

### 第三周 马克思主义者的南亚、东南亚研究 (2021.3.25)

*'To put it another way: if we take A to be the general history of Holland, AB to be the history of Dutch Indonesian relations, and B to be the history of Indonesia, what we have here in effect is AB offered to us as a substitute for B which remains largely unwritten [...] The foreign relations approach is like an automobile headlight on a moonlit night; it illuminates a part of the scene very brightly but distracts attention from the rest. Turn off the light and things which were always there appear again in all their detail.'* (John Smail)

After reading John Smail's *On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia*, it made me curious as to the psychological dimensions of colonialism that are productive of a paranoia in the metropole, where everything that happens routes through the coloniser, all changes are his cause, his movement. I found an essay by a PhD candidate Bilal Ahmed at SOAS in London, [Marx in British India](#) which critiques Marx on this point, 'in Marx's analysis, the British were bound to force India through a bourgeois revolution, because they would crush feudalism under the demands of modern industry. Villages would be connected by roads, telegraphs, and railway networks. Modern institutions would be supported by a skilled national military. In short, the British Empire would lead to modernisation, creating a newly centralised India, liberated from the oppressive isolation of rural life and the backwardness exemplified by the caste system.' Ahmed however questions Marx's historical materialist reading of Indian history. Marx believed that the Mughal Empire had stagnated to such a degree that it was bound to be conquered eventually, and that Indian rural life was isolated and disconnected. Ahmed suggests Marx projected readings of the English, French and German peasantry onto an Indian context, it was curious reading Marx write of India as 'an Italy of Asiatic dimensions, or, from a social perspective, resembling Ireland. Ahmed notes, Marx 'predicted that the caste system would be flushed out by capitalist modernisation, as part of the British Empire's destructive and regenerative impact on India.'

In reality, however, the British Raj ended up formalising castes in order to manage labour more effectively. Marx's prediction was incorrect and based on a flawed historical vision where remnants of feudalism must *necessarily* be wiped out as capitalism evolves.' I was curious as to whether the driver in Marx's thought lay closer to a more general paranoid psychological apparatus of the metropole in which historical progress only existed and could be effected by the coloniser. Ahmed doubles down on the scholarship of Aijaz Ahmed who writes that, 'rather than the British crushing feudal backwardness, as Marx had predicted, they simply served as an external agent that dealt the finishing blow to a decaying civilisation that hadn't quite yet been overthrown by *significant internal movements that preceded their arrival*. "Colonialism did not bring us a revolution. What it brought us was, precisely, a non-revolutionary and retrograde resolution to a crisis of our own society."

The *significant internal movements that preceded their arrival* parallels the account of John Smail documenting the tendency of Southeast Asian historiography to 'reduce the general history of modern Indonesia to a kind of history of foreign relations between the Dutch and the Indonesians.' Against Lieberman's 'law of Southeast Asian inertia', or Marx's image of isolated village inertia, Smail states that Indonesian society was coherent and alive and not merely a rubble used by the Dutch for a new building, a society which, by being alive, generates its own history - which like any other history must be seen first of all from the inside - and does not merely receive it.' Smail documents the scholarship of de Graaf, Hall, Sanusi and Vlekke on the Aceh War where each author fails to mention the ancient rivalry and dominant theme in Achenese history of a power struggle between the secular elite (the Teuku) and the religious elite (the Ulama). He writes of the idea of sequences, 'we are opening up the possibility of seeing the Aceh War as part of a completely different sequence of events from the sequence it usu-

ally appears in, that is the expansion of Dutch rule.’ Smail continues, with the so-called Darul Islam rebellion in Aceh in 1953 we are dealing here with a completely autonomous historical sequence which intersects at certain points, notably in the Aceh War and in 1942, with sequences from Netherlands Indies history. However it cannot be understood from a Dutch-centric view of history.

I found it interesting how Smail traces post-Independence Indonesian scholarship which can be angled toward over-emphasising the domination of the coloniser, an inverse pressure to the paranoia of metropole scholarship; Smail’s rejection of the notion that control logically implies the insignificance or feebleness of the controlled rather than a more complex reality of active psychological activity by dependent elites; Smail’s observations of scale, ‘the Dutch were never more than a tiny minority in the East Indies, in a 1930 census about 100,000 versus 60,000,000 Indonesians’ (for this Smail draws on Von Leur’s scholarship, ‘cutting the VOC and Netherlands Indies down to size, destroying the myth of 350 years of Dutch rule’, reversing colonial history to assert that for Indonesian history in the Company period it was the Indonesian world and not the Company that was the more important’; and Smail’s provocation of passing candle-light: *For if the Indonesian world grows more and more insignificant as the Dutch march heavily through the 19th century and into the 20th, if it recedes more and more into the passivity of a “closed continuity” as van Leur suggested elsewhere (pp. 278-9), we have less and less reason to want to look at things from an Indo-centric point of view. What then? Does the torch pass, by default, to colonial history with its Europe-centric point of view?*

In a [blog](#), an unnamed author traces the young Dutch historian J.C. van Leur’s project before his untimely death in the battle of the Java Sea at the age of 34. van Leur ‘denounced the writing of Indonesian history through European eyes – “from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading house”, as if nothing could happen without a European being present, or at his instigation. It dismissed the idea that the arrival of Europeans by sea in the sixteenth century had transformed Asia’s trading economy. Instead, Europeans were latecomers in a huge maritime commerce, pioneered by Asians, linking China, Japan, South East Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and East Africa. Far from awaiting the Promethean touch of merchants from Europe, a ‘global’ economy already existed.

Toward the end of his article, Smail traces out elements of a subaltern scholarship for Indonesia, noting how an emphasis on internal history enables us to fit the great bulk of the people into the historical picture; that by displacing our attention from the colonial relationship to the domestic history opens up new autonomous sequences like the birth of Indonesia as idea as fact and the growth of new classes by creative adaptation. Smail in this sense pulls the psychological profile and consciousness of the masses into the equation, away from the doldrumic view of inertial, primitive, village life that Marx and other elite metropole scholarship imagined. It also made me think of how subaltern writing frames the colonial contact; of orality and stories of the outside; of messages from Aceh or Batavia rippling into the distance, some disappearing; and the thought ‘if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? or tiān gāo, huángdì yuǎn and the markers of psychological distance. When Smail writes of autonomous sequences I imagined it in some telluric terms like a nuclear dynamo, rotating deep in the earth under Aceh, autonomous to the foreign waves of influence/interference, sending off differential messages into the psyche of the community.

Differential messages are raised by Gyan Prakash in his essay on post-orientalist scholarship. Prakash notes how Marxist scholarship aligns with subaltern scholarship in opening out the history of the oppressed, in the contestatory histories of domination, rebellions and movements. In the context of India, Marxist scholarship replaces the

notion of a homogenous Indic civilization with one of heterogeneity, change and resistance. Prakash however hazards against the attempt to proliferate histories from below into a Bakhtinian carnivalesque but as a means of engaging in the relations of domination. He interestingly quotes Marx's view that 'history would produce out of oppression, violence and cultural dislocation not merely new technological and social forces but also a new social consciousness in Asia and Africa.' Prakash argues that the subaltern studies project derives its force as postcolonial criticism from a combination of Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, Gramsci and Foucault, the modern West and India, archival research and textual criticism, and writes of how 'postcoloniality is not born and nurtured in a panoptic distance from history. The postcolonial exists as an aftermath, as an after - after being worked over by colonialism. Gayatri Spivak terms such scholarship catachresis, 'reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding. In this sense, I was drawn to the quandary of how 'histories written from below as documents of counterinsurgency can account for Smail's idea of autonomous sequences, or whether in demanding an opposition to the colonial present, such scholarship must generate an inverse paranoid account whereby all consciousness is directed to a history of the metropole-colony and its new beginning, hiding voices that lived a different sequence. Interestingly in Marx in British India, Ahmed returns to Marx, writing of how 'his fantasy of autonomous villages that need to be transformed by colonial capitalism is difficult to distinguish from the petit-bourgeois myth of rural purity that currently drives violent movements like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

I was also drawn to the tenets of Smail's arguments on autonomous sequences and the cinematic form. This week I watched the Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene's 1966 *La Noire de* for a different course in Comprehensive African Studies. The film is centred on Diouana, a young Senegalese woman who moves from Dakar, Senegal to Antibes, France to work for a rich French couple. The psychological dimensions of colonialism emerge in the film, I later found an article on 'the construction of French-dominated colonial Dakar, 1857-1940' after finding Dakar in the film disorientingly mirror-like. On subalternity, there is also a sense of visual short-circuitry or autonomous sequence loss whereby left unwritten or out of the lens is a history of Dakar or Diouana's life as anything beside its relation to the metropole. I was also curious as to how Sembene's work intersected French New Wave cinema's experiment in multiperspectivity, the writing of Frantz Fanon on the psychological effects of colonialism, and the intersection of cinema with subaltern voice, *automobile headlights on moonlit nights, opacity, internal movement, belts, roads, tides, inertia, dynamos, contact zones, autonomous sequences, elision, depth, distance, paranoia, metropole, elite, masses, scale, perception, reality, control, the psychological vitality of that 'isolated village'*.

## References

马克思：《不列颠在印度的统治》、《不列颠在印度统治的未来结果》

Gyan Prakash, *Writing post-orientalist histories of the Third World: perspectives from Indian historiography*

John Smail, *On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia*

J. C. van Leur, *Indonesian trade and society; essays in Asian social and economic history*