins, driven to crime by force of circumstance', but murdered out of 'sheer lust of killing'.⁷² Time and again, however, Paton's approvers emphasized the pragmatic rationale behind Thuggee and when asked whether a runaway approver would return to his former ways, the response was simply: 'Where will he get food? He will kill, to feed himself!'⁷³ Similarly, the Thugs were said to be hereditary criminals bound to follow the footsteps of their fathers and one British official stated that 'Once a Thug always a Thug is their motto and their creed. Nothing can or will reform or deter him from the practice of his profession.'⁷⁴ As might be expected, Paton also inquired into the approvers' familial sentiments with feigned naïveté:

Paton: Do Thugs love their wives, their sons and their daughters as others do?

Allayar: They like them better than others. Animals and all creatures love their offsprings.

Paton: If they love their sons, why do they teach them to be Thugs?

Sheodeen: How could they be supported? Fathers are glad, when their sons accompany them, why should they not be so? They get a share, they instruct their sons in Thuggee, in the mode of inveigling travellers; and they are glad, when their children become proficient & expert. If the family be in no pecuniary want, the fathers will tell their sons to remain at home. But when in want, they take them with them.⁷⁵

Instead of a secret fraternity of ritual stranglers, driven by bloodlust and fanaticism, Paton's conversations leave us with the possibility of

an entirely different interpretation – an interpretation that is inherently incompatible with the conventional colonial accounts. Even the most blatant attempts on the part of Paton to impose a distinctively Christian morality on the approvers failed:

Paton: Bhowanee, appears by your account to delight in misery, she cannot then be a good being. We know that Satan, the enemy of God and man, is the cause of all the evils, sins, misery and bloodshed in the world. But nobody would worship Satan. Should we not expect the curse, and vengeance of God to fall upon us, if we fell down and worshipped his enemy the Devil? Now this Bhowanee you describe, seems to have a large portion of Satan's spirit. How then do you venture to side with her? Are you not afraid of the wrath of God! who has expressly said 'Thou shalt not steal', 'Thou shalt not murder?!'

[...]

Futteh Khan: What! is Bhowanee the enemy of God! If she were, would she be tolerated? I have no fear in worshiping Bhowanee. I consider it to be God's order, that I worship her. I have no fear of her, I serve her in my trade of murder. She never troubles me. She pardons our murders. It is not I, who murder, but Bhowanee, she is responsible!

Dhoosoo: If a man murders another, without reference to Bhowanee, he will be haunted by ghosts. But we, who kill, under the patronage of Bhowanee, are not troubled in the least. Bhowanee takes all the responsibility from us.⁷⁶

Seen in this context, the elaborate rituals and practices ascribed to the Thugs by the British assume a rather less exotic appearance. Similar to bandits elsewhere in the world, the approvers probably belonged to gangs that enjoyed the protection of local authorities and sought to legitimize their actions through the appropriation of high-status practices.⁷⁷ Adhering to certain religious observances associated with goddess worship seems to have enabled bandits to spill blood and murder with both moral and ritual impunity, as well as a clear conscience. And according to Paton's approvers, their religious beliefs were by no means unique to them:

Taija: All Thugs, thieves, and robbers, worship some god or other. They worship Dabee (the same as Bhowanee) praying for success in the undertaking, and all proceed guided by 'Shoogoon' or

omens, as the braying of an ass, or chirping of a bird, from that Goddess.

Paton: The Dabee would appear to be the patroness of crime, to be in spirit a very devil?

Taija: She is like a devil, and people commit crime, & shed blood, in her name.

Paton: Then, as you allow she is like a devil, why do you worship her, is not this the same as the worship of Satan?

Taija: All the world worship Dabee, because she prospers their undertakings; Satan, and all evil accompany Dabee.

Paton: Dabee, then appears opposed to God?

Taija: God is pleased with Dabee, if it were not so, how could she exist?

Futteh Khan (a Mahomedan): If God were not pleased ('Razee') with Satan, how could he exist? All men committing theft, venture not to do so, without some supernatural 'ar' or protection.⁷⁸

With Paton's approvers we are a far cry from the colonial stereotype of Thuggee. And the famed secrecy of the Thugs? According to Paton's approvers, 'A village boy that big, knows who the Thugs are! But no one dare say aught to us, for we are generally a gang and the zemindars [landholders] favour us!'⁷⁹

The accidental anthropologist

Obviously the approver's statements were not spontaneous but elicited under specific circumstances and their responses to Paton's questions hardly reflected the manner in which they would ordinarily talk or think about these matters amongst themselves – if they ever did so. The dialogic nature of the conversations and the contribution of the approvers to the colonial construction of Thuggee is nevertheless undeniable. Just as the British were constructing a master narrative of Thuggee on the basis of the interviews with approvers, so too were the approvers actively using these interviews to negotiate their identities and refashion themselves. The conversations between Paton and his approvers were accordingly not just an act of ventriloquism but an exchange through which very different agendas were pursued by all parties involved. To read these exchanges merely as an imposition of colonial discourse upon native informers is thus to miss the point, and the approvers 'were never passive dupes or simple victims of Europeans'.⁸⁰ Obviously the relationship between Paton and his informants was deeply unequal and

shaped entirely by the context of their imprisonment. The statements of the approvers were furthermore appropriated by the colonial authorities and, through a process of (mis)interpretation, provided the raw material upon which the official account of Thuggee was constructed. That, however, does not invalidate the presence of their voices in the colonial archive; on the contrary, it only makes their recovery more urgent. According to Carlo Ginzburg:

The voices of the accused reach us strangled, altered, distorted; in many cases, they haven't reached us at all. Hence – for anyone unre-signed to writing history for the nth time from the standpoint of the victors – the importance of the anomalies, the cracks that occasionally (albeit very rarely) appear in the documentation, undermining its coherence.⁸¹

When we encounter references to 'underlying inchoate and ill-recorded systems of thought', which were never described by Sleeman or found in any other official accounts of Thuggee, I think it is safe to assume that these elements were not introduced by the colonial interlocutor but reflects the beliefs of the approvers.⁸² The comparison made by the approvers between Thuggee and the sacrifice of goats, for instance, finds no parallel in any other accounts and was obviously not the product of colonial discourse. In his attempt to uncover the dark secrets of Thuggee, Paton inadvertently documented accounts of common yet elusive popular beliefs and practices. The interviews elicited various kinds of information, which was not the intended object of Paton, and the colonial interlocutor may perhaps be regarded as an *accidental* anthropologist – but only insofar as his 'ethnography' can be read against the grain. It is accordingly my contention that what may be described as the 'colonial archive of repression', when approached with circumspection, may provide us with precisely the kind of 'rich evidence' that makes the reconstruction of the beliefs of the subaltern possible.⁸³

In this essay, I have sought to tease out the incidental details of Paton's conversations with approvers – the bits of information that were not instrumental to the judicial discourse, and which did not find their way into the official representation of Thuggee. Paton's manuscript was never published, and even though the material has been utilized by modern historians, it did not have any impact on colonial accounts. It is thus a source-collection in limbo; a product of its time, that never became part of its time. This is worth keeping in mind when considering the diverse nature of the colonial archive(s). The interviews conducted

by Sleeman and Paton may appear to be almost identical; Sleeman's conversations, however, were a by-product of the vocabulary he was assembling, whereas Paton deliberately conducted his interviews with a view to publish them. And while Sleeman's work was well-distributed and widely read, Paton's manuscript never made it further than the shelves of the British Library. It is also noticeable that Paton himself seemed to have harboured reservations about the approver-system and even discussed a case when several innocent people had been wrongly identified, thus effectively subverting the very precondition for his own interviews.⁸⁴ Sweeping assertions about the colonial construction of Thuggee, and the nature of approver testimonies, obscures their diversity and the fact that they impacted on their time in very different ways – or not at all.

Conclusion: 'listening to the silences...'

The complete separation of reality from representation constitutes one of the basic premises of the work of Teltscher, Amin, and others, who have made the latter their sole object of study. At the same time, colonial discourse analysis is precipitated upon the acceptance of imperialism and Western dominance as a reality – a historical specificity which was crucial in the shaping of colonial texts. The social reality of Indians and their participation in the colonial encounter, however, is not accorded the same status of material context. British representations of India are believed to reveal something very significant about the reality of colonial rule, of which they are a product, but nothing whatsoever about India or Indians. It is simply taken for granted that texts are evidence only of their own production and that a discursive approach is the only methodologically sound manner in which to engage with historical sources. While the importance of colonial discourse is thus taken to be self-evident, whatever discourse might have informed the utterances of native informants, who have a significant presence in the colonial archive, remain largely unexplored.

The postcolonial critics position themselves against the straw-man of positivism: a belief in the existence of a single truth about the past or facts that can simply be discovered and verified by historians. Yet this approach no longer has any adherents and hardly constitutes a relevant point of contention – we all agree that texts are situated and provide but a subjective perspective on a past to which we have no unmediated access. Obviously, the colonial representation of Thuggee cannot be taken at face value. But events and their representation are not so easy

to prise apart and if we accept that the historical context of colonial rule shaped accounts of Thuggee, we must also acknowledge that the historical context of Indian banditry *may* have influenced their production. In the words of Nicholas Thomas, 'Noticing that histories are written, and repudiating the positivist's preoccupation with an exhaustive (and therefore inaccessible) image of the past, should not, however, lead us to scrutinize nothing other than historical representations, or insist that there is no reality external to such representations.'⁸⁵ Reality matters even though its representation can never be examined independently of the discursive context in which it was produced.

Shahid Amin describes his elaborate examination of the approver testimony as 'a necessary first step towards listening to the silences of the peasant-accused'.⁸⁶ It seems to me, however, that the discursive analysis actually silences the accused. The conversation between colonizer and colonized is reduced to a dialogue between the ventriloquist and his dummy, thus effectively rendering it a colonial monologue. In this manner, Taylor's fictional Ameer Ali and Sleeman's historical Ameer Ali are collapsed, even though one was a figment of the colonial imagination and the other a living breathing person. Admittedly, interrogations often do appear *monologic*, 'but', as Carlo Ginzburg argues, 'in some exceptional cases we have a real dialogue: we can hear distinct voices, we can detect a clash between different, even conflicting voices.'⁸⁷ The response of Paton's approvers clearly constituted a voice separate from, and to some extent even independent of, colonial discourse. Unless we are to believe that the British invented syncretism and popular religion in nineteenth-century India, it must be obvious that these details were not simply suggested by Paton and that the conversations constitute a unique record of the approvers' beliefs. Simply concluding that Thuggee was constructed or invented by the British reduces the production of colonial knowledge to a hegemonic exercise in misrepresentation, thus ignoring the complexities of the colonial encounter.

According to Amin, 'The speech of the approver is [...] fabricated by the power of the state; it is this *construction* of the AT [approver testimony] rather than its particularistic truth or falsity that deserves recognition from a subaltern perspective.'⁸⁸ Given the fact that we are not dealing with simple truths or falsities, I can only agree with Amin on this point. What in my opinion deserves recognition, however, is the possibility that the speech of the approver, and by extension that of native informants, may still yield insights into aspects of the past that rarely leave any traces in the archives *in spite* of the fact that it has been facilitated and prompted by the power of the colonial

state. The interviews conducted by the likes of Paton were obviously not 'unrestrained conversations' and the notion that the 'truth' about Thuggee could be recorded from the lips of the approvers was indeed an imperial fiction. Yet regarding native informants as mere mouth-pieces for Western stereotypes is to deprive the subaltern of whatever might have been left of his voice. In their eagerness to theorize, the critics reduce the approvers to limp puppets; if any agency on the part of local informants is recognized, it is certainly never examined. It may be a 'hopelessly positivist venture' to try and establish what really happened, as Amin puts it, but it is equally futile to ignore the existence of a wider world and broader context in which the discursive construction of the colonial archive emerged. Regardless of the coercive nature of the colonial judicial system, Paton could never elicit testimonies from his informants that neatly corroborated the official representation of Thuggee. Even when approvers were prompted by fear of punishment or tempted by the promise of a pardon, their life and personal experience impacted on what is often presumed to be the sole domain of the colonial discourse.

As the historiography stands today, we are left with a history of persecution, but not of the persecuted, and the subalterns are left by the wayside. If the British simply invented Thuggee, then what were the thousands of Indians who became entangled in the colonial legal bureaucracy and either imprisoned, deported, hanged, or taken on as approvers? It is a peculiar characteristic of the postcolonial discussions that no attempt is made to explore subaltern mentalities beyond a token deference to vague notions of 'resistance' and 'agency'. If being British 'meant' certain things, as Edward Said has it, and we can explore that in great depth, then what did it mean to be an Indian peasant – or bandit?⁸⁹ In the purely discursive reading of the colonial archive, the approver's voice is used only to indict the colonial legal system or demonstrate the manner in which the colonial project of information gathering was implicated in a wider discourse of misrepresentation. What did the approvers do before they became approvers and what was the 'circumstances of their actuality'?⁹⁰ According to the historian Catherine Hall, 'Postcolonial scholars have taught us how to read and listen differently, to hear voices that once were not heard.'⁹¹ They have also, it seems, taught us to discount certain voices that once were not heard and which, thanks to the invocation of colonial discourse and hegemonic ventriloquism, may remain unheard.

In the end, however, Paton proved to be a particularly inept ventriloquist and his approvers were not nearly as compliant as Taylor's Ameer

Ali. The question is accordingly not whether subalterns can speak, but, in the words of Marshall Sahlins, 'whether they can be heard and understood'.⁹² We need not take colonial representations at face value, nor completely dismiss their empirical significance, in order to recognize the fact that the encounter between the colonial interlocutor and the native informant sometimes allow a few rare glimpses into a hitherto unrecorded past.

Notes

This essay has evolved from my original contribution to the conference 'Engaging Colonial Knowledge' in 2006, and following several major publications on Thuggee, it is my hope that it represents a more mature reflection on the subject. I owe a debt of gratitude to those friends and colleagues who have commented on the essay, especially Richard Drayton, as well as Julie Hartley and Ricardo Roque (the Tonga to my Jonathan Small). Also thanks to Tom Lloyd for letting me try to convince him that there is more to Thuggee than colonial imaginings.

1. 'Collections on Thuggee and Dacoitee, by Capt. James Paton', British Library, Add. 41300, p. 4. Henceforth referred to as 'Paton'. It should be noted that there are two sets of irregular page numbers in the manuscript.
2. See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and C.A. Bayly, *Empire and information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
3. John W. Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company: A History of the Indian Progress* (London: R. Bentley, 1853), pp. 355–56.
4. For the few notable exceptions see Wagner, *Stranglers and Bandits – A Historical Anthology of Thuggee* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2009).
5. See for instance Stewart N. Gordon, 'Scarf and Sword: Thugs, Marauders, and State-Formation in Eighteenth Century Malwa', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 4 (Dec. 1969), pp. 403–29; and Radhika Singha, 'Providential Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1 (1993), pp. 83–146.
6. Martine van Woerkens, *The Strangled Traveler: Colonial Imaginings and the Thugs of India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 72.
7. My attempt at reconstruction may be found in Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007). See also: Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).
8. Carlo Ginzburg, 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist', in *Myths, Emblems and Clues* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1986), p. 155.
9. Meadows Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug* (London: Richard Bentley, 1839).

10. Review of *Confessions in Literary Gazette; and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, & C.*, 27 (July 1839), pp. 466–71.
11. See also Mary Poovey, 'Ambiguity and Historicism: Interpreting *Confessions of a Thug*', in *Narrative*, 12, 1 (January, 2004), pp. 3–21; and Caroline Reitz, *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004).
12. Taylor, *Confessions*, p. 5.
13. See 'Deposition of Ameer Alee', 14 April 1832, Board's Collections (BC), F/4/1406, Asia, Pacific & Africa Collections, British Library (APAC). The original confession bears only a very slight resemblance to that of Taylor's protagonist.
14. Regulation VI of 1796, V/8/17, pp. 13–14, APAC.
15. See for instance Smith to Swinton, 26 May 1832, BC, F/4/1405/55519, APAC.
16. 'Tabular Statement', 14 Oct. 1835, W. H. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana, Or a Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language Used by the Thugs...* (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1836), pp. 38–39.
17. See for instance W. H. Russell, *The Prince of Wales' Tour: of India* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1877), pp. 513–15.
18. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–270. While the early Orientalists were famously interested in Indian languages, Sleeman is more likely to have been inspired by the 'dictionaries' of 'thieves' cant' often included in popular histories of the underworld in Britain, see for instance Lee Beier, 'Anti-language or Jargon? Canting in the English Underworld in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in Roy Porter and Peter Burke (eds), *Languages and Jargons: Contributions to a Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
20. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, pp. 65–66.
21. Kaye, *Administration*, p. 371.
22. Meadows Taylor, *The Story of My Life* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1877), p. 80.
23. Taylor, *Confessions*, p. 13.
24. Taylor was certainly familiar with Sleeman's work, see *ibid.*, p. xii. An article on Thuggee often ascribed to Taylor was actually authored by one of the officers of the Thagi Department, Lieut. Reynolds, see Wagner, *Stranglers and Bandits*, pp. 36–40.
25. See also Robert Grant Williams, 'Shadows of Imperialism: Canonical Typology in Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug*', *Dalhousie Review*, 72, 2 (1992–93), pp. 482–93.
26. On the significance of the confession see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), pp. 38–39.
27. See for instance Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 127–55.
28. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, p. 3.
29. Taylor, *Confessions*, p. 550.
30. Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600–1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 5–6. *Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 3. **Stephen Greenblatt

- (ed.), *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. xvi.
31. Parama Roy, *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 42.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
 33. Amal Chatterjee, *Representations of India, 1740–1840: The Creation of India in the Colonial Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1998), p. 134.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
 35. Rajnarayan Chandvarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 226. See also Máire ní Fhlathúin, ‘The Travels of M. de Thévenot through the Thug Archive’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, third series, 2, 1 (April 2001), pp. 31–42, 42.
 36. Tom Lloyd, ‘Acting in the “Theatre of Anarchy”’ (2006), in Wagner, *Stranglers and Bandits*, p. 301.
 37. Shahid Amin, ‘Approver’s Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura’, in *Subaltern Studies V* (Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1987), pp. 166–202, p. 167.
 38. Tom Lloyd, ‘Thuggee, Marginality and the State Effect in Colonial India, circa 1770–1840’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 2 (2008), pp. 201–37, p. 223.
 39. *Ibid.* n. 85.
 40. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 22. See for instance Satadru Sen’s review of van Woerkens’ *The Strangled Traveler* in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72, 2 (June, 2004), pp. 566–69.
 41. Taylor, *Confessions*, new edition with introduction by Patrick Brantlinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xi. Brantlinger is by no means the only one to be fooled by Taylor’s novel. Thus Patrick Cadell’s claim, for instance, that *Confessions* was ‘based almost entirely on his own first-hand material’ is demonstratively incorrect, see Cadell (ed.), *The Letters of Philip Meadows Taylor to Henry Reeve* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. xiii.
 42. It is beyond the scope of this essay to cover all aspects of Paton’s manuscript, but see Wagner, *Thuggee*, for a more detailed discussion.
 43. Paton, p. 4. See also quotation at the beginning of this essay.
 44. See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 75. The same process is described in almost identical terms by modern criminologists, see A. Trankell, *Reliability of Evidence* (Stockholm: Beckmans, 1972), p. 27.
 45. Quoted by Irfan Habib in *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1999), p. 75, n. 40 and p. 478, n. 96.
 46. J. Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs: Selected and Abridged from Letters Written during Seventeen Years Residence in India* (London: White, Cochrane & co, 1813), vol. IV, pp. 12–13. See also William R. Pinch, ‘When Stranglers Roamed the Roads’, *CounterPunch*, 16, 21 (1–15 Dec. 2009).
 47. See for instance Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, pp. 154–224.
 48. See Sleeman, *Report on the Depredations Committed by the Thug Gangs of Upper and Central India, from the Cold Season of 1836–37...* (Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1840).

49. See Janet Dunbar (ed.), *Tigers, Durbars and Kings: Fanny Eden's Indian Journals 1837-1838* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 104. While visiting Cawnpore in 1837, a British traveller described another officer engaged in the operations against the Thugs: 'A Captain G. here is one of its great persecutors officially, but by dint of living with Thugs he has evidently grown rather fond of them, and has acquired a latent taste for strangling.' Emily Eden, *Up the Country - Letters from India* (1866, reprint London: Virago Press, 1983), p. 59.
50. Paton, pp. 40/50 and 57-47/58.
51. The translation of the approvers' statements, from Hindi and Urdu into English, obviously added another layer of cultural dissonance, but it is also worth noticing that Paton often recorded the original vernacular terms.
52. Ginzburg, 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist', pp. 160-61.
53. Paton's illustrations are instantly recognizable and adorn many later publications on Thuggee, see for instance Mike Dash, *Thug - The True Story of India's Murderous Religion* (London: Granta, 2005).
54. 'Thugs strangling a traveller', Paton, n. pag.
55. Note by Paton, 'A gang of Thugs burying their victims', *ibid.* Emphasis in original.
56. See second version of 'A gang of Thugs burying their victims', *ibid.*
57. The manuscript was never published, as it happened, although Paton made an effort of showing it to all the visitors who came to Lucknow and on whom the illustrations apparently made a big impression, see *Fanny Eden's Indian Journals*, pp. 119-23.
58. Paton, p. 56/67. Parenthesis in original.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 4/8-8/9.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 18 and 12.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 20-18.
62. It should be noted that further notes of a strong Evangelical tenor have been added to Paton's manuscript in a different hand, but I am only concerned with the original unedited text here.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55. The festival referred to is the Dassehra.
65. David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), pp. 91-92, see also n. 15.
66. The notion of the goddess feeding on blood was quite clearly derived from animal sacrifice at places such as Vindhychal in Mirzapur, see Paton, p. 41/52.
67. See also Peter Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity in Narratives from Village India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
68. Paton, p. 28/33.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
70. Taylor, *Confessions*, p. 16.
71. Paton, p. 58/69. Parenthesis in original.
72. James Sleeman, *Thug or a Million Murders* (London: S. Low, Marston & co. Ltd, 1933), p. 5.
73. Paton, pp. 22-19.
74. F. C. Smith: Report on the sessions of 1831-32, 20 June 1832, quoted in N.K. Sinha (ed.), *Selected records collected from the Central Provinces and Berar Secretariat relating to the suppression of Thuggee, 1829-1832* (Nagpur: Government Printing Central provinces and Berar, 1939), p. 121.

75. Paton, p. 26.
76. Ibid., pp. 47/58–59.
77. See for instance Anton Blok, *Honour and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); and Wagner, 'Thuggee and Social Banditry Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, 50, 2 (2007), pp. 353–76.
78. Paton, pp. 64/79–80.
79. Ibid, p. 59/74, my italics. See also p. 58/69.
80. Nicholas Thomas, *Out of Time – History and Evolution in Anthropological Discourse* (second edition, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 111.
81. Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990), p. 10.
82. Keith Thomas, quoted in *ibid*. It should be pointed out that I do *not* accept the general arguments of Ginzburg's book, such as the existence of a pan-European substrata of unconscious beliefs.
83. Ginzburg, 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist', p. 157.
84. Paton, p. 36.
85. Thomas, *Out of Time*, p. 4.
86. Amin, 'Approver's Testimony', p. 168.
87. Ginzburg, 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist', p. 160.
88. Amin, 'Approver's Testimony', pp. 186–87.
89. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 11.
90. Ibid.
91. Review of C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914*, Catherine Hall, Institute of Historical Research, 2004: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/hall.html>.
92. Marshall Sahlins in Robert Borofsky, 'CA Forum on Theory in Anthropology: Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere and Sahlins', *Current Anthropology*, 38, 2 (April, 1997), pp. 255–82, 273.

6

From Civil Servant to Little King: An Indigenous Construction of Colonial Authority in Early Nineteenth-Century South India

Niels Brimnes

But what is remarkable is that with the exception of Said's own voice, the only voices we encounter in the book are precisely those of the very Western canonicity which, Said complains, has always silenced the Orient. Who is silencing whom, who is refusing to permit a historicized encounter between the voice of the so-called 'Orientalist' and the many voices that 'Orientalism' is said to suppress, is a question that is very hard to determine as we read this book.¹

Perhaps the most important development in Indian historiography in the 1980s was the emergence of a new genre: 'colonial discourse analysis'. Based on the rich documentation left behind by the East India Company and the India Office, studies of how knowledge constructed by British administrators, scientist and commentators helped transform Indian society according to the needs of the colonial state abounded. It was shown how new forms of knowledge were instrumental in processes by which pre-colonial institutions were replaced by institutions with a significant British imprint. It was shown, for instance, how the formal Anglo-Indian judiciary took the place of a less formalized indigenous dispute management, and how local magnates with a capacity to intervene in most aspects of local life were transformed into landowners in the European sense.

The main impulse behind this development was no doubt Edward Said's *Orientalism* and its forceful notion of a hegemonic discourse – 'the nexus of knowledge and power creating the "Oriental"'² – but it is important to note that Said was not the only source of inspiration. Bernard Cohn was another highly influential figure, and he arguably provided the most eloquent formulation of the narrative that informed most analyses of colonial discourse throughout the 1980s:

In the conceptual scheme which the British created to understand and to act in India, they constantly followed the same logic, they reduced vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms... India was redefined by the British to be a place of rules and orders; once the British had defined to their own satisfaction what they construed as Indian rules and custom, then Indians had to conform to these constructions.³

One of the problems with this narrative is the risk of simplification and victimization, and from the early 1990s critics began to point to a tendency to overemphasize the capacity of colonial administrators to impose their forms of knowledge on a seemingly passive Indian society. In this way colonial discourse analysis often overlooked indigenous contributions to the colonial transformation and ended up replicating the eurocentrism it had set out to disclose. One of these critics, David Washbrook, asked in 1993: 'Why should the often ill-informed and prejudiced views of a handful of extremely distant scholars and administrators... have restructured the social relations of an entire subcontinent? How did they?'⁴ Having posed this critical question – which was also directed against some of his own earlier writings – Washbrook went on to suggest a more open understanding of the colonial discourse, in which Indian elites were seen as important contributors to the discourse rather than merely its victims. In a similar vein, Eugene Irschick in 1994 published a book – aptly entitled *Dialogue and History* – in which he suggested that colonial knowledge be understood as a 'dialogic production' rather than a western monologue about the other stemming from Said's notion of a hegemonic discourse.⁵

Of course, not all contributions within the genre of colonial discourse analysis were assuming that the agents of colonialism could simply invent and transform Indian society as they pleased. In 1986, Nicholas Dirks had argued that although the colonial state was ultimately successful in transforming the pre-colonial 'little kings' of South India into 'landlords', this was an ambiguous and protracted process in which

indigenous agents had considerable room for manoeuvre.⁶ Two years later, Lata Mani masterfully demonstrated how the 'colonial' discourse on tradition in Bengal in the early nineteenth century was in fact co-authored by indigenous elites.⁷

This suggests that we should not think of the construction of knowledge embedded in the colonial encounter as a one-way process. Rather it was always a process in which both the colonial power and representatives of the indigenous population participated, although they rarely participated on equal terms. Even if the British were often the stronger part, it is possible to identify instances of the colonial encounter, in which the opposite was the case and the capacity to define the terms of the colonial encounter was held by powerful voices within Indian society.

In this chapter I offer an analysis of a dispute between the right and left hand castes from Tranquebar, a small Danish colony on the Coromandel Coast in South India. The dispute took place in 1822 and in this context the colonial power was sufficiently weak to allow Indian notions to significantly influence the construction of the colonial encounter. In order to understand the significance of the right and left hand caste division, I will first present an outline of a dynamic model of pre- and early colonial south Indian society.

The dynamics of south Indian society

Pre-colonial south Indian society was far distant from the stereotypic picture of a society dominated by the static and Brahman-dominated hierarchy of caste and non-market exchange relations. Instead, an increasing number of scholars has come to see pre-colonial south India as highly fluid, competitive, and dynamic. In particular emphasis has been on three institutions: the king, the temple, and honours.

In *The Hollow Crown* Nicholas Dirks has revealed an indigenous discourse of kingship which places the king – and not the priestly Brahmins – at the centre of the social order. Within this discourse kingly authority existed on several interacting levels. Local chiefs received their legitimacy by entering into relations with a greater ruler, and the ultimate source of legitimacy was the great kings of Vijayanagar. In return for subordination and loyalty the smaller king received gifts and honours from the greater king. According to the principle of *dayada*, or shared sovereignty, gifts received from a greater king conferred parts of his sovereignty to the smaller king. Within his own domain the 'little king' upheld a structure of political privilege by distributing gifts and honours to his subjects.⁸

The central position of the king is further suggested in the model of the south Indian temple, advocated by Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenbridge. In the present context the crucial feature of the temple is that it did not possess any capacity to resolve conflicts over honours and precedence between worshippers, but needed arbitration from an outside agency. Ideally, this agency was the king. Kingly intervention in disputes over honours should not, however, be understood as an attempt to lay down a general, legislative rule. Arbitration was a context-sensitive decision, which was open to renegotiation when circumstances were different.⁹ Indeed, continuous renegotiation of ceremonial rights and social status was a central dynamic element in pre- and early-colonial times.

Finally, 'honours' played a crucial role both in relation to the king and the temple. Honours were chief markers of status and power, and – as they were never distributed on a permanent basis – they were highly contended objects. In relation to the temple, honours typically consisted in the right to receive sacred substances from the deity or in the right to perform a certain ritual in public.¹⁰ In relation to the king honours consisted in the right to maintain ritual control within certain areas and the right to display honorary emblems, such as coloured flags and umbrellas. Honours were always 'public' and their value was determined in relation to honours held by others; essentially honours were *privileges*. In the present context an important feature of honours was that they were only valid if granted by a superior, a king or a deity.¹¹ Taken together the models of the king, the temple, and honours suggest that the importance of caste was not that it constituted a rigid and religiously defined 'system', but rather that it was part of a society where groups competed for ritual precedence and social positions.

Nowhere was the competitive character of south Indian society more visible than in the bifurcation of castes into the 'right' and 'left' hands.¹² Castes associated with these two divisions fought fiercely over honours and precedence in late pre-colonial and early colonial India. It is difficult to determine with certainty the castes belonging to each of the two divisions. A caste belonging to the right hand division in one place could be neutral or even associated with the left hand division in another, and the lists compiled by Europeans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries show a significant variety in the composition of the two divisions.¹³ This has led to the conclusion that there was no single, substantive, and consistent property underlining the division. Instead, it was to be seen as a basic form, capable of providing meaning to a variety of antagonisms within south Indian society.¹⁴

There was, however, some broad principles in the lines of division. Agricultural castes and castes involved in local trade were normally associated with the right hand division, whereas artisans and traders involved in trade over longer distances often belonged to the left hand division. Within the right hand division we find the dominant agricultural communities, the Paraiyans, and the merchant communities of Komatis and Balija Chetties. In the nineteenth century the core group of the left hand division was a group of five artisan castes known as Panchalar in Telugu and Kammalan in Tamil, but the division also included weaver castes and merchants. Brahmans were normally considered to be outside or above the division.

The right and left hand divisions appear as a prime example of patron–client relations. In early colonial Madras, for instance, each division was headed by a merchant community and included weavers, painters, washermen, and members of other communities employed in the essential textile business. The divisions also contained low-ranked groups, conveniently used as ‘mobs’ during violent disputes. On such occasions the leading merchant communities often paid their clients to desert the settlement. When most of the right hand castes deserted Madras in 1707, the council obtained intelligence that they were paid by the leaders of the division ‘in Proportion to the days they were absent’. In 1716, when a group of right hand weavers again deserted Madras, the governor intercepted a letter from the leaders of the right hand division in which the deserters ‘were encourag’d to insist on unreasonable terms, & promis’d to be supported with mony [sic] for their expenses’.¹⁵ In the conflict from Tranquebar to be analysed below the right hand leaders also paid the Paraiyans to stay away from the settlement and rice was supplied to the deserters.¹⁶

The caste divisions constituted important institutions, through which the pre-colonial social and ritual orders were constantly renegotiated. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries virtually every European settlement on the Coromandel Coast experienced extensive and violent disputes between the caste division over the right to take processions through a certain street or the right to display certain symbols.¹⁷ During these disputes the contending parties looked towards the European authorities as they would have looked towards the ‘little king’ outside the colonial context; they expected the colonial rulers to take up the position of an indigenous ruler and arbitrate the disputes. This expectation was nowhere more clearly expressed than in Pondicherry in 1768. Here, the leaders of the left hand division simply informed the French authorities that ‘The Company is our

common Prince, therefore the superior Council can grant ... honors to whomsoever they think proper.¹⁸ The Europeans were not, however, inclined to accept this assigned position as an indigenous 'little king'. On the contrary, hoping to stay clear of the complicated and unintelligible dynamics of south Indian society, they adopted a policy of non-intervention towards ceremonial disputes between Indians. They preferred to see the disputes between the two divisions as unfortunate disruptions of an essentially stable and 'traditional' social order. Consequently, confrontations between indigenous expectations and the intention of the various colonial powers were unavoidable. One of these confrontations took place in the settlement of Tranquebar in early 1822.

The dispute¹⁹

The dispute between the right and left hand castes began on 27 and 28 January 1822, when inhabitants belonging to the right hand division started deserting the small territory under Danish control and settled at 'Naraina Naik's Choultry' on British territory just outside the borders. Tension had, however, been smouldering since 1818 when the Paraiyans attacked a wedding *pandal* raised by the Senaittalavans, the most important left hand caste in the settlement. The issue remained unsolved until December 1821, when a commission consisting of three of the most prominent Indian inhabitants granted the Senaittalavans a number of ceremonial rights. Most notably, the commission bestowed upon the Senaittalavan merchant brothers Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti the unlimited right to travel by *palankeen*. In January 1822 the Paraiyans and other right hand castes expressed dissatisfaction with this ruling and attempts were made to gather an assembly of castes, known as the *maga nadu tesattar*. The government refused to give permission to the assembly and the desertion followed shortly after.²⁰

It is not possible to determine the exact number of deserters, who defined themselves as *maga nadu tesattar*, but estimates from both Indians and the Danish council indicate that the number of Paraiyans alone was about 1,000 males. To this figure should be added the number of deserters from higher ranked castes and, possibly, women and children.²¹ What probably concerned the Danish authorities more than the mere number of deserters was the fact that the gathering attracted a number of *poligars* or petty chiefs, who had recently been dismissed from the service of police in the settlement, and Paraiyans from the surrounding areas.²²

On 29 January a mob of Paraiyans invaded Danish territory and plundered and burnt down houses belonging to the Senaittalavans. More arson attacks followed, but soldiers in Danish service were able to impede the attacks. On 2 February the government received a letter from the deserters containing their terms for return; the main condition being the withdrawal of the ceremonial rights granted to the Senaittalavans. But they also demanded that Comerasamy Pillai from the dominant right hand caste of Vellalas should be appointed as leader (*talaivan*, spokesman) of the *maga nadu tesattar*. Although the government consented to some of these demands and informed the deserters that the Senaittalavans by themselves had agreed to abandon the disputed ceremonial privileges, the deserters did not return.²³

Instead, the deserters wrote to the Indians in military service demanding that they joined the gathering, as they were members of 'the Community of Right Hand Castes' and thus obliged to protect the deserters. The Indian *sepoys*, however, remained loyal and the Danish authorities finally succeeded in breaking down the resistance of the deserters. The majority of the deserted Paraiyans were Christians – a fact that did not prevent them from participating in contests about honour in a wider Hindu universe²⁴ – and in co-operation with Lutheran missionaries the council persuaded them to return, impressing on them that they had nothing to do with 'the Customs and Regulations of the Heathens'. They came back on 14 February, and the rest of the deserters, rather harmless without their violent clientele, followed shortly after.²⁵

The Danish authorities cautiously decided not to proceed immediately with an investigation into the desertion. Instead, the government seized the opportunity to open an investigation two weeks later, when part of the *maga nadu tesattar* petitioned the government, accusing Comerasamy Pillai of being one of the ringleaders behind the desertion. They further demanded that Comerasamy Pillai was again dismissed as leader of the *maga nadu tesattar*. At the same time, Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti presented their claims for compensation. On 18 March the government established a special commission to investigate into the dispute, which was headed by the secretary to the government, Lorentz, and further consisted of two Europeans and two Indians.²⁶

The investigation of the commission lasted until May 1823 when the majority of the cases brought before the commission were ready or nearly ready for judgement. But the sudden appearance of a new governor, U. A. Schönheyder, and his special envoy, C. A. Bluhme, radically altered the situation. Schönheyder and Bluhme arrived on 6 May 1823 and by 13 May Bluhme was made president of the commission.

On 17 May Bluhme recommended that a general pardon, granted by the government in February 1822 was implemented although the deserters had not adhered strictly to the conditions given in it.²⁷ A few days later a compromise was reached, which implied that the Senaittalavans received a somewhat lower amount in compensation than they had claimed. Bluhme dissolved the commission, thus ending the dispute about the ceremonial rights and privileges of the Senaittalavans.²⁸

Tranquebar in 1820s

The dispute between the right and left hand castes described above is interesting because it was in a sense out of date. By the early nineteenth century the importance of violent disputes between right and left hand castes had significantly diminished in the colonial centre of Madras. Through a complicated process which involved the emergence of a more differentiated social structure among the indigenous inhabitants, more bureaucratic forms of governance and the insistence on the policy of non-intervention, the British succeeded in asserting their construction of the colonial encounter. In this construction South Indian society was perceived as 'traditional', essentially stable and harmonious and it had no room for violent clashes between groups fighting for precedence within a dynamic social order.²⁹

In the tiny Danish settlement of Tranquebar things were, however, much different. In the eighteenth century Tranquebar had been of some importance as a neutral port and as a centre for illicit remittances of fortunes earned in India by British civil servants, but in the early nineteenth century – after eight years of British occupation 1807–15 – Tranquebar turned into a silent backwater town.³⁰ The shrinking Danish administration did not develop the more bureaucratic forms that characterized contemporary British colonialism.³¹ The administration of Tranquebar continued to be based on revenue farming and gave to influential Indians the possibility of obtaining important and relatively independent positions within local society. This system was more in keeping with the pre-colonial social order and maintained a social structure of patronage and patron–client relations.

Consequently, it is possible to identify a small number of individuals constituting the indigenous elite of Tranquebar in the early nineteenth century. Within the right hand division the leading individuals were from the communities of Vellalas and Kavarais. The former constituted, as in other parts of Tamil Nadu, the established agricultural elite, while the latter were Telugu-speaking Baliija Chetties, who had

settled in Tamil country and taken up a variety of occupations. Within the left hand division the trading community of Senaittalavans stood out as the most important caste. In general, the composition of the elite in early nineteenth-century Tranquebar tends to confirm the view that this part of Tamil Nadu was, to a greater extent than further west and north, dominated by the right hand division.³²

The most prominent individual in Tranquebar in the early 1820s was doubtless the Vellala Tendatzia Pillai, who held the office of *providiteur*; the highest administrative position attainable for Indians.³³ Throughout the dispute he remained loyal to the government, and did not participate in the desertion of his fellow members of the right hand division. Instead, he was employed by the Danish government as negotiator during the dispute and as a member of the commission to investigate the dispute.³⁴ Sidambara Pillai was another influential Vellala, who remained loyal to the government during the dispute. In the early 1820s he held several farms, but in 1823 he encountered economic difficulties and applied to the government for a pension. This was granted, because of his long-standing services to the Danes.³⁵

Other Vellalas were, on the other hand, deeply involved in the dispute. The most important was Comerasamy Pillai, whom the government saw as one of the ringleaders behind the violent action that accompanied the dispute. He occupied an important position in the settlement and the government described him as 'the most important of the Heads in the town'.³⁶ In 1820 he appeared as farmer of the salt revenue but – in all probability due to his involvement in the dispute – he lost the farm two years later. In 1824 his relations with the Danish authorities were repaired and he again obtained the salt farm. He was the brother of Colenda Velu Pillai, holder of the arrack farm from 1820 and also recognized as one of the key figures in the dispute.³⁷ Among the Kavarais the *sarrishtadar* or registrar, Kannusamy Naik, was the most influential. He was accused of having encouraged the dispute and of supporting the right hand division with money during the dispute.³⁸

Within the left hand division the most influential individuals were the Senaittalavan merchant brothers Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti. In the early twentieth century the Senaittalavans were described as a caste of betel cultivators concentrated in Tirunelveli District and therefore also known as Elai (leaf) Vaniyans. Eighteenth-century missionary sources, however describe them as dealers in rice, fruit, and spices. In 1822, the right hand division described them as a trading caste, and in a petition the Senaittalavans presented themselves as a community of 1000 households, of which one hundred were peasants while the

others were employing 'other Business and Trade'. They also claimed to have been suppliers of rice to the garrison since the establishment of Tranquebar.³⁹ Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti appear to have been successful traders. They described themselves as owners of two vessels 'with which we conduct a considerable Trade to the Benefit of his Majesty and the Inhabitants'. Furthermore, they claimed to have 'not only acquired Respect from Europeans and distinguished Merchants in foreign Places but also paid Alms and given generous Support to the Pagodas and poor People of the Settlement'.⁴⁰ In 1834 Appu Chetti was registered as living in one of the most expensive houses in Tranquebar and as the owner of several grounds and gardens.⁴¹

At the time of the dispute there were many rumours of the imminent promotion of the two brothers. An anonymous poster, left on the door of Governor Kofoed's house, declared that the reason behind the desertion was that Appu Chetti was going to succeed Kannusamy Naik as *sarrishtadar*, whereas Tirumudy Chetti was to be appointed *dubash* or personal servant to the governor.⁴² Against this background it is not difficult to identify the reason behind the dispute between the two caste divisions that broke out in 1822 as the rise in power and influence of the left hand merchants Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti in an environment dominated by right hand castes.

Danish attitudes towards conflict

There can be no doubt that the Danish authorities looked at the desertion as a serious threat to their authority. Immediately more *sepoys* were admitted into service and military posted in all parts of the settlement. The feeling that the desertion of *maga nadu tesattar* represented a sort of rebellion was intensified when the deserters wrote to the *sepoys* of the right hand division and demanded their attendance and protection.⁴³ Similarly, it caused great concern when the commission learned that the deserters had claimed that they could easily overthrow the small number of *sepoys* in Danish service and take over the fort.⁴⁴ Clearly, the desertion was a demonstration of force, which put considerable pressure on the Danish authorities.

In 1818, when the Danish government was for the first time confronted with the disagreements concerning the ceremonial rights of the Senaittalavans, it opted for a policy of non-intervention and delegated the decision to the heads of the castes. Thus, *maga nadu tesattar* was allowed to assemble. The attempt to solve the matter in this way was fruitless, but it was not until three years later that the issue reappeared. This time the Senaittalavans asked the government to entrust the

decision to a commission consisting of Tendatzia Pillai, Comerasamy Pillai, and Sami Chetti, the then leader of *maga nadu tesattar*. The government accepted this proposal arguing that it was a cautious policy and compatible with the usual procedure in cases regarding the customs of the castes.⁴⁵ So far the policy of non-intervention seemed to work.

The indigenous commission conferred certain ceremonial rights on the Senaittalavans, which the government just had to confirm. But now the government departed from the policy of non-intervention. The commission had limited the right of the Senaittalavans to perform the disputed ceremonies to two minor villages, but Governor Kofoed now discreetly added Poreiar, the largest and most important of Tranquebar's villages, to the list.⁴⁶ Later, Kofoed defended the actions of government in relation to the dispute with 'the need to increase the reputation of an enterprising Caste, and to keep Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti in the Settlement, which benefitted from their Trade, by granting them Rights which they believed they could obtain elsewhere'.⁴⁷

After the desertion in early 1822, however, the situation was altogether different. The official ideal of non-intervention gave way to a delicate balancing act between a firm attitude on the one hand and a measured degree of leniency on the other. On the one hand, it was important to affirm the authority of the Danes; on the other hand, it was necessary to prompt the return of the deserters. The balance was vividly expressed by the government when it presented its policy during the desertion as:

to encounter the misled Heads of Caste with all possible Mercy and Leniency, to grant to them everything compatible with Equity and Justice, but, to the utmost, to deny them everything, which could contribute to weaken the Authority, which is necessary in order to act publicly to the Interests of his Majesty and the benefit of the Settlement.⁴⁸

After the establishment of the special commission headed by Lorentz the Danish Government was no longer directly involved in the dispute and it seems as if the commission was conveniently used to 'shelve' the issue. The commission worked in an elaborate way and a very large number of witnesses were examined. This attitude was criticized by Bluhme when he in May 1823 reported on the progress of the commission. The procedure in a case of this particular character, he wrote, ought to have been summary.⁴⁹

The dispute also had consequences for the general policy towards conflicts between Indians. In the mid-1820s a revision of the administrative framework in Tranquebar took place, and the new guidelines were laid

down with the recent disturbances in mind. In a proposal for a new general instruction, sent to Copenhagen in 1823, it was explicitly stated that no officer was allowed to intervene in the honours and privileges of the castes by issuing regulations and orders.⁵⁰ More interestingly, the judicial regulation of 1823 directed that in cases concerning ceremonial rights among Indians, the Danish judge should 'not, as formerly, refer the Case to the Judgment of the Castes' but determine the case himself.⁵¹ This new attitude was explained at length in the comments following the regulation to Copenhagen. Experience had shown, it was argued, that the Indians never by themselves would agree in disputes on caste privileges:

If the Public kept out of the Disputes, except by charging and punishing Offenders against the public Order, this would be the same as to authorize Usurpations of any Caste Privilege, because not those who made the Usurpation but those who with Force prevented it, ... were the offenders.

Thus, it will be necessary to judge in these Disputes, which, because the Verdict is founded on Proofs of established usage, is very different from issuing Decrees and Orders (which are often *against* established Usage).⁵²

After the dispute of 1822–23 the Danes explicitly accepted that they had to make judgements in ceremonial disputes between Indians. The Danes had to concur with the fact that they were being constructed by agents in Indian society as a 'little King'. In this respect the desertion of the right hand castes had been successful.

Indian attitudes towards conflict

Turning to the Indian attitude towards conflict it must be emphasized that the desertion did not represent a rebellion against European authority. As the deserters remained just outside the borders of Danish territory, it was rather a contest of how far this section of the local elite could go in their attempt to secure their position in society. The demands raised by the deserters confirm this. Apart from denying the social and ritual aspirations of the Senaittalavans, they required the return of three banished inhabitants, the dismissal of the indigenous leader of the police, and Comerasamy Pillai to be the approved head of *maga nadu tesattar*.⁵³ The Danes might have interpreted the situation as a severe challenge to their authority, but these demands represented nothing but adjustments to the administration of local affairs.

The public display of symbols was always at the root of disputes between right and left hand castes. The dispute analysed here was no exception and during the negotiations for the return of the deserters, an interesting contest took place over the right to proclaim 'victory'. It began when the envoys to the government were informed by the deserters that in 'former days' when *maga nadu tesattar* returned from assemblies, 'they came with Music to Town and visited the Honorable Members of the Government'. To this the envoys reacted sharply: 'Your mob has been this time a very mischievous one and their conduct was very unbecoming – Your returning should be like Mourning, grieved and covered their heads with Cloths – for which you deserve and not for any other honour.'⁵⁴ The envoys did, however, persuade the government to grant the deserters the possibility of displaying their return in public. They were to be received in the garden of Governor Kofoed, and they were allowed to proceed to the garden 'without swords and sticks but only with moderate Musics'. This agreement was never effected, and in the *cowle* granted by the government on 8 February 1822 it was stated that the deserters should return 'in Silence as peaceful and obedient Subjects...without making Noise with Tom Tom or in any other Way'.⁵⁵

It is significant that the public display of symbols was just as important to the Danish authorities as it was to the deserters. In this respect the Danes remained fully incorporated into the indigenous order. Formerly, the government explained to Copenhagen, it had been necessary to allow deserters to return in triumph, surrounded by armed Paraiyans and accompanied by music, flags, and even a guard of honour from the garrison. This time it was different. The government proudly described the return of the Paraiyans as follows: 'In the utmost Silence they marched in flocks past the Detachment of Erichitanchery, who had orders to let them pass. There was not a Weapon among them. Their Banners and Flags were folded and bundled up, their Instruments hidden.'⁵⁶

The discourse on Indian society

In their report to Copenhagen on the desertion the government communicated a particular view of Indian society, aiming to convince their superiors that the leaders of the desertion did not enjoy any deeply rooted support in local society. From the outset the Danes were convinced that the deserters consisted of two blocs: a minority of evil-minded ringleaders and a large majority of misled, but essentially peaceful inhabitants.⁵⁷ The ringleaders did not represent a legitimate authority, only the Danish administration could claim to do that.

Obviously, the government made a particular effort to explain the existence and authority of *maga nadu tesattar*. They sought to acquaint the authorities in Copenhagen with 'the Nature of such an Assembly and the Authority it had usurped'. *Maga nadu tesattar* was described as an assembly of the heads of the most important castes, and as possessing an extensive authority over the castes. Such an authority was, the government argued, compatible with the Danish administration as long as order and security prevailed. However, outside Danish control the authority of *maga nadu tesattar* became tyrannical.⁵⁸

The reason why the peace-loving inhabitants of the Danish settlement preferred the tyranny of *maga nadu tesattar* to the legitimate administration and protection provided by the Danes was, according to the government, threefold. First, *maga nadu tesattar* had the capacity of excommunicating members of the castes. Second, the number and ambivalent position of the Paraiyans made them a useful instrument in the hands of the heads of caste. The Paraiyans, although 'the meanest and most despised among the Castes of India', enjoyed remarkable ceremonial privileges within the right hand division.⁵⁹ Thus, they were always prepared to create disorder. Thirdly, the Hindus had an excessive respect for usage and custom. Because custom had prevailed since time immemorial, it was believed to be sacred. To government, only these circumstances could explain the existence of social disorder at a time when 'probably eleven out twelve deserters, excepting the [Paraiyans], in their Hearts were devoted to the Government'.⁶⁰

Against this background it was hardly surprising, the government further explained, that the peaceful part of the deserters soon became dissatisfied with their role as instruments in the hands of the ringleaders. As a result unrest and disorder grew among the deserters. In the end it was the lack of appropriate authority of *maga nadu tesattar* that brought the desertion to an end. After the return of the deserters, the government gloatingly wrote:

The Name Maganada Tessator, which earlier was mentioned by Europeans as well as Indians with a certain fearsome Awe, is now a Mockery for the Children in our Streets, and after the Result of the recent Events, it is very unlikely that a similar Assembly will ever again disturb the Settlement.⁶¹

This report to Copenhagen was, of course, a long apologia for the conduct of the government, which largely excluded Indian perceptions of what had happened. It was a monologue on the nature of indigenous

society, which incorporated notions of a 'traditional' India governed by 'immemorial' customs. As such the discourse on Indian society was not significantly different from contemporary British accounts of south Indian society. The question, however, is whether this report is the best – or the only – place to locate colonial discourse.

There was, at least, another aspect of the colonial discourse on the nature of Indian society in which indigenous conceptions constituted the dominant element. This aspect of the discourse was not directed towards distant civil servants in Copenhagen, but towards the local and practical solution of caste disputes and it recognized that local society in Tranquebar was best controlled through networks of patronage.

Reinforcing patron–client relations

Above I have argued that social relations in Tranquebar were dominated by patron–client relations. The Paraiyans were commonly referred to as *val-ankai-mattar*, or 'the friends of the right hand castes', and there is evidence that Comerasamy Pillai exercised great influence over the Paraiyans.⁶² It is significant that relations of dominance were represented as parent–children relations, and that the government was seen as an integrated part of this structure. When the deserters submitted their first letter to the government they asked for a pardon and to be again protected as the 'children' of the government. A few days later, they wrote to the governor portraying him as a 'father' to the humble peasants. When part of *maganadu tesattar* complained over Comerasamy Pillai and Tambu Chetti they reminded the government that the Danish king, 'being like a father to us, is obliged to protect and guard us, his poor subjects and children'. Finally, in their attempt to persuade the deserters to return the envoys to government equated the government with 'fathers...willing to pardon their mischievous conduct and to treat them with love and kindness'.⁶³

The government also used the metaphor. When the deserters rejected the first *cowle* granted by government they explained that the content of the *cowle* was not clear to them, because their understanding of the issue was limited. In its answer the government adopted this argument and utilized it to disparage the deserters. It was, the government claimed,

a Proof of your weak and simple Intellect, that you have started and continued such an erroneous and unreasonable Action...[which] makes you and your Children unhappy, and it is furthermore a proof of a weak and simple Mind that good and righteous men, because Government knows that such Individuals are among you, has been

misled to erroneous Actions ... considering this the Government shall, once again, talk to you as a Father talks to his immature Children.⁶⁴

More importantly, the government not only represented Indian society in terms of father–son – that is, patron–client – relations, it also actively sought to establish itself as a patron in relation to the troublesome Paraiyans, which appeared to be crucial for the control of local society. In April 1823 the government produced a minute, in which it concluded that the attachment of Paraiyans to the right hand division was at the root of violent caste disputes. Accordingly, the key strategy to avoid future violence was to break down that connection, and establish the Paraiyans as a separate entity in local society. The Paraiyans should be brought into such a relation to government that their position was promoted and their sense of pride flattered.⁶⁵

The government first persuaded the lutheran Paraiyans to accept the idea. A regulation was framed, which placed the lutheran Paraiyans directly under the protection of government, and, whereas they used to be called ‘the Children of the Right Hand Castes’,⁶⁶ they should for the future enjoy the title ‘the Children of the Government’. The government promised to protect the honours and ceremonies enjoyed by the Paraiyans as long as they were compatible with their lutheran faith.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Paraiyans were given their own *talaivan* with a number of assistants. These even received a salary and was equated with other indigenous civil servants. In return the *talaivan* and his assistants were required to maintain a strict control over the Paraiyans and instantly report any signs of disturbances. This arrangement concerned only the lutheran Paraiyans, but it was made clear that their Roman Catholic and Hindu brethren could at any time secure an agreement on the same terms.⁶⁸ In the following years salaries to the heads of the Paraiyans figured in the account books of the colonial administration.⁶⁹ By openly offering to protect the Paraiyans, the Danish government acted in accordance with the model of the ‘little king’ and the distribution of honours embedded in it. In other words, the construction and application of knowledge in this particular – and perhaps a-typical – instance of the colonial encounter was dominated by indigenous and not European notions.

Conclusion

The dispute between right and left hand castes in Tranquebar in 1822 exemplifies that the colonial encounter was not always a process in which the colonizer – through the application of a hegemonic colonial

discourse – was able to construct the colonized. In early nineteenth-century Tranquebar, the colonizers were so weak that they to a significant extent were constructed by indigenous leaders as a south Indian ‘little king’. In this respect their situation was closer to that of the missionaries analysed by Susan Bayly, who rather than converting Indians to christianity were themselves converted into figures fitting the existing religious landscape in south India.⁷⁰ Or even to that of James Cook in Hawaii in early 1779. In Marshall Sahlins’ famed analysis Cook was incorporated into a polynesian cosmology and died as an ‘historical metaphor of a mythical reality’.⁷¹

Unlike Cook, the Danish settlement survived being constructed by indigenous agents, but they did so by reinforcing patron–client relationships, which were giving way to more bureaucratic forms of governance in contemporary centres of British colonialism.⁷² In these centres the colonial discourse was arguably becoming more ‘hegemonic’, but the events in Tranquebar remind us that the colonial discourse was in principle always a dialogue.

Notes

1. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 172–73.
2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 27.
3. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 162.
4. David Washbrook, ‘Economic Depression and the Making of “Traditional” Society in Colonial India’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series III (1993), pp. 237–63. For similar concerns, see also: Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, ‘Histories in Transition: Approaches to the Study of Colonialism and Culture in India’, *History Workshop*, 32 (1991), pp. 110–27, esp. 115–16.
5. Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History. Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 8, 193.
6. Nicholas B. Dirks, ‘From Little King to Landlord: Property, Law and the Gift under the Madras Permanent Settlement’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28.2 (1986), pp. 307–33.
7. Lata Mani, ‘Contentious Traditions. The Debate on Sati in Colonial India’, in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), pp. 88–126.
8. Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 94–107, 128, 134. Dirks’ model is clearly inspired by and generally in accordance with Burton Stein’s notion of the segmentary nature of South Indian polities. See Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980) and *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

9. A. Appadurai and C. A. Breckenbridge, 'The South India Temple: Authority, honour and redistribution', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS), 10.2, (1976), pp. 190, 206. Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 33–36, 46–52.
10. See, for instance, Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict*, pp. 36, 41–2. C. J. Fuller, *Servants of the Goddess. The Priests of a South Indian Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 42–46.
11. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, p. 87.
12. For an extended treatment of the 'right' and 'left' hand caste Niels Brimnes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter. Right and Left Hand Castes in Early Colonial South India* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 26–35.
13. Stein, *Peasant State*; pp. 474–77.
14. Arjun Appadurai, 'Right and Left Hand Castes in South India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11.2–3 (1974), pp. 216–59. Francis Zimmermann, 'Geometrie sociale traditionnelle. Castes de main droite et castes de main gauche en Inde du Sud', *Annales E. S. C.*, 29.6 (1974), pp. 1381–401.
15. Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library, London. P/239/83; Madras Public Proceedings (hereafter MPP): 27. August 1707 (fols. 110–11) and P/239/87; MPP: 16. November 1716 (fol. 41).
16. Danish National Archives, Copenhagen (hereafter DNA). Asiatisk Kompagni (hereafter ASK) vol. 1517: 6. and 24. May 1822 (fols 93, 209–10).
17. For numerous references to disputes between right and left hand castes in Madras, see Henry Davidson Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vols I–III (London, 1913). Some of these disputes are analysed in Brimnes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter*.
18. Tamil Nadu State Archives, Military Sundries vol. 88 (fol. 263). The quoted document is an eighteenth-century English translation of the original French manuscript.
19. The following is based on Brimnes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter*, pp. 188–219.
20. The Council gave an extensive account of the events intended for the authorities in Copenhagen. See DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fols 274–313).
21. DNA ASK vol. 1341; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 31. January 1822 (fol. 416). DNA ASK vol. 1517; Protokol for kommissionen: 6. and 11. May 1822 (fols 94–95, 136).
22. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 15 (fol. 17).
23. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 2, 3 and 4.
24. Susan Bayly has convincingly argued that the religious universe of early colonial south India was highly syncretic. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings. Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
25. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 7 and 10. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fols 306–7).
26. DNA ASK vol. 1341; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 21. March 1822 (fols. 441–45). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 3 and 14.
27. DNA ASK vol. 1342; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 7., 13. and 17. May 1823 (fols 120–32). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 48. News about the dispute apparently reached the authorities in Copenhagen

through a Bengal newspaper, and Schönheyder and Bluhme were not just sent out as a new Governor and his envoy, they also constituted a special commission to investigate the administration of the Danish possessions in India. RA Generaltoldkammeret, Vestindisk resolutionsprotokol 1822: nos 111 and 125.

28. The two brothers, Appu Chetti and Tirumudy Chetti, had claimed more than 9,000 Madras rupees and other members of the caste had altogether claimed a similar amount. The compromise gave the claimants in the two cases 3,000 Madras rupees each. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 48. DNA ASK vol. 1342; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 22. May 1823 (fol. 133).
29. This development is traced in detail in Brimnes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter*. See particularly pp. 103–24, 139–87
30. Ole Feldbaek, *India Trade under the Danish Flag 1772–1808* (Odense: Studentlitteratur, 1969).
31. For classic analysis of the ‘bureaucratization’ of colonial relations in the context of temple disputes, see Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict*. A recent reassessment of colonial rule and temple conflict can be found Kanakalatha Mukund, *The View from Below. Indigenous Society, Temples and the Early Colonial State in Tamilnadu, 1700–1835* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005), esp pp. 97–135.
32. B. E. F. Beck, ‘The right-left division of South Indian Society, *Journal of Asian Studies* 29.4 (1970), pp. 788–89. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fol. 275). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 4.
33. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 14. The office of the *providiteur* was a Danish creation, and the term was probably derived from ‘provider’. The *providiteur* presided over the court dealing with indigenous disputes and was responsible for the provisions in the government warehouses.
34. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 1, 14 and 15. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 19. February 1824 (fols. 433–4). DNA Kommercekollegiet (hereafter KK) Ostindiske Journalsager 1818: no. 238, 1819: no. 215, 1820: no. 147, 1824: no. 233.
35. DNA ASK vol. 1341; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 10. January 1822 (fols. 410–11). DNA ASK vol. 1342; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 19. September 1822 (fol. 34). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 22. DNA ASK vol. 1342; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 30. October 1823 (fol. 232). DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1821: no. 135.
36. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 13 (littra u). ‘The town’ must refer to Tranquebar itself. See also DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fol. 276).
37. DNA ASK vol. 1517; Protokol for kommissionen: 29th April 1822 (fol. 69). DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1821: no. 135. Comerasamy Pillai’s second term of salt farm lasted only a short time. In June 1824 the Danes agreed with the British not to produce salt in Tranquebar. Rasch 1967: 217.
38. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 14 and 16. DNA ASK vol. 1517; Protokol for kommissionen: 9., 13. and 18. May 1822 (fols 116–17, 145, 174).

39. Edgar Thurston, *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), vol. VI, pp. 360–61. Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, 'Ausführliche Beschreibung der Malabarischen Heidenthums'. Published by W. Calland as *Ziegenbalg's Malabarisches Heidentum*. In: Verhandlungen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam. Afdeeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks, Deel XXV, No. 3 (Amsterdam, 1926), p. 165. August Hennings, *Gegenwärtiger Zustand der Besitzungen der Europäer in Ostindien* (Copenhagen, Hamburg and Kiel, 1784–6), vol. II; pp. 482, 488. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: nos 6 and 16. The Senaittalavans clearly exaggerated the number of households. According to a census taken in 1790 the number of Senaittalavan households were around 250. DNA ASK vol. 1447a; Mandtal over Tranquebars indbyggere. DNA ASK vol. 1447b; Mandtal over Tranquebars landsbyers indbyggere.
40. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 14. I have not been able to trace any ships belonging to the port of Tranquebar owned by Appu or Tirumudy Chetti. See Tamil Nadu State Archive Danish Records 11618, vol. 220/92; Catalogue of vessels.
41. DNA Folketællinger, Tranquebar 1834.
42. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 6 and 19. See also no. 28. The *sarrishtadar* was a registrar or a record keeper. In British South India he was the Chief Secretary to the District Collector and the highest ranking Indian official in a district. In Tranquebar the *Providiteur* was more powerful.
43. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fol. 302). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 7.
44. DNA ASK vol. 1517; Protokol for kommissionen: 22. and 24. April 1822 (fols 37–39, 53–56). Colenda Velu Pillai denied this part of the accusations against him with particular eagerness. See, 15. May 1822 (fol. 159).
45. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August (fol. 276). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 14.
46. DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1823: no. 220, 1823: no. 109, 1824: no. 15.
47. DNA Privatrarkiv no. 5167; C. A. Bluhme: G.1. (fol. 9).
48. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fol. 295). In a similar statement the Government wrote that their aim was not only to maintain the authority vested in the council but also to heighten the esteem of this authority 'within the settlement and outside its borders'. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fol. 309).
49. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 48.
50. DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1824: no. 157.
51. *Ibid.*, no. 159 (para 14). For another copy, see Tamil Nadu State Archive, Danish Records 11607, no. 209; Draft of Regulations of Justice.
52. DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1824: no. 159. Emphasis in original.
53. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 2 and 4. There were a few other demands, not changing the general picture.
54. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 15. This document is originally in the English language. A similar contest took place in Cuddalore in 1786. Here, deserters from the right hand division refused to return to their villages unless 'they were admitted within the Bounds with Tom Tom,

Musick, Dancing Girls, Colors flying, and Arms, such as pikes Sticks &c' Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library P/240/63; Madras Public Proceedings: 20. June 1786 (fol. 967). I am grateful to Professor Ravi Ahuja for this reference.

55. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: nos 5 and 15.
56. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fols 298–9, quoted from fol. 307).
57. DNA ASK vol. 1341; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 21. February and 21. March 1822 (fols 431, 442). DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fols 278, 280, 283).
58. DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 15. August 1822 (fol. 282–86).
59. Ibid. (fol. 284).
60. Ibid. (fols. 284–86).
61. Ibid. (fols. 305–8).
62. DNA ASK vol. 1517; Protokol for kommissionen: 25. Juni 1822 (fol. 355). DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 13 (littra h). For the meaning of *valankai-mattar*, see Zimmermann, 'Geometrie sociale traditionnelle. Castes de main droite et castes de main gauche en Inde du Sud', p. 1382.
63. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: nos 2, 25, 13 (littra i) and 15. See also DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1821: no. 227.
64. DNA ASK vol. 1518; Akter fra kommissionen: no. 5.
65. DNA ASK vol. 1342; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 3. April 1823 (fols 103–6). DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 1. May 1823 (fols 350–4).
66. In Tamil *jati-pillai*. See Zimmermann, 'Geometrie sociale traditionnelle,' pp. 1386–87.
67. Again this indicates the extent to which the christians, with the sanction of government, were incorporated in a wider ritual universe.
68. DNA ASK vol. 1342; Guvernementets Resolutionsprotokol: 3. April 1823 (fols 106–12, 115). DNA ASK vol. 1406; Guvernementets Depecheprotokol: 1. May 1823 (fol. 353).
69. DNA KK Ostindiske Journalsager 1824: no. 241, 1825: no. 115.
70. Bayly, *Saints*, pp. 3–5, 329, 398, 436–37.
71. Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 106.
72. The Danes did not, however, remain in India much longer. The Danish settlements in India were sold to Britain in 1845.

7

French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina

Susan Bayly

Introduction

This chapter uses anthropological as well as historical approaches to explore the distinctive nature of colonialism in French-ruled Indochina.¹ From this interdisciplinary perspective, it seeks to contextualize a rich but little-known series of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writings on Indochina's peoples and cultures. It notes particularly their emphasis on concepts of the community and of the transforming revolutionary event. And it argues that these writings' distinctive understandings of race, culture, and polity profoundly affected the thought and action of Asians as well as Europeans, with these effects being felt both within and beyond the French empire.

The chapter's focus is thus on the ideological and intellectual dimensions of empire. Its central premise is that for both rulers and their colonial subjects, empire was as much a dynamic experience of mind and culture as an expression of the material realities of economic and political power. Furthermore, in this arena of 'invisible empire' occurred many of the critical interactions and transformations which gave French-ruled societies including those of both Indochina and Algeria their unique status in the making of what in the twentieth century was thought of as the Third World, with its special endowment of insurrectionary faiths and peasant-based revolutionary politics. Thus while concentrating on Indochina, the chapter also underlines the need to transcend the anglo-centrism and narrow 'area studies' perspectives which have tended to dominate accounts of both culture and political economy under colonialism.

Change and the event in French and British colonial anthropology

The seminal writings of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and his intellectual heir Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) still loom large in the theoretical formulations of both French and anglophone anthropologists. Still read too are Marcel Griaule (1898–1956) and other pioneering researchers in the Durkheim and Mauss tradition whose ethnographic missions to sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific and Latin America were sponsored by those twin bastions of pre-Second World War social science, the Institut d’Ethnologie (Institute of Ethnology) of the University of Paris, co-founded by Mauss in 1926, and the Musée de l’Homme (the Paris Museum of Mankind, founded in 1937). These ethnographers’ works are still seen as important intellectual landmarks, even though their vision of social science (*sociologie*) as the study of sociality through the observation of its collective material and ideological mechanisms was very different from the concerns of present-day anthropologists.²

In contrast, both anthropologists and historians have largely overlooked the vast array of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings which sought to apply France’s most up-to-date social science perspectives to the study of its largest and most turbulent dependencies, Indochina and Algeria. The intention is not to be uncritical about these works and their authors. While some were surprisingly sympathetic towards what they saw as manifestations of revolutionary thought and activism amongst colonial peoples, even the left-wing Durkheimians often wrote in terms that are unabashedly racist or Orientalist by today’s standards.

Yet these works deserve study, not only because they were influential in their own day, but because they have contributed in surprising ways to modern anthropology in both its anglophone and French-speaking variants. Indeed in a number of cases, the term Orientalist should be shorn of the pejorative overtones it has acquired through oversimplified readings of Edward Said’s works. This applies above all to the work of Paul Mus (1902–69), the academic polymath and wartime man of action whose employment of Durkheimian perspectives in the analysis of Vietnamese revolutionary nationalism is explored below.

What must also be stressed about intellectual life in the colonial period was that it involved extensive interaction between Asians and Europeans. This was a particular feature of France’s pre-eminent centre of Orientalist learning, the Hanoi-based Ecole Française d’Extrême Orient (EFEO or French School of the Far East), founded in 1898, and

its *Bulletin*. Of great importance too was Hanoi's Institut Indochinois pour l'Etude de l'Homme (Indochinese Institute for the Study of Man), founded in 1938 under the auspices of Mauss's Institute of Ethnology and the Musée de l'Homme. This organization was an important inheritor of the Durkheimian religious studies tradition which before the First World War had been enshrined in the outspokenly liberal formulations of the remarkable *Revue du Monde Musulman* ('Revue of the Muslim World' or *RMM*).³

Within Indochina, these institutions which published the works of colonial-era French anthropologists became a critical meeting ground between French and Asian intellectuals who were directly involved in the politics and social movements of the colonial period. From this domain of anthropological debate came ideas about the nature of sociality and the values of the peasant locality or commune which inspired both champions and opponents of Indochina's insurrectionary nationalisms.

There were thus important parallels with the activities of the many Britons and Indians whose writings did so much to shape both the understanding and the lived experience of caste, tribe, nation, and ethno-religious community in British-ruled India. Furthermore, by the 1930s, a surprisingly large number of Indians had become active participants in this world of French anthropological debate. As I show below, these included prominent Hindu cultural nationalists who were inspired by French accounts of early Indian 'colonizers' in southeast Asia, and by the vision of an 'Indic' *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) which had supposedly left its traces in both the living cultures and ancient monumental architecture of southeast Asia.

This concern with architecture deserves special emphasis here. Ideas about the built environment were of enduring importance in both British and French anthropological writing about the presence or absence of such qualities as 'race health' and nationhood: this applied to European as well as non-Western societies. Yet there were striking differences between these French and anglophone works. Generally speaking, British colonial anthropology tended to exclude the modern in its models of an archetypal Indian or Muslim or African polity and social order.

It is true that by the early twentieth century some British scholar-officials ascribed great importance to the activities of religious and cultural modernists around the world, most notably in India where both Islamic revivalists and Hindu cultural movements such as the Arya Samaj attracted much attention.⁴ Yet on the whole, French anthropological

writing was marked by two key characteristics which distinguished it from its British equivalents. The first was a more consistent emphasis on the understanding of both politics and religion as domains of modernity, rupture, and revolutionary initiative. The principal reason for this was that throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French social thought in both the metropole and the colonies remained strongly marked by consciousness of the French Revolution as a turning point in the history of humanity, and hence of the revolutionary or transforming event as a critical focus of human experience.

The second hallmark of these French works was that the concerns of those writing on the French-ruled colonies were generally far closer to those of metropolitan social science. Indeed in contrast with Britain and its empire, the whole French colonial experience was far more tightly bound up with the life of the metropole, and particularly with the persistent ruptures and insurrectionary crises of French domestic politics.

What played particularly into French anthropological writings on colonial societies was an awareness that the theme of polity divided, contested, and ruptured applied directly to France itself. Those who wrote about culture both within and beyond Asia were profoundly influenced by the legacy of metropolitan debate about the history of French political experience as a sequence of epic transformations. In the forefront of this thinking were France's many abrogations of the existing political order, from the 1789 Revolution and the Commune of 1871 to the crises and repeated constitutional dissolutions of the twentieth century.

For commentators on colonial political life, the key point of reference was therefore France's own heritage of nationhood, conceived by Durkheimians and conservative anti-Durkheimians alike as both eternal and eternally revolutionary, deriving as it did from the experiences of a history-conscious peasantry with a dynamic yet enduring sense of rootedness in an ancestral terrain or *terroir*.⁵ The key distinction here is with the anti-evolutionism of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and other leading structural-functionalists of the mid-twentieth century who dismissed historical perspectives as unsuitable to the concerns of British social anthropology. In contrast, there was no point at which French social science was not history-conscious, not profoundly concerned with social change and the all-defining event. As a result, the expectation of sudden and dramatic dissolution of polity was something that many French social scientists came to look for in the non-European world. This was a vision of political assertiveness which was nourished by the experience of the two world wars, together with the economic

dislocations and regional insurgencies of the 1930s Depression, and the bloody and costly colonial wars that brought down French rule in Asia and Africa in the 1950s. In this respect French Orientalism in both the neutral and the pejorative sense of that term differed greatly from its Anglo-Saxon equivalents, and attempts to portray colonial social science in terms of a monolithic 'Anglo-French hegemony' are unpersuasive and self-defeating.

French anthropology and the study of Indochina's Cham minority

How then might one observe these concerns being played out in real life? The trend in recent years has been to study the globalizing whole from the perspective of the micro-level fragment. Indeed a switch from the general to the particular is appropriate at this point, given the dual understanding of Indochina's cultural essences which prevailed so widely among French anthropologists in the colonial era. Of these two components, the first was a fragmenting vision of the Asian empire, as reflected in French commentators' enduring insistence on the mosaic-like ethnic diversity of Indochina.⁶ In contrast, the second element was global and unifying, with French researchers unceasingly proclaiming their own capacity to discern the enduring yet dynamic unities of sociality and political order which made Indochina loom so large in their eyes as a bastion of large-scale Asian civilization.

I therefore turn now to French writings about one particular minority people within the Asian empire, the Cham of southern Indochina. A remarkably rich and diverse body of work was published on the Cham from the 1880s onwards. Its concerns reflected the full diversity of French colonial scholarship, from the evolutionist preoccupations of nineteenth-century race theorists to the great themes of sociality and its deformations which inspired the followers of Mauss and Durkheim.

At the end of the nineteenth century, French-ruled Indochina was thought to contain about 130,000 Cham out of a total population of 12 million 'Annamites' (Vietnamese-speakers), 1.5 million Khmer-speakers and approximately 500,000 of the hill and forest-dwelling people for whom the French and their Vietnamese-speaking subjects used the pejorative term *moi* (savage).⁷ Most Cham were and are Muslims; the Islamization of their forebears has generally been thought to date from the fifteenth century CE. A source of much fascination for colonial anthropologists was the fact that the Cham constituted the only sizable Muslim population in French-ruled Asia. As will be seen below, much

comparative thinking was therefore directed towards the question of why Islam in this particular setting appeared to be such a mild and unassertive force, in contrast with Islam as it was thought to exist in every other colonized society.

This small and impoverished population had also come to be regarded as the remnants of a once-great 'Indic' kingdom, the ancient realm of Champa, an expansive maritime polity whose Hindu dynasties proclaimed their rule over much of modern-day Vietnam from the second to the fifteenth centuries CE. One of the sensations of nineteenth-century French Orientalism was the decipherment of Sanskrit inscriptions indicating that it was these 'Indianized' dynasts whose master-builders had created the sandstone and brick-built structures known as Cham towers.⁸ These constitute Indochina's only large-scale ancient monumental architecture, apart from Cambodia's great Angkorian shrine complexes.

From the late nineteenth century, these structures were exhaustively analysed by French scholar-officials.⁹ As with the exaltation of Angkor Wat as a key site of Cambodian national memory, they are preserved today as important Vietnamese national heritage sites. Even French commentators hailed the role of Vietnamese scholars such as the litterateur Truong Vinh Ky (1837–98) in overturning the once-prevalent assumption that the towers were of Cambodian/Khmer dynastic origin. This provided one of the key intellectual foundations for the portrayal of Vietnam by pre- and post-independence cultural nationalists as a civilization with long-standing roots, its sense of national identity nourished over many centuries by a history of enduring confrontation with its Khmer and Chinese neighbours.

Throughout the colonial period, French Orientalist journals published extensively on the Cham monuments as mute witness to the epic story of imperial Champa's rise and fall.¹⁰ Well into the twentieth century, these writings remained rooted in the concerns of evolutionist race science. This discipline, which was referred to as ethnology in Britain and *anthropologie* in France, is best known today in its applied anthropometric form, with its tabulation of cranial measurements and nose widths and its understanding of human history as a ceaseless evolutionary struggle between those of supposedly advanced and inferior racial 'stock'. Also central to these doctrines was the concept of civilization as the unique attainment of superior racial groups, of nationhood as the supreme manifestation of human sociality, and of empire-building as an expression of superior national will and race spirit.¹¹

The key point for ethnologists was that the Cham had once been monumental builders as well as conquerors and rulers. This meant that from

an evolutionist perspective, they were to be seen as one of the exceptional peoples whose superior 'race energies' had endowed them with the capacity to achieve both nationhood and civilization. It followed too for these theorists that the expansiveness of the ancient Champa polity was a direct expression of this superiority. Like the French themselves, the Cham were widely represented as being the product of a particularly fruitful blending of distinct racial 'stocks'.

This was one of many ways in which French social science linked colonial concerns with those of the metropole. A key manifestation of French race science was the attempt to show that French nationhood possessed unique and superior qualities because as a people, the French had come into being as an historic racial composite, melding the best elements of at least two 'vigorous' and ethnologically superior European racial 'types': the Celt and the Latin.

These concerns were nourished by France's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conflicts with other European powers, particularly Germany. The 1870–71 Franco-Prussian War was a key event of this kind, widely characterized in France as a test of the 'barbarous' but gifted 'Teuton' – the German, whose military successes had already come to be characterized by race scientists as an expression of so-called Aryan race purity – against France's racially composite 'Mediterranean man'. These ideas about the special character of the Mediterranean as a zone of racial and geo-cultural distinctiveness have had an enduring importance in French thought. In the years before the First World War, they had a particular appeal to French thinkers as a means of challenging both Britons and Germans who polemicized about ancient 'Aryans' as the bringers of civilization to the so-called Indo-European world. More broadly, these concerns helped to foster the special interest in comparative ethno-geographical theorizing which remained one of the hallmarks of both liberal and conservative French social science until well into the twentieth century.¹²

This thinking entailed a vision of the world as a great vista of inter-connecting ethno-geographical regions and sub-regions, each marked by its distinctive heritage of religion, polity, and race. Each was an arena of great historic ruptures as their great civilizations and polities first grew and then collapsed in the face of both inner and outer dissolutions and crises. This was a vision in which both Europe and the 'Orient' were regarded as part of a single continuum, rather than representing eternally opposed essences.

Apart from the Mediterranean and its sub-regions the Levant and the Maghreb, the geo-cultural arena to which French thinkers attached

particular importance was the region which cultural geographers had named Indochina (Indochine). The use of this term for the lands of French-ruled 'Monsoon Asia' (Further or Trans-Gangetic India, *l'Inde transgangaétique*) identified the region as a great cultural meeting point for the once-great classical civilizations of the 'Indic' and 'Sino-Confucian' East. It signalled too that through such initiatives as the discovery of Champa's 'Indic' heritage, the French themselves were to be seen as both interpreters and revitalizers of civilization in these lands.

The colonial empire was thus a critical arena for the many French thinkers and politicians who warned of a coming cataclysm in which civilization itself might undergo an irreparable rupture at the hands of 'barbarous' Teutons. Such commentators feared that this impending ethnological peril might come about through the building of bonds between Germans and the 'restless' racial groups of the Islamic world. Both the prospect of war with Germany and the rise of *fin-de-siècle* pan-Islamism also evoked apocalyptic responses from many British commentators at this time. Nevertheless, the twin French preoccupations with the country's notoriously low birth rate, and with its vulnerability to the German military threat, led French race theorists to give particular emphasis to this theme of races and civilizations in decline.

Many of these thinkers held that the catastrophe awaiting France could be staved off only by an active policy of ethnological self-strengthening. The colonial Empire was widely seen as France's best defence against this threat of dissolution and decline. Some looked to Algeria's fast-growing white settler population as potential contributors to a massive ethnological regeneration of the metropole.¹³ These portrayals of a settlers' civilizing mission represented the white incomers as having returned Algeria to the fruitfulness it had enjoyed in classical antiquity, nourishing its vineyards and olive groves, and bringing with them their special Mediterranean sense of *terroir*, with its characteristic rhythms of work and distinctive building styles. Despite their importance to ultra-conservative nationalists of the Le Playist tradition, these were ideas which fed directly into Durkheimian *sociologie*, with its keen interest in the mechanisms of social interdependency, as manifested in such expressions of sociality as the norms governing collective work modes in particular environmental settings, including those of both the Mediterranean and Indochina.¹⁴

At the same time, north Africa's minority Berber populations had come to be conceived of in terms much like the Cham, that is as a racially distinct population within the otherwise predominantly

Arab/ 'Semitic' population of the Maghreb. As a fellow Mediterranean people, the Berbers were also supposedly closer in ethnological terms to the French than the region's other indigenous peoples. In much French anthropological writing, the Berbers were 'civilizers', builders in wood and stone. Such commentators as the Durkheimian Islamist René Maunier made much of reportage indicating that Berber mosques and dwellings were erected by ritualized collective work techniques, and that such structures were constructed around forum- and agora-like civic spaces. These were widely seen as the mark of 'Mediterranean man's' healthy and open sociality.¹⁵

All this is very similar to the terms in which the Cham were discussed, both by French race theorists and by the Asian scholars who both shared and contested their assumptions. Despite their small numbers, the Cham greatly interested French commentators because they appeared to be a case of a once-great civilization in a state of degenerative decline. The ethnologists' claim that the Cham were of racially composite 'stock' was important here. Within Indochina, it occasioned much debate about the extent to which this amalgamation was derived from the enhancement of Cham 'race energies' through the migration of Indians to southeast Asia in ancient times.

Colonial commentators argued fiercely about whether these incomers were of 'Dravidian' or 'Aryan' racial origin, or whether on the contrary the Chams' 'virile' and fecund racial stock was primarily Malayo-Polynesian rather than 'Indic'. One French race scientist reported unapologetically on the ancient burial sites he had despoiled to secure skulls for anthropometric head-measuring surveys. He and other researchers attempted to classify the so-called racial types represented in the sculptures and *bas-reliefs* adorning the Cham towers and also carried out head-shape and skin-colour studies on living 'native subjects'.¹⁶

Out of all this came the French ethnologists' view that of all the peoples of their Asian empire, it was the Cham whose ethnological makeup was closest to their own. These were held to be resemblances of 'mental evolution' as well as physiological type. This had three important implications. First, since Cham and French nationhood were somehow comparable in these ethnological terms, the French could claim to be legitimate heirs to a kindred form of political power which had once held sway in an important part of their Asian empire. Secondly, it could be claimed that France also had a moral entitlement to dominate those peoples who had come under the sway of Annamite rule after the downfall of the Champa realm, because Annamite race energies were a vehicle for a profoundly different form of political order which was innately

tyrannical and oppressive. And thirdly, there was the importance of the Cham as a people who had 'fallen' in ethnological terms.¹⁷

The argument here was that as long as they remained powerful in Southeast Asia, the Cham were a bastion of literate high civilization and therefore able to defend their 'national homeland' from their Annamite, Chinese, and Cambodian rivals. Yet for ethnologists there were implacable laws of nature which decreed that even the most 'vigorous' races must ultimately degenerate, thus succumbing to the conquering energies of 'newer' and 'fresher' ethnological rivals. Thus as in its British forms, French ethnology's portrayals of Asian race-history focused on the importance of polity, and on the power of the transforming event. But in contrast to prevailing British notions of both racial and social evolution, the concept of revolutionary rupture was fundamental to the thinking of French race theorists. It was the core principle of the biological laws to which both human and animal life were subject, and it was the driving force in the history of human polity and social experience.

It was this perspective from which French theorists used the evidence of epigraphy and regional court chronicles to compile an exhaustive picture of Champa's dynastic history. This they portrayed as an epic story of race conflict, with the Cham first expanding and flourishing, then succumbing battle by battle until the decisive moment in 1471 CE when their 'race' was forcibly assimilated into the new Annamite-ruled polity. The overthrow of the last Champa dynasty was thus seen as the key transforming event which revolutionized Indochina's history and culture by expunging the ancient 'Indic' form of polity which had hitherto been the region's predominant source of civilization. Its replacement in what is now Vietnam was the Sinic/Confucian form of high culture embodied in the dynastic power of the new Annamite polity. It was the Confucian underpinnings of this realm which the French claimed they were preserving as a legitimating prop of their power after their conquest of 1883. Indeed by 1896, the French had constructed regimes of sponsored kingship in Laos and Cambodia as well. French imperialists proclaimed this a unique form of rule, superior to the colonial regimes of Britain and other Western powers because of its purported basis in spirituality and its responsiveness to native cultural traditions.

The advent of the Durkheimians and the reinterpretation of the Cham

As was noted above, the rise of Durkheimian *sociologie* took metropolitan and colonial social science in very different directions from

old-style race theory. Yet race science did not die out, either within or beyond the French empire. For francophone intellectuals both at home and overseas, there remained both tensions and interaction between the liberal adherents of *sociologie*, and the anti-Durkheimian advocates of Le Playist social science. These ambiguities were particularly powerful in the writings of early twentieth-century French social scientists on sociality and political awareness within Muslim polities and cultures around the world.

A remarkable expression of these concerns is to be found in a study of the Cham which appeared in 1907 in the first number of France's great Durkheimian showcase for studies of the contemporary Muslim world, the *Revue du Monde Musulman* (*RMM*). Not all of this journal's contributors were avowed Durkheimians, but both its liberal ethos and its dedication to the collection and analysis of 'social facts' were broadly in the Durkheim tradition. This can be seen particularly in the *RMM*'s concern with studying Muslims in different world regions as sharers in the forms of community life through which practitioners of *sociologie* could discern the experience of religion as a collective expression of social needs and mechanisms. For Durkheim, such expressions of sociality were especially visible to the trained observer in times of transformation and revolutionary crisis.

Until the First World War, the *Revue* pursued these ends by soliciting accounts of Muslim life and thought in environments which were seen as being rapidly and in general successfully transformed by the forces of social and intellectual modernity. There was thus a strong emphasis on the growth of the Muslim press in such societies as Egypt and India, and on the importance of urban intelligentsias, Islamic modernists, constitutional nationalists, and campaigners for feminist causes throughout the Muslim world. The author of the 1907 *RMM* essay on the Cham was the bibliographer and linguist Antoine Cabaton who had observed Cham villagers at first-hand while serving as an *Ecole Française* (EFEO) researcher. His *RMM* study focused on the downfall of the Chams' supposed imperial glory, and their transformation into a population which was both 'weak' and 'degenerate', and also predominantly Muslim.¹⁸ His work combined the perspectives of liberal Durkheimian *sociologie* with old-style racial evolutionism. Cabaton thus focused on the Chams' supposedly low birth rate, which for both British and Continental eugenicists was a critical marker of degeneration and decline among so-called 'down-going races' everywhere from the Pacific to north Africa and beyond.¹⁹

Equally significant for Cabaton was the fact that the Cham were no longer builders. This loss of the civilized skills of building in wood and

stone was, in his view, a telling sign of the Chams' degeneracy, and their failure of political will. Furthermore, he found Cham religion to be degenerate, superstitious, and un-Islamic. This, he said, was a reflection of their political experience. He regarded the Champa kings' Annamite successors and their mandarin elite as both decadent and crushingly oppressive, thus contributing further to the supposedly weakened and deformed sociality experienced by these rulers' Cham subjects in his own time.

In contrast, Cabaton held that Cham living under the rule of France's clients, the Khmer rulers of neighbouring Cambodia, were experiencing a significant renovation in both religion and material life. This too he saw in terms of political culture, as reflected in architecture and the habituations of the built environment. Under French tutelage, he argued, Cambodia's puppet Khmer monarchy had achieved a superior form of royal state. More specifically, there is a suggestion that the distinctive open pavilions of the Khmer rulers' palaces were like the open social spaces which Durkheimians observed in Berber villages, meaning that they functioned as forum-like arenas for the practise of a healthy, inclusive form of civic kingship. Cabaton considered too that this less crushing rule without 'despotic' mandarins had enabled the Cham to experience the bracing influence of globalizing Islamic spiritual reform of the sort that he and other *RMM* commentators viewed approvingly among Muslim peoples in such places as Syria.²⁰

By the 1920s, the views and assumptions contained in these works were under attack from a new generation of Durkheimians, many of whom were implicitly or even openly radical in their politics and overtly critical of Indochina's colonial regime. As in the case of north Africa's race-history debates, there were important 'native' voices in these exchanges. One was that of the Vietnamese demographer Nguyen Thieu Lau, who in the 1940s was one of the small number of Asian intellectuals appointed to EFEO research posts.²¹

In 1943 Nguyen Thieu Lau published a remarkable essay on Cham demography, 'La population cham du Sud-Annam s'accroît-elle?' ('Is the Cham population of southern Annam increasing?'), in the journal of Hanoi's newly founded centre of Durkheim- and Mauss-inspired sociological research, the Institut Indochinois pour l'Etude de l'Homme (IEEH). Lau's project was conceived as an explicitly Durkheimian exercise harking back to the famous concerns of *Le suicide* (1897), a key early landmark in Durkheim's lifelong project of exploring the empirical facts of human conduct as products of collective social forces. Lau's study was also close in spirit to the writings of the Islamist René

Maunier whose Durkheim-inspired works had included a study of the social meaning of suicide for which he had used British demographic data from Egypt.²²

Nguyen Thieu Lau's also made use of statistical data to explore a specific sociological problem, in this case the apparent degeneration of the Cham in both physiological and cultural terms. His aim was thus to test the hitherto uncontested claim that the Cham living in Indochina's predominantly Vietnamese-speaking territories were a declining race with a low birth rate and other markers of supposed ethnological feebleness.

The sociology of the built environment was still a major arena for these concerns: a study of Champa architecture published in the 1920s had described the modern Cham as a dying race living in a 'sterile' habitat, their degenerate state reflected in a dread of shade and shadows to which they reacted by stripping their villages of leafy trees.²³ Lau dismissed all this. Rather than 'superstition' and defective sociality, he argued, it was the barrenness of the soil to which they had been driven by their richer and more powerful neighbours which made the Cham live in shadeless villages. Furthermore, he maintained that his birth and death statistics showed that while Cham population growth was lower than that of other Vietnamese, the Cham were not a 'dying' people in the sense of being in a state of actual numerical decline. At the same time, Lau had a solidly Durkheimian belief in the study of both material culture and habituations of the body in their particular ethno-geographical and social environments. Like his Durkheimian contemporaries, he was also a believer in what would now be called fieldwork, that is the systematic collection of ethnographic data through intensive first-hand observations carried out in living social environments.

So, notwithstanding his demographic findings, from his observations that contemporary Cham habitually wore the garb both of '*moi*' (a pejorative colonial term for ethnic minority peoples) and of 'Annamites', Lau believed he had found evidence of a real transformation overtaking them. This he held to be occurring in the domain of linguistic and material culture, rather than that of eugenic soundness or 'race health'. At this level, meaning that of culture rather than physiological or reproductive health, the Cham were failing to hold their own, being swamped in Lau's view by the more powerful cultural energies of both the so-called *moi* and the Annamite/Vietnamese.²⁴

It should be noted that in the interwar period, this view of cultures as competing ethno-geographical entities engaging in acts of rivalry

and self-assertion had become very pervasive. Both within and beyond France, liberal social scientists saw the study of culture through time as an attractive alternative to the formulations of race science, especially given the murderous extremes to which racial doctrines were being taken in Germany and elsewhere. Nevertheless the two often ran in parallel, not least among believers in the cause of Aryan Hindu revival in both colonial and post- Independence India.

Lateral connections – French anthropology and Indian nationalism

It was this understanding of culture as a manifestation of superior race energies that took scores of India's twentieth-century intellectuals into the world of francophone Cham and Champa studies. This is not as surprising as it may sound: there was much more movement of both ideas and people between British and French colonial societies in Asia than is often recognized. Even so, it is still remarkable to discover the detailed coverage of Champa and the other 'Indic' polities of Indochina appearing in the 1920s in the journal of India's most important Hindu revivalist organization, the Arya Samaj. This journal, *The Vedic Magazine and Gurukula Samachar*, followed with approval the activities of the Calcutta-based Greater India Society (founded 1926).

A widely held view among the Society's members was that both the living Cham and the Champa monuments were remnants of a civilizing mission undertaken in ancient times by Indian colonizers. Especially striking in these authors' writings is their glorification of the Champa polity as the creation of Hindu India's 'colonizing genius'. In these accounts, all of civilized 'Further India' had come into being through acts of cultural conquest achieved by ancient Indians.

We hear so much of Magna Grecia and Pax Romana, [sic] but what about that pax Sarvabhaumic, that established a strong empire not only in the vast sub-continent of India, but also penetrated through the lofty Himalayas and crossed the vast eastern and western oceans. The ancient Hindus of yore were not simply a spiritual people, always busy with mystical problems and never troubling themselves with the questions of 'this world' ... India also has its Napoleons and Charlemagnes, its Bismarcks and Machiavellis.²⁵

Nevertheless, for this contributor to the *Vedic Magazine*, the 'real charm of Indian history' was not its martial strengths but 'its peaceful and

benevolent Imperialism'. This, he said, was 'a unique thing in the history of mankind'²⁶:

The colonisers and imperialists of India did not go with sword and fire in their hands; they used, on the contrary, the weapons of their superior culture and religion for bringing the world under their sway. Wherever they went, they conquered the world through their culture.²⁷

The aim here was thus to proclaim that India's cultural heritage had been consistently misrepresented as lacking in the drive and expansiveness which had led both Muslims and Christian Europeans to achieve power in so many lands. Ancient Indians too had traversed the world like 'Vikings' and 'sea wolves'; they had never been otherworldly or fearful of traversing the *kala pani* (the inauspicious oceans).²⁸ Thus the Greater India polemicists used French research on the Champa monuments and the other great architectural remains of southeast Asia to identify India as the home of a master-race whose imprint could still be discerned throughout southeast Asia.

[The]...regeneration of the Cham power in the second century A.D. was due to the introduction of a new element in her politics, Viz. the Indian colonists. From this time forward...the Chams...cheerfully submitted to their foreign masters and adopted their manners, customs, language and religion. They were politically merged in the Indian elements and there was a complete cultural fusion between the two races.²⁹

Paul Mus and the *sociologie* of Vietnam at war

No less a figure than the celebrated Orientalist George Coedes of EFEO praised the Greater India polemicists for what he saw as a rediscovery of their heritage as a great 'colonizing people'. Interactions between Indian and French scholars of 'Further India' persisted well into the 1950s. Within Indochina, however, the study of the Cham and the Champa monuments achieved its most distinctive expression in the remarkable writings of the EFEO scholar Paul Mus, who first made his name in the 1930s as a brilliantly original interpreter of architectural form and culture both within and beyond Indochina.³⁰ In many ways, Mus's works of 'comparative religious archaeology' represented the culmination of Durkheimian social science in colonial Indochina. At the

same time, his later writings on Vietnamese revolutionary nationalism in the twentieth century foreshadowed much that has come to be central to present-day anthropology and history in their treatment of peasant societies across the Third World. This inheritance has been largely forgotten, with the result that concepts such as the peasant moral economy have become detached from the highly specific theoretical context in which they originated, and elevated to the status of unsustainable universal principles.

Mus's ill-starred wartime experiences of the Indochinese countryside in crisis played a critical role in the shaping of his ideas about Vietnamese political morality.³¹ He describes these perilous episodes as moments of revelation which made him recognize the deep sense of nationhood pervading the thinking of Vietnamese-speaking peasants and intellectuals. In particular, his perilous overland escape from the Japanese in 1945 became a kind of epiphany in the rice fields in which the principles of culture and sociality that he had hitherto studied in the abstract came vividly to life for him. Defenceless and on the run, dependent on the tillers and labourers who sheltered him in their villages and amongst their temples and monuments, Mus presents himself as a man transformed, no longer a privileged white man living at arm's length from a colonial subject population.³² Thus humbled and unblinkerred, he claims, he could truly appreciate the living force of Vietnamese culture. This he saw as inspiring collective revolutionary action as an expression of values which were at once culturally distinctive, and yet close in spirit to the French sense of *terroir* or native soil. For the Vietnamese, this was experienced as both an enduring and a highly event-conscious sense of reverence for physical terrain, that is for native soil made sacred and fruitful by collective human endeavour.³³

Mus's pre-war publications provide a foretaste of his post-1945 sociological writings on war and revolutionary rupture in the Vietnam of his own time, strikingly anticipating his explorations of the deep-seated norms of sociality on which he believed Vietnam's revolutionary nationalists were building their anti-colonial liberation movement. His writings of the 1920s and 1930s differ strikingly from those of the Indian and Western polemicists who painted a crude picture of Asian culture as an arena of primordial race wars or cultural colonizations.

What Mus proposed in his studies of the built environment was far more sophisticated, his insistence on exchange and mutuality recalling the formulations of both Durkheim and Mauss. Thus he too believed that Indian culture had been imported into Indochina, but not as a form of imperialism, whether of mind or sword. In his view, Champa

and its monuments were products of mutual exchanges and sympathetic interactions between native and external forms of thought and faith.³⁴ In later years, this idealistic vision of communion and productive interaction between separate cultures which were both distinct and self-assertive and at the same time capable of making fruitful moral contacts with one another reappeared in a strikingly different form in Mus's writings. His works on the sociology of war and revolutionary rupture in both France and Indochina proposed that the French and their colonial subject peoples might somehow achieve a state of reconciliation and harmonious Durkheimian sociality if only the French would transcend their commitment to old-style coercive colonialism.

As far as Vietnam was concerned, this would involve recognition of the authenticity of Vietnamese nationhood and the completeness of the moral and political rupture which had occurred in twentieth-century Indochina, making French rule a thing utterly defunct in the minds of all Vietnamese. This was the central argument of Mus's works on the cultural values of the twentieth-century Vietnamese peasantry and the traditions of peasant morality which he saw as underpinning the thought and strategy of Vietnam's revolutionary nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh.³⁵

All this will come as a surprise to those who believe that so-called Orientalists have invariably seen Asian cultures as static, otherworldly, and apolitical, hence based on values which differ fundamentally from those of the rational and individualist West. In contrast, what Mus argued from the 1940s onwards was that at the level of both elite and popular tradition, Vietnam's enduring system of culture was rooted in a dual sense of territoriality and historicity which was much like that of the nation-loving modern Frenchman.

From Durkheim to revolutionary nationhood in Vietnam

Mus's postwar sociological writings on the deep-seated cultural roots of Vietnamese nationhood were a direct challenge to the many French commentators for whom Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh anti-colonial movement was either a conspiracy of unrepresentative Marxist fanatics, or an assault by the inherently anarchic 'Oriental mind' on the civilized values which France had brought to Indochina. Mus's postwar writings therefore gave much attention to the question of social pathology. Especially notable are his discussions of suicide amongst members of the Vietnamese intelligentsia, and his treatment of the alleged Viet

Minh atrocities which to French observers were evidence of the inherent brutishness and irrationality of all Vietnamese.

On all these issues Mus's work clearly anticipates the writings of modern anthropologists on the cultural roots of violence in postcolonial societies.³⁶ At the same time, his comparative approach is also recognizably in the tradition of Durkheim and Mauss. He thus recounts stories of wartime massacres committed in France – but by Frenchmen rather than Germans – in an attempt to illustrate a characteristically Durkheimian argument about violence as an expression of the individual community's collective will or drives (*entraînement collectifs*).³⁷

This does not mean that one should excuse or justify such acts, he says. But they are to be understood from a functionalist perspective, as expressions of social solidarity. All human actions serve a social function, Mus insists; what had to be recognized was how powerfully twentieth-century life in both Asia and the West had become pervaded by forms of social functionality which were morally defective or perverse.³⁸ Thus in his own time, Mus writes, Vietnam was experiencing two distinct forms of violence and dislocation. The most pernicious of these was the breakdown of order and morality which the French themselves were causing in Indochina, through their misperceptions and failures of human sympathy. To French officialdom, this was an especially unwelcome aspect of Mus's message. And it was this deeply Durkheimian aim of correcting his countrymen's failures of comprehension and humanity, thus restoring morality and equilibrium to their own social order, and to their interactions with the peoples of Indochina, which Mus made the focus of these postwar writings.³⁹

The most notable of these was Mus's remarkable *Vietnam: Sociologie d'une guerre* (1952). This title is best rendered as 'Sociology of Vietnam at War', thus signalling Mus's concerns with the events and transformations of war, and his determination to place Vietnam's epic moment of political crisis and rupture at the centre of his analysis. The key argument of this and his other post-1945 sociological commentaries was that the second form of upheaval taking place in Vietnam – in contrast to the violence and turmoil caused by the errors of French rule – was a manifestation of the Vietnamese people's inexpugnable sense of nationhood.

Thus for Mus, the violence perpetrated by the Communist-led Viet Minh insurgents was ordered and meaningful, deriving from Vietnam's powerful tradition of ancestral patriotism, and its people's enduring event-consciousness and sense of the revolutionary moment. In this patriotic struggle, he insisted, the role of Communism had been greatly

exaggerated by the French authorities. The Vietnamese fighters were to be seen as patriots rather than doctrinaire Communists.⁴⁰ Or, more properly, as in China, they were first and foremost lovers of their homeland who had remade Marxism into an Asian moral system, a path of collective virtue and selfless spirituality.

For its Asian adherents, Mus said, 'Le marxisme est en effet une doctrine à catastrophe' [Marxism is in effect a catastrophe theory], a system which its Vietnamese adherents had adjusted to fit their pre-existing cultural tradition, with its 'cyclical instinct' and its conception of the world as a sequence of ruptures and discontinuities.⁴¹ Neither class war nor anti-capitalism had great appeal in Vietnam, Mus insisted; the aim of the Viet Minh, he thought, was a regime of moderate socialism preserving the peasant-based village economy, rather than a repressive Soviet-style regime.⁴²

Therefore, Mus argued, where one saw wall slogans denouncing the Empire's great economic powerhouse, the Bank of Indochina (the Banque de l'Indochine), their true message was not anti-capitalist, but a patriotic remonstrance in the tradition of earlier assertions of outraged ethical propriety in the face of wrongs against the divinized soil of Vietnam. In this case, he maintained, the focus was the board of foreign directors whose signatures appeared on the Bank of Indochina's piastre notes. These were Vietnam's colonial currency. As such, they were a symbol of unrighteousness, of the nation being bled of its wealth under foreign rule. Here there was a strong echo of both Mauss and Durkheim in Mus's suggestion that the operations of this bank run by and for foreigners was seen by Vietnamese as the antithesis of just rule in a land where good rulers saw to the healthy circulation and renewal of its productive resources.⁴³

Mus therefore saw Vietnam's anti-colonial insurgency as a true people's war. In his view, it was to be understood as a collective expression of the whole society's dynamic culture as he had described it in his earlier works, that is as a system of active social habituations which were rooted in a deeply felt sense of territoriality and cosmic order. Any would-be ruler whom the Vietnamese saw as violating these principles of ordered righteousness would inevitably arouse their capacity for resistance and national self-assertion.

This, Mus said, was a mentality of resistance which the Vietnamese had repeatedly displayed throughout their history.⁴⁴ The Sino-Confucian worldview accustomed unlettered peasants as well as the learned to think in terms of concrete events and decisive moments of cosmic and earthly transformation, sharing knowledge of how to decipher natural

signs and portents pointing to great moments of impending political change: 'All regimes decay; every State changes.' Thus, says Mus, the world is 'seasoned' by these cycles of ceaseless transformation.⁴⁵

The French had gone wrong, Mus argued, because they underestimated Vietnamese knowledge of the great wartime dislocations affecting both France and Monsoon Asia. Further, the French in his view had failed to recognize that their own behaviour – their ignominious political collapse in 1940, and their surrender of power to the Japanese in 1941 – had signalled to these informed and knowledgeable Vietnamese that their homeland had reached one of those great moments of rupture out of which new polity would inevitably be formed. Like Captain Cook as interpreted in Marshall Sahlins's *Islands of History* (1985), the French had violated cosmic norms and affronted celestial will and the mandate of heaven in attempting to resume power, returning to Vietnam, 'out of season' as Mus puts it.⁴⁶

So for Mus, these are Asians who are emphatically not passive or fatalistic Orientals living out of time. His view of the Vietnamese, though not of Muslims, is of a people conscious of living and acting in real episodic time. Above all, both peasants and literate élites made critical judgements about political power in relation to this structuring logic of time, change, dynastic cycles, and heavenly mandate.⁴⁷

Mus's accounts of Vietnamese cultural life are insistent on the centrality of events and real moments of history to this sense of contract-based political morality. His view of the Vietnamese rural commune and its traditional mentalities is thus very far from the Marx/Maine 'village republic' model. He does not think that Vietnamese peasants live in a timeless equilibrium, untouched by great events and regarding kings and polities as fragile and evanescent. For Mus, the world of court and peasant commune is part of a single continuum. Peasants' mental horizons are not limited by their village boundaries. On the contrary, the tiller of land sees his environment as existing through time as a political collectivity.

This, Mus says, has been expressed throughout Vietnam's history in the form of oral and written declarations expressing its people's enduring sense of nationhood in the face of foreign incursions. Invasions from China were the great historic spur to this spirit of collective resistance. As far back as the first century C.E., Mus points to the issuing of anti-Chinese declarations by Vietnamese patriots at the time of invasions by Sung imperial forces. This same patriotism manifested itself again, he says, in an anonymous and hence collective remonstrance known as the *Go Cong pancarte* (writ or charter). Issued in 1862, this

was an eloquently phrased protest against the actions of French forces on Vietnamese soil; its themes, he implies, were much like those of the later wall slogans against the improprieties of the Bank of Indochina. Indeed like Magna Carta and the other great patriotic remonstrance documents of European history, Mus identifies this text as a declaration confirming and extending the moral bonds of Vietnamese nationhood.⁴⁸

Furthermore, at these times of crisis, Mus says, patriotic Vietnamese expressed this sense of attachment to their divinized soil in terms of a distinctive humoural theory of nature and cosmic balances. They were saying, in effect: we the Vietnamese are a people; our physical environment, our native terrain or *terroir*, has unique properties. We alone live in health and harmony with this environment; to the invader and disrupter of its cosmic and human harmonies these same properties and essences are unfavourable or even fatal. Yet we take the initiative as patriotic sons of the soil to defend our land, at which point its essences will come to the aid of those who fight.⁴⁹

Ho Chi Minh and the revolutionary individual

When Mus writes about Ho Chi Minh and the turbulent events of Vietnam's post-1945 Communist-led insurgency, he says that he finds the same theories of territoriality and humoural balance being articulated by the young Vietnamese freedom-fighters whom he meets on his 1947 mission to the Viet Minh. This too Mus describes as a series of revelatory moments which he experienced in the Vietnamese countryside.⁵⁰

Sitting amongst the village rice fields and ancient irrigation works, Mus says he learns to see Ho Chi Minh through the eyes of the young cadres. According to Mus, these youths revered Ho as a sage and elder whose authority is that of their own elders and ancestral kin. Thus, says Mus, Ho Chi Minh was not seen by his followers as the bearer of alien Marxist teachings overriding their existing moral norms. On the contrary, he insists that what Ho embodied for them were the same values of reverence for kinship and divinized soil which the young fighters had been taught to cherish from childhood. Far from being a modernizer or destroyer of the nation's ancient moral system, Ho was its true fulfilment, a patriot, and champion of righteousness rather than an advocate of divisive class war.⁵¹

So when Mus describes the nature of the youthful fighters' reverence for Ho Chi Minh's sage-like bearded visage, he echoes his earlier writings

on the sanctity of habitat and ancestral kin, and points to the rites of the household ancestor altar which he had documented as a manifestation of Vietnamese sociality in its most powerful and enduring form. In these household observances, he says, the young son of the household is told to fix his gaze on the features of his grandfather so as to ensure the continuity of the lineage, and its enduring ties to the land. This act of visual fixing interiorizes and thus transfers the elder's vital presence (*la présence vitale*) to be passed on from generation to generation.⁵²

Furthermore, Mus argued, the young cadres invoke the same humoural theories that informed the nation's earlier patriotic remonstrances to explain why they have declared allegiance to Ho Chi Minh instead of the French administration's puppet ruler, the Nguyen emperor Bao Dai. Vietnam, say the Viet Minh fighters, was experiencing one of those great break or disjuncture moments which were recognizable to those versed in the principles of Sino-Vietnamese dynastic cycle theory. This Mus said they understood in terms known throughout 'Monsoon Asia' as a notion of eternally recurring rupture; the 'Annamite' version of these ideas was a key structuring principle of Vietnamese thought, he believed.

Mus says the young cadres told him that with his pencil-thin pointed beard, Ho Chi Minh was an embodiment of the humoural fire principle. The rotund playboy Bao Dai personified the opposing water principle. Water was known to be an element with pacific properties; its qualities were appropriate to untroubled times. But at a time when Vietnam was confronted by the corruptions and dangers that always accompany such moments of disjuncture, it was the cleansing properties of fire which were required to restore morality and order to the world.⁵³ Yet there was no question here of returning to a pre-existing form of cosmic and material order. A new epoch was at hand; what Ho Chi Minh would provide were principles of ordered rule which though still recognizable in Vietnamese terms, were still profoundly new as was required to fit the needs of Vietnam's new epic moment.⁵⁴

Mus's understanding of these ideas about cosmic portents and humoural balances related them all to a notion of the human moral order as existing within and emanating from a socially constructed landscape. Both personhood and its deformities or pathologies are to be understood in these terms, above all in the circumstances of psychic trauma engendered by colonialism. This is one of the most striking elements of Mus's postwar work on the cultural sources of Vietnam's anti-colonial insurgency. He does not think that individuality is absent from Vietnamese minds. Humans are rational beings; they live in a world of

cosmic harmony, with the forces of heaven existing at their highest in the form of pure reason.⁵⁵ So humans can act and take initiative as individuals, having first been ushered into the world of order and sociality and instructed in its governing norms through collective ritual, and through the other disciplines of community life which exist in conformity with the principles of cosmic harmony.

In all this, Mus says, the human mind and personality are direct counterparts of the structured forms of landscape and the built environment. One's mental terrain ('le paysage mental') corresponds precisely to the physical terrain that frames it.⁵⁶ To survive and prosper in a rice economy, humans must take collective action to dam the 'seasonal exuberance' of rivers; in just the same way, mental terrain must be subjected to a collective process of taming, damming, and socializing. Thus what modern anthropologists would nowadays refer to as the structure of personhood is held by Mus to be understood in Vietnam in terms deriving from a profound sense of the power of sociality. In the thinking of Vietnamese, this involves a striking correspondence between the regulation of the individual's mental landscape, and the ordering and productive regulation of the territorial environment in which he lives.⁵⁷

For Mus, it was crucial to understand all these elements of culture in order to grasp the principles of thought motivating Vietnam's anti-colonial insurgents. His argument about the causes of their revolution therefore turns on this kind of broad cultural analysis, with its insistence that the dynamic sense of patriotic awareness which he saw as central to Sino-Annamite thought was shared universally among both peasants and élites. Yet he does differentiate between the experience of Vietnam's peasant majority and that of its small but disproportionately influential intelligentsia. At certain points in his discussion it is the alienated intellectual rather than the people as a whole who are the key to Vietnam's revolution. For the populace at large, he says, colonial rule has been a distant and unevenly felt force. It is in the minds of the French-educated city-dwellers that the traumas of colonialism have impacted most profoundly.⁵⁸

This he says is because the rural masses were accustomed to a high level of tension and pressure within their social order. They perceived the equilibrium of their everyday milieu as inherently fragile and volatile. In the way that torrential rivers and other violent natural forces eternally threaten to overspill their man-made boundaries, there is always latent violence in the ordered (*police*) rural social world. The ritualized norms and decorums of rural society can only just contain

this inherent propensity towards rupture and disorder. This leaves the villager equipped both to endure the tensions and vicissitudes of everyday life, and to welcome and embrace the moment of revolutionary rupture for which he is prepared by his 'traditional' worldview.

The return of *le suicide*

For the French-educated intellectual, however, all is different. Mus writes with warmth and sympathy about the disorientation of his childhood friends and schoolmates from Hanoi's pre-war intelligentsia families, their mental horizons forever altered by the Western scientific education they receive in the Francophone lycées and universities. These are remarkable passages in Mus's writing, in many ways anticipating current postcolonial theories of fractured personhood in their discussion of these young educated Vietnamese contending with the experience of conflict between their science-aware French-speaking selves, and their still-active sense of traditional Sino-Vietnamese selfhood.⁵⁹

Mus's Durkheimian perspective is put to work here in his discussion of the alienation and despair affecting a significant proportion of those for whom French education had discredited the cosmology and moral values of their ancestors.⁶⁰ A high rate of suicide among apparently successful members of the Francophone intelligentsia is, he says, to be explained in these terms. It is not simply that French rule had destroyed all but the vestiges of the Vietnamese Confucian state in which men of their background would once have found service. What has engendered such people's sense of 'solitude and desolation' was the loss of intellectual groundings engendered by their travels and education. As officials of the Confucian state they would have been central to the collective processes which through ritual situated all individuals within a domain of cosmic harmony. Now they were men of science rather than geomancy and heavenly portents; the conceptual props of their ancestral worldview had been irreparably ruptured. To those nourished in a world of cosmic and worldly sociality, this could prove unendurable.⁶¹

Equally striking here are the anticipations of contemporary anthropological arguments about the home and the world, and the gendered nature of colonial selfhood. Once again, the importance of architecture and the built environment is central to Mus's discussion. This can be seen most clearly in Mus's account of young Vietnamese returning home from their overseas schooling, fluent in French, which they have

experienced as both the language of Western positivistic science, and as the tongue of their own father's domain within the household.

This part of the francophone *évolué's* urban house Mus characterizes as the European-style preserve in which the young people's fathers entertained their Francophone male contemporaries. In these households' male-dominated reception rooms with their European-style furniture, the young were made to master the etiquette of this quasi-Western milieu so as to make themselves acceptable to the wider world, in both social and career terms. Yet, Mus says, the returning youths were still powerfully animated by residual memories of their mother tongue. This was to be taken literally: Vietnamese was the language they had learned from their mothers, and within the inner private women's spaces of the home. For many, he says, it was these remembered nursery words and phrases – few in number but imbued with deep significance – that had inspired those who had chosen not to despair but to act as insurgents and leaders of the national cause.⁶²

Conclusion

This chapter has had three main aims. In exploring the writings of French anthropologists about the Cham people of southern Indochina, its first concern was to highlight the distinctive nature of French colonial anthropology, both in the early twentieth century and at the time of France's bitterly contested decolonization process. This distinctiveness was manifested in a variety of ways. It is to be seen in the interactions which so persistently linked both thought and experience in the colonial world to the political and intellectual life of the metropole. It is apparent too in its distinctive conceptual orientations, and above all in the emphasis on revolution and disjunctive crisis which characterized so many of these anthropologists' works on French-ruled colonial societies both within and beyond Asia.

Here the enduring legacy of the Durkheim and Mauss traditions is of key importance. This can be seen most clearly in the writings of Paul Mus on suicide. In Mus's work, this key Durkheimian topic became a means of achieving sympathetic insights which were highly unusual in their day into the social pathologies of colonialism and the cultural roots of Vietnamese revolutionary nationhood. Equally important in Mus's formulations is his concern with the social habituations of the built environment, and with the sense of native soil or *terroir* as a central component in the shaping of both individual and collective national awareness. All this, he argued, together with a profound awareness of time, history, and the

power of the transforming event, was as powerful for the patriotic modern Frenchman as it was for the Vietnamese peasant and intellectual.

This in turn reflects yet another of the distinctive features of French colonial anthropology, which was that its practitioners so often rejected crude dichotomies between Europe and the 'Orient'. In this respect French anthropologists did differ in important ways from many if not all of their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

The chapter's second concern was to take note of the importance of these anthropological formulations in the thinking of Asians. It is notable that those who took an active part in the local-level development of these ideas included intellectuals from both India and Indochina. Indeed many of these formulations became lodged in the ideologies of Asian nationalist movements. And, as can be seen from the enthusiasm of Indian nationalists for the idea of Indochina as a domain of 'Greater India's' supposed civilizing mission, it is important to break down old-style area studies approaches, and to recognize the cross-cutting interactions which linked the intellectuals and political movements of different colonial systems.

Finally, by exploring these rich anthropological works, I have sought to show that many of the general assumptions which have come to prevail in anglophone and especially North American anthropologists' and historians' work since the 1960s have a largely unacknowledged genealogy in these French writings of the colonial period. This can be seen in such diverse areas as the work of Clifford Geertz, in the formulations of the Wolf-Scott moral economy thesis, and even in more recent postcolonial theorists' writings on gender and fractured personhood. In some cases there is a close genealogical link which has since been buried, as in the direct and indirect transmission of Mus's ideas to the American moral economy theorists.⁶³ In other cases these ideas were perhaps more generally 'in the air', but in either case the recovery of this rich French anthropological literature serves to remind us that most general assertions in the social sciences about 'peasants', 'community', and 'resistance' actually emerged out of specific historical and intellectual contexts. Those who use such terms and concepts would be well advised to take this into account.

Notes

1. This is a shortened and edited version of an article originally published in *Modern Asian Studies*, 34, 3 (2000), pp. 581–622, and anthologized in Eric Jennings (ed.), *French Colonial Indochina: A Reader* (University of Nebraska

- Press: forthcoming). I am grateful to the editors of both publications for permitting its republication in the present volume.
2. The early Durkheim school was associated with the Dreyfusard republican left; its adherents played a major role in metropolitan and colonial intellectual life from the 1890s to the Second World War. See P. Besnard (ed.), *The Sociological Domain. The Durkheimians and the Founding of French Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); A. Giddens, *Durkheim* (London: Fontana, 1978); K. Wolff (ed.), *Emile Durkheim: 1858–1917* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1960). On Griaule, see James Clifford, 'Power and Dialogue in Ethnography: Marcel Griaule's Initiation', in G. Stocking (ed.), *Observers Observed. Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 121–56.
 3. Founded in 1898 to run archaeological work in Asia, EFEO's expanded brief reflected the heightened sense of national competition nourishing European Orientalist initiatives until well into the 20th century. Its counterpart in the French-ruled Mediterranean, the Mission Scientifique en Maroc, published the RMM; it too had an explicitly Durkheimian ethos. See E. Burke, 'The First Crisis of Orientalism', in J.-C. Vatin et al. *Connaissances du Maghreb. Sciences Sociales et Colonisation* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1984), pp. 213–26.
 4. This engagement with the modern reached one of its most sophisticated expressions in E. E. Evans-Pritchard's path-breaking monograph *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949).
 5. The concept of *terroir* – denoting the essences and qualities which characterized one's native soil and thus shaped both human personality and the products and environmental features of a given regional milieu – nourished both conservative and leftist theorizing about the rural roots of French nationhood. See H. Lebovics, *True France. The Wars over Cultural Identity 1900–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).
 6. Comparable to the encyclopaedic race, tribe, and caste surveys in British-ruled Asian societies are such works as J. Harmand, 'Les races indo-chinoises', *Mémoires de la société d'anthropologie de Paris*, 2d series ii (1882), pp. 314–68.
 7. The region's present-day Cham population is predominantly poor and rural and is now classed as one of some 60 'national minorities' whose lifestyles are in need of being modernized and 'uplifted'. See Philip Taylor, *Cham Muslims of the Mekong Delta: Place and Mobility in the Cosmopolitan Periphery* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2007).
 8. A. Bergaigne, 'L'ancien régime du Champa', *Journal Asiatique (JA)*, Jan. 1888.
 9. H. Parmentier, *Inventaire descriptif des monuments cams de l'Annam* (Paris, 1909–18). See also G. Maspero, *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris and Brussels, 1928).
 10. E.g. in *JA* and *Revue d'Ethnographie (RE)*. See e.g. A. Aymonier 'Les Chams' *RE* (1885), pp. 156–60, and C. Lemire, 'Les tours Kiams de la province de Binh-Dinh', *RE* 6 (1887), pp. 383–94.
 11. See S. Bayly, 'Caste and race in colonial ethnography', in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 165–218.
 12. This tradition also fed into the pioneering work of Pierre Gourou on the Indochinese peasant milieu, and is still alive today in the Braudelian

mandate underpinning such institutions as the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme at Aix-en-Provence.

13. See P. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: Tauris, 1995).
14. On the Durkheimians' intellectual rivals the Le Playists, see Lebovics, *True France*, pp. 20–23.
15. Maunier, *Mélanges de sociologie Nord-africaine* (Paris, 1930), pp. 54–87.
16. Zabarovski, 'Origine des Cambodgiens, Tsiams, Mois, Dravidiens', *Bulletins de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris* (1897), pp. 38–58.
17. See A. Cabaton, *Nouvelles recherches sur les Chams* (Paris, 1901).
18. Apart from his *Nouvelle recherches sur les Chams* (1901) he published extensively in journals such as the EFEO *Bulletin*.
19. See S. Bayly, 'Racial readings of empire: Britain, France and Colonial Modernity in the Mediterranean and Asia', in L. Fawaz and C. Bayly (eds), *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 285–313.
20. Cabaton, 'Les chams musulmans de l'Indochine française', pp. 165, 179–80, *RMM* 1, 6 (1907), pp. 129–80.
21. Another was Tran Van Giap, a Paris-trained EFEO Orientalist who published pioneering historical works on Vietnamese Buddhism (e.g. *BEFEO* 32, 1932, pp. 191–268).
22. In the 1930s, as Director of the Institute of Comparative Law in the University of Paris, Maunier edited a monograph series entitled *Études de sociologie et d'ethnologie juridique*. Its publications about colonial societies included such works as the Paris-trained jurist Le Van Ho's monograph *La mère de famille Annamite* (1932) which used the perspectives of Durkheim and Mauss to transmit a covert nationalist message about the superior moral values encoded in the principles of traditional 'Annamite' (Vietnamese) civil law.
23. J. Leuba, *Un royaume disparu: Les Chams et leur art* (Paris, 1923, first pub. 1915).
24. Lau, 'La population cham', *Bulletin et Travaux de l'IEH*, 6 (1943), pp. 213–23.
25. Review of *The Hindu Colony of Cambodia* by Phanidranath Bose (Madras, 1927), p. 620, *VMGS* (Dec. 1927), pp. 620–21. The other major outlet for such writings was the *Journal of the Greater India Society*.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Anon, 'Contemporary thought reviewed' [review of a work by the Greater India polemicist Kalidas Nag].
29. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies* (1927), pp. i, 21.
30. See David Chandler and Christopher E. Goscha (eds), *Paul Mus (1902–1969). L'espace d'un regard* (Paris, 2006).
31. After joining Charles de Gaulle's anti-Axis Free France movement, Mus spent much of the Second World War working in Calcutta with the British intelligence directorate responsible for anti-Japanese propaganda operations. He was parachuted into Japanese-controlled Annam in 1945 and undertook another dangerous mission in 1947 in an abortive attempt to negotiate peace terms with Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969), leader of the revolutionary nationalist

- Viet Minh movement spearheading Vietnam's 1946–54 anti-French liberation war.
32. Mus, *Le Viet Nam chez lui* (Paris, 1946), pp. 10–11.
 33. Mus, *Sociologie d'une guerre*. (Paris, 1952).
 34. I. W. Mabbett and D. P. Chandler (eds), *India Seen from the East. Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa* (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1975), p. 5.
 35. Mus, *Ho Chi Minh, Le Vietnam, L'Asie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971).
 36. E.g. S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed. Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
 37. Mus, *Le destin de l'Union Française de l'Indochine à l'Afrique*. (Paris, 1954), pp. 128–32.
 38. Mus, *Le destin*, p. 132: again there is a striking contrast with British anthropologists whose Durkheim-inspired functionalism generated very few such comparative reflections on morality and culture in their own society.
 39. This reflects the influence of another of Mus's pre-war mentors, the radical-pacifist philosopher Alain (1868–1951) who had taught him at his Paris *lycée*.
 40. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 301. A shortened version of this work was published in English as John T. McAlister Jr and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and their Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1970).
 41. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 303.
 42. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 306, and McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, pp. 146–48.
 43. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 92. There are comparable themes in Maunier's account of Algeria as a domain of defective sociality, the chief offenders in his view being urban Arabs whom he saw as hoarders of useless uninvested wealth and concealers of women whose seclusion denied them healthy sociability and circulation. Maunier, *Loi française et coutume indigène en Algérie*. (Paris: Les Éditions Dornat-Montchrestien, 1932), p. 35.
 44. The theme of resistance is prominent in Mus's work, especially *Sociologie d'une guerre* in which he aroused much controversy by insisting that there were close parallels between wartime French resistance to German occupation and Vietnamese resistance to foreign rule.
 45. Mus, *Le Viet Nam chez lui*, p. 33.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 220. Unlike his views on the Vietnamese, Mus had decidedly Orientalist opinions about the 'fatalistic' qualities of Muslim thought.
 48. Mus, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 19–23. In both Hanoi's and Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City's historical museums, national history is still portrayed as an episodic sequence of resistance episodes, with pictorial montages of Vietnamese liberators fighting a series of invaders including the Chinese and the French.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 24. Here Mus echoes the perspectives of such scholars as Tran Van Giap in ascribing to the Vietnamese a sense of their homeland as a defined and bounded polity mapped in real territorial space, rather than a disembodied abstraction or projection of idealized 'galactic kingship'. He thus anticipates Benedict Anderson in relating the emergence of national consciousness to the acquisition of concrete geographical knowledge through map-making and the writings of pilgrims and other travellers. But for

Mus, this 'modern' sense of nationhood has its roots in classic Vietnamese texts, most notably in pilgrimage accounts describing the known world as a composite of defined polities with their own humoral essences, and with Vietnam/Annam existing as a co-equal imperial realm to that of China.

Ibid., pp. 32 ff.

50. Ibid, pp. 79–80.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p. 82.

53. Ibid, p. 38.

54. Ibid., p. 39.

55. McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, p. 98.

56. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 140.

57. Ibid.

58. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 139 ff and McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, p. 96.

59. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 142 and McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, p. 96. The son of a pioneering colonial educator, Mus was brought up in Hanoi and attended state-run schools admitting francophone Vietnamese and Eurasians as well white pupils.

60. McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, p. 103.

61. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 146; and McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, p. 96.

62. Mus, *Sociologie*, p. 143; and McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese*, p. 101.

63. From the 1950s until his death in 1969, Mus held a visiting professorship at Yale, where he taught John McAlister in the late 1950s. McAlister was an important influence on participants in the debate between the Scott-Wolf moral economists and their opponents, notably Samuel Popkin, whose seminal monograph *The Rational Peasant. The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) builds on Mus and McAlister, as well as Gourou and other French cultural geographers whose writings share many of the intellectual orientations of the *Annales* historians.

Part III

Archives of Entanglement

8

Treachery and Ethnicity in Portuguese Representations of Sri Lanka

Alan Strathern

Writing from the imperial capital of Goa in the 1630s, the official chronicler of the Portuguese East, António Bocarro, turned his attention southwards to 'the enemy that we have in this island of Ceylon'. This bountiful island was the only place in Asia where the Portuguese had launched a successful project of extensive territorial conquest. They were now directly ruling the lowlands and engaged in a ceaseless attempt to defeat the island's last independent kingdom, the highland bastion of Kandy.¹ Bocarro's verdict was not flattering: 'all the Sinhalese are by their nature treacherous and inconstant and for any advantage they would kill their own father'. He was not only referring to the recalcitrant inhabitants of Kandy but also the lowland people who were considered vassals of the king in Lisbon. He lamented the ease with which these vassals would 'cross from us to the enemy, and return from the enemy to us'. He went on to say,

But with a big difference, because when on our side they never refrain from being ready for any treachery against us, however obligated they may be to us for benefits received from the Portuguese. And also, so strong and firm are they in their hatred of us and their subjection, that even those who have showed themselves always faithful and have proved it with their own lives [in our service], confess that even unto the grave, they will not be able to give up that hatred.²

Bocarro was writing not long after the disastrous expedition of 1630 in which the lowland Sinhalese had conspired with their highland countrymen to inflict a devastating defeat on their European foe. Just as

the Portuguese forces approached Kandy, their lascarin troops defected en masse while a rebel faction announced itself in the colonial capital of Colombo. On the 22nd of August the entire Portuguese army was annihilated or taken prisoner at the battle of Randenivala. Shockingly, among the dead lay Constantino de Sá de Noronha, the Portuguese Captain-General of Ceylon (1616–20, 1623–30). His post-mortem fate was now to be worshipped as a vengeful deity by the Kandyans, staggered perhaps at their own achievement.³ There was more salt to be rubbed into the wounds: many of the leading defectors were Sinhalese who had converted to Christianity and been rewarded with intimate positions of service by Sá de Noronha.⁴ Raised up from low origins and endowed with new noble titles, they now turned against their benefactor. These troubling events reverberated around the Portuguese empire while the subsequent wars of the 1630s drained the Goa treasury at a time when funds were desperately needed to see off the predatory advances of the Dutch.

What was driving the rebels? Were they fighting out of some conscious commitment to their identity as Sinhalese? Or is that hopelessly anachronistic, a capitulation to modern nationalist assumptions? And does this characterization of ‘infidelity’ reflect anything more than the wounded amour-propre of Europe’s first imperialists?

For Bocarro, as a New Christian who had temporarily slipped back to Judaism and only received full absolution from the Inquisition in 1624, the theme of inconstancy must have been particularly salient.⁵ Yet in his characterization of the Sinhalese he was making use of a stereotype which had long coalesced in the Portuguese mind. Or rather, there were two stereotypes at work. It was felt that the Sinhalese were unfaithful to their own lords, to be sure, but behind this generic predisposition was discerned a more selective one: a flickering antipathy to foreign dominion borne out of national pride.

Both these images would be called into question today and subject to interpretation by scholars familiar with Edward Said’s well-known critique of Orientalist knowledge. Historians are now routinely concerned to show how shaky the epistemological foundations of Western representations of the East may be, and yet how powerful they were subsequently in shaping Easterners views of themselves. There is more than a touch of Michel Foucault too in the strong assumption that knowledge is the creature of power. The historian John Rogers has termed this sort of scholarship as ‘post-Orientalist’, and this essay will also adopt this term.⁶ I should say that within Sri Lanka itself this approach to history has often been either ignored or fiercely resisted.⁷ But among

those scholars of Sri Lanka based in other countries, post-Orientalism has achieved certain hegemony. I shall not here provide an exploration of how this has happened as there are good accounts elsewhere. Perhaps the two most influential works one should note are Jonathan Spencer's *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* and Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail's *Unmaking the Nation*.⁸ The former was particularly seminal in advancing the argument that current assumptions about the long-term nature of Sri Lankan ethnicity, state and religion owe a great deal to the Victorian Orientalist imagination.

Above all, recent writing has called into question the antiquity of 'Sinhaleseness' (and to a lesser extent 'Tamilness') as a meaningful identity. During the past quarter of a century of civil war, nothing has been could have been more controversial in the island than this. But international academia, with its largely liberal persuasions, has been concerned to emphasize that current political emotions have very shallow roots. In fact, we might discern here an intellectual alliance between post-Orientalism and the modernist interpretation of nationalism.⁹ The former brings to the table the feeling that Western representations are likely to be deeply mistaken and self-serving; the latter, that mass culture and mass group identity can only be produced by the forces of modernity. Add them together: the West has shaped an invented past masking its creation of the present.

In fact, few of these writers have actually been historians – there are simply not that many historians of Sri Lanka around.¹⁰ Their most important source, the empirical foundation for much subsequent theoretical architecture, has been Gunawardana's well-known essay on 'the People of the Lion', first drafted in 1979. Although Gunawardana's later work explores the impact of Orientalism, this foundational paper derives its impetus from a quiet Marxism.¹¹ Moreover, the obvious problems with the more extreme post-Orientalist arguments, in which knowledge-warping power is only accorded to Europeans, have been recognized and now one or two scholars have begun to deconstruct local pre-modern texts in a similar manner.¹² Therefore, in broad terms, one can describe the prevailing academic tendency as 'historicist' as contrasted with a 'traditionalist' one. 'Historicism' here refers to an emphasis on discontinuity and incommensurability between different epochs, combined with a robust critique of texts as specific projections of power rather than reflections of long-standing and wide-reaching cultural traditions.¹³

For the post-Orientalist argument, one particular watershed or epistemic rupture is critical. The consensus seems to be that the pivotal

moment occurred around the 1830s, some four decades into British rule, when a new form of centralized bureaucracy was established through the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms, and at same time the British were beginning to appreciate the long antiquity of the local literary tradition. Largely through the activities of the official George Turnour, the principal chronicle tradition or *Mahavamsa* was heralded as the key to understanding the history and therefore fundamental nature of the Sinhalese.¹⁴ It is around this time, indeed, that the Sinhalese were first properly established in the imagination as a distinct racial or ethnic group. If any self-conception of 'Sinhalaness' is acknowledged to exist before this date, it is as an idea with very little emotional or political weight attached. From the 1830s, the British used racial categories as the basis for 'native' representation in the legislative council. Caste, hitherto employed as an element of a heterogeneous system of imperial rule, was thereafter largely ignored by officials, in direct contrast, of course, to India. Redoubling the dichotomous conceptualization of Ceylon and India, if the inhabitants of the subcontinent were sometimes deemed to be 'without history', the Sinhalese were imagined to have long possessed a proper understanding of history. Their past, lovingly extracted from the *Mahavamsa*, now dated back to the centuries B.C.¹⁵

This is the point at which we can return to the Portuguese, for the awkward existence of the Portuguese period of influence in Sri Lanka (1506–1658) elbows apart the alliance between post-Orientalism and modernist theory. Here we have a Western nation – but not Western as we know it, and certainly not modern. Portuguese representations of the East issued before the Enlightenment, before an explicit biology of race, and while some of the earlier big 'distinguishers' of the West – the Reformation and the rise of the nation-state – were only just beginning to play out. Furthermore, how do we conceptualize the impact of a European people who, for almost the entire sixteenth century, were not governing Sri Lanka so much as intruding onto the island's affairs through the institutions of vassalage and mission? In short, given that there must be a world of difference between the worldviews of a sixteenth-century Iberian and a nineteenth-century Briton – does this mean they describe different worlds when they write about Sri Lanka?

When it comes to the method by which post-Orientalists interpret European texts, there is actually a good deal of common ground with more traditional forms of source criticism.¹⁶ In our case, it must be an obvious starting point that Portuguese representations of Sri Lanka are – to use Buddhist terminology – 'conditioned' (that is to say they must reflect the particular nature of their origins). It seems equally clear that

a stubborn indigenous reality has shaped those representations, establishing parameters of plausible interpretation, demanding further investigation, instigating surprise and changes of mind. Portuguese writers may not have been particularly sensitive and disinterested observers of Sri Lankan society, but they were undoubtedly alive to the predicament in which the Portuguese found themselves. And that predicament was forced upon them by pre-existing principles of Sri Lankan society. Most of this essay will consider the implications of the post-Orientalist arguments for the nature of pre-modern consciousness.¹⁷ How well are they borne out by the evidence from the Portuguese period?

Treachery

The treacherousness of the Sinhalese became a recurrent stereotype in Western representations from the late sixteenth-century onwards.¹⁸ It is difficult to think of a more obviously self-serving colonialist trope than this. What greater excuse does an imperial regime need to keep its subjects oppressed than an appeal to their intrinsic infidelity, their brutish inability to comprehend the basic principles of political authority? How redolent too, of such long-standing Occidental characterizations of the Orient as associated with fickleness, double-standards, unmanly irresolution.¹⁹ If early modern Iberians did not have a fully-fledged theory of race, perhaps proto-climatic ideas deriving from the widely accepted humoral axioms of Hippocratic-Galenic medical theory may have fuelled the stereotype. The principle of change itself was seen to be quickened in the tropics: things grew and decayed at speed there, and men's minds too might suffer from a corresponding excess of dynamism.²⁰

After the Portuguese finally conquered the lowlands in the 1590s, some of the above may have come into play. The development of the stereotype must have owed something to a typical psychology of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, as a justification for the former's assumed superiority perhaps, or an analgesic for any occasional twinges of guilt. But its roots pre-date the imposition of direct rule or 'colonial' policy. In the 1580s, the Augustinian friar, Agostinho de Azevedo, claimed that the Sinhalese had the reputation of being the most 'false and deceitful that there are in the whole of India'.²¹ I shall then locate its origins in the Portuguese encounter with an out-of-control reality, in two aspects of their predicament.

(1) The first is the fact that the Portuguese in Sri Lanka found themselves contending with an unfamiliar form of political authority. They never realized this in those terms, never developed an adequate theory

of the political forces they spent the sixteenth century trying, in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion, to master. Theorists today have done a better job. Tambiah has argued that they were not even states but 'galactic polities', defined by an exemplary show of strength and glory at the centre rather than by any fixed boundaries and engaged in a constant struggle for status with other centres.²² The brighter stars were able to amass weight, pulling in the obedience of lesser rulers, who were allowed substantial autonomy as satellite courts emulating the style of kingship at the centre. Whatever one makes of Tambiah's analytical language, it is true that the ties of obedience or vassalage needed to be constantly remade; they retained a strongly conditional quality. Rebellions and coups, which made even European dynastic affairs seem sedate by comparison, were a frequent affair.

This mattered a great deal to the Portuguese because they spent the bulk of the century attempting to influence Sri Lankan affairs through their relationship with its indigenous kings. Until the 1590s, their principal aims – to secure a monopoly of the lucrative cinnamon export trade and exercise vigilance over the strategically important Sea of Ceylon region – were best served by establishing themselves in a few port strongholds such as Colombo and Mannar and making the rulers of the hinterland vassals of the Portuguese Crown. This was not simply a matter of coercion: by the end of the 1540s almost every ruler on the island had asked to take Dom João III (r.1521–57) as their liege.²³

Many of the lesser rulers were in fact trying to escape from a homage (*dakum*) relationship to the high kings in Kotte, who held the *cakravarti* title of all-island overlordship. Besides this, in less than four decades the Portuguese witnessed: a bloody coup at Kotte in 1521, in which Vijayabahu (r.1513–21) was assassinated by his three sons who proceeded to carve up the kingdom between them; the ascendancy of one of those sons, Mayadunne of Sitavaka (r. 1521–81), who sought to destroy the power of his elder brother and nominal overlord, Bhuvanekabahu (r.1521–51), in Kotte; the opportunism of the ruler of Kandy seeking to escape vassalage to Kotte; that same ruler being ousted by his son Karaliyadde Bandara and forced to flee his realm; a breakaway rebellion by Vidiye Bandara against his son and Bhuvanekabahu's grandson and heir, Dharmapala (r. 1551–97).²⁴ In the first instance, then, it was the way in which the Sinhalese had behaved towards their own rulers that disturbed some Portuguese considering these matters in later decades. The Portuguese found themselves drawn into and exacerbating dynastic struggles and status competitions that were playing out according to an essentially internal logic.

By the 1560s, that logic was turning against them. Particularly once the young king Dharmapala had accepted Christianity, their own power came to rest on the authority of Kotte, and, as such, it suffered from a corresponding and precipitous decline. The most obvious shift in the fortunes of competing centres, the haemorrhaging of manpower from Kotte to its rival based in the nearby upstart city of Sitavaka, therefore worked to their disadvantage. Largely confined to Colombo (after Kotte was abandoned in 1565), the Portuguese-Kotte forces were restricted to military sorties into a hinterland under the control of Rajasinha (de facto rule 1560s–1593), the warrior king of Sitavaka. In the 1580s and 90s, Sinhalese politics seemed in meltdown, as dizzying changes in allegiance, repeated defections to and fro, continual warfare and the rise to prominence of freewheeling military specialists such as Jayavira Bandara, seemed to spell the end for any form of stable monarchy on the island.

The stereotype was further propelled by observations of the local attitude towards religious boundaries. For reasons too complex to introduce here, the Sinhalese generally felt able to adopt a highly eclectic attitude to religious practice, crossing boundaries willy-nilly which seemed sacrosanct to missionaries, appearing to accept Christianity without giving up Buddhism, or promising to do so and then reneging on that promise. The result was that just as the Sinhalese were treacherous to their political lords, so to they appeared treacherous to the divine Lord. The man who would attract the most vehement accusations of infidelity was someone who had demonstrated that vice in both its temporal and spiritual aspects: Vimaladharmasuriya, the re-founder of Kandy, had been fighting for the Portuguese under the baptismal name of Dom João d'Austria (after the hero of the battle of Lepanto). When he raised himself as a Buddhist king in Kandy in 1591, he became not only traitor but apostate, and *casado* oral tradition records a desperate need to see him punished and suffering for his sins.²⁵

(2) The second phase of the Portuguese predicament occurred with the imposition of direct rule over the lowlands in the 1590s. If the Sinhalese were hardly undyingly loyal to their own rulers, they were even less obedient towards their new masters. This, indeed, is when the stereotype of treacherousness became widely established. The first decade of Portuguese rule was the most turbulent, inspiring four major rebellions in the lowlands, which suggests it was seen as inherently offensive to many Sinhalese even before the full burden of exploitative or incompetent colonial policies had been felt. Apart from continuing small-scale expressions of discontent, there were further major rebellions in 1616–19

and 1630.²⁶ At these times, it could appear to the terrified Portuguese that the whole island had risen up in arms against them.

Equally shocking to the Portuguese, however, were the sporadic but spectacular defections by *lascarins*. Like many an imperial power, the Portuguese position in the island depended on the support of substantial bodies of indigenous troops. In many circumstances they proved loyal, but apparently what the bulk of them would not countenance was collusion in the destruction of the last independent Sinhalese kingdom. On three occasions, in 1594, 1603 and 1630, attempts to invade the highland kingdom of Kandy were undermined by the mass defections of *lascarins* at crucial moments.

We have already encountered what resulted from the defection of *lascarins* in 1630, whose leaders included men of Kotte brought into service by Sá de Noronha himself. If the treachery of the Sinhalese could therefore be experienced in very personal terms, it also took on a more general cultural aspect. It is an intriguing fact about many of the most redoubtable rebels that they came from strongly Lusitanised backgrounds. Edirille Rala (Domingos Correa), who led the rebellion in 1595, had been a literate second-generation Christian with many Portuguese relatives by marriage and well-favoured with high office.²⁷ Nikapitiya Bandara, who led a rebellion in 1616, had spent his youth in the service of Franciscan friars and had been a palanquin-bearer for the Portuguese Captain-General.²⁸ It could seem to onlookers, therefore, as if there was something utterly inherent in the enmity and disloyalty of the Sinhalese, something that mere upbringing, education or benign treatment could not erase. Reflecting on the events of 1630, the ex-soldier João Ribeiro, commented that 'they had been brought up among us, yet they conspired with the King of Candia in such a manner that they were the cause of our total ruin... for in the end the blacks are all our enemies'.²⁹

In fact, the Lusitanised origins of many of the rebels provide us with a powerful explanation as to why they felt that they had to apostatize in a very public way. I suggest that this was a form of 'conspicuous indigenization', a way for a suspect turncoat leader to prove to his followers that he had now revealed his true identity as a protector of the true Sinhala (or possibly Lankan) cultural tradition. It also indicates a need to cater for the expression of popular anti-Christian sentiment. Many of the lowland rebellions were guided by the symbolism of iconoclasm, targeting Churches, killing friars, making priests undergo perversions of the mass. The Portuguese had tied the projection of imperial power to the march of the Cross: the rebels merely pursued the same logic in their

rejection of both. This all makes a great deal of sense to us now, but how would it have seemed to Portuguese on the island at the time? As if no Sinhalese, however Christian, however well-turned out in European dress, could ultimately be trusted.

What about the Sinhalese perspective? Flip over the coin of treachery and it will show an emblem of loyalty.³⁰ Loyalty to what?

Ethnicity

The imposition of Portuguese rule exacerbated the fissiparous tendencies of Sinhalese political authority. To be sure, some local elites in the lowlands did convert and fashioned for themselves an identity that could take the kings in Lisbon/Madrid as the focus of dynastic sentiment. But the explosion of rebellion in the lowlands, the symbolism the rebels employed, and their moments of co-operation with the Kandyan kings indicate that many lowlanders were liable to see Portuguese rule as illegitimate. This brings us to the question of group identity.³¹ According to post-Orientalist theory, Sinhaleanness should not exist as anything more than a feeble, inconsequential or elite category before the nineteenth century.

The first major ethnological-geographical appraisal of the island, Barros' 'third Decade' of his chronicles written in the 1550s, used the term 'Chingála' (Sinhala) much as we do today, referring to a language and a people.³² Later surveys are clear on the differences between Sinhalese and Tamils, sometimes emphatically so.³³ In the seventeenth century, we find Dutchmen such as Joris Van Spilbergen, and Englishmen such as Robert Knox using the term 'chingala' in the same way as the Portuguese.³⁴ They were represented as having particular natural characteristics; a certain religious system, literary tradition, script, set of customs; and indeed ancestry. Queirós makes his rebel leaders inspire their men by holding before them their pride in the 'Chingala name and nation [*nação*, people].³⁵ These writers also presented various stories taken from indigenous literary and oral traditions (particularly, the *Rajavaliya* and *Mahavamsa*) as origin myths for the Sinhala people.³⁶ Sinhala ethnicity is perhaps most vividly brought to life in the texts written once the Portuguese had lost their control of Sri Lanka to the Dutch in 1658.³⁷

So the world evoked by these writers often looks rather familiar. If ethnicity must be a fiction, do we then merely locate its origins further back in time, rendering it a story first told by the Portuguese and Dutch and only later reiterated by the British? After all, one might argue

that the Portuguese's own sense of self-definition was under construction at this time, attaining new heights as a result of their own loss of autonomy under the union of crowns with the Spanish Habsburgs (1580–1640). It is an irony worth bearing in mind that the Portuguese depriving the lowland Sri Lankans of indigenous rule were themselves vassals of a foreign king in Madrid. Did some of them read their own stiffening passions on to the natives? Undoubtedly.³⁸ Queirós' Iberian origins must bear upon his remark that the particularly rebellious people of the Four Korales 'were the worst enemies of the Portuguese name, their hatred increasing with the vicinity of Colombo, as always happens between nations opposed and neighbouring'.³⁹ In that sense, then, the Sinhalese were not 'Othered' but 'Samed'. They were attributed, much in the fashion of Roman writers such as Tacitus, with a similar set of political emotions to those animating their conquerors.

It is also possible that the Portuguese discourse of blood (*sangue*), so powerful a generator of hierarchy in their colonial cities, influenced some of more important Sinhalese opinion-formers and lent a new aspect to their identity. Once again, this derives from the observation of how Lusitanised many of the rebel leaders were. Edirille Rala, for example, had been a translator. When the later Franciscan chronicler Paulo da Trindade reports that he titled himself the liberator of the Chingala people' (*se intitulou libertador da nação chingalá*'), we cannot imagine any inherent dislocation between the author's language and that of his subject.⁴⁰ In other words, it is plausible that the likes of Edirille Rala considered the Sinhalese as a *nação* [people], in the same way that the Portuguese were a *nação*.⁴¹ Equally, when our sources refer to the Sinhalese fighting for their 'liberty' they may have been reflecting a discourse of imperial dominion and resistance which Portuguese and Lusitanised Sinhalese shared.⁴² If the image of a bureaucratic state imposing theoretical knowledge from above is inappropriate here, we may be faced with a more organic merging of concepts. There had been much inter-marriage between the Portuguese colonists and the Kotte elites: just as their blood mingled so too perhaps their language of blood; just as in actuality the *nações* were dissolving into one another, so in the imagination they were solidifying on both sides.

I offer this argument here as an example of how fruitful it can be to take loose inspiration from the post-Orientalist approach, even if the results contradict specific post-Orientalist contentions. Nevertheless, it cannot bear too much weight. And the principal text from which our Portuguese scholars and officials were reading was not some master-narrative assembled at home but a more troubling series of announcements in the island.

The most profound influence of Portuguese was only indirectly epistemological – physical not cognitive violence. The result of generations of constant warfare was an indigenous discourse that can only be described as patriotic and xenophobic, in love with the shining image of the island of Lanka and exulting in its kings. We cannot really know how widespread or fundamental this discourse became, as it is principally expressed through the genre of the *hatana* or war poem which first appeared with the *Sitavaka Hatana* of 1585 and was resurrected in the mid-seventeenth century with the *Rajasinha Hatana* (circa 1638) and the *Maha Hatana* (circa 1658).⁴³ Questions remain about how much these poems promoted a sense of Sinhala-ness *per se*, and even their patriotic sensibility must be seen as possessing a propagandist quality. But, in certain respects, the sentimental world they inhabit is familiar from the picture of the Sinhalese generated by the Portuguese sources.⁴⁴ Naturally, one could also refer to all manner of interesting differences in perspective between them, but once one has been submerged in post-Orientalist theory and come up again for air the commonalities seem just as striking.

Particularly after the traumatic events of 1630, there was a rush of Portuguese treatises trying to explain what had gone wrong in Ceylon.⁴⁵ Once Portuguese conquest was executed and defied by rebellions, there arose a strong need to explain both what was wrong with Portuguese imperialism and what was wrong with the Sinhalese. The elaboration of the former allows us a glimpse into a world in which the Sinhalese might have accepted foreign rule if only it had not been so exploitative, cruel and ignorant of local custom.⁴⁶ This can even take on a somewhat masochistic air. Indeed, the way in which the Portuguese lost the support of the locals could become something of a formula in the hands of moralizing chroniclers, as it allowed them to illustrate the consequences of what they considered wrong or un-Christian about the imperial project.⁴⁷ But, in Sri Lanka, such rhetoric did not need to stray too far from events on the ground.

Historical consciousness

Those Portuguese chroniclers who commented explicitly on the matter were sure that the Sinhalese had long held a clear sense of themselves as a distinct people. Fernão de Queirós remarked ‘as for the character of the Chingalas, they are generally proud, vain and lazy...because of the antiquity of their Kingdom and people [*nação*] and the liberty in which they were always brought up’.⁴⁸ Queirós was right to point to the importance of their long and continuing literary tradition, in both

Pali and Sinhala, for sustaining a desire for independence. It gave them an instant ability to turn mere events into eloquent history, outrages into propaganda.⁴⁹ Nor were such writings entirely written-off by the Portuguese. Some, such as the Captain-General Constantino de Sá de Miranda, apparently felt so threatened by this immense past that they tried to scorn it as based on 'monstrous falsehoods'.⁵⁰ But the chief tendency among Portuguese chroniclers was to treat indigenous texts as valuable if problematic sources of information about the past. Agostinho de Azevedo, who was commissioned by Diogo de Couto to flesh out the early history of the island, based his work on a version of the *Rajavaliya* chanted to him by scions of the ruling families of Sitavaka and Kotte who fled to Goa in the 1590s.⁵¹ This stands as an obvious rebuttal to the argument that it was only after the epistemic 'rupture' of the 1830s, that Europeans could see Lankan texts as sources possessing a commensurable historicity. Pradeep Jeganathan, for example, has asserted that 'European accounts from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century are unanimous that no texts that can be read as historical (in the sense set out above), can be found among those available in the island.'⁵² Instead, one could argue – although it would take more serious research to properly make the case – that the dismissive attitude towards the Sinhalese literary tradition reflects how superficial European exposure to it was during the early stages of imperial endeavour, and that once there was a felt need to understand the natives more deeply and conduct research into their textual heritage, then scorn could melt into appreciation.⁵³

West into East

Lastly, Portuguese imperialism is awkward for the post-Orientalist method because of its refusal to remain aloof from Eastern society. As the colonial centres push their roots further into Asian soil, the terms of the Saidian debate begin to lose some of their purchase. Was seventeenth-century Goa really still 'Western'? Were the Christianized and inter-married elites of Kotte really 'Eastern'? I do not want to suggest that occidental and oriental become inadmissible conceptual categories: the merging was not comprehensive enough for that. But it does mean that it is not always a simple matter to categorize the knowledge that our texts present us with as either Western or Eastern.

We referred above to the willingness of Portuguese writers to use local historical tradition. This willingness extended to contemporary reports coming out of the island too. For example, in the Portuguese sources, Rajasinha I of Sitavaka appears as something of a monster who attained

mastery of Ceylon through the exercise of tyranny. The image is most starkly drawn in the most contemporary of chronicle accounts, Diogo do Couto's 'Tenth Decade', in which Rajasinha becomes a king paranoid enough for a Shakespearean tragedy as he mires himself in the blood of rivals.⁵⁴ He seems to have become the very type of the 'Oriental despot', ruling through fear rather than through reciprocal institutions. In a more immediate sense, the image must reflect important features of the Portuguese settler's emotional life at the time, their anger at having their superiority so obviously called into question by his might, their anxiety about their fate, their fantasies that his rule might rest on brittle foundations. However, it seems as if one important strand of this black propaganda issued from an indigenous source: the Kandians who were struggling for independence against Rajasinha and were disturbed by his increasing devotion to Saivism. The image of a king who in the last years of his life became increasingly in thrall to a perverse supernaturalism and lost the loyalties of his people may owe a great deal to a particular Sinhalese perspective.

A good final image of the interweaving of European and indigenous traditions is that of the island itself, which from early on in the Portuguese encounter and consistently thereafter was portrayed as something of an earthly paradise. For the more religious-minded, it was ear-marked too for a special Providential role in the establishment of Christianity in Asia. Had not St. Thomas left his footprint at the top of that famous mountain which the Muslims mistakenly called Adam's Peak? Long before this, however, the Sinhalese had attributed that footprint to the Buddha, and had developed their own sense of a land with a divine destiny, its physical bounties reflecting its blessed state. That sense seems to have been transmitted to the Portuguese, and such images needed only a dusting of Christianity to be mustered into action by those pressing for the island's conquest and re-conquest.

The first years of this century have seen the post-colonial and post-Orientalist methods pushed to extreme but logical conclusions in Sri Lankan studies. One chain of logic finds its end-point in the notion that any form of verifiable knowledge is suspect, that any appeal to the 'facts' is merely a rhetorical move masking fundamentally corrupt intellectual-political projects. Hence we have Qadri Ismail, who argues from a 'post-empiricist' position to show how the disciplines of history and anthropology must lead to the 'wrong' conclusions about the current ethnic conflict.⁵⁵ Susantha Goonatilake doesn't much care for anthropologists either, whom we see as manufacturing a distorted anti-Sinhala Buddhist vision of Sri Lanka for Western consumption.⁵⁶ Although

starting from quite different points on the political spectrum, Ismail and Goonatilake come to share a good deal of common ground – but it is not the sort of place where the majority of scholars will choose to stand.⁵⁷ Most scholars surely believe both that reliable or useful knowledge of human society is possible, and that it cannot only be accessed from within hermetically sealed nations or cultures. As a Buddhist might put it, we can understand that knowledge, like human beings, is both conditioned and capable of transcending the conditions of its origin.

Notes

1. The only other areas in Asia where the Portuguese directly ruled swathes of the hinterland were the Província do Norte, on the Northwest coast of India, and the land around Goa. I have not used Sinhala diacritics in this text.
2. Translated from António Bocarro, *Década 13 da Historia da India*, dir. Rodrigo José de Lima Felner (Lisbon, 1876), pp. 497–98, which was completed in 1635. This comment is echoed in Fernão de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, trans., and with introduction by S. G. Perera, 3 vols (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992), p. 23.
3. Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 192.
4. As a text from 1633 asserted, cited in Jorge Manuel Flores and Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, 'A 'Tale of Two Cities', and a 'Veteran Soldier': The Two Jornadas de Huva (1633, 1635) Revisited' in Flores (ed.), *Portugal-Sri Lanka, 500 Years* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007).
5. See C. R. de Silva's introduction to T. B. H. Abeyasinghe, (trans., ed.) 'Antonio Bocarro's Ceylon', intro by C.R. de Silva, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, n.s. 39 (Colombo, 1995, published 1996), p. xiv.
6. John D. Rogers 'Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Pre-modern and Modern Political Identities: the Case of Sri Lanka', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (1994), pp. 10–23. Rogers refers to post-Orientalist interpretations of India's pasts as bearing 'the clear influence of Said and Foucault' and shifting the origins of ethnic and cultural nationalism to 'the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the first years of British rule. Post-Orientalists place great importance on the role of the British in the construction of new identities through the power of colonial discourse on India'. See also John D. Rogers 'Racial Identities and Politics in Early Modern Sri Lanka', in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 'Early British Rule and Social Classification in Lanka', *Modern Asian Studies*, 38 (2004), pp. 625–47. And see Michael Roberts, 'Sri Lanka. Intellectual Currents and Conditions in the Study of Nationalism', in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Sri Lanka. Collective Identities Revisited* (Colombo: Marga Institute 1997), pp. 1–44; 'Ethnicity after Said: Post-Orientalist Failures in Comprehending the Kandyan Period of Lankan History', *Ethnic Studies Report*, 19 (2001), pp. 69–98. Roberts has offered theoretical opposition to aspects of post-Orientalism since it began to wield influence.

7. A major exception has been the Social Scientists Association, which has been at the forefront of their application to Sri Lankan studies through important publications during the 1980s and 90s.
8. Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1990), and Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: SSA, 1995).
9. See also Chris Bayly, 'Foreword' to Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan period, 1590s–1815* (Colombo, 2004).
10. Anthropologists tend to predominate. Nor would many describe themselves as scholars primarily working from a 'Saidian' perspective.
11. R. A. L. H Gunawardana, 'The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography', in Spencer, *Sri Lanka*, pp. 45–86; *Historiography in a Time of Ethnic Conflict* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 1995).
12. E.g. Jonathan Walters, 'Buddhist History: the Sri Lankan Pali Vamsas and their Community', in Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali (eds), *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 99–164.
13. Alan Strathern, 'Theoretical Approaches to Sri Lankan History and the Early Portuguese Period', *Modern Asian Studies* 38 (2004), pp. 189–226, where the (Concise Oxford) dictionary definition of 'historicism' is used, the first of which is the 'theory that social and cultural phenomena are determined by history'. It is sometimes defined quite differently to invoke a much-maligned epistemology associated with British colonialists themselves.
14. Rogers, 'Early British Rule', pp. 639–45, Walters, 'Buddhist History', pp. 152–64; Pradeep Jeganathan 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura' in Jeganathan and Ismail (eds) *Unmaking the Nation*, pp. 106–37.
15. Confusingly for readers of this paper, this colonial rendering of the *Mahavamsa* as a source of accurate historical information is often presented, disapprovingly, as the product of a 'historicist' mindset. Worse, David Scott 'Dehistoricizing History' in Jeganathan and Ismail, *Unmaking the Nation*, seems to mean something else altogether by historicism, namely the general significance of rational historical enquiry *tout court*, which is also considered a bad thing.
16. See Alan Strathern, 'Fernão de Queirós: History and Theology', *Anais de História de Além-Mar*, 6 (2005), pp. 47–88, for source-criticism of the major Portuguese chronicle.
17. Note 'implications': there is not anything approaching a developed post-Orientalist critique of the period of Portuguese influence; its significance has barely been registered. So I shall often have to construct what a post-Orientalist case might look like, before going on to deconstruct the deconstruction, as it were.
18. It is a recurring theme in Queyroz, *Conquest*, who uses terms such as 'natural restlessness' (p. 185), 'turbulent inconstancy' (p. 291), 'variable' (p. 321), Chingalâ infidelity' (p. 603), 'ever faithless Chingalâz, grand masters of deceit' (p. 623), 'inconstancy of the Chingalâz' (706), 'natural perfidy of these people' (p. 753) 'there were already so many examples of Chingalâ infidelity' (p. 766).

19. As just one example, see a letter by Charles-Joseph Bussy of 1752 on India, quoted in Sanjaya Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions. Making Politics in Early Modern South India* (Michigan, 2001), p. 19.
20. See Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics. The Catholic Frontier in India (16th–17th centuries)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 8–10, for notions of the tropics situated within Hippocratic-Galenic discourses. The relevance of this to racial thinking and to Sri Lanka itself requires further investigation. A vague climatic perspective is observable in the case of Queirós, but no explicit theories are referenced. He avers that the wonderful climate of Lanka explains the laziness of its inhabitants – but is also conducive to the health of Portuguese. See Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 21, 79, 1144.
21. Agostinho de Azevedo, in *Estado da Índia e aonde tem o seu principio* (printed as anonymous document in *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, I (1960), p. 238, repeated by Diogo do Couto in D. Ferguson, (ed. and trans.) *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Times to 1600 A.D. as related by João de Barros and Diogo do Couto* (New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1993), p. 66. Note the contrast with other Oriental peoples.
22. S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 102–32.
23. Including the Kings of Kandy and Sitavaka, the prince of the Seven Korales, the chiefs of Trincomalee and Batticaloa, a pretender to Jaffna throne and various disinherited princes, see Vito Perniola, (ed.), *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, The Portuguese Period*. 2 vols (Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo 1989–91), I, pp. 60–64, 101–9, 154, 166, 211–13, 220–21, 229, 287.
24. See Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion*, or K. M. De Silva (ed.), *University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka. Volume II, from c.1500 to c. 1800* (Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya 1995).
25. Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 604–5.
26. T. B. H. Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, 1594–1612* (Colombo: Lake House Investments Ltd., 1966) remains the foundational study of the early period of rebellions.
27. Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 496–508.
28. Bocarro, *Década 13*, p. 497.
29. João Ribeiro, *The Historic Tragedy of the Island of Ceilão*, ed. and trans. P. E. Pieris (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries co., 1948), p. 90.
30. As Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 100–1, recognized: ‘The Portuguese held them as great traitors...but if we consider the constancy wherewith they defended their independence in so continual a warfare, we cannot deny that it was the outcome of their valour and if they gave us the treatment which the Portuguese gave them, or if we realized that they wanted to subdue us altogether, we should without any doubt have characterized as courage and valour what in them we consider to be treachery.’
31. C. R. De Silva, ‘The Historiography of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka: A Survey of the Sinhala Writings’, *Samskriti*, 17 (1983), p. 16, and ‘Ethnicity, Prejudice and the Writing of History’, in *G. C. Mendis Memorial Edition* (Colombo, 1984), p. 4 was the first to suggest that their interaction with the Portuguese may have affected Sinhala and Buddhist group identity.
32. João de Barros, in Ferguson, *History of Ceylon*, p. 33.

33. Constantino de Sá de Miranda, in Jorge Manuel Flores (ed.), *Os Olhos do Rei: Desenhos e Descrições Portuguesas da Ilha de Ceilão (1624, 1638)* (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 2001), p. 119, which is the source for Queyroz, *Conquest*, 50, plus pp. 104, 110, 113, 152–53, 158, 184). See Flores' discussion of 'ethnology' in the service of Portuguese government in introduction to the above, pp. 36–49.
34. Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon*, ed. J. H. O. Paulusz, 2 vols (second edition including interleaved notes, Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo 1989), p. 187; Joris van Spilbergen, *Journal of Spilbergen, The First Dutch Envoy to Ceylon, 1602*, ed. and trans. K. D. Paranavitana (Colombo: Paranavitana 1997), p. 36.
35. Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 561, 763–64.
36. Azevedo, *Estado da Índia*, p. 242; Couto in Ferguson, *History of Ceylon*, p. 101, which is explicit on how texts were given oral currency: 'all their ancient events have been put into verse where they are chanted at their festivals'; Miranda, in Flores, *Os Olhos*, pp. 162–63; Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 6–7, contrasting with p. 48 on the later Indian origin of the Tamils of Jaffna; Paulo da Trindade, *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*, ed. Fernando Félix Lopes, 3 parts, (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos 1962–67), III, pp. 5–7.
37. Maya Jasanoff, 'Before and After Said', a review of Robert Irwin's *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, in *London Review of Books* 28 (2006), pp. 11, 14–15, has referred to the 'perplexing ambiguity' in Said's argument as to whether Orientalism is a substitute for empire, an enabler of it, or a consequence of it. In those terms, a writer such as Fernão de Queirós was trying to revivify a dream of empire once it had long since collided with reality and fallen apart.
38. In fact, this is only really explicit by the late seventeenth-century: Ribeiro, *Historic Tragedy*, p. 264, echoed by his contemporary Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 577, 620, 1064–65.
39. Queyroz, *Conquest*, p. 44.
40. Trindade, *Conquista Espiritual*, III, p. 104, probably drawing here on the lost chronicle/ethnology of Fr. Negrão, who was in the country from 1610, see Perniola, *Catholic Church*, II, p. 290.
41. See also Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness*, p. 105–7.
42. Perniola, *Catholic Church*, II, p. 346, (from 1612), Bocarro, *Década 13*, pp. 497–98; Queyroz, *Conquest* p. 626). Compare with the early seventeenth century European quotations on the need for nations to have 'liberty' from tyrannical rule or foreign domination in Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 15, 114.
43. Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness*; Alan Strathern, 'Review of 'Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period 1590s to 1815' by Michael Roberts', *Modern Asian Studies* 39 (2005), pp. 1013–26.
44. For more here, see Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion*, chapters 9 and 10.
45. Abeyasinghe, (trans., ed.) 'Antonio Bocarro's Ceylon', p. 17; Miranda in Flores, *Os Olhos*, pp. 52–4, 164; S. G. Perera, (ed.), *The Expedition to Uva made in 1630 by Constantino de Sá de Noronha* (Colombo, 1930), pp. 31, 45; some lascarinis themselves in 1636, reproduced in Queyroz, *Conquest*, p. 1012; Juan Rodrigues de Saa e Menezes, *Rebellion de Ceylan, y los progressos de su*

- conquista en el gobierno de Constantino de Saa, y Noronha* (Lisbon: Antonio Craesbeeck de Mello, 1681), which was probably written before 1640; and see Cruz and Flores, 'Jornadas de Huva' for further texts and for an illuminating discussion of their context.
46. Abeyasinghe, 'António Bocarro', pp. 17, 58; Jerónimo de Azevedo in 1614, in T. Abeyasinghe (ed.), *A Study of Portuguese Regimentos on Sri Lanka at the Goa Archives* (Colombo, Department of National Archives, 1978), p. 43; Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 1023–49; and see C. R. De Silva, *The Portuguese in Ceylon, 1617–38* (Colombo: H. W. Cave 1972) for an excellent study of these issues of governance in the seventeenth century.
 47. Thanks to Zoltán Biedermann for articulating this point to me.
 48. Queyroz, *Conquest*, pp. 21–23, and see p. 305, on the Sinhalese consciousness of history going back to Anuradhapura, which clearly derives from Constantino de Sá de Miranda's report published in Flores, *Os Olhos*.
 49. Queyroz, *Conquest*, p. 304, and see also p. 117 on verse composition.
 50. Flores, *Os Olhos*, p. 171.
 51. Azevedo, *Estado da India* Couto in Ferguson, *History of Ceylon*, p. 101.
 52. Jeganathan, 'Authorizing History', p. 111. It is perhaps telling that all texts he cites, apart from Valentyn, are British! If we give due emphasis to the parenthetical 'the sense set out above' then we become somewhat snared in paradox, because it seems to refer to an essentially nineteenth-century 'colonial epistemological field' or 'positivist historiography', which seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts could by definition not exhibit.
 53. This seems plausible for the British period, for which John Rogers 'Historical Images in the British Period', in Spencer (ed.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, pp. 87–106 is useful. It is more awkward to apply to the Portuguese, because the research impetus came much less from officialdom than from the literati and religious orders, and because a distaste for aspects of the Sinhala literary tradition, and its heathenism, always remained. Little work has been done on the Dutch experience.
 54. Couto in Ferguson, *History of Ceylon*, pp. 271–73, 277–78, 284–86.
 55. Qadri Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place, and Postcoloniality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota press 2005). Anthropology, which is taken to be something the West does to the rest, is seen as exoticizing and objectifying Sri Lanka from the outside; history is seen to be too 'inside', necessarily locked into and reificatory of national parameters. Only literature will save us, it seems.
 56. Susantha Goonatilake, *Anthropologizing Sri Lanka: A Civilizational Misadventure* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2001).
 57. In principle, the intention to project a Sri Lankan commentary on the globally hegemonic foreign commentary on Sri Lanka is fair and good. But the practice, in this instance, is another matter.

9

William Hodges As Anthropologist and Historian

Nicholas Thomas

This essay engages the colonial knowledge of the Pacific at what was arguably its foundational stage. Though navigators passed through the ocean from the sixteenth century onwards, contacts were for the most part fleeting and observations cursory. While an analysis can be made of the accounts of early Spanish and Dutch voyagers, the European interest in, and understanding, of the Pacific and Pacific peoples, gained particular momentum from the 1760s onward. Here, I do not survey the discourses of the period, or track the representations and misrepresentations that surfaced and resurfaced in the accounts of the various British, French, Spanish and Russian explorers, who between them made contact, and gained some familiarity with, peoples across Polynesia, as well as, to a more limited degree, those of Melanesia and Micronesia. This is a micro-historical ethnography of colonial knowledge, focussed on James Cook's second voyage, and a particular set of visual representations by the voyage artist, William Hodges.

Cook's *Voyage Toward the South Pole*, published in 1777, the official account of the famous navigator's second voyage, was arguably unprecedented among travel books. This was so not because of the work's literary accomplishment. For his writing, Cook offered the somewhat disingenuous apology of a 'plain man' at sea since youth.¹ What was new was rather the remarkable standard of the book's illustration. Previous voyage narratives, even those such as Anson's that had been opulently produced, had included few prints. Such images as did appear were generally concocted by metropolitan artists on the basis of the text, and derived nothing from field sketches or any other putatively primary visual sources. Now, the purchaser of Cook's *Voyage* got as part of the bargain 64-finely engraved plates, of which more than half were based on portraits and views drawn in the course of the expedition by William Hodges.

The subjects of these images reflect a larger anomaly of the voyage itself. The central aim had been the discovery of the long-rumoured southern continent. No land had been found, during three gruelling summer cruises in far southern latitudes. Instead, however, an extraordinary range of encounters with Oceanic peoples had taken place, during the two intervening winters, spent substantially in the tropics and New Zealand. The bulk of Hodges' pictures depicted these Islanders and their islands. These people were interesting, undoubtedly. But if meetings with them were extraneous, strictly speaking, to the voyage's purpose, and if the findings, with respect to the great southern land were negative, how was the accomplishment of this expedition to be measured and evoked?

Similar problems had nagged at Cook during his first voyage. He had a strong sense that an explorer trod a delicate balance. He might be charged with cowardice or 'timorousness' if he failed to approach a dangerous coast, but with recklessness or 'temerity' if he was wrecked upon it.² He worried too that readers would make adverse judgements about his dealings with native peoples and the fatalities among his crew. During his second voyage, his concerns were mostly less defensive. He read Bougainville's *Voyage* with its rich account of Tahiti and was impressed by it. He perhaps gained a new sense that information about native peoples – about human rather than cartographic discoveries – might loom large in a book that recounted a voyage. Above all, Cook knew that the systematic nature of his efforts to criss-cross blank spaces on maps made his predecessors over two centuries look like naïve amateurs. He was not only conscious that the definitive nature of his exploration of the southern oceans gave his voyages historic significance; he also wanted his public to be fully aware that that was so. As the second voyage progressed, he gave – his journals suggest – steadily greater thought to what was involved in making his voyage's accomplishment explicit and public. He certainly thought about the sort of book he wanted to write, and he did much work revising his journals toward publication, during the voyage itself.³ To what extent he also thought about how the book might be illustrated, we do not know. William Hodges was not Cook's servant, but his own artist. Yet if he thought toward paintings appropriate to the Royal Academy, he must also have anticipated that some of his work would be engraved to provide a visual complement to Cook's text; at some point in the voyage, he must have thought toward those engravings.

It would be impossible and perhaps unprofitable to try to reconstruct those thoughts. But certain phases of the process – of coming to terms

with the voyage's findings, and arriving at an expression of them that would convey the right messages to the *Voyage's* public – are manifest in Hodges' extant work. This essay focuses upon two moments of that process, one attested to by a group of sketches, and one by a distinct group of the published engravings.

The first group of works need to be seen in the context of the richness of the human contacts of the voyage, that I have already alluded to. Cook's predecessors in the European exploration of the Pacific had generally had no more than brief or sporadic encounters with Islanders. In most cases the visitors had no linguistic competence, people were in some cases met in canoes without Europeans even landing, even when they did land stays were short and marked more by mutual incomprehension than by dialogue or the acquisition of what we might call anthropological knowledge. For example, Bougainville – though considerably more curious and sophisticated than earlier European observers – had called at Tahiti for only ten days and had no knowledge of any other Polynesian population. In contrast, even during his first voyage Cook had profited from what was already known of Tahiti and Tahitian from Wallis's visit of 1767; his crew included both officers and common seamen who had sailed either with Wallis (the European 'discover' of Tahiti) or his predecessor Byron (who had encountered other Polynesians in the Tuamotu archipelago); the *Endeavour* was at Tahiti for three months; this stay was followed up by meetings with both closely related populations elsewhere in the Society Islands and the more distantly related Maori of New Zealand; such understandings as derived from these contacts were enriched by much discussion with the Raiatean priest Tupaia who was on the ship from July 1769 until his death at Batavia in December 1770.

At the beginning of the second voyage Cook and some of his crew thus already possessed greater – if nevertheless still limited and certainly ethnocentric – knowledge of Pacific Islanders than any previous European visitors. A mix of chance and design meant that both the depth and the range of this knowledge would be spectacularly enhanced. Tahiti, Huahine, and Raiatea would each be revisited twice and (in the case of Tahiti) for extended periods. New Zealand too would be called at again; the people in Dusky Sound, in the far south, would be encountered for the first time; and people around Queen Charlotte Sound, where Cook had already met Maori, would be visited three times. The Tongan islands, Easter Island or Rapanui, and Tahuata in the Marquesas Islands, that had been earlier reported by Tasman, Roggeveen, and Quiros respectively, provided anchorages, supplies, and further contacts. Niue

would be called at for the first time by a European. All this meant that a range of the Polynesian peoples – who to varying degrees had social and cultural institutions and practices such as chieftainship, hereditary rank, tattooing, and the making of barkcloth in common – were recognized for the first time as related populations, as representatives of a ‘great nation’ that had quite astonishingly dispersed itself across extraordinary Oceanic distances.

The decisive evidence for this relatedness was linguistic. Cook later pointed out that if one speculated about the common origins of populations on the basis of affinities in customs, one could easily be led astray by accidental similarities, but where whole series of words were identical or obviously cognate, groups of people, however geographically separated, had to have been previously connected.⁴ It was this fact also that facilitated the voyagers’ communication with even those Polynesians they had no previous knowledge of. Conversation was not necessarily more than rudimentary, since some of these languages were much closer to the one known best, Tahitian, than others, and in many cases the Europeans’ grasp of Tahitian was in any case only basic. If this trawl of information generally remained remote from indigenous self-perceptions and understandings, it was nevertheless dramatically more nuanced than any earlier observation. The affinities between the peoples encountered moreover prompted less in the way of general reflection on ‘the state of nature’ than curiosity concerning the character and causes of particular differences, for example in the mode of life of Marquesans, Tahitians, and Tongans. The variations among these closely related Islanders would moreover be thrown into relief by encounters with apparently unrelated or at least physically, culturally and linguistically different peoples in the western Pacific.

The pre-eminent synthesist of ‘the varieties of the human species’ in the Pacific was Johann Reinhold Forster, who had replaced Joseph Banks as the second voyage’s senior naturalist after Banks withdrew. Forster’s *Observations Made during a Voyage Round the World* (1778) is notable for its sustained and elaborate discussion of the range of forms of ‘social union’, government, religion, education and so forth observed among the peoples of the Pacific Islands. Forster did not merely describe the manners and customs that had been witnessed, but analysed them from the standpoint of enlightenment social theory. He understood the differences between the Islanders of the east and west in progressive terms, and postulated a grand analogy between the progress of society and the development of the individual human being. Savages were like children, barbarians like passionate and unruly adolescents, and

more civilized peoples were more or less mature. Maori, in Forster's eyes, were certainly passionate and prone to warrior excess; in Tahiti, he saw refinement and the feminine amelioration of masculine barbarity, but also luxury and incipient corruption. He did not precisely order or rank each society on a single progressive continuum, but discoursed at length concerning their qualities, and was sometimes equivocal in his assessment of their faults, virtues, and advancement or lack thereof.

Forster's writings have been drawn upon by a number of commentators to contextualize the work of William Hodges, and especially major paintings such as the views of Matavai Bay and Vaitepiha Bay. Both these paintings and Forster's book were of course completed after the voyage, and their analysis is thus an analysis of the ways questions that arose during the voyage were if not answered, at least provisionally resolved, in the work that voyage participants produced after the fact. In this essay I offer a complementary discussion by focussing on a set of major sketches by Hodges that were produced during a critical phase of the voyage. The artist's perceptions were at this time no doubt stimulated by discussion with Johann Forster, as well as with Forster's brilliant son George and others on board, not least Cook himself. Yet Hodges' understanding of what he was depicting could not at this time be informed by an interpretation that was yet to encounter some of its materials, and yet to be distilled.

The works in question are a group of nine pen and wash drawings, that are views of coasts, and in most cases bays, canoes and inhabitants at Tahuata, Tahiti, Raiatea, Niue, Tonga, Malakula, Efate, and New Caledonia.⁵ They are not published here but [Figures 9.1](#) and [9.2](#) are related engravings. The drawings may be distinguished from other voyage sketches of Hodges', most obviously, by their impressive size. So far as I am aware no technical comparison has been undertaken, but the paper is presumably of the same stock, since in all cases the height is around 60–62 cm (24 inches), and the width around 117–119 cm (46–47 inches). Two works are panoramas consisting each of two sheets of this size.⁶ Some but not all are bordered with ruled lines; in several cases titles are printed in capital letters beneath the drawing. Joppien and Smith suggest that these were prepared during the voyage's second tropical cruise, that in effect began with the visit to Easter Island of March 1774 and concluded with the return to Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand, in October of the same year.⁷ This is uncontentious in the sense that five of the drawings depict Tahuata, Niue, Malakula, Efate, and New Caledonia,⁸ none of which were visited earlier; and this second cruise was important precisely because it was this phase of the voyage



Figure 9.1 'The Fleet of Otaheite assembled at Oparee', engraving after Hodges, published in James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (London, 1777).

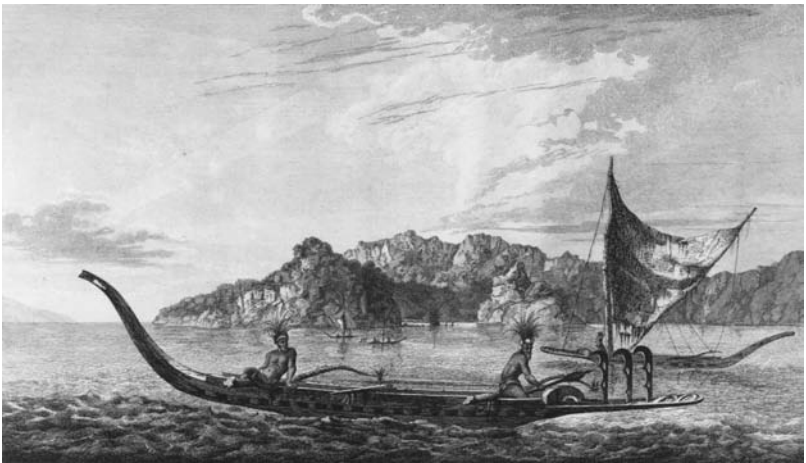


Figure 9.2 'Resolution Bay in the Marquesas', engraving after Hodges, published in James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (London, 1777).

that saw the knowledge of Polynesia dramatically extended, and the first Cook voyage encounters with peoples of the western Pacific.

On arriving at places not previously visited, Europeans immediately noticed the physical characteristics of the 'new' people, and they also had to deal, immediately, with how those people dealt with foreigners. Receptivity or hostility was not a merely pragmatic issue, however. Almost instinctively, Europeans would understand people as more or less civilized, according to the level of curiosity and openness they exhibited toward foreigners. Those who appeared devoid of interest, and uninterested in acquiring European things, were considered (in for instance the case the Tierra del Fuegians) as the most miserable of human beings, or (in that of indigenous Australians) at any rate the closest to the state of nature. Conversely, people who were both interested in acquiring new things, and keen to establish relationships with Europeans were thought to be civilized. Although relationships between the British and the Tahitians had not been free of violence and tension, the nature of chiefly politics in the Society Islands prompted Tahitian chiefs to actively seek alliances with the powerful visitors, to fete them, treat with them, extract goods from them, and otherwise make the most of them. Though Europeans were not oblivious of the pragmatic and strategic motivations of individual chiefs, they persistently interpreted chiefly friendship sentimentally, and represented it as an uncomplicated, genuine civility rather than a response that was to some extent politically shaped.

Hodges' two-sheet panoramic view is of Matavai Bay but is entitled simply OTAHEITE and can be seen as a summative view of both the bay that had provided the central theatre of European-Tahitian meetings up to that time, and the people encountered there. The 'face of the country' is certainly benign and opulent. The littoral is plainly densely inhabited; there are canoes on the beach, and canoe shelters and houses can be seen. The foreground is occupied by several canoes of different types – single, double, with and without shelters, and in one case with an elaborate sculpted attachment. Hodges places these canoes close to the boat or (given the apparent height of the vantage point) the ship. This is not just a compositional arrangement but one that implies a relationship between the occupants of the canoes and the occupants of the ship. The relationship is not only one of unthreatening proximity but mutual interest. The most prominent of the canoes is not simply nearby or going about its business, but is approaching the European vessel. A number of those in the canoes look toward or turn to look at the artist/viewer, who is thus struck

by their lively curiosity. This might appear a banal observation, but in other drawings in this sequence, recording other places and other encounters, the response and attitude that Hodges records, or at any rate chooses to present, is quite different.

If this drawing has a single eye-catching feature, it is the carving that is central to its right hand section. A double-canoe is carefully depicted; the viewer sees the ingeniously sewn hulls that Cook's journal describes. But if these and other aspects of the canoes shown may be technically admirable, the arresting feature is an improbably tall column that rises from the prow of one hull, that is rigid and erect but constructed of some indeterminate material, that has a substantial bundle of cloth wrapped about it half-way up, and that supports a solid, squat, loosely naturalistic, anthropomorphic figure. There is no Tahitian canoe of this sort preserved in any museum collection, but the strong proportions of the figure correspond with a type of Tahitian sculpture, examples of which were collected by Forster during the voyage; those he obtained, now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, are around 30 cm (a foot) in height; another example, in the British Museum, is 53 cm high. If one's eye moves from the carving to the seated man in the canoe, the scale looks right, if the object is at the larger end of the range. But the effect belies whatever perspectival correctness we may impute. The carving and its enigmatic support (probably of basketwork, around a pole) are given daunting prominence, commanding the scene, looming over, and over-seeing the landmass of Tahiti itself.

The image implies that Tahitians are 'civilized' at any rate to the extent that their society is differentiated and complex (the statuses of those in the canoes evidently vary, some exhibit the bearing, demeanour and idleness of aristocrats) while the canoes themselves display the advancement of their industry and arts. The people themselves seem benign and friendly (though the double-canoe is of the sort elsewhere described as a 'war galley' no weapons are brandished) but the carving that is given such prominence nevertheless insists on the alien remoteness of their religion. A mysterious (and possibly barbaric) cult seems to hold sway over this landscape; the landscape is not a natural wilderness but a humanized and cultivated terrain; yet it is humanized exotically; it is effectively integrated with the curious customary order, that the figure seems to govern.

Others of these large sketches evoke different environments and, in part by omission, quite different responses to peoples. The view of Niue, briefly visited in June 1774, aptly conveys the distinctive topography of this raised atoll. The island is fringed not by any pleasing coastal

plain but by jagged coral cliffs. The ship is not far offshore and two boats are shown, sailing from the shore back to the *Resolution*. On June 22, a party had landed but been subjected by the Niueans to a barrage of stones and spears. 'The Conduct and aspect of these Islanders occasioned my giving it the Name of *Savage Island*', Cook wrote after withdrawing.⁹ Hodges may have been among the party but made no attempt to depict the action. Although there were said to be canoes on the beach that is visible, he does not show these. Perhaps neither houses nor gardens could be seen from the sea, in any event Hodges gives no indication that the island was occupied. The dense brush above the cliff suggests that if it was, it was nevertheless uncultivated. There is no impression that even a savage kind of customary order reigns over this landscape, that appears rather as a topographic than a national entity.

The island of Malakula, towards the north of the archipelago called the New Hebrides by Cook, now the nation of Vanuatu, is significant to the second voyage's emerging ideas of Oceanic anthropology because it was here that darker-skinned speakers of non-Polynesian languages were first encountered. Hodges' drawing, inscribed MALLICOLO, has certain compositional parallels with OTAHEITE that underscore the contrasts between the two scenes. In both cases canoes occupy the foreground. The Malakulan landscape consists of low coastal hills rather than the grand juxtaposition of Tahitian mountain and plain; its uniform vegetation like that of Niue suggests no particular agricultural activity; this lack of literal cultivation might connote a lack of other natural and social improvements.

The occupants of the canoes are again close but in this instance proximity does not promise friendliness. The men are armed in one case with bow and arrows, in another with a heavy and bulbous club. Though this canoe too has a sculpted prow, the bird is not the image's eye-catching feature. The figure that is unambiguously central, rather, is that of the standing warrior. The presentation of him in profile draws attention to an aspect of dress and ornament that the mariners had not before encountered, that they found surprising and shocking. The testicles were exposed, but the penis itself wrapped in an extended cloth that was tied up around the belt. This covering 'rather displays than conceals, and is the very opposite of modesty', considered George Forster.¹⁰ Cook thought that the tightness of wrapping had to be painful ('it was a wonder to us how they could endure it'); this no doubt accentuated the distastefulness of the display.¹¹ Whereas the imagery of Tahiti presented a voluptuous landscape, beautiful women, and male aristocrats who lived luxuriously, the vision here is of an unsocial, insensible and at

least potentially belligerent masculinity. The voyage journals indicate that the Malakulans were in fact not inclined to violence but were profoundly cautious before visitors whom they may have seen as potentially malevolent ghosts or returning ancestors. They suffered Europeans to land but dissuaded them from moving beyond the immediate shoreline or venturing near women. As in the case of the Niue drawing, the information here is constrained by the limits imposed on Europeans. There were elaborate agricultural systems here, and native art forms that were no less spectacular than those mounted on Tahitian canoes. But both gardens and sculptures were out of view; Hodges could not depict what he did not know. The little he did know was inflected by the attitude that imposed the limitation in the first place. While the lively interest that the Tahitians exhibited toward Europeans manifested their civility, the caution shown by Malakulans was perforce taken to illustrate something else, a degree of barbarism that seemed consistent with their martial sociality (though the Tahitians were often enough warriors too), their black skin, their way of treating their women, and so on.

The Malakulans and the inhabitants of southern Vanuatu were puzzling in part because the islands they occupied lay between Tahiti and Tonga on the one hand and New Zealand on the other. Both New Zealand and the eastern Oceanic islands were clearly occupied by related, Polynesian speaking peoples, so it seemed anomalous that those generally in their geographic midst should not belong to the same family. After Vanuatu Cook proceeded south-west and encountered the coast of New Caledonia, not previously known to Europeans. Here the people were again somewhat cautious but less so than either those of Malakula or Tanna. Relations were generally good, the Europeans were impressed by irrigation systems, and pleased that the people did not possess the propensity to pilfer that they were generally accustomed to. While later ethnologists grouped the Kanaks (to use a modern term of indigenous self-identification) with ni-Vanuatu as 'Melanesians', these eighteenth-century visitors were probably more struck by the differences than the similarities.

Hodges produced a further panoramic view with canoes in the foreground. The implication that it represents an addition to a series is supported by a similar inscribed title, 'NEW Caledonia'. One of the canoes, to the far left is close to the vantage point of the artist. Unfortunately the face of the standing figure at the very edge of the image is smudged and partly lost, and it is not clear whether this man looked at or away from the artist and viewer. A crouching figure beside him looks away; his attitude is one of disengaged independence. Those in other canoes

appear more interested by the European presence. The group in the canoe central to the right hand sheet manifest a social structure. The vessel is propelled or at least steered by a man with an oar; a standing figure holds a club with a star-shaped head (corresponding to a type well-known in ethnographic collections); two women and a man are seated around a small cooking-fire; they all wear cloaks, the man one of the 'Concave cylindrical stiff black caps' that Cook noted were 'a great ornament among them, and we thought only worn by men of note or Warriors'.¹² In other words a hierarchical society of something like a Tahitian type appeared to be present here, even though, in physical and other respects, the people had more in common with the Malakulans and Tannese.

These images and others in the series register the responses to 'the varieties of the human species' (Forster's term) that the second voyage encountered in the Pacific. The idea that Tahiti was an island of unusual civility, a place that uniquely excited curiosity, and one that was singularly luxurious comes through in the Matavai panorama. This work alone foregrounds a lively engagement on the part of indigenous subjects in the scene of interaction; elsewhere people seem to put up with or just witness the European intrusion, and notably do not reciprocate the Europeans' curiosity in the face of a new people. The approbation of the Tahitians had been elaborated upon in a further large sketch depicting a fleet of war canoes; this drew attention again to the remarkable character of native naval architecture, and to the exotic elaboration of priests' costumes and suchlike, and also to the fact that this was a society that mounted spectacles; a mass of what might have been called the Tahitian public line the foreshore and crowd the hill visible at the far left, behind the assembled fleet, that was evidently extraordinary to Europeans and native people alike.

Views of the Marquesas and Raiatea in the series do not evidence any similar native curiosity through the depiction of spectators, individual attention or expression, but do depict the *Resolution* surrounded by canoes presumably engaged in vigorous trade. In fundamental contrast, the Malakulans are standoffish and potentially hostile. The Niueans are not seen at all. The New Caledonians look to be more advanced in their form of government, but their country lacks the attractiveness of Tahiti, and they themselves resemble the ni-Vanuatu.

By the time Forster produced his *Observations* in 1777, these incomplete and inconsistent perceptions were to some extent resolved. It was clear to him that all the people of the western Pacific were of a distinct nation that was not as advanced as that which occupied the eastern

part of the ocean. The anomaly of Niuean resistance was a detail that dropped out of the picture. Skin colour was not central to this discrimination, but it happened to be the case that the east was occupied by light skinned and the west by dark skinned people. The negative aspect of this judgement was in due course reinforced when later voyagers came to the conclusion that New Caledonians were cannibals. The understanding of human variety in the Pacific thus became increasingly moralized, racialized, and straightforward.

Immediately after the voyage, Hodges was actively producing major voyage-derived paintings for the Admiralty, the Royal Academy and for private patrons. He was also at work on material to appear in engraved form in Cook's *Voyage*. Many of the plates would be portraits derived from his large red chalk sketches. Some of the individuals depicted were named, and others were described generically ('Man of Mallicollo', 'Man of Tanna', 'Woman of Tanna', etc.). Apart from one Tongan, all the named individuals are Society Islanders and are represented essentially as aristocratic figures, and in this sense the set is consistent with the larger impressions of human variety that emerged over the course of the voyage: Tahiti occupied the zenith of Oceanic civility. Tonga was evidently also a highly advanced Oceanic society, yet one with an order and institutions somewhat different to those of the Society Islands, one that remained essentially unfamiliar to Europeans. On the other end of the spectrum, the 'Man of Christmas Sound' appeared as desperately uncivilized as Cook's narrative found the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego to be. Yet, although a variety of physical characteristics and distinctive ornaments are depicted, in more particular senses the series of portraits does not illuminate the types of more specific assessments that Cook, Wales and the Forsters most systematically were forming of particular peoples. The facial decoration of the Tannese man for example makes him appear more remote from Europeans than the Malakulan, though those on the voyage were all more impressed by the former than the latter. The Maori woman does not appear a representative of one 'great nation' that is more advanced than another, to which the women of Tanna and New Caledonia belong. In fact she looks more like a waif from the streets of London than a member of the people Cook rather idealized. The Marquesan and Maori are both either ornamented or disfigured by their facial tattooing; there is no sense that the former is closely affiliated with the idealized Tahitians, and the latter a representative of a disturbing warlike people whose cannibalism had been witnessed or rather staged, in late 1773. In sum, though these images no doubt worked to stimulate the interest and curiosity of purchasers of

the *Voyage*, they cannot have done much more than they claimed to do, in depicting a range of individuals.

This is notable but not surprising, because the objects of the voyage's proto-anthropological knowledge were not 'races' of the sort that would, over the decades subsequent to the voyages, unevenly in various discursive domains become the classic objects of anthropological study.¹³ 'Races' could have been and in due course would commonly be exemplified by individual specimens. But the indices of human variety salient to the voyage were far more nebulous. They included the status of women, which was obliquely indicated in some of Hodges' work. They also included, as I have discussed, the level of interest that native peoples variously exhibited toward foreigners. In his major, panoramic sketches Hodges had the makings of a set of engravings which suggested this dimension of native civility. Yet these works were used to only a limited extent in the book that was published: plates appeared based on the views of Tahiti and the Marquesas, and of the war canoes of Tahiti, but the Malakula and New Caledonia images were not worked into prints.

Evidently, Hodges made his own decisions about which pictures should be developed further, and no doubt also participated in discussions with Cook, Sandwich and possibly also Banks as to which images were to appear in the book. These discussions cannot be reconstructed, but for whatever reasons led only the series I have discussed being only partially represented in print: the views of Matavai, the canoe fleet (a subject that Hodges dealt with in several oils), and Tahuata appeared but no others. On the other hand, a new series of works, for which there seem to have been no preparatory sketches that date from the voyage, was developed. These featured the moments of initial contact at 'Eua, Malakula, Erramanga, and Tanna and were entitled 'The Landing at Middleburgh' (Eua), 'The Landing at Mallicollo', and so on (Figures 9.3, 9.4, and 9.5). As Joppien and Smith have pointed out, these 'were designed and painted in accord with the conventions of history painting then obtaining in England'.¹⁴ If it is not clear why these four encounters were singled out, the interest seems to have been in the fraught drama of new meetings rather than the potentially more sentimental moments of return to places such as Matavai and Fare. The three landfalls in Vanuatu were at places unknown to Europeans until the second voyage. Although Eua had been sighted by Tasman in 1643, it had not been revisited subsequently, so the 1773 meeting there was effectively a moment of first contact too. Hodges could equally have depicted new meetings at Dusky Sound, Easter Island, Niue, New



Figure 9.3 'The Landing at Erramanga', engraving after Hodges, published in James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (London, 1777).

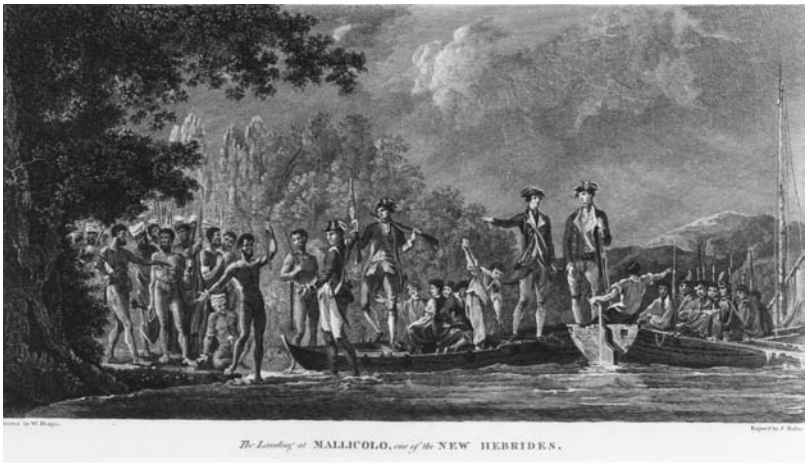


Figure 9.4 'The Landing at Mallicolo [Malakula]', engraving after Hodges, published in James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (London, 1777).



Figure 9.5 'The Landing at Middleburgh [Eua]', engraving after Hodges, published in James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (London, 1777).

Caledonia and Tahuata, perhaps merely because he ran out of time, or because there were thought to be sufficient prints, but the four images represent contrasting, perhaps representative, experiences of contact.

The Malakulans were shown to be armed but welcoming. The Erramangans vigorously resisted Cook's landing, as they in fact had. The Tannese were awed and alarmed; some cower or flee; others brandish their weapons. In each of these cases, and despite the negative implications of native caution or hostility, both sides are represented as parties to a founding historical moment. These meetings, Cook understood, were ideally expressions of mutual friendliness and benevolence, but were prone to break down. Shortly after making contact with the Tannese, but undoubtedly with the violence at Erramanga in mind, he wrote

we found [the Tannese] people Civil and good Natured when not prompted by jealousy to a contrary conduct, a conduct one cannot blame them for when one considers the light in which they must look upon us in, its impossible for them to know our real design, we enter their Ports without their daring to make opposition, we attempt to land in a peaceable manner, if this succeeds its well, if not we land nevertheless and mentain the footing we thus got by the Superiority of our fire arms, in what other light can they than at first look on us but as invaders of their Country; time and some acquaintance with us can only convince them of their mistake.¹⁵

Cook understood that these moments might be subjected to intense moral scrutiny. He is concerned to vindicate his own practice. If his landings entailed an injustice, it was an unavoidable one, one that followed from an understandable but nevertheless (he presumes) false assumption on the part of Islanders, who took him and his men to be invaders. At the same time he is almost equally concerned to vindicate them: their hostility arises not from savagery but a predictable patriotic suspicion. In another version of the text I have quoted, he elaborates, 'these people are yet in a rude state... frequently at War not only with their Neighbours, but amongst themselves, consequently must be jealous of every new face.'¹⁶ This contextualization is consistent with the generally dignified treatment of indigenous caution and resistance in Hodges' 'Landings', but detracts something from these peoples' advancement, even as it presents their behaviour as rational. Cook's proto-anthropological observations were less systematic than Forster's but consistent with them. For both, a key feature of society in 'a rude state' was this mutual antagonism and fragmentation. Greater civility meant a greater degree of social union and the development of government and law.

Hence the 'Landing at Middleburgh' shows that the people Cook significantly called the 'Friendly Islanders' did not possess this deep-seated suspicion of foreigners. Evidently, their dealings with each other enabled them to anticipate that Europeans might not be invaders. Their civility is manifest in the fact that one chief has clearly entered Cook's boat prior to the actual landing; he appears to have assumed the role of the Europeans' spokesman, and announces their diplomatic intentions by holding aloft the plantain or banana leaf that was in fact an emblem of peace among most Polynesian people. Although it is not clear from the journals that the man, Ataonga, who Cook did meet at this time, in fact escorted the party ashore in the manner depicted, it is entirely conceivable that he did so. It was and is a normal aspect of Polynesian sociality that a native of one place can affiliate himself with a group of visitors, in order to make signs and offerings and express respectful greetings that they, for reasons of linguistic incompetence or unfamiliarity, are unable to make and express. The Europeans were certainly familiar with somewhat similar behaviour, in that Society Islanders such as Tupaia (on the first voyage) and Mahine (on the second) had acted as go-betweens in a number of contexts. In any case, invented or not, Ataonga's diplomacy for Cook's party was striking for its implication that an Islander might be instantly enlisted, to help inaugurate a peaceful commerce.

If the 'Landings', most obviously, underscored the historic nature of Cook's mission, they also conveyed the emerging understanding of the major distinction between the nations of the eastern and western Pacific. Though the islands visited were unevenly represented by this particular group of images, the juxtaposition between the civility of the 'Landing at Middleburgh' and the violence at Erramanga could not have been starker. Yet the variations among the three landings in Vanuatu can only have deprived the viewer of these prints of any neat understanding of human variation in the Pacific. While Forster had articulated, more clearly than anyone else, the sense that there were 'two great varieties of people in the South Seas', he had proceeded to acknowledge that within each variety, there were a plethora of notable differences.¹⁷ Although he was nothing if not a Linnean traveller, he seems nevertheless to have accepted Buffon's understanding, that variety was manifold and mutable. Varieties of people, like other life forms, changed more or less drastically or subtly as they moved into new climates – climates that were social, hence to some degree of a people's own making, as well as merely natural. People, therefore, were susceptible to description but perhaps, in the end, not to rigorous classification.

To embrace this sort of principle was perhaps to make a virtue of necessity. The observations of Oceanic peoples that participants in Cook's second voyage were able to make were extensive and various but also in many ways confusing and inconsistent. They were empowered by a novel level of familiarity and an unprecedented degree of linguistic competence, in Tahitian and closely related Polynesian dialects. But they were ultimately constrained by European assumptions, for example about the nature of 'superstition' and 'government', that precluded any but the most superficial perceptions of Polynesian ritual, and any but the most mechanical ideas of Polynesian politics and sovereignty. And the differences among peoples, from one place to the next, sometimes did not add up; it was just not straightforward to say whether one set was more or less civil than another. What makes the textual and visual archives of Cook's second voyage enduringly fascinating, is that they fully reveal the obstacles to synthesis and the unevenness of cross-cultural understanding – at various times and in various ways, these travellers could not help admitting that for every moment of insight there was another of incomprehension. In what amount to his representations of 'the varieties of people in the South Seas', William Hodges left us with a set of real problems, rather than a false solution.

Notes

This is a slightly revised version of an essay previously published in *William Hodges 1744–1797: The Art of Exploration*, ed. Geoff Quilley and John Bonehill (Greenwich: National Maritime Museum/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

1. James Cook, *A Voyage toward the South Pole* (London, 1777), I, xxxvi. In this essay I keep citation to a minimum, but the reader should be aware that Cook's second voyage has been extensively discussed, notably in the introduction and annotations to *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, ed. J. C. Beaglehole (Cambridge and London: for Hakluyt Society by the University Press, 1955–67), vol. 2, and by Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (2nd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Imagining the Pacific* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Rüdiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985–87), vol. 2. is particularly relevant for Hodges' work; for the Forsters see J. R. Forster, *Observations Made during a Voyage Round the World*, ed. N. Thomas, H. Guest and M. Dettelbach (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996) and George Forster, a *Voyage Round the World*, ed. N. Thomas and O. Berghof (Honolulu: : University of Hawaii Press, 2000). For recent commentary see also: Anne Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003) and Nicholas Thomas, *Discoveries: the Voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Penguin, 2003); and on Hodges specifically, Quilley and Bonehill (eds) *William Hodges*, and Harriet Guest, *Empire, Barbarism and Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). In the text and notes, 'Forster' means Johann Reinhold unless otherwise indicated.
2. Cook, *Journals*, ed. Beaglehole, I, p. 380.
3. See Thomas, *Discoveries*, pp. 202–03, 217–19.
4. Cook, *Journals*, ed. Beaglehole, III, pp. 462, 468.
5. The whole group is located at Add. Ms. 15743 in the British Library. These include views of Sandwich Island (Efate), a Tongan canoe, and the port of Fayal, that I do not discuss here. Unfortunately for cost reasons images of these works cannot be published here (and they anyway need to be seen 'in the flesh' because of their size and the importance of their detail), but the interested reader may refer to Quilley and Bonehill, *William Hodges*; Joppien and Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages* for reproductions.
6. A third, also consisting of two sheets and showing the massing of a fleet of Tahitian war canoes, is not as wide.
7. Joppien and Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, II, p. 78.
8. The Tahitian view of the war canoe fleet certainly relates to the 1774 visit, and it is likely that the other does also. It is of course difficult to argue that these drawings were not prepared *later*, though in most cases they precisely record topographic and other local information, and thus are likely to have been drawn at the time or soon afterwards, with the help of field sketches.
9. Cook, *Journals*, ed. Beaglehole, II, p. 435.
10. Forster, *Voyage*, p. 480., cf. p. 492.
11. Cook, *Journals*, ed. Beaglehole, II, p. 464.

12. Cook, *Journals*, ed. Beaglehole, II, p. 540.
13. For further discussion, see Bronwen Douglas, 'Art as ethno-historical text', in N. Thomas and D. Losche (eds), *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 65–99.
14. Joppien and Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, II, p. 71.
15. Cook, *Journals*, ed. Beaglehole, II, p. 493.
16. *Ibid.*, fn. 3.
17. Forster, *Observations*, ed. Thomas, Guest and Dettelbach, p. 153.

10

Entangled with Otherness: Military Ethnographies of Headhunting in East Timor

Ricardo Roque

The Timorese who cuts one head off is considered *assuai* (brave) and is entitled to a reward from his *régulo* [indigenous chief or ruler]. The moment one Timorese takes a head, the *arraial* [warriors, Timorese irregulars] of his kingdom immediately sings the *Loro Sai*, the warrior chant, full of quite remarkable melody and harmony. Severed heads also make for great ceremonies, which begin by looking after [the heads] and end by kicking them countless times. As soon as one arrives at the encampment the *arraial* of each kingdom collects the heads decapitated by his people and hangs them by the long hair worn by the Timorese, on bamboos stacked on the ground, and puts in the mouth of each of them a chew of betel and areca so that they do not miss the pleasures that they had in life. At night all the *arraiais* form a circle, each of them around the heads they had cut off, and then start a peculiar ceremony. The chief, standing up at the centre of the circle, commences the *Loro Sai*, which the Timorese sing only when they have cut heads off. In this chant the chief begins by presenting the head with a thousand apologies for having cut it off; then demonstrates to the head why its decapitation was necessary, but tells it not to worry, because it will never fall short of anything, not even the chew! From time to time, the *arraial* choir confirms these apologies, and when they are fed up with apologizing, they start incriminating the heads, and it is then that the heads pass through harsh times! The *arraial* chief turns towards the heads with his sword in hand and, very angry, sings to them, asking: 'But why have you armed yourselves against us?

Why did you want to kill us? For didn't you know that we are stronger than you?' And as the heads do not respond to these questions the *arraial* gets furious, screeches, jumps up and down and finally throws the heads down to the ground and kicks them madly, frenetically. This ceremony is repeated over many nights, always in the same way.¹

The above is an account of a Timorese *lorosa'e* rite, in Portuguese sources usually called *feira das cabeças* ('feast of the heads'). The author, Eduardo da Câmara, was an army captain and a colonial officer in the Portuguese colony of East Timor, who arrived in 1894 to take up the post of government secretary, a position of the highest political importance ranking just below the governor. In March 1895, the captain was put in command of one of the so-called 'pacification campaigns': the war against the western kingdoms of Obulo and Marobo. After a military education in Portugal the captain had spent most of his career overseas, having already served in the Portuguese colonies of Goa and Mozambique. The Obulo and Marobo campaign was Câmara's first combat in Timor and his first direct contact with the local ways of war. The new experience, judging from his vivid account of the events, clearly left a strong impression on his spirit. The captain's report on the campaign was submitted to the governor, Colonel Celestino da Silva, just a couple of months after his return to Dili, the capital. Considering it to be a text of particular worth, the governor forwarded a copy to Lisbon with recommendations.² The report, however, went beyond a simple description of military actions. It claimed to be an accurate eyewitness account of Timorese headhunting ceremonies observed during the campaign, offering a series of ethnographic vignettes on the rites of war performed by the warriors under his command – before, during, and after combat. One of the vignettes authored by Eduardo da Câmara in May 1895 was the long passage on the *lorosa'e*, the 'great ceremony' that much bewildered the captain.³ In using this account in the context of a historical anthropology of colonialism and headhunting, however, a question arises. How is ritual violence to be accounted for as historical phenomenon and meaningful practice, on the basis of this colonial ethnographic knowledge? What kind of (re)description of 'headhunting' can we, students of colonial history, provide today?

This essay addresses these problems in relation to the principal object of Captain Câmara's description: the *lorosa'e* rites or 'feasts of the heads'. It approaches this colonial knowledge of headhunting from a perspective that takes as object of description the entanglement of the colonial and

indigenous worlds. This stands in opposition to deconstructive methodologies focused on the internalist critique of colonial discourse, as well as to methods of historical reconstruction of 'indigenous cultures' that tend to abstract the European agency. I will claim that the military ethnographies constituted eyewitness accounts that described Timorese headhunting both as a sphere of otherness *and* as a realm of practices *coincident* with Portuguese colonial campaigns. For these reasons, I argue, the analysis of Portuguese military ethnographies enables us to account for headhunting as a mode of colonial entanglement in two ways. On the one hand, these ethnographies pave the way for a historical description of indigenous headhunting as a practice that extended to the colonial system. Thus the dynamics of colonial campaigns and indigenous headhunting were brought together by a process of *mutual inclusion*, through which otherness was reciprocally incorporated and used to benefit both the indigenous and colonial participants.⁴ On the other hand, these accounts allow us to look at this mode of entanglement as being traversed by European gestures of *purification* that aimed to produce purity by removing, or occulting, the symbolic dirtiness derived from polluting contact with the 'savagery' of ritual violence and the dangers of severed heads. Therefore, both the intertwinements between headhunters and imperialists created in the actual course of colonial campaigns, *and* the attempts to clean and purify the Europeans' connection with savagery can be discerned in our readings of colonial accounts of headhunting. Consequently, the study of colonial and indigenous violence in this context needs to consider simultaneously the topics of 'entanglement' and 'purification'. These issues are analysed here in three sections. I begin by critically examining the colonial ethnographic knowledge, and afterwards move on to reconstruct one important sequence of the ritual life of headhunting: the *lorosa'e* rites that took place during, or after, colonial campaigns. This will be done by articulating the insights of colonial ethnographies with the interpretive devices of later anthropology. Finally, I call attention to the European management of purity and pollution in headhunting rites. The notions of entanglement and mutual inclusion are explored in the conclusion, in conjunction with the significance of gestures of purification.

Military ethnographies of headhunting

The *lorosa'e* rites were a central motif in Portuguese military ethnographies of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Descriptions of Timorese manners and customs of war circulated in official

correspondence within administrative circuits of information as well as in published works since at least the 1860s. During the governorship of José Celestino da Silva (1894–1908) this pragmatic form of gaining knowledge, though not formally institutionalized, was greatly encouraged.⁵ In effect, Câmara's account was part of a tradition of knowledge practices associated with the culture and identity of army officers in Timor. Although by no means exclusive to that colony, this tradition turned out to be crucial for colonial anthropology on East Timor. The acquisition of knowledge about Timorese manners and customs was entailed in the colonial praxis of army officers. It was, foremost, a form of knowledge born of the pragmatic need to master the ceremonials and conventions that organized interactions with the indigenous population in the spheres of war and justice. In 1884, in a text describing the Timorese customs and rites of war, Major Vaquinhas made this pragmatic context clear: 'when a European officer in command of a force comprising these people does not know these customs [...] he finds himself in serious trouble, as happened in [my] first war, when not only was I ignorant of the manners and customs here reported, but also did not understand the dialects.'⁶

With regard to East Timor, headhunting rites emerged as an object of anthropological discourse in the army officers' ethnographic tradition.⁷ The available accounts were authored by colonial army officers, governors, or state officials, on the basis of direct experience of military campaigns, or (to a lesser extent) of second-hand information provided by indigenous people who served as irregulars in colonial wars.⁸ A striking characteristic of these accounts was their claim to eyewitness observations.⁹ They claimed to be accurate empirical descriptions of the total set of indigenous ceremonial gestures – speeches, dances, songs, etc. – witnessed by Europeans on the spot. As distinct from a common premise of modern social and cultural anthropology, there was little interest in sympathetically reconstructing the meaning behind the gestures. The empiricist style of these accounts was mechanical rather than interpretive. In addition, headhunting was enveloped in a civilizing idiom. The rites were portrayed as 'superstitious' and 'savage' ceremonials, external, different, primitive, and morally inferior. Câmara's above-mentioned account, for instance, presents head-taking as a purely 'Timorese custom' of the *arraiais* (indigenous irregulars), thus acquitting the Portuguese of any active involvement in indigenous violence during colonial campaigns. In this regard, therefore, these colonial ethnographies seemed to merely play their small part in the larger discursive processes of 'othering' that critical scholars have identified as

distinctive of Western objectifications of indigenous cultures throughout the colonial period.¹⁰

The study of headhunting must take this colonial knowledge as its point of departure. The essentialist tone of the accounts can pose constraints to historical and anthropological analysis. For example, because it was at best sensitive to the divides into the so-called 'kingdoms' (*reinos* in the colonial language), yet not guided by the identity divides into 'ethnic groups' (e.g., the Kemak; the Mambai, etc.), which later anthropologists were to consider meaningful, it is in many cases difficult to avoid a generalist description. However, rather than assuming *a priori* its dismissal as epiphenomena of 'orientalist' misconception, a more productive approach to these texts is proposed here.¹¹ In order to provide a re-description that circumvents their limitations as much as it gains from their insights, the colonial sources will here be linked with the insights of later social theory and anthropological research.¹² Furthermore, my historical re-description of headhunting rites on the basis of Portuguese military ethnographies aims at taking us beyond the traps of both the colonial stereotypes and post-colonial 'discourse analysis'. For my purpose is not to replicate the colonial process of othering by describing headhunting as a discrete indigenous domain. This approach thus contradicts a tendency of some historical anthropology to take colonial sources as evidence of authentically 'traditional' or 'pre-colonial' and indigenous cultures.¹³ In this view, the indigenous cultures of the past are reconstructed as if colonial presence and interference could be abstracted. My purpose, too, is not to denounce the process of othering as a mirror-image of the colonial self. This then contradicts another tendency, common amongst postcolonial literary critical approaches, to consider European texts and European constructs of savagery as a mere figment of the Western imagination. In this perspective, the only available historical method is a self-referential deconstructive description of Western 'discourse'. In describing colonial headhunting, in contrast, I aim to account for an *entangled* historical reality. I shall return to this point further below. Now, before continuing, let us see how the colonial ethnographies themselves entail the possibility of providing such an alternative description.

The military ethnographies are complex historical and ethnographical documents. Although they represent headhunting as something distinctly 'indigenous', it is not simply otherness these accounts reveal. They also situate indigenous headhunting inside the dynamic of Portuguese colonialism. Headhunting rites and colonial campaigns are depicted as simultaneous and interdependent. In effect, as the

authors recognized, the indigenous headhunting rites consisted of colonial rites of war. In 1863, Governor Afonso de Castro, one of the most reputed colonial authors and a noteworthy observer, brought this interconnection to light. In closing his description of Timorese warfare, he revealed that indeed there was no basic 'difference' between indigenous and colonial warfare as regards headhunting rites. The 'customs' were the same; the particularity was that the Portuguese were part of them:

If the war begins between some [Timorese] kingdoms and the Portuguese government, the customs are roughly the same, because in Timor [European military] forces were never enough to quell the rebels. The *Praça*,¹⁴ that is Portugal, fights the Timorese with the Timorese, and the government side is not dissimilar from the other side, apart from the fact that an army officer is in command and they [on the government side] have greater force.¹⁵

Afonso de Castro's reference to the inclusion of Timorese warriors in Portuguese armies, as well as to the colonial complicity with the indigenous ritual violence, suggests that they had always occurred. In fact, from the start of the Portuguese establishment in Timor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there developed and persisted a kind of reciprocally convenient association with some indigenous classes and communities as far as warfare was concerned. Throughout all the colonial period the shortage of regulars was constant, and in the event of war against local enemies the Portuguese dependence on indigenous irregulars was total. The incorporation of Timorese warriors in colonial armies had been institutionalized in the form of two types of armed forces: the *arraiais*, companies of warriors provided to the government by the Timorese kings as a tributary obligation of vassalage to Portugal; and the *moradores*, a structured and loyal volunteer company of indigenous irregulars created by Portuguese governors in the early seventeenth century. From the outset, the interactions between the Timorese and the Portuguese had been characterized by alliances as well as by enmity on occasion of war. As a Portuguese nationalist historian noted, whenever conflicts arose in Timor the Portuguese pragmatically complied with the 'bellicosity of the loyal tribes' in order to keep possession of the island: 'And it was always like that, from the era of 1500 to the civilized twentieth century'.¹⁶

The complicity between Portuguese and Timorese in the realm of war was thus a 'custom' that dated back to the early days of the

Portuguese establishment. Accordingly, in the colonial accounts it is unclear whether some of the events and expressions of ritual violence in colonial warfare can be simply considered as 'Timorese custom'. Burning down villages, for instance, could be referred to in nineteenth century texts as a purely Timorese warfare tradition, without which the defeat of the enemy was not considered to have been entirely attained. However, as Captain Raphael Dores noted in 1903, the practice could have been an 'inveterate [Timorese] custom' – but one that had always been adopted by the Portuguese authorities who, this officer remarked, sometimes 'look more savage than the Timorese themselves'.¹⁷ Thus village burning can hardly be ascribed to the Timorese alone, and indeed to set villages on fire was a military tactic recommended by contemporary European strategists and was a standard practice in actual colonial wars.¹⁸

Headhunting traditions in East Timor probably precede the presence of Europeans. However, throughout most of the European colonial period headhunting customs in Timor found a fertile ground for their development. Recent archaeological findings in East Timor suggest that headhunting traditions in this region possibly date back to more than 1,000 years ago, thus long before the arrival of the Europeans.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the historical past of headhunting in the island for the last 450 years needs to be considered in relation to local and regional conflicts in which the Europeans could be, to a greater or lesser extent, also involved. According to the Dutch missionary and colonial ethnographer, P. Middelkoop, in the years preceding the Second World War some West Timorese traced the origin of headhunting traditions back to a historical period of invasions by the Makasarese – who allegedly introduced the custom of ritual decapitation.²⁰ In these Timorese views, headhunting was a custom introduced by outsiders in more or less ancient times. It is worth observing, then, that not only had the Portuguese in Flores and Timor been directly involved in wars against the Makasarese in the past, as also the early success of the Portuguese in Timor resulted from military support given by the Catholic missionaries to Timorese rulers against the Makasarese, in the seventeenth century.²¹

Therefore, even though the military observers claimed to describe 'external' events, in fact headhunting rites had been an 'internal' element of Portuguese local warfare for a long time. Hence colonial knowledge about these events revealed the intimacy of colonial-indigenous interactions in the realm of war. There was no being 'outside' headhunting rites. The descriptions concerned rites witnessed by Portuguese army officers in the course of colonial campaigns, and

rites practised by the Timorese *arraiais* and *moradores* under their command. Moreover, as we shall see below, governors and army officers participated in the rituals; they were themselves actors in the rites. The boundaries between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of description blurred. Thus, Portuguese colonial ethnographies do not merely represent a process of ‘othering’. Embedded in the connections of warfare, descriptions of the ‘other’ amount to a (self-) description of colonial encroachment. Critical to the theme of this volume, then, this form of colonial knowledge allows us to consider headhunting to be a historical event placed at the intersection of the colonial and indigenous worlds. It is neither ‘indigenous’ headhunting, nor the ‘Western’ self that the accounts of *lorosa’e* rites allow us to describe, but the Portuguese entanglement with Timorese ritual violence, as it developed in colonial warfare. In now turning attention to the so-called ‘head-feasts’ in colonial campaigns, the object of my description, in sum, will be colonialism as a form of indigenous ritual violence, and the ritual life of headhunting as a form of colonialism.



Figure 10.1 Portuguese officers, indigenous irregulars, and war prisoners after a campaign in Timor c. 1900. From Carlos Leitão Bandeira’s photograph album. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of António Bandeira.

The ritual life of headhunting

Timorese headhunting in Portuguese colonial campaigns should be understood as an activity of a ritual and socio-political nature. During colonial wars, the Timorese warriors made the presence of invisible and spiritual energies constantly felt by mediation of divinatory rites, magical weapons, or war costumes. To serve the government as *arraial* was of ritual significance; it meant a tribute to Portuguese jural authorities, expressing principles of ritual and political exchange. In addition, the seasonal rhythm of colonial warfare indicated that tribute to the Portuguese government as warriors was integrated in the indigenous agricultural calendar. Military ethnographies offer the possibility of analysing these ritual dimensions of colonial violence. For analytical purposes, I will here focus on the rites that concerned the circulation and manipulation of the severed heads in the *lorosa'e* rites. If the rites of war were properly performed, the physical appropriation of severed heads in colonial warfare could result in symbolic as well as socio-political benefits for the indigenous groups allied with the Portuguese. Let us start with the symbolic aspects of these circuits in the rites of incorporation, and then look at their social and political character.

The *lorosa'e* rites of incorporation

The *lorosa'e* rites constituted the communal ceremony of the reception and incorporation of severed heads in the community. They represented the collective climax of ritual circuits that began with the decapitation of the enemy in battle, on the occasion of which a *lorosa'e* song was also chanted by the warrior. The ceremony took place at the villages, at the military encampments during colonial campaigns, but also, as we will see, at the seat of government in Dili. Professional ethnographers have been trying to cope with the complex meaning of similar ceremonies.²² Robert McKinley, for instance, argued that headhunting rites signify the incorporation of the enemy/outsider as a friend into the community. This might be a structuralist reduction that does not allow for the importance of enmity.²³ Yet, if taken in a more nuanced view that comprehends the prevalence of enmity, the idea that a friendly incorporation of a hostile outsider is the strategic goal of such rites might in the current context be accepted.²⁴ In fact, the *lorosa'e* rites of reception seemed to configure a set of activities oriented to taming the enmity of the heads on the one hand, and, on the other, to integrating them as collaborative object-mediators between the two realms of the indigenous

community: the visible realm of the living and the hidden spiritual world. The intimate link between the earthly world and spiritual entities, between life and death, has been noted as a core element of East Timorese beliefs by later ethnographers.²⁵ In East Timor, the assurance of life and fertility among the living required consistent ritual activity devoted to the preserving of good links with the world of the dead and other spiritual agencies. It is therefore likely that severed heads played a part in these connections, conveying mediations with the invisible world and agencies of spirits. The colonial officers' ethnographies give evidence in this direction. They also suggest that the purpose of the rites was to ensure the cooperative intervention of spiritual entities in the community. However, the risk of hostile mediations was constant. Some colonials depicted Timorese *lorosa'e* rites as forms of appeasing the spirits of those violently killed, or of calming the guardian spirits of the ancestors.²⁶ With regard to war rites in Ataúro, Lieutenant Pinto Correia noted: 'The enemies were decapitated so that their soul (*hóhoi*) would not harm the adversary.'²⁷ Severed heads embodied the potency of hostility. Osório de Castro, for instance, recounted the fantastic story of a Timorese *morador* whose foot was bitten by the enemy's freshly decapitated head.²⁸

During and after the *lorosa'e*, the ambivalent condition of the heads as friend and enemy remained unresolved. As good (friendly) object-mediators, they could help hold the community together; as bad (hostile) links, on the contrary, they could cause harm. Therefore, enmity had to be controlled and collaboration had to be ensured through continuous ritual practices. There was a constant risk of the heads intervening in the community as harmful agencies, so that friendly collaboration had to be systematically re-established. During the *lorosa'e*, this twofold ritual purpose was manifest in two types of ritual gestures: reconciliation and recrimination. The heads were firstly the object of a justificatory and apologizing speech, in which the motives for their killing were proclaimed. As Câmara's account of 1895 illustrates, this was followed by an offensive speech and a series of humiliating gestures, of which the most impressive perhaps was the collective practice of kicking the heads in a circle. Both the conciliatory and offensive gestures helped neutralize hostility and incorporate the head as a collaborator into the community.²⁹ In this regard, the role of women in the *lorosa'e* was central. They conducted conciliatory and offensive gestures in the head-feast. They handled the heads, pressed them on their body and genitals, sang the *lorosa'e* song, participated in the head-kicking, and performed the offensive ritual speech to the enemies' remains. The women could also



Figure 10.2 Timorese warriors from the *arraial* of Liquiçá, carrying the severed heads of their enemies (c. 1900). From Carlos Leitão Bandeira's photograph album. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of António Bandeira.

perform the *régulo's* role in the event of his absence, executing his ritual gestures in receiving the heads and leading the dances.

The rites of incorporation took on communal scale and public impact during the head-feasts. Yet the conciliatory purposes of the *lorosa'e* were continued in ritual work of apparently more private nature. Whilst the head was included in the community, ritual practices still had to be performed with a view to managing enmity and enhancing cooperation.³⁰ These included practices of preservation of the head, and gestures of food-gifting. As a rule, after the head-dances, the heads were cleaned in water, the brain extracted, and then they were smoked and dried on the fire.³¹ These tasks were undertaken by the headhunter himself. Afterwards, the warrior, after a period of seclusion and purification, would nourish the head with food-gifts. Second lieutenant Acácio Flores, for instance, explained how the warriors carefully treated the severed heads by presenting them every day with food-gifts and chew

'as if they had turned into one more family member'.³² Preservation techniques also seemed to express the double ritual strategy of domestication of hostility and friendly incorporation.³³ The ritual circuits finally involved special procedures for exhibiting the heads of enemies. These culminated with the permanent display of severed heads in segregated locations deemed *lulik* (sacred and tabooed) by the community. Eventually, the skulls of enemies were displayed on a fig-tree, or alternatively a tamarind tree. These skull-trees were sacred places and contact-zones with the spiritual world, and were considered *lulik*. As *lulik*, the heads were ritually preserved, exhibited, and protected from indiscriminate contact with the outside world. In addition, skulls could appear in stone piles or in stone walls, 'constructions of loose stone' often located 'in the protection of' *lulik* trees; or even inside caves located at the foot of high mountains – possibly because mountains were usually understood as sacred homelands of spirits and ancestors.³⁴

The status of *asua'in*

The heads taken in the Portuguese colonial campaigns were thus embedded in the symbolic dynamics of Timorese ritual life. Yet indigenous communities could seek prosperity in a less spiritual manner. The participation in colonial headhunting could constitute an indigenous social and political strategy.³⁵ In this regard, colonial headhunting shaped the indigenous social structure by helping to sustain a status group of warriors: the *assuais*, or *asua'ins*. In the colonial sources, this indigenous term from the Tetum language commonly appears in association with the Portuguese adjective *valentão* (a most brave one).³⁶ Alternatively, *asua'ins* might have been designated as *mano ama* ('cock of the king'), or even classified as *meo*, a social category of headhunters to which students of the Atoni have been making reference.³⁷ At the kingdom level, there were various military ranks and honours associated with warfare. Yet the title of *asua'in* was an honour bestowed only upon those who had taken heads in battle, including in colonial campaigns. The indigenous *régulo*, or the war leader, upon the victorious return of warriors, ceremonially granted the title of *asua'in*. The Portuguese governor or army officers, as we will see, could also fulfil this role. The ceremonial rewarding of the *asua'in* took place during the head-feasts in the form of public praise for the warrior's bravery. On this occasion he was granted the insignia of *asua'in*: golden or silver disks (*luas*) to be used by the warrior.³⁸ However, in areas close to Dili, wearing earrings also signalled the status of *asua'in* – insignia used, for example, by the

moradores, which proved their active part in headhunting in the service of the colonial government.³⁹

The development of ceremonial warfare in the colonial period resulted in the consolidation of a respected class of *asua'in* warriors in Timorese society. The key role of the irregulars, *arraiais* and *moradores*, in Portuguese colonial warfare contributed to this consolidation. This was clearly the case during the pacification period, with regard to the companies of *moradores*. The *moradores* had a reputation for being loyal government warriors, and in the indigenous mind they became identified with the Timorese category of *malai*, used to classify outsiders in general and the Portuguese in particular. They were designated as *malai meta* (meta=black): 'if [the Timorese] fear us greatly', said governor Celestino, 'do not fear them less than they fear us'.⁴⁰ By the time of the governor Celestino da Silva, it was prestigious to become a 'government *asua'in*'. The governor raised the status of *moradores*. He re-organized and expanded the companies, giving them a uniform, and a regular salary.⁴¹ They eventually became a special class, a type of 'indigenous nobility', responding directly to the governor and not to the *régulos*.⁴² After the campaigns of 1896, some were rewarded for their bravery with Portuguese medals, knighthoods, or with ruling rights over conquered territories. As well as these rewards, the bravest *moradores* were given the title of *asua'ins* for their action in campaigns, possibly a title bestowed by the governors themselves. In fact, by the 1900s, many *moradores* exhibited a 'small earring on the left ear', an insignia only the *asua'ins* were allowed to wear.⁴³

The entanglement with indigenous otherness could, however, also be problematic. With regard to head-feasts and generally the indigenous appropriation of severed heads and 'harvest of war', the Europeans had to make an effort to create difference and establish boundaries. The next section highlights this tension by looking at Portuguese ritual action in the *lorosa'e* rites and European attempts to purify transgressions.

Pollution and purity in headhunting rites

Do not sanction the horrible and barbaric custom of *head-feasts* with your presence, nor authorize any European to attend them, on whatever pretext, nor give permission for the celebration of those feasts in the vicinity of temples, command houses, schools and barracks; instead you shall try to avoid them as much as you possibly can.⁴⁴

The above is a regulation established by the governor Celestino da Silva in his *Instructions to Military Commandants* of 1896. Under the heading

'Relationships with the natives', the instruction circumscribed the Portuguese tradition of pragmatic observance of Timorese ritual life. A policy of preservation and tolerance of indigenous manners and customs thus stopped short of involvement in the head-feasts. These rites constituted a dangerous area of colonial interaction, from which the governor wished the officers to remain distanced. The governor proposed a rule for purity and cleanliness: stand clear of 'head-feasts', stay European, stay clean. The mere presence in the *lorosa'es* was a form of being in the wrong, of 'being dirty'. Boundaries were at risk. The governor's rule of purity expressed concern with the collective consequences of individual acts of contamination with head-feasts. In effect, to participate in or give permission to head-feasts seemed to interfere with important tenets of the two important dimensions of European identity as regards the colonial project: the civilizing ethos, and its call to the eradication of all forms of savagery; and Christian religion, namely the beliefs on the sanctity, integrity and liminality of the human corpse. The instruction thus did not convey the need for 'civilizing interference'; it did not command officers to eradicate a 'horrible and macabre' indigenous rite. Instead, it regulated symbolic boundaries by setting a rule for avoiding contact with the 'polluting dangers' of indigenous headhunting – the kind of dangers and powers, as Mary Douglas observed, that 'punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate.'⁴⁵

Yet in practice, as Celestino da Silva's instruction suggests, the breaking of these symbolic boundaries and the consequent risk of pollution were difficult to avoid. While the governor drew a line, at the same time he had to concede the difficulty of actually respecting its existence. The management of purity was ultimately left to the arbitration of the military; they were to avoid contact with head-feasts 'as much as they possibly could'. In the end, therefore, the governor set down a flexible rule of purity open to the contingencies of the Portuguese embroilment with Timorese ritual life. Polluting dangers protected the existence of symbolic boundaries. But the pragmatic intimacy of Europeans with those rites put these boundaries constantly under threat. In effect, Celestino da Silva's attempt to purify the entanglement of Portuguese colonialism with headhunting had a clear rationale. Purification was necessary because transgressions were common.

The governor's intention to impede the rites from taking place next to European locations suggested that the indigenous sites of *lorosa'e* ceremonies could be coincident with the Portuguese sites of authority. Indeed, the circuits of severed heads in pacification campaigns passed

not only through Timorese villages and *lulik* trees. They intersected with the geography of colonial power. They could be held at the military encampments during punitive expeditions. In addition, the concern with head-feasts held 'in the vicinity of temples' indicates that this might have been customary. In 1893, for instance, Timorese warriors exhibited the severed heads of Chinese enemies before a Catholic church in Okussi.⁴⁶ During a campaign in the 1900s, severed heads 'were lined up in front of the Catholic church', after which the government troops celebrated the *lorosa'e*.⁴⁷ The preference for Catholic churches for this ceremony should be interpreted as an instance of a broader Timorese incorporation of Catholicism into animist culture, a process begun in the early years of missionary activity. In preferring Portuguese sites as spaces for celebrating the *lorosa'e* in colonial campaigns, it is possible that the Timorese sought to connect with the hostile elements of Portuguese power. Moreover, other locations of *lorosa'e* rites suggest that the ceremonies were held close to, or in juxtaposition with, the places that embodied Portuguese authority. Thus Dili, as the capital city and ceremonial centre of Portuguese power, was selected as the ritual setting for elaborate head-feasts celebrating glorious campaigns and victories. In 1861, Dili was the stage of triumphal *lorosa'es* to celebrate a great victory over Ulmera and Lacló. According to Afonso de Castro who thoroughly documented the ceremonies, the scene had been customary in Timor since times immemorial.⁴⁸ Mention of similar head-feasts in the colonial record appeared 50 years later, describing the *lorosa'e* conducted by the *moradores* in Dili, after the dramatic Portuguese victory over Manufai in 1912.⁴⁹ The entwining of *lorosa'es* with Portuguese authority remained up to the point when ritual violence temporarily faded out between 1913 and the Second World War. During this period, the rite was held without severed heads, yet the ceremonial gestures and songs of the head-feasts were performed on the occasion of Portuguese colonial authorities visiting the *sucos* or villages.⁵⁰

This entangled geography points towards the importance of different modes of Portuguese involvement in the circuits of severed heads. The ritual efficacy of the *lorosa'e* rites of incorporation seemed to depend on the presence of Portuguese objects, signs, places, and people. Without this presence, the incorporation of heads into indigenous communities as cooperative object-mediators was perhaps an outcome unlikely to be achieved. The 'head-feasts' in colonial campaigns constituted an entangled ritual in which the Portuguese themselves took part as ritual actors. By virtue of *estilo* (traditional law), the army officers, even colonial governors, were often present. This made the eyewitness

knowledge of military ethnographies possible. The officers, apparently, were only there as 'observers', but as a rule did not describe themselves as an active part of the rites. However, their mere presence as an eyewitness was a form of ritual action and enabled the rite to occur. As Celestino da Silva seemed to be aware, the simple bodily presence of the Portuguese propelled the *lorosa'es*. Portuguese officers worked as mediators that put the invisible power and authority of Portugal in the service of the ritual efficacy of head-feasts. Moreover, there was no such thing as a passive eyewitness. In the *lorosa'e*, Portuguese officers and governors were called to play an active ritual role as war chiefs.

According to colonial ethnographies, 'one chief' normally performed the leading ritual role in the ceremony. This chief received the heads and superintended the opening scenes of the rite. The heads were laid on his feet and mounted on a pile by the warriors as a form of tribute. Then it was his duty to initiate the rite. He picked up one of the heads and performed a justificatory speech explaining why the head was decapitated. Afterwards, he gave the first kick, triggering collective head-kicking and the start of the *lorosa'e* singing and dancing. Also on this occasion, the chief praised and rewarded the warriors, granting them the title of *asua'in*. Colonial sources may refer to the chief as an indigenous lord, either 'the *régulo*', 'the chief of the *arraial*', or the *datólulik* (sacred lord) of the kingdom.⁵¹ Sometimes, however, the mention is vague and ambiguous, allowing for either indigenous or European chiefs.⁵² One source, for instance, described the chief as the 'captain': 'One of the heads was presented to the war captain, who received [it] and applied the initial kick.'⁵³ Indigenous war chiefs probably performed this ritual role. But ambivalence in the sources might also conceal the fact that the Portuguese commanding officers at times performed the same leading role.

Governor Afonso de Castro's account of head-feasts in Dili provides one of the few occasions of the visibility of Portuguese ritual action. In 1861, Castro described these rites in detail, suggesting the traditional character of the Portuguese action in the ceremony, in particular of the governor as supreme war chief. 'All the forces that have composed the victorious army come together in Dili, on a pre-arranged date.'⁵⁴ War prisoners (women, men, and children) were displayed in a circle 'in the centre of which are laid the heads cut by the *asua'ins*'; at that moment, Castro observed: 'The Governor comes out of his residence, accompanied by his staff, and takes up a position near the heads. Then the *asua'ins* come forward, they dance and sing around their enemies' heads, which they kick.'⁵⁵ Then the governor's function in this

ceremony, with the help of an indigenous chief, consisted of rewarding the warriors, bestowing on the brave the *asua'ins'* insignia – golden and silver discs.

A Timorese war legend collected and retold by Father Ezequiel Enes Pascoal in the 1940s illustrated the relevance of Portuguese ritual agency in *lorosa'es*, from an indigenous perspective. The legend offered a contrast with the passive idea of eyewitnessing brought forward, for example, by Captain Câmara's account. Significantly, this tale situated Captain Câmara himself as ritual actor in a *lorosa'e* ceremony. According to legend, Bere-Laca, a brave *asua'in* of the government, served under the command of Captain Câmara during a campaign near the Dutch border 'in the first years of Celestino da Silva's governorship'.⁵⁶ Bere-Laca gloriously returned to the colonial station of Batugadé carrying many severed heads. Then, Pascoal wrote: 'Captain Câmara embraced [Bere-Laca]. The captain declared that his courage and dedication was an example to follow. In the *loro-sá'e*, he was put at the forefront of all the other *assuais*.'⁵⁷ In Timorese eyes, Captain Câmara was not an eyewitness external to indigenous customs. As war chief, he was entitled to perform a leading role, playing an active part in the ritual circuits of severed heads. In the ritual life of colonial campaigns, therefore, *lorosa'e* rites did not come into being as a pure Timorese custom. They were a powerful ritual drama of mutual significance in which the Portuguese intervened as productive actors according to an indigenous script.

Entanglement and purification in colonial accounts

In his *Entangled Objects*, Nicholas Thomas has called attention to the 'colonial entanglement'.⁵⁸ With this notion, Thomas intended to recover the importance of indigenous agency in the study of colonialism, a point he demonstrated by examining how material objects were culturally appropriated by both the indigenous and the European agents in the course of colonial encounters. Approaching this entangled nature of encounters does not discount European power or domination; instead it means exploring its significance in the context of 'transcultural histories' that bring the dynamic of colonial interactions and the interplay of indigenous and European agencies into light.⁵⁹ In this essay, I have approached the Portuguese military ethnographies of headhunting from a similar methodological sensitivity. I have argued that the colonial reports of indigenous headhunting do not simply account for the otherness of an indigenous realm; they also do not simply reflect the Western subject and its preconceptions. Colonial knowledge is an

entangled object. The colonial ethnographies of Timorese headhunting describe an entwined realm of violence and ritual life in which both 'colonizers' and 'colonized' are engaged actors. I have thus suggested that the colonial descriptions of 'indigenous' practices associated (such as headhunting) with stigmas and stereotypes of 'savagery' can reveal embroiled realities in which European and indigenous elements were entwined in actual practice. Rather than standing for a self-referential Western discourse, or contrastingly for an 'authentic' indigenous culture of 'pre-colonial' character, colonial knowledge embodies the tensional dynamics of colonialism as a cross-cultural experience. As such, it provides the means to consider the disclosure of intertwinements simultaneously with the performance of purifications. It can pave the way for the historical description of zones of practical activity in which the European and indigenous worlds come closely together; whilst, in addition, it might allow for a description of the gestures and strategies deployed in the creation of difference and alterity.

My engagement with the colonial ethnographies of headhunting has suggested the importance of reconstructing overlapping histories. But it has also emphasized the necessity to account for practices of differentiation and boundary-making which come into the being in the very same colonial accounts. In this light, this essay has suggested that, in engaging with colonial knowledge, we should be prepared to take into consideration the two key logics of the 'colonial entanglement' between self and other here brought forward: mutual inclusion and purification. The study of military ethnographies has here allowed me to observe these two dimensions of the colonial encounter in the context of East Timor. The first concerned the dynamic of Portuguese-Timorese inclusion in the practices of ritual violence; the second, the polluting dangers and the work of purification undertaken to discipline the entanglement. In concluding, my intention is to briefly point to the ways the military ethnographies of headhunting enable us to address the conjunction of these two themes.

The Portuguese-Timorese imbrications in headhunting rites can be seen as one assemblage held in place by mutual inclusion: indigenous headhunting lived as a part of what was colonial, while European colonialism held the otherness of indigenous headhunting inside itself. In Timor, colonial headhunting emerged as a form of ritual life that encompassed both the indigenous and colonial realms. The Portuguese and Timorese were actors in ritual dramas from which both could take advantage – even if only indigenous groups were to physically take possession of the human heads obtained in battle. With this circulation,

the indigenous communities allied with the Portuguese were granted means of symbolic and socio-political prosperity. The ritual circuits of severed heads and war booty could thus benefit the communities of the *arraiais* and *moradores* simultaneously with symbolic, social, economic, and political force. Yet the energies generated by these circuits also helped keep Portuguese authority alive.

The ritual life of Timorese headhunting depended on the inclusion of Portuguese places, things, and signs – but also of people, especially of the governors and army officers as ritual actors in the *lorosa'e* ceremony. However, this entwinement entailed the possibility of separation. It was not a mere blurring, a hybrid amalgamation. Instead it constituted a process of merging in which practices of elaboration of difference were as crucial as the formation of entangled realities. In fact, some areas of this interconnected world could be symbolically problematic. Europeans also lost something in taking part in the indigenous ritual life: they jeopardized their symbolic purity. As the *Instructions* issued by the colonial government in 1896 suggest, the participation of Europeans in the ritual life of headhunting in colonial campaigns was surrounded by polluting dangers, which Europeans tried to circumvent by drawing boundaries, setting rules of purity, and purifying transgressions. It was around ritual action in headhunting rites that problems of purity and pollution could arise. By the time of Celestino's *Instructions*, the Portuguese presence in *lorosa'e* rites seemed difficult to justify. European cultural sanctions were put forward but seemed unable to prevent actual contact. Transgressions were constant, but could not simply be removed without endangering the dynamics of colonial power. In the face of local resilience and enmity, the durability and authority of the Portuguese colonial establishment in Timor throughout the nineteenth century was maintained through the systematic display of the ritual violence of headhunting during colonial punitive campaigns. Nevertheless, the Portuguese entanglement with otherness in headhunting rites could be symbolically purified. For if in practice the rule of purity had constantly to be breached, boundaries needed to be maintained in the representation of 'civilizing' colonialism.

Because the entanglement with otherness could not be destroyed without endangering colonial power, the management of purity in a system based on transgressions was often a symbolic and rhetorical work, rather than one exercised in material practice. This work could be observed in *gestures of purification*. This notion has been used here in a wider sense to designate practices whose strategic purpose was to make the European entanglement with indigenous elements – namely

activities and occasions perceived as 'savage', 'primitive', or 'barbaric' (here, the ritual violence of headhunting) – pure, by removing every sort of dirty or polluting element. As such, this notion is potentially of wider application in other settings and cases in which the European colonizers' sense of purity and pollution as regards indigenous materials was at stake in practical relationships. The idealized result of colonial purification, to evoke Latour's use of the later term, consisted of a state of total dichotomy between Europeans and Indigenous, 'Us' and 'Them'.⁶⁰ Two main types of gestures of purification can be discerned. Firstly, colonial purity could be exhibited by downplaying or concealing transgressions. The invisibility that, in the colonial texts, generally surrounded the presence of Portuguese in headhunting rites was a way of displaying cleanliness and preserving difference. Occulted, the transgressions did not impact on boundary divides. The colonial ethnographies could protect colonial purity in this manner. They removed from the texts the polluting active articulations, portraying the Portuguese officers as passive outsiders, witnesses devoid of any action during the rites. Secondly, colonial purity could be arranged by separation. From this perspective, processes of othering in colonial ethnographies can also be understood as gestures of purification. They detached the 'Europeans' from the rites essentially by depicting headhunting as a sphere of 'Indigenous' otherness.

Eduardo da Câmara's description of the *lorosa'e* rites in the Obulo and Marobo campaign of March 1895 is a prime example of these two processes – and as such it is very suitable material with which to begin, and, indeed, to close this text. By engaging with this artefact of colonial knowledge I have brought to light the entangled constitution of colonialism and headhunting in warfare – as well as the tensions it upholds with regard to practices of purification. In effect, in appropriating specifically Câmara's detailed description of the *lorosa'e* in the opening sequence of this essay, I have offered a revelation of the overlapping of indigenous and colonial violence, whilst, in the end, disclosing yet another gesture of purification. Eduardo da Câmara died at the hands of indigenous warriors in Timor in September 1895 in the course of a failed campaign against the kingdom of Manufai. This tragic Portuguese defeat caused national consternation, Câmara being killed and decapitated by a Timorese *asua'in*. At the close of 1895, following his death and months after his manuscript on the Obulo and Marobo campaign had circulated to Portugal, Câmara's report was posthumously published in Lisbon, in a special journal issue dedicated to his memory.⁶¹ However, the section containing precisely the account of the *lorosa'e*

rite was removed from publication by the editors; it was not part of the text displayed to the readers. This editorial censorship might have represented an attempt to protect the late captain's memory from the dirtiness of portraying an imperial hero as an eyewitness of barbaric rituals. Moreover, the editors might have been aware that Câmara's ethnographic observations of May 1895 were detailing the same *lorosa'e* rites of incorporation eventually undergone by the captain's remains, a few months later. The account was tragically prophetic. In September 1895, Câmara's severed head was incorporated and exhibited in the *lulik* tree of the kingdom of Cová. Thus, there were other ways in which European bodies could make their presence felt in the ritual life of headhunting. In the event of defeat, the heads of Portuguese officers could become the possession of their Timorese enemies.

Notes

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1. Eduardo da Câmara to Celestino da Silva, 25 May 1895, Lisbon, AHU, Macao and Timor, ACL_SEMU_DGU_RM_005_Cx 1, 1890–1899.
2. Câmara's report is enclosed in Celestino da Silva to Ministry and Secretary of Navy and Overseas Affairs, 10 July 1895, Relatório da Guerra aos reinos de Oeste, Lisbon, AHU, Macao and Timor, ACL_SEMU_DGU_RM_005_Cx 1, 1890–1899.
3. Câmara to Celestino da Silva, 25 May 1895.
4. In another work I elaborate on mutual inclusion in colonial headhunting as entailed in a particular social form of colonial interaction, 'mutual parasitism'. See Roque, *Headhunting and Colonialism*, ch. 1. Mutual inclusion is a term that I inventively borrow from Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).
5. Cf. Celestino da Silva, *Relatório das Operações de Guerra no Distrito Autónomo de Timor no anno de 1896 enviado ao Ministro e Secretário dos Negócios da Marinha e Ultramar* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1897), pp. 40–43. Eventually this policy was continued by his successor in office. Cf. Alberto Osório de Castro, *A Ilha Verde e Vermelha de Timor* (Lisbon, 1943, reprint Lisbon: Cotovia, 1996), p. 87.
6. J. S. Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de Guerra', *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, IV (1884), p. 478.

7. Interesting comparisons might be drawn with the British tradition of military colonial anthropologies of headhunting concerning the Nagas of India, which emerged in the same historical period. Comparatively, too, in West Timor, Atoni headhunting was recorded as a vanished and strictly 'indigenous' phenomenon by the Dutch colonial ethnographers. Cf. Andrew West, 'Writing the Nagas: a British Officers' Ethnographic Tradition', *History and Anthropology*, 8 (1994), pp. 55–88; P. Middelkoop, *Headhunting in Timor and Its Historical Implications* (2 vols Sydney: University of Sydney, 1963). For general arguments on the importance of colonial military ethnographies in the history of anthropology, see Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, 'Introduction: Five Theses on Ethnography as Colonial Practice', *History and Anthropology*, 8, 1–4 (1994), pp. 1–34; Ricardo Roque, *Antropologia e Império: Fonseca Cardoso e a Expedição à Índia em 1895* (Lisbon: ICS, 2001), part III.
8. Later academic ethnographers of East Timor did not examine Timorese ritual violence. They restricted themselves to an analysis of ritual life in realms other than warfare. See for example the essays collected in James Fox (ed.), *The Flow of Life: Essays on Eastern Indonesia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).
9. In this mode of founding 'ethnographic authority' they seemed not fundamentally different from similar claims of modern anthropology. Cf. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 21–55.
10. Compare with Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Edward Said, 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (1989), pp. 205–25.
11. For seminal arguments in line with this suggestion see Nicholas Thomas, *Out of Time. History and Evolution in Anthropological Discourse* (2nd edn, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), ch. 6 and afterword; Marshall Sahlins, *How 'Natives' Think About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), epilogue.
12. See Thomas, *Out of Time*, p. 69.
13. A seminal example of this approach is Clifford Geertz, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
14. The term *Praça* (literally Square) was commonly used to refer to Dili, the seat of Portuguese government in East Timor.
15. Afonso de Castro, 'Résumé historique de l'établissement portugais à Timor, des us et coutumes de ses habitants', *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, XI (1862), p. 505.
16. Luna de Oliveira, *Timor na História de Portugal* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1950) II, p. 390.
17. Raphael das Dores, 'Apontamentos para um Dicionário Chorographico de Timor', *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, 7–12 (1903), pp. 768–69.
18. Village burning was adopted as a standard colonial military tactic against the indigenous peoples by notorious strategists of colonial wars and punitive expeditions, such as the French General Bugeaud. See Douglas Porch,

- 'Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare', Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy. From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 376–408.
19. Rock art found by the Australian archaeologist Sue O'Connor at the Moa Mimi Raka site in East Timor portrays a victorious warrior hanging a cut head in one hand and an axe in the other, the axe resembling those from metal age cultures older than 1,000 years. I thank Nuno Vasco Oliveira for this information.
 20. 'The invasion [from Makasar]', stated Middelkoop, 'seems to have marked the beginning of warfare and head-hunting in Timor.' Middelkoop, *Headhunting in Timor and Its Historical Implications*, I, p. 37.
 21. Cf. Artur Teodoro de Matos, *Timor Português 1515–1769. Contribuição para a sua História* (Lisbon: Instituto Histórico Infante D. Henrique, 1974), pp. 23, 55.
 22. For an overview of this debate see Janet Hoskins, 'Introduction: Headhunting as Practice and as Trope', in Janet Hoskins (ed.), *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 1–50.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 14. Cf. Robert McKinley, 'Human and Proud of It! A Structural Treatment of Headhunting Rites and the Social Definition of Enemies', in G. N. Appell (ed.), *Studies in Borneo Societies: Social Process and Anthropological Explanation* (Illinois: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1976), pp. 92–145.
 24. Cf. Andrew McWilliam, 'Case Studies in Dual Classification as Process: Childbirth, Headhunting and Circumcision in West Timor', *Oceania*, 65, 1 (1994), p. 66.
 25. For example David Hicks, *Tetum Ghosts and Kin: Fertility and Gender in East Timor* (2nd edn, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2004).
 26. See for example Ferreira da Costa, 'Que significam o corte de cabeças humanas e a conservação dos crânios humanos em muralhas e árvores sagradas', *O Mundo Português*, 7 (1947), pp. 22–36; Paulo Braga, *Nos Antípodas* (Lisbon: Cosmos, s.d.), pp. 35–39; Castro, *A Ilha Verde e Vermelha de Timor*, p. 138.
 27. A. Pinto Correia, *Timor de Lés a Lés* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1944), p. 40. See also: Francisco Azevedo Gomes, 'Os Fataluku' (B.A. dissertation, ISCSPU, 1972), p. 96.
 28. Castro, *A Ilha Verde e Vermelha de Timor*, p. 138.
 29. In some cases, the rites of incorporation might also have included cannibalistic behaviour, although anthropophagy was not characteristic of Timorese cultures. Cf. Gomes, *Os Fataluku*, p. 106; Castro, *A Ilha Verde e Vermelha de Timor*, pp. 140, 172; Hoskins, 'Introduction: Headhunting as Practice and as Trope', p. 12.
 30. Cf. Correia, *Timor de Lés a Lés*, p. 33.
 31. Acácio Flores cit. in A. Pinto Correia, *Gentio de Timor* (Lisbon: Lucas & Ca., 1934), p. 40.
 32. *Ibid.*
 33. Cf. McWilliam, 'Case Studies in Dual Classification as Process', p. 66.
 34. José Simões Martinho, *Timor. Quatro Séculos de Colonização Portuguesa* (Porto: Livraria Progredior, 1943), pp. 248–49, n. 1.

35. Cf. Andrew McWilliam, 'Severed Heads That Germinate the State: History, Politics, and Headhunting in Southwest Timor', in Hoskins (ed.), *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia*, p. 133.
36. Eventually, the Tetum term *asua'in* became equivalent to the Tetum expression *válentâne*, an indigenous modification of the Portuguese word *valentão*. The Portuguese could also translate *asua'in* as 'hero', or as 'the warrior who cuts more heads from the enemy'. See Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de guerra', pp. 477–78; Alberto Osório de Castro, *Flores de Coral. Poemetos e Impressões da Oceânia portuguesa* (Dili, 1908, reprint Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 2004, vol. I), p. 436.
37. Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de guerra', 477–78; Correia, *Timor de Lés a Lés*, p. 32. Cf. McWilliam, 'Severed Heads that Germinate the State'; Schulte-Nordholt, *The Political System of the Atoni* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 338–45.
38. Flores cit. in Correia, *Gentio de Timor*, p. 40.
39. See Afonso de Castro, *As Possessões Portuguezas na Oceânia* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1867), p. 336; Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de Guerra', p. 481.
40. Silva, *Relatório das Operações de Guerra no Distrito Autónomo de Timor*, pp. 36–37; Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de Guerra', p. 328.
41. Silva, *Relatório das Operações de Guerra no Districto Autónomo de Timor*, pp. 36–37.
42. Gonçalo Pimenta de Castro, *Timor (Subsídios para a sua História)* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1944), p. 104.
43. See *Ibid.*; J. A. Fernandes, *Timor. Impressões e Aspectos* (Porto: Tip. A Tribuna, 1923), p. 26. Cf. Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de Guerra', p. 481.
44. José Celestino da Silva, *Instruções aos Commandantes Militares* (Macao: s.ed., 1896), p. 8. [italics in the original]
45. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966, reprint London: Routledge, 2002), p. 140.
46. René Pélissier, *Timor en Guerre. Le Crocodile et les Portugais (1847–1913)* (Orgeval : Pélissier, 1996), p. 131.
47. Castro, *A Ilha Verde e Vermelha de Timor*, p. 140.
48. Afonso de Castro, 'Une Rébellion à Timor en 1861', *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, XIII (1864), p. 403; Castro, 'Résumé historique de l'établissement portugais à Timor', p. 506.
49. See Jaime Inso, *Timor 1912* (Lisbon: Cosmos, 1939), pp. 19–20, 37; Pélissier, *Timor en Guerre*, p. 294, n. 231.
50. See for example Correia, *Timor de Lés a Lés*, pp. 24–25.
51. Eduardo da Câmara to Celestino da Silva, 25 May 1895, Lisbon, AHU, Macao and Timor, ACL_SEMU_DGU_RM_005_Cx 1, 1890–1899; Vaquinhas, 'Timor. Usos – Superstições de Guerra', 477; Castro, *A Ilha Verde e Vermelha de Timor*, p. 140.
52. Cf. Castro, *Timor (Subsídios para a sua História)*, p. 14; Flores cit. in Correia, *Gentio de Timor*, p. 40.
53. Correia, *Timor de Lés a Lés*, p. 38.
54. Castro, 'Résumé historique de l'établissement portugais à Timor', p. 506.
55. *Ibid.*

56. Ezequiel Enes Pascoal, 'A morte do Buan. Conto', *Seara*, VII–VIII (1950), p. 174.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).
59. Cf. *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 204–8.
60. Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
61. Eduardo Ignacio da Câmara, 'Relatório do Comandante das Operações contra os Reinos Rebeldes de Obulo, Marobo, Baboi, Balibó e outros', *Anais do Clube Militar Naval*, 25, 11–12 (1895), pp. 695–707; 795–803.

11

'What Do You Really Want in German East Africa, *Herr Professor?*' Counterinsurgency and the Science Effect in Colonial Tanzania

Andrew Zimmerman

'What do you really want in German East Africa, *Herr Professor?*' was a question asked of the anthropologist Karl Weule by more than a few of his fellow passengers on board a ship bound for the German colony that is today Tanzania, in 1906.¹ At least this was what Weule himself recalled after he returned from a journey during which he was caught up, and participated in, the counterinsurgency operations that followed one of the greatest anti-colonial uprisings that Africa had ever seen, the Maji Maji uprising. One elegant woman, Weule wrote, demanded: 'And what do you want, *Herr Professor*, from all these tribes? Simply to collect for your museum in Leipzig? Or does the anthropology of today also have other, higher goals?' Anthropology did indeed, Weule explained, have 'other, higher goals': 'The museum you speak of, my dearest, exists out in reality, as even the most hard-hearted Philistine would have to admit. ... But how will anthropology be able to assert its much-contested status as a science, when it knows nothing higher and better than simply to bring together bows, arrows, spears, and thousands of other things? This collecting and preserving is really just...the elementary branch of our work. The other, higher part is the study [*Aufnahme*] of mental culture [*geistige Kulturbesitzes*].'²

This memory cannot be accurate, because Weule did not, prior to his arrival in German East Africa, have 'other, higher goals' than collecting for museums.³ In fact, during this voyage Herr Professor Weule had no

idea what he would be doing in German East Africa. Weule was taking a conventional program of anthropological fieldwork into a colony gripped by one of the largest, most effective, and deadliest anti-imperialist insurgencies of the period before the First World War.

Weule's false memory is one common to the history of anthropology and to the history of colonial science generally. The armchair-to-the-field narrative structures the history of the discipline of anthropology, and, in an instance of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny, also many careers of individual anthropologists. In these narratives, an adventurous anthropologist abandons the musty travel accounts and dusty museum collections that had satisfied the scientific aims of his seniors and ventures out into what Weule referred to as 'reality'. To-the-field narratives, whether centred on a plucky hero or on a morally compromised individual taking advantage of European colonization, on a trustworthy observer, or on what has come to be called an 'orientalist' viewing the world through ideological lenses, all share a common feature: by focusing on the activity of anthropologists they exclude questions about how social and political struggles and structures shape knowledge and the subject supposed to possess that knowledge.

The grounding fantasies of anthropology, like those of all sciences, includes not only the well-known fantasies of objectivity, but also fantasies of subjectivity, of the power of a scientist to record, describe, or even ideologically distort the world.⁴ Science studies has called into question the apparently passive objectivity of science, not merely exposing the latent ideology in disciplines from anthropology to mathematics but also revealing the necessity of such latent ideology for the constitution of scientific knowledge.⁵ Science studies have never challenged the truth of science, but only its independence from individual or collective subjects of knowledge.⁶ Historical and sociological studies of the subjectivity of the scientist present equally important challenges to conventional misunderstandings of knowledge production.⁷ In the history of anthropology, Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink have called for studies of the 'fore field' of anthropology, the political situation into which anthropologists step when they enter the field.⁸ In this essay, I give the politics of the field not only chronological, but also logical priority to anthropological fieldwork: I emphasize how the field constructs the anthropologist rather than how the anthropologist constructs the field. Proceeding from the field allows me to approach the double fantasy of scientific objectivity and subjectivity without giving either explanatory priority.⁹ In other cases, the field of anthropology – that is, the scientific conventions of the discipline – plays the decisive role

in shaping anthropological perception. In still other cases, as George Steinmetz has shown, prior ethnographic knowledge shapes both subsequent ethnography *and* the colonial policy that creates the field.¹⁰ In Weule's case, however, the field of insurgency and counterinsurgency in German East Africa overwhelmed the scientific field, transforming conventional museum anthropology into something Weule came to call 'colonial folk research'.

Weule's fieldwork was one of a number of what I will call *science-effects* that emerged in the process of colonial rule, of insurgency and counterinsurgency, in German East Africa. In conceptualizing science as science-effect, I follow Timothy Mitchell's symmetrical analysis of capital and the state as parallel 'aspects of the modern reordering of space, time, and personhood and the production of the new effects of abstraction and subjectivity ... Both produce the effect of an abstraction that stands apart from material reality'.¹¹ Science, I will argue, is also an effect (and not a cause or a reflection) of the discipline that also produces capital and state effects. Such an approach highlights the ways in which science, the state, and capital are intimately intertwined outcomes of historically specific conflicts.

It was precisely such collaborative connections among state, science, and capital formation that won German East Africa admiration as an exemplary modernizing state practically from the time Carl Peters and the German East Africa Company conquered it in 1884. Juhanaï Koponen's magisterial 1994 account of German East Africa, *Development for Exploitation*,¹² expands upon a phenomenon noted as early as 1893 by Frederick Lugard, one of the pioneers of the British Empire in East Africa, and later perhaps the greatest political theorist of colonialism. For Lugard, because East Africa had 'no staple of commerce – such as the palm-kernel on the West Coast, the clove in Zanzibar, or coffee in Nyasaland' – scientific experts could select new commodities to engineer an economy more diverse and profitable than elsewhere in Africa. German administration in East Africa, Lugard wrote, '...set us an example in the thorough and practical way in which they set about to develop their territories, though, as regards tact with the natives, the advantage, perhaps, lies with us. Even so much as three years before it was officially administered, preliminary expeditions were sent to German East Africa (in 1885) of experts and scientists, to report on the geology, climate, soil, and vegetation; and this was immediately followed by the establishment of plantations, so that some thirty were in existence in 1888.'¹³ The example of German East Africa, Lugard explained, taught that the colonial state should sponsor scientific research that would support

a plantation economy. Lugard leaves open whether sacrificing 'tact with the natives' followed necessarily from such state-science-capital co-operation, or whether this was simply a German peculiarity.

German East Africa presents a good example of the modernizing state also because it was the site of one of the first great anti-colonial insurgencies of the twentieth century, the Maji Maji war of 1905–7, an insurgency that occasioned, and provided the fore field, for Weule's fieldwork. The play of insurgency and counterinsurgency makes visible elements striving to become (or to become once again) the state. The violent counterpoint of insurgency and counterinsurgency shows politics prior to the subject-effect of the state, prior to legitimacy, that is, prior to the successful claim to monopoly on legitimate physical violence within a given area that constitutes the state itself. Situating Weule's fieldwork in the process of insurgency and counterinsurgency of the Maji Maji uprising will make particularly clear the coproduction of the subject-effects of science, capital, and state.

The political economy of East Africa developed in ways contrary to the colonial ideologies that the regions German colonizers brought with them. A binary opposition of nature and culture, elaborated by the discipline of anthropology, structured much German perception of the world outside Europe in the first decade-and-a-half of the colonial venture. For Germans, culture was not a universal human property, but rather the exclusive possession of Europeans and other 'historical peoples' or 'cultural peoples' (*Kulturvölker*). Africa, as well as most of the rest of the world, was a static realm of natural peoples (*Naturvölker*) and objects. Natural peoples were natural both because they did not change historically and also because they could not transform nature.

This early understanding of nature and natural peoples reflected the earliest contact of Germans with Africans on the west coast of the continent, dominated by merchants and based on simple exchange of European for African commodities. Colonial scientific research in this period focused on collecting from the already existing realm of nature, much as colonial economies revolved around coastal merchants trading within already existing African exchange networks. In the colonies, botanical, zoological, and anthropological specimens were brought together, usually by amateurs, and mailed to Berlin, where they were then distributed to the nation's museums. In its emphasis on collecting empirical data, conceived as the raw material for later scientific theorizing, nineteenth-century colonial science was typical of the empiricism then prevailing in the social and natural sciences. The practices of colonial science were simultaneously shaped by the real conditions of

colonial rule and consistent with what might be called the non-colonial social and natural sciences of the time. Weule would be among the first anthropologists to abandon the search for timeless natural peoples.

The political economy of East Africa even in its earliest years sustained only with difficulty this concept of nature as a static realm from which culture could collect. Nature for Europeans in East Africa was never a thing to be acquired through trade or scientific collection but rather a factor of production to be developed, along with capital and labour. As Lugard, in the above-cited passage, recognized, the economy of East Africa was based not on what was already there but rather on what could be introduced and cultivated. Before significant numbers of Europeans arrived in the region, East Africa had a thriving economy based on venerable trade networks and plantations managed by Swahili-speaking coastal elites, controlled politically by the Sultan of Zanzibar, and based on the exploitation of slave labour. Europeans, however, had little use for this already existing economy, which primarily benefited local elites. While Europeans had little compunction about using slave or quasi-slave labour, this was complicated by the 1885 General Act of the Berlin Conference. 'Nature', which amounts to a specific conjuncture whose historicity authorities deny by declaring it natural, came to play a different role in the East African economy and therefore in the colonial science that emerged out of East Africa.

Alongside the older ideological concept of 'natural peoples', advanced colonial thinkers adopted the term 'Negro' (*Neger*) as part of an attempt to use the post-slavery American South as a model for their own colonies. These colonial thinkers and policy-makers pursued methods to achieve, as they put it, 'education of the Negro to work' (*Erziehung des Negers zur Arbeit*), which they viewed as a simultaneously ethical and economic imperative.¹⁴ Many Germans spoke highly of the African-American educator Booker T. Washington, and in Togo the German government initiated the trend of bringing the industrial education of Tuskegee Institute to Africa, which was taken up with such zeal by other colonial powers after the First World War.¹⁵

Anthropology, an integral part of colonial science in the mercantile era of collecting, risked falling out of touch with the German imperial project in the era of capitalist development. Anthropologists clung to the concept of 'natural peoples', which, unlike English notions of 'primitives', were radically ahistorical, out of time, never changing, and lacking culture (even a 'primitive' one). To catch up with the changing colonial situation, and the political-economic transformations of colonial nature, anthropologists began to pursue what they regarded as

sociological questions treating the 'Negro' as an economic agent rather than an inextricable piece of a static nature. Karl Weule was among the first to synthesize the older anthropological discourse of 'natural peoples' with the newer discourse of the 'Negro' in his fieldwork in German East Africa.

The shift from commerce to capitalist development, registered by the increasing use of the term *Neger*, demanded a shift in the economic role of Africans from merchants, porters, and petty commodity producers to sellers of commodified labour power. The shift from collecting to development entailed discipline, control, and separating Africans from ready-to-hand sources of livelihood. Africa was not to be a great marketplace but rather a great plantation. Instead of merchants trading European goods for African goods, plantation managers would purchase African labour power to create more and better agricultural products. The collecting of the already existing natural goods of Africa by anthropologists or by Africans had at most a limited place in the new, modernizing Africa.

This shift in science and political economy in relation to African nature and African people was inseparable from the development of political control and state institutions in the colonies. Science needed the power of the state, whose bureaucratic organization and police powers ensured that experiments could be carried out throughout the colony. Science provided the content for state administration, administration provided the framework and the authority for science, and both worked to raise agricultural production, and thus promote capital accumulation and labour discipline, throughout the colony.

German rule in East Africa produced capital, science, and state effects above all in the northern agricultural experimental stations of Kwai, founded in 1896, and Amani, which in 1902 replaced Kwai as the principal station in the colony. Both functioned as scientific research stations, outposts of governmental authority, and institutions of labour discipline. For both institutions, politics, economics, and science were inseparable. Northern Tanzania developed as a region for European plantations supported politically, economically, and scientifically by the Amani and Kwai research stations.

Southern Tanzania developed state, science, and capital effects more slowly and diffusely than did the North. In 1900, a German district official, Hans Zache, advocated greater attention to the South of the colony for the purposes of administrative unity: 'the elevation of the severely backward southern part to the development level of the northern half', he wrote, was necessary to make German East Africa an 'organic whole'.¹⁶

The poorly policed border with Portuguese Mozambique presented both threats and opportunities for political and economic development in the South. As Zache warned, 'The border, which takes fourteen days to march, is in practice nothing more than a line limiting our power: taboo for our conscientious policy, but an asylum for all miscreants and malcontents in the district, a back door for constant criminal and economic raids.' The German state had been reluctant to institute any taxation or other programs in the South for fear that they would simply drive the inhabitants into Mozambique. Zache was concerned that the ethnic groups currently living in the South would not prove good workers or good taxpayers. He looked at the Makonde with disdain and wondered whether this 'rabble' could be 'educated into taxpayers'.¹⁷

For Zache, the relatively open Portuguese border also presented opportunities for attracting workers and taxpayers into the South from Mozambique. Zache welcomed the plans of the Yao Sultan Mataka to lead his 20,000 subjects from Mozambique to southern Tanzania, 'only,' reported Zache, 'out of a desire to belong to our ordered administration'. 'It remains to be seen,' Zache remarked, 'whether this drive to culture [*Kulturdrang*] can survive the trial by fire of taxation.'¹⁸ Mataka was the head of a powerful Yao group that had gained its strength through slave-raiding, long-distance trade, and even banditry.¹⁹ This outlaw behaviour did not seem to bother the Germans much, and, in September 1900, they concluded an agreement with the Sultan that gave him a government salary to settle his people in southern Tanzania and promised not to prosecute him for crimes he committed before coming to the German colony.²⁰ The German government, however, could get little information about the Sultan's movements, and waited anxiously for him to arrive in the colony.

In 1905 the administrative director of the Amani Institute, Franz Stuhlmann, advocated a more active program of intelligence gathering in the South, since, he had concluded, the Portuguese government itself knew nothing about the Tanzania-Mozambique border. Stuhlmann's plans could not be realized immediately, however, because Africans in the South of the colony rose up against German and African state officials, missionaries, and plantation owners. This marked the beginning of the Maji Maji uprising, so called after the war medicine, *Maji* (Swahili for water), that symbolized the unity of diverse African societies against German domination. A small contingent of German troops, commanding large numbers of African soldiers and *Ruga Ruga* (irregulars), fought the insurgents, finishing major combat operations by April 1906 and killing approximately 75,000. The counterinsurgency operations

continued through 1907 and employed scorched earth tactics that were responsible for the further deaths up to 200,000 Africans. The German government found that the immediate provocation for the uprising was resistance specifically to cotton growing and generally to the beginnings of the German economic and political efforts in the South.²¹

Governor Götzen concluded that the uprising was the 'reaction of the 'bush Negro' against the advances of *Kultur*', and especially the higher labour demands by German agriculture, a judgement echoing the report of an official commission that interviewed African and German participants in the conflict.²² Another official, Eduard Haber, agreeing that the uprising was a reaction by Africans to increased labour demands, emphasized the continuing liability of the southern border with Mozambique, especially because it was so easy to smuggle firearms across it. He recommended conducting a 'thorough study of the local conditions' in the region before taking measures to control the border.²³

Conditions in the south were more uncertain than in the north from the perspective of politics, economics, and science. Because the north had more secure political boundaries and a more established plantation economy, it could concentrate knowledge and power in research stations representing this large, relatively stable area.²⁴ In the south, state sovereignty depended upon constant counterinsurgency. After the fighting against the first Maji Maji uprising dwindled, the south of the colony was gripped by a 'Mecca letter' scare. Officials feared that the Muslim population, inspired by a certain letter from Mecca, might soon rise up against German rule. This was especially terrifying because Muslims had, for the most part, remained loyal to the German state during the Maji Maji uprising. While no Muslim uprising occurred, the insecurity of the border with Mozambique and the fears of an uprising created a permanent mood of emergency in the south.²⁵

Economically, Maji Maji both devastated the labour force and subjected what remained to increased German coercion. Plantation owners came to depend on the state to supply chain gang labour. Even before the Maji Maji war, as Thaddeus Sunseri has shown, prison chain gangs supplied an astonishing 10–20% of the East African workforce employed by Germans.²⁶ The conflict increased both the need and the possibilities for such an economy in the south.

The knowledge concentrated in the northern agricultural stations as science was diffused in the south as espionage and counterinsurgency. Science and espionage have long had an intimate connection,

their distinction, as Johanna Bockman has argued for the case of the Cold War, often resulting as much from the protests of scientists as from any distinction essential to the nature of either profession.²⁷ The bureaucratic and technical control that allowed a scientific station in the Usambaras to represent and construct knowledge about the entire northern region did not exist in the south. The political loyalty and economic potential of the various populations were unknown, as were political and demographic relations with Mozambique.

The Maji Maji uprising only intensified the colonial production of science, state, and capital effects in the south of the colony. The official report by the German East African government on Maji Maji saw the uprising as a failure of economic development that, perhaps paradoxically, required even greater efforts at reforming East African nature and 'Negroes': 'Now it is the task of the German administration to compel the indolent Negro to greater production, and we must constrain his exploitation of nature [*Raubwirtschaft im Reiche der Natur*] to achieve these higher values.'²⁸

According to this report, the uprising demanded that the German state redouble its efforts to discipline and exploit African labour. From almost the beginning of the uprising, military officers were empowered to levy fines on alleged insurgents and, when the accused had no cash, to require them to work for the government or for European plantations.²⁹ In the last stages of the war, one official recommended preventing Africans from independently harvesting rubber and ivory in order to make them 'permanently dependent on our administration for collecting and selling these products'.³⁰ Political order was connected to the transformation of the colonial economy from simple exchange to labour exploitation and capital formation.

While the uprising and its repression initially reduced the number of workers available to the German government and to German firms, it also increased the amount of coercion that employers could exercise over workers. Weule, for example, noticed that those areas that had taken part in the uprising maintained the best roads, since the government could punish the disloyal by forcing them to do road work, and chain gang labour could be subjected to greater oversight and coercion than nominally free labour.³¹ Local plantations initially complained of labour shortages and environmental devastation, especially a large increase in crop-destroying wild pigs, generated by the conflict.³² Some plantations made up for these labour shortages by purchasing slaves. This was allowed, despite the provisions of the Berlin Act, since it was understood that the slaves were being 'purchased free' (*freikaufen*), that

is, purchased and then freed after a period of service deemed equivalent to the price paid for them.³³ While many plantations complained about labour shortages, others won the vigorous competition to obtain prison labourers from the state. A German firm even founded a coconut plantation in Kilindi to make use of captured labourers.³⁴ Ewerbeck himself would later retire from his position as district chief of Lindi to serve on the board of the newly founded Lindi-Kilindi Company, which made use of his and another official's connections to the government to acquire more imprisoned labourers than any of their competitors could.³⁵ Such acts of corruption, war profiteering, and exploitation by business people of personal ties to the government, as prevalent today as a century ago, are symptomatic of the coproduction of capital and the state. Both shared an interest in transforming Africans from '*Naturvolk*' to '*Neger*', to maximize the supply of commodified labour power, obedience, and taxes. Both state and capital were, in turn, effects of this primary act of discipline, this primitive accumulation, which emerged from colonial counterinsurgency.

Weule set sail for German East Africa at a moment when the issue of development, the southern border, and the 'elevation of *Kultur*' had never been more urgent. His expedition was among the first sent out by the Geographical Commission (*Landeskundliche Kommission*) of the Colonial Section of the Foreign Office. This Commission, founded in 1905, was among the first initiatives of scientific colonization sponsored by the German Government in Berlin. The new scientific approach to colonialism had, as we have seen, already emerged in German East Africa several years earlier. By 'Geography' the commission explained, 'we understand...all branches of the natural sciences in their relation to a specific region and to the botanical, animal, and human inhabitants of this region.' The geography promoted by the commission was to reveal 'the causal connections that unify all the individual details of a land and make it the organic unity that we see before us in nature'.³⁶ Grasping the colony as a natural totality was regarded by the new colonial science as a step beyond mere collecting toward a science that would bring with it (and also depend upon) political unity and economic development.

After earning a doctorate in geography from the University of Leipzig in 1891, Karl Weule entered the colonial service, which sent him to Berlin to study Swahili at the Seminar for Oriental Languages. In addition to his linguistic studies, Weule took anthropology courses from the museum curator Felix von Luschan, and these soon inspired him to leave the colonial service for a career in anthropology. In 1893 he

became an assistant in the Berlin Museum of Ethnology and in 1899 he moved to the museum in Leipzig, where he became director, just before leaving for Tanzania in 1906.

At the time the Geographical Commission sent out Weule, it was still committed to the empirical imperatives of the disciplines it encompassed. It thus necessarily conceived of anthropology as collecting objects and, to a lesser extent, making empirical observations. Weule's brief was to spend eight months in an area in northern Tanzania between Lake Eyasi and Lake Manyara where, Weule claimed, 'in the space of just a few geographical degrees a large portion of the racial elements of the population of all of Africa is united. It is, as has been noted often enough, the scene of a regular ethnic tumult.' This ethnic mix was in part the result of the northern plantation economy, which drew workers from all over Tanzania. Weule intended to collect artefacts from all of the groups in this area, observe their 'economy, morals, and customs', research their histories, and record their language.³⁷ Weule's initial plan was entirely consistent with conventional museum anthropology. Indeed, his contract with the Geographical Commission discussed only his 'scientific collections' and their disposal.³⁸ He chose an area that would allow him efficiently to collect artefacts and observations from a maximum number of societies. Junior anthropologist often began their careers with several collecting trips, and Weule's expedition was unusual only in that it was funded by the Foreign Office.

Only after his arrival in Africa was Weule integrated into the programs of colonial espionage and economic development in southern Tanzania. When he landed in Dar es Salaam, the German governor persuaded him to change his research location from the North of the colony to the South, which had been the scene of intense fighting just months before. Moving the expedition to the war-torn south of the colony meant that Weule would be less successful in assembling museum collections, which had been the initial focus of his trip. This move made no sense in terms of the disciplinary goals of anthropology or of his mission. Weule found that the war had made anthropological collecting in the South difficult: 'Unfortunately the beautiful, old cultural property of the Muera, Makonde and others has been in parts completely destroyed by the uprising. Elsewhere it has remained intact. It is necessary to study it before a further uprising completely destroys the old here forever.'³⁹ Weule found that individuals would not sell him those objects that had survived the fighting because they thought it would be impossible to replace their own possessions in the postwar conditions of scarcity. The devastating aftermath of the Maji

Maji uprising thus, at least in part, conditioned Weule's turn away from collecting material culture and toward what he called, in his shipboard screen memory, the 'higher part' of anthropology, 'the study of mental culture'. He certainly did not give up collecting, and, by the end of his expedition, he had gathered 1,640 objects. However, working in an area that had recently been a war zone forced Weule to focus on research less directly related to expanding museum collections.

The change in fieldwork location from the North to the South of the colony transformed Weule's expedition from museum collecting into an intelligence-gathering mission for the German Colonial State. As the governor explained to Weule: '...the people in [the northern area you originally wished to study] will not run away from us; however, this is a constant danger among the inhabitants of [the South], who would all too gladly move to the Portuguese territory, if they are not happy with us. Go there, study them: that will certainly do no harm to your science, and it will only help the colony.'⁴⁰ The governor thus recruited Weule, who had gone to East Africa as a museum collector, for the project of state, capital, and science formation in the South, with the peculiar problems of counterinsurgency it involved. In retrospect, Weule's neglect of collecting might seem like a logical development of his discipline from the armchair to the field. However, at the time it was a break from the discipline of anthropology.

Counterinsurgency operations did not merely push Weule away from collecting objects; they also helped him carry out what he dubbed 'colonial folk research' (*kolonialen Volksforschung*). Weule explained that the presence of large numbers of colonial officials in the hinterland of the South due to the counterinsurgency allowed him to 'push into the soul of the people' (*Eindringen in die Volksseele*) in a way that would otherwise have been impossible.⁴¹ To help this 'folk research', the government made available the services of a certain Norwegian by the name of Herr Knudsen. Knudsen had been a vocational teacher in Lindi before the Maji Maji uprising. He spoke Yao and had led a commando of *Ruga Ruga* against the insurgents.⁴² The German government provided Weule's expedition with 12 police soldiers, firearms and ammunition, and a German flag that indicated the expedition was on official imperial business. Weule remarked that this gave his expedition, 'an impressive appearance' that helped his work by securing the co-operation of the Akidas and the village headmen.⁴³ For the first week of Weule's travels, until he reached Massassi, this already martial expedition was accompanied by District Chief Ewerbeck and well-armed African troops whose counterinsurgency operations were combined with Weule's own tour.

As they marched into villages, local leaders assembled their people so that the military could mete out punishments to suspected insurgents, including whippings, sentences of forced labour, and death by hanging. The assembled people offered Weule 'photographic subjects that would never come before the camera of a private researcher on his own'.⁴⁴

Weule hoped his anthropological research would assist, or even directly contribute to, the kind of counterinsurgency operations to which his own expedition was attached: 'I have crawled into hundreds of Negro huts... searched every corner, collected, sketched, or noted everything remarkable.' Weule suggested forming a group of 'men... who combine [anthropological] expertise with strong will power' to carry out this sort of research in the future. It would be 'the task of the colonial government to employ them for the benefit of science and the glory of the fatherland'.⁴⁵

A number of Weule's African employees made sketches that give an African perspective on Weule's expedition, the aftermath of Maji Maji, and German rule more generally. Juma's drawing of a chain gang (Figure 11.1) suggests a canny understanding of political and economic discipline, emphasizing the regimentation of bodies produced by neck chains, the discipline that turned African individuals into the evenly spaced, abstract workers necessary for the commodification of labour power and thus the accumulation of capital. Juma's representation of judicial lashing (Figure 11.2) reveals the fate of those Africans who dared step outside the regimentation of commodified labour power. The outstretched arms and splayed fingers of the victims make tangible both the pain of the whipping and, in combination with the station-



Figure 11.1 Juma, 'Chain Gang in Lindi'. The figure on the far left appears to be an armed overseer with a shouldered rifle.

Source: Weule, 'Ostafrikanische Eingeborenen-Zeichnungen'.



7. Strafvollzug in Tschingulungulu

Figure 11.2 Juma, 'Punishment in Tschingulungulu'.

Source: Weule, 'Ostafrikanische Eingeborenen-Zeichnungen'.

ary legs, the inability of the victims to escape German captivity. In his article about the drawings Weule justified cruel German punishments, explaining, 'imprisonment would be a kind of reward for Blacks, since they would not have to work'.⁴⁶

Weule's expedition made a great loop around southeastern Tanzania and focused on studying the Yao, who had been an object of German economic interest since the turn of the century, when Mataka's plans to move to the German territory sparked hopes of great development in the South. This was likely the government's motivation for sending along Knudsen, whose linguistic expertise allowed Weule to research Yao 'puberty customs, around which everything here revolves', courtship and marriage practices, and matrilineal structures.⁴⁷ The combination of matrilinearity with 'big man' politics, as Felicitas Becker has shown, formed the core of Southern Tanzanian politics in this period, and was a source of confusion to the German colonial administration.⁴⁸ The expedition even took on a directly diplomatic function when Weule and Knudsen visited two major Yao leaders in the German territory, Matola and Nakaam. Weule also tested the reliability of Yao workers by paying them in advance to deliver ethnographic objects to Lindi. When the goods arrived safely, Weule concluded that the Yao would make proficient and honest workers.⁴⁹

Weule also researched the other major ethnic groups in the South, considering their abilities as plantation labourers, their political loyalty, and their potential as taxpayers.⁵⁰ He concluded that, aside from the Muera, the people of the South could once again be trusted after the

conflict. Although the Makua might have become even better workers than the Yao might, they were, Weule claimed, less loyal and might flee to Portuguese East Africa at any time. The Makonde, with a population Weule estimated at 80,000, could be very important for the East African economy. However, he cautioned, as long as they remained 'hidden in the bush' it would be impossible 'to master them in a regular fashion and make them serve in any way, either as taxpayers or as plantation workers'. 'The only solution', he concluded, 'is to concentrate them in large settlements, where one can easily oversee the people and their deeds. Such a relocation would be difficult to initiate because the new lifestyle would run contrary to the old Makonde habits, but it would not be impossible.'⁵¹ Weule reported that all of the peoples of the South farmed at a level far above that associated in the popular mind with the concept of 'natural peoples', and thus 'the Negro of the South could be educated to a still higher level' in agriculture.⁵² He encouraged the government to continue the development schemes that it had initiated before the Maji Maji uprising.⁵³ Weule assured the readers of his popular travel account that, despite the recent uprising, the people in the South were just as intelligent as Europeans and were, therefore, 'capable of development' (*Entwicklungsfähig*). He concluded his book with the proclamation, common in German colonial propaganda, that one day there would be a 'German India in Africa'.⁵⁴ Weule had fully abandoned the anthropological terminology of '*Naturvölker*' for the new colonial ideology of 'educating the Negro to work'.

By the end of November 1906, after six months travelling in Tanzania, Weule was ready to return to Germany. However, he had one final task. Just after he had left for Africa the Berlin museum curator Felix von Luschan received notice from the Colonial Office that, in putting down the Maji Maji uprising, German troops had captured more than 4,000 weapons, mostly muzzle loaders, spears, bows, and arrows. Since Weule was already in East Africa, Luschan asked him to oversee the packing and shipping of the collections.⁵⁵ After inaugurating a new 'colonial folk research', Weule was now being reintegrated into the traditional tasks of museum anthropology: labelling, packing, and shipping. In doing so he shifted the captured weapons across the permeable boundary between counterinsurgency and science. Weule took a few objects for his Leipzig museum and mailed the rest to the Berlin Museum of Ethnology, as his contract required. Luschan was disappointed to find, however, that the spears, which formed the bulk of the collection, were mostly not traditional handiwork but rather weapons improvised for a mass uprising. Such objects bearing traces of the modern histories of

'natural' people had, in Luschan's words, 'practically no scientific or market value'. He considered sending the objects back to East Africa to be sold to tourists, but managed in the end to get other anthropology museums in Germany to take them.⁵⁶

The incommensurability of the Maji Maji spears with the museum-based anthropology of 'natural peoples' reveal some of the mechanisms driving the shift of colonial knowledge and colonial practice from passive museum collecting to active colonial development. On the most obvious level, the spears were themselves fashioned for a war that helped determine the economic development of Tanzania. The material culture of the Maji Maji uprising – like the uprising itself – gave the lie to attempts to grasp Africans as ahistorical 'natural peoples'. Anthropologists had long been aware that their terminology of *Naturvölker* was inadequate to the people they encountered, who were, in fact, obviously in the process of historical change. Since, however, they had no other concept for their objects of study, anthropologists stubbornly sought the remnants of ahistorical *Naturvölker* in the changing people of Africa.⁵⁷ Representing Africans as 'Negroes' was not simply preferable to grasping them as autonomous equals. This colonial appellation also reflected a specific stage of Tanzanian economic history. The concept of the 'Negro' allowed Weule to think about Africans as regularized, though historically changing, objects of anthropology because the discipline that also produced capital and state effects rendered Africans as regularized, though historically changing, subjects. Weule's disdain for museum work, in his imaginary shipboard conversation, was in fact only made possible during his fieldwork by the integration of anthropology into colonial counterinsurgency. The discursive shift from 'natural peoples' to 'Negroes' was not merely a shift in free-floating images of others. Rather, those who brought about this terminological shift helped transform the political economy of Eastern Africa from commercial extraction to state-driven economic development.

I have tried to show that science, the state, and capital are parallel effects of colonial discipline and counterinsurgency. The three depend on what might be called surplus discipline.⁵⁸ Marx has made most familiar the role of surplus discipline in the production of capital: capital is the product of abstracted labour power stored as 'dead' labour. To abstract labour power from real, living workers, to exploit labour, requires the discipline promoted by the factory, the plantation, and indeed by the entire social apparatus. Capital requires individuals not simply to produce, but to provide regularized, predictable, quantifiable, and, ultimately, abstractable labour; this is precisely what Kwai was

working on when it measured Nyamwezi productivity in rupees per hectare. The state not only plays a role in the reproduction of capital through further disciplining labour, but also is itself, no less than capital, the result of surplus discipline. This is why German officials in east Africa were keen to spread labour as a form of discipline and, after Maji Maji, as a form of counterinsurgency in the south as well as the north. If the state were to be more than a roving gang, it had to transform its territory into what the above-cited report called 'an organic whole' under the singular control of the state as subject-effect. Capital plays a role in the reproduction of the state as much as the state plays a role in the reproduction of capital. As capital becomes an agency, a subject-effect, with a monopoly over legitimate labour discipline, the state becomes a subject-effect with the successful claim to, in Weber's famous phrase, 'a monopoly over legitimate physical violence' within a given area.⁵⁹ Science, finally, as a third effect of surplus discipline, is an effect of the ordered world produced by discipline: that science has a world of regularized phenomena at all results from the regularization produced by discipline, whether the discipline of laboratory procedure, the factory, or the state.⁶⁰ There were no 'Negroes' for Weule before colonial projects of 'cultural elevation' created them, just as there were no 'natural peoples' for Weule's anthropological predecessors before simple colonial exchange created the world of supposedly natural African objects to which they belonged.

As I have tried to show for the case of German East Africa, state-, capital- and science-effects are inextricably intertwined. All three were subject-effects of colonial discipline, and it would be impossible to isolate all the activities of any given actor in just one of the three realms. Yet each of the realms depends, for its legitimacy, on a retroactive transformation of the effects of discipline into subjects causing discipline. Each of these newly invented subjects must purify itself from the other two, so that it appears as autonomous, self-causing, and independent. Capital is thus retroactively posited as an autonomous realm – the economy – in which economically rational 'Negroes' come to work for rational capitalist-planters or sell their goods to commercial capitalists. The state is retroactively posited as a leviathan-subject that rules an already given population. Science is retroactively posited as a result of creating and knowing subjects, rather than being itself an effect of discipline, of counterinsurgency, that produces both subject and object of knowledge, both the scientists and the orderly world they study.

The intermingling of state, science, and capital are commonly regarded as corruptions of previously pure entities only because they

are mistakenly held to have once been autonomous in some prior, more innocent age. In fact, these supposedly pure entities are themselves screen memories covering a real history of discipline, of insurgency and counterinsurgency. In this article I have tried to show how, in German East Africa, the three effects of science, capital, and the state were coproduced, and then how this coproduction was forgotten, masked by screen memories of subjective autonomy for each. German East Africa is a particularly important case, for it was, as Lugard was perhaps the first to recognize, a paradigmatic modernizing state in Africa, and the colonial has been the most empirically prevalent form of modernity. Thus, I hope, interpreting Weule's screen memory of his conversation with the curious women travelling first class to German East Africa has shed light on how the coproduced effects of discipline, of insurgency and counterinsurgency, are imagined as its autonomous causes. The memory that Weule 'really' wanted something in German East Africa, and that this real want determined the course of what only retrospectively could be called his anthropological fieldwork, both obscure, but is the real result of, the colonial regime that also produced state and capital effects. Finally, this analysis of Weule's screen memory suggests that Africa, far from being a peripheral point where modernity was applied, has in fact been a place from which modernity has emanated.

Notes

This chapter is a shortened version of Andrew Zimmerman, "What do you really want in German East Africa, Herr Professor?" Counterinsurgency and the Science Effect in Colonial Tanzania', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48 (2006), pp. 419–61. The longer version contains more extensive discussions of the primary and secondary literature I relied on in this essay.

1. The German colony did not include the island of Zanzibar, as Tanzania does today, but did include the Sultanates that are today Rwanda and Burundi.
2. Karl Weule, *Negerleben in Ostafrika: Ergebnisse einer ethnologischen Forschungsreise* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1908), pp. 15–21.
3. I treat the history of German anthropology in the age before fieldwork in *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
4. Suggestive in this regard is the discussion of Kant, Copernicus, and Kuhn in Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, Sabu Kohso, trans. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 29–44.
5. Such latent ideology is what Louis Althusser called 'the spontaneous philosophy of the scientists', in 'Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists' (orig. 1967), in Gregory Elliot, (ed.), *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster et al. (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 69–165.

6. Awarding the Nobel Prize similarly acknowledges the active role of subjects in scientific knowledge, although the prize committee has aroused less ire than has science studies.
7. For an excellent example, see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
8. See Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, 'Introduction: Locating the Colonial Subjects of Anthropology', in idem, (eds), *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 1–52.
9. Important for my thinking about the field have been the works of Bruno Latour, especially *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
10. See George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
11. Timothy Mitchell, 'Society, Economy, and the State Effect', in George Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 76–97, p. 91.
12. Juhani Koponen, *Development for Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884–1914* (Helsinki: Tiedekirja, 1994).
13. Frederick D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire*, 2 vols (1893) (London: Frank Cass, 1968), I, pp. 389, 402–3.
14. For a survey of the literature on this topic, see Anton Markmiller, *'Die Erziehung des Negers zur Arbeit'. Wie die koloniale Pädagogik afrikanische Gesellschaften in die Abhängigkeit führte* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1995).
15. Booker T. Washington collaborated with German colonists in Togo directly, sending Tuskegee students and faculty member to set up a cotton school in that colony. See Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Zimmerman, 'A German Alabama in Africa: The Tuskegee Expedition to German Togo and the Transnational Origins of African Cotton Growers', *American Historical Review*, 110 (2005), pp. 1362–98.
16. Zache to GEA Government, 23 Jan. 1900, sent by the Governor of East Africa to the Colonial Section of the Foreign Office, 27 June 1900, BArch, R1001/220, Bl. 12–83.
17. Zache to GEA Government, 23 Jan. 1900.
18. Ibid.
19. On Mataka and the history of the Yao, see Edward A. Alpers, 'Trade, State, and Society among the Yao in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 10 (1969), pp. 405–20. On Southwestern Tanzania in this period, see Felicitas Becker, 'A Social History of Southeast Tanzania, ca. 1890–1950' (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 2001).
20. Contract between Mataka and Bezirksamt Zache, 20 Sept. 1900, BArch, R1001/220, Bl. 102–4.
21. Götzen, Denkschrift über die Ursachen des Aufstandes in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1905, 26 Dec. 1905, printed for the German Reichstag, BArch, R1001/724, Bl. 30–35. The official report was sent by Götzen to the Colonial Section of the

- Foreign Office, 10 Nov. 1905, BArch, R1001/723, Bl. 149–53. See also Haber (Dar es Salaam) to Götzen, 9 Sept. 1905, BArch, R1001/726, Bl. 80–90.
22. Götzen, Denkschrift über die Ursachen des Aufstandes in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1905, 26 Dec. 1905, printed for the German Reichstag, BArch, R1001/724, Bl. 30–35.
 23. Haber (Dar es Salaam) to Götzen, 9 Sept. 1905, BArch, R1001/726, Bl. 80–90.
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47. Karl Weule and Fritz Jäger, 'Zweiter Bericht über die landeskundlichen Expeditionen der Herrn Dr. Fritz Jäger und Prof. Dr. Karl Weule in Deutsch-Ostafrika', *Mitteilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 20 (1907), pp. 106–14.
48. See Becker, 'A Social History of Southeast Tanzania'.
49. Weule, *Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse*, p. 140.
50. See *ibid.*, pp. 139–46.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
54. Weule, *Negerleben*, p. 511.
55. Foreign Office, Colonial Division to Luschan, 7 May 1906, Archiv des Museums für Völkerkunde, Berlin (MfV), IB78, 1009/06.
56. Luschan to the Director of the Colonial Section of the Foreign Office, 15 Mar. 1907; Luschan to the Director of the Colonial Section of the Foreign Office, 12 Apr. 1907; Colonial Section of the Foreign Office to Luschan, 18 Apr. 1907 MfV, IB 78, 308/07; Luschan to the Secretary of the Imperial Colonial Office, 3 June 1907; Luschan to Wilhelm Foy, Director of the anthropology museum in Cologne, 13 July 1907; Luschan, Memo, 30 July 1907; Luschan, Memo, 30 July 1907.
57. See, for example, Felix von Luschan, 'Ziele und Wege der Völkerkunde in den deutschen Schutzgebieten', *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Kolonialkongresses 1902 zu Berlin am 10. und 11. Oktober 1902* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1902), pp. 163–74. Luschan still regarded anthropology as salvaging the remnants

- of natural peoples, but also recognized that these natural peoples were undergoing historical changes.
58. Lacan has argued that surplus enjoyment is the general form of which surplus value, as described by Marx, is an example. Since, for Lacan, the essence of the superego is the command to enjoy, that is, that enjoyment is the essence of modern coercion, it makes sense in the present context to use the term 'surplus discipline'. See especially the explication of Lacan's seventeenth seminar offered by Mark Bracher, 'On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses', in Mark Bracher, Marshall W. Alcorn, Ronald J. Corthell, and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (eds), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 107–28.
 59. 'The state is that human community, which, inside a specific area – this area belongs to the characterization [of the state] – successfully claims a *monopoly over legitimate physical violence* [*Gewaltsamkeit*].' Max Weber, 'Politik als Beruf' (1919), in Johannes Winckelmann (ed.), *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, 3d ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971), pp. 505–60, 506.
 60. Jeremy Bentham was perhaps the first to recognize the identity of laboratory, factory, and state in his 'Panopticon, or, the Inspection House', in John Bowring (ed.), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, vol. 4* (reprint, New York: Russel and Russel, 1962[1843]), pp. 37–172.

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