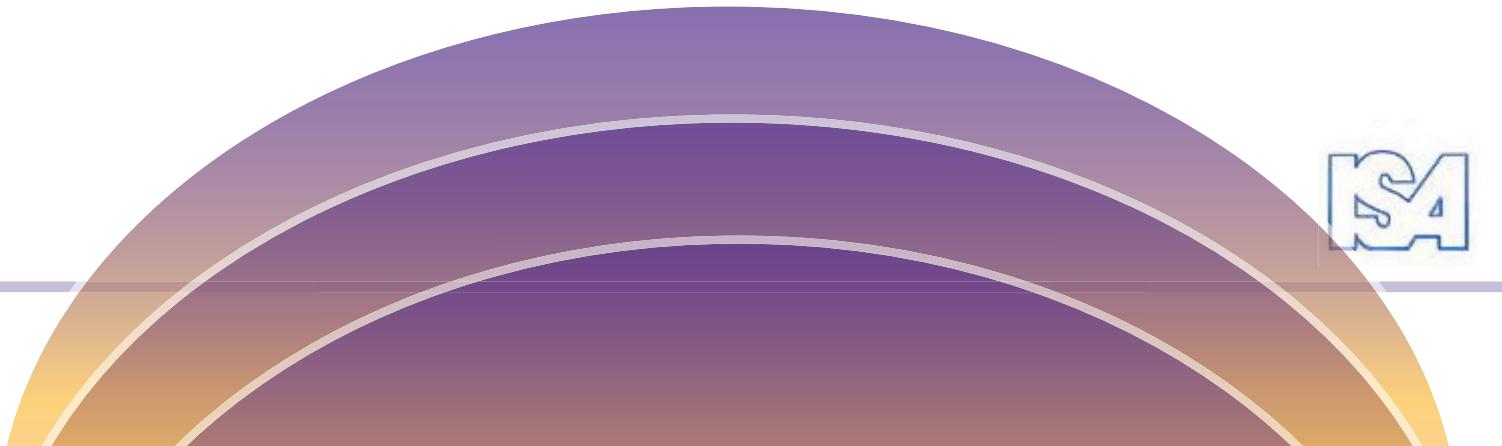


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Number 11, November 2008

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The eleventh issue of the ISA E-Bulletin carries diverse contributions from social scientists placed globally and in a variety of media. The essays segment features an article by the late Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, ‘Science and Society Forum: Science and Change’ while the interview segment travels to Australia and listens in on a conversation between Michael Roberts and Sophia Rainbird, based at the University of Adelaide. This issue introduces a segment on ‘Visual Essay,’ with a fascinating piece, ‘Murder Murals: A Cultural Adaptation to Urban Violence’ by James B. O’Kane, James M. O’Kane, and David Carbone from the United States of America. The ‘Reporting a Conference’ segment continues with a contribution from Roxana Waterson, who writes about the The 14th Sardinia International Ethnographic Film Festival, held in Nuoro, Sardinia, from 15-21 September 2008.

I am grateful to fellow sociologists who have supported the ISA E-Bulletin as contributors and readers. I look forward to many more suggestions, feedback and of course, contributions.

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“Science and Society” Forum: Science and Change¹

Syed Hussein Alatas
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Syed Hussein Alatas was previously Professor at the Institute of Malay World Civilisations (Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu), National University of Malaya. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Amsterdam in 1963 and became lecturer in the Department of Malay Studies at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. He subsequently took up the position of Professor and Head of the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore, which he held from 1967 to 1988, before he assumed the position of Vice-Chancellor at the University of Malaya from 1988 to 1991. He authored many publications, amongst which included *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (Frank Cass, 1977), *Corruption: Its Nature, Causes and Functions* (Avebury, 1990), and *Corruption and the Destiny of Asia* (Prentice-Hall, 1999). He passed away on 23 January 2007 in Kuala Lumpur.

In September 1886, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche made the following observation: “The utility involved in the unchecked investigation of knowledge is so constantly proved in a hundred different ways that one must remember to include in the bargain the subtler and rarer damage which individuals must suffer on that account. The chemist cannot avoid occasionally being poisoned or burnt at his experiments. What applies to the chemist is true of the whole of our culture. This, it may be added, clearly shows that knowledge should provide itself with healing balsam against burns and should always have antidotes ready against poisons.”² In human society, there is always more than one angle to everything. Let us take skillfulness. It is a gain to society if we have

¹ The paper was presented at the ‘Science and Society Forum’ on Friday, 30 January 1981, at the Singapore Science Centre.

² F. Nietzsche, Human All Too Human, page 18, tr. P.V. Cohn, Foulis, London, 1911.

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skillful policemen, but it is a loss to society if we have skillful bandits. As for the bandits, our prayer should be that they become forever stupid, whereas for the policemen that they become increasingly clever.

Scientific knowledge and preoccupation with change have accompanied human society for at least 3000 years. What is the relation between the two? A major purpose of science is the introduction of change. One is change in our apprehension of the truth. Until the modern period in Europe, the earth was believed to be the centre of the universe. Now science has changed our worldview. The sun is the centre of our universe. There is a Greater Universe yet unknown. There are several systems in this Greater Universe of which ours is only one. This is simple change in the perception of the truth. This kind of change does not change the being of man or the being of the universe.

There is, however, another kind of change brought about by science. That is change affecting human society: change in understanding and control of diseases, of food production, of means of communication, of manufacturing, of building, of means of leisure, and innumerable other constituents of human social life. What has emerged as a problem is the change in the conception of change itself.

Until the 19th century, the conception of change is interlocked with other values of life considered to be of permanent validity. The idea of change is not dislocated from its purpose of conserving something of permanent value. In the course of several centuries, for instance, the marriage laws of Europe have changed. But this change was supposed to preserve and make more meaningful the institution of marriage based on monogamy. But now, there is a suggestion that we should do away with the institution of

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marriage as such. This change is of a different nature than that pertaining to marriage laws.

The idea of change has been extended in scope to cover all possible areas. It is here that certain serious problems emerge. This idea of change is what I would call run away change. It is a change with no permanent direction; a change for the sake of change arising from boredom; a change which is not interlocked with abiding values; a change without profoundly anticipated consequences. The driving force behind this attitude towards change is a philosophical outlook dominated by relativism and the idea of progress.

Relativism does not attach any permanent validity to ethic and moral values and their function. It has been reinforced by the Darwinian theory of evolution wherein the survival of the fittest becomes the overriding consideration. The notion of change is then applied to anything that attracts attention without serious appraisal of its effects on other values. It has, for instance, been suggested that we should drastically decrease our sleeping time.

It is believed that some marine animals never sleep, although they presumably rest. Prodigies like Thomas Edison slept two to three hours a day. The advocate of changing our sleeping time hopes for the following: "In any event, some prodigies, like Edison, have been able to lead active lives on two or three hours of sleep a day, while medical science has reported cases of individuals who have not slept for years at a time and have apparently been none the worse for it. Even if we cannot abolish sleep

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altogether, it would be an immense gain if we could concentrate it into a very few hours of really deep unconsciousness, chosen when convenient.”³

Watching television is one of the reasons given to shorten our sleep: “It seems very likely that the development of global TV and cheap telephone networks cutting across all time zones will lead inevitably to a world organised on a 24-hour basis. This alone will make it imperative to minimise sleep; and it appears that the means for doing so is already at hand.”⁴ The human need for long sleep is relativised to our external condition, not to any inherent biological need: “From hypnosis it is a short step to sleep – that mysterious state in which we fritter away a third of our pitifully brief lives. No one has ever been able to prove that sleep is essential, though there is no doubt that we cannot do without it for more than a very few days. It appears to be the result of conditioning, over eons of time, by the diurnal cycle of light and darkness. Because lack of illumination made it difficult to carry out any activities at night, most animals acquired the habit of sleeping until the sun returned. In much the same way, other animals acquired the habit of sleeping through the winter, but this does not mean to say that everyone has to go to bed from October to February. Nor need we always go to bed from 10 pm to 7 pm.”⁵

The suggestion to change the length of our sleep, the relativisation of the function of sleep to light and darkness, the idea of progress involved, that we use our time for better purposes than sleeping, all these are the characteristics of run away change. To begin, mankind has not felt it as a problem because it needs sleep for as much as eight

³ Arthur C. Clarke, Profiles for the Future, pp. 222-223, Victor Gollancz, London, 1974.

⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 221-222.

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hours or more. The biological function of sleep in the length we are accustomed to is brushed aside. The rest and regeneration accomplished through sleep is not carefully appraised. The fact that babies naturally take to long sleep is not seen as an expression of inherent need by the organism.

It is true that it is difficult to decide the exact amount of sleep each individual would need. But to cut it down to three hours or none at all seems to be pressing the notion of change too hard. It is not only the idea which is suggested, but also the mechanical means to bring it about: "Several years ago, the Russians put on the market a neat little 'Electric sleep apparatus' about the size of a shoe-box and weighing only five pounds. Through electrodes resting on the eyelids and the nape, low-frequency pulses are applied to the cerebral cortex, and the subject promptly lapses into profound slumber. Though this device was apparently designed for medical use, it has been reported that many Soviet citizens are using it to cut down their sleeping time to a few hours a day."⁶

The idea of unbridled change with a far reaching ethical consequence is best exemplified by the development of the nuclear bomb. Let me first present the consequences which are already with us. Weapons of death have been developed to such an extent that their use will destroy the great majority of mankind and its habitation in the course of several decades. Not only their use, but the mere testing of such a weapon can destroy hundreds of thousands.

The testing of large superbombs causes radioactive fall out that endangers human life. The principal danger is the radioactive nucleus strontium-90. This fall out is taken up

⁶ Ibid., p. 223. The author received several enquiries from his readers who wanted to obtain the device.

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by plants and animals together with calcium. According to Linus Pauling, a Nobel prize winner, “Human beings eat vegetables and drink milk – all of the vegetables and all of the milk in the world now contain strontium-90. The human beings build some of the ingested strontium-90 into their bones, where it stays throughout the lifetime of the individual.”⁷

Strontium-90 is a terrible poison that did not exist before, except for a few stray atoms in uranium and thorium minerals. Now it has become worldwide and has entered the human body, causing bone cancer and leukemia in thousands of people. It was estimated that the testing of a superbomb of 15 or 20 megatons of nuclear explosive would cause the death of about 100,000 people in the course of some forty years, through bone cancer, leukemia, and other diseases resulting from the radioactive fall out.

What is the idea of change and progress involved in the development of nuclear bombs and the sacrificing of hundreds of thousands of lives arising from testing the bombs? What is the mind behind radioactive polluting of the earth’s atmosphere; the mind that knowingly accepts the consequent increase of bone cancer and leukemia? Such a mind is governed by the following considerations: (a) The value of human life is relative to the purpose; (b) Getting the country well prepared for war is the supreme value; (c) Any change that enhances the accumulation of power is to be pursued; (d) Science and technology are tools to be used without restraint in the interest of power and defence no matter what the cost is to human life in general; and (e) Ethics and morality are subordinated to the value of power.

⁷ Linus Pauling, No More War, p. 101-102. Victor Gollancz, London, 1958.

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The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has devoted some attention to radioactive pollution. Since this agency is a United Nation outfit, and since the United Nations is funded by the builders and testers of nuclear bombs, its attention on the problem is by way of merely adjusting to the situation, rather than censuring the builders of the bombs. In a seminar on radioactive contamination sponsored by FAO, a participant said the following: “Radioactive fallout from nuclear weapons affects the whole of mankind. It increases the levels of external radiation to which he is exposed and also increases internal exposure, either generally, or to specific organs. Other types of radioactive contamination, for example, that from atomic energy factories, are usually more localised in extent, and each presents its own problems.”⁸ The participant used the phrase ‘affects the whole of mankind’ while in reality it ‘endangers the whole of mankind’. Linus Pauling accurately sized up the situation when he said, “I believe that the nations of the world that are carrying out the tests of nuclear weapons are sacrificing the lives of hundreds of thousands of people now living and of hundreds of thousands of unborn children, and that this sacrifice is unnecessary.”⁹

The question of radioactive fall out is an excellent illustration to our theme, science and change. The advocates of nuclear weapon have that particular outlook on change and the function of science which has become a very serious problem. It undermines our deepest moral convictions. Change guided by power as the supreme value would create havoc in man’s social life. Through the revolutionary development of

⁸ W.T.L. Neal. ‘ Sources and Nature of Environmental Radioactive Contamination’, p. 19, in Agricultural and Public Health Aspects of Radioactive Contamination in Normal and Emergency Situations, FAO, Rome, 1964.

⁹ Linus Pauling, op.cit., p. 111.

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scientific knowledge, man has tremendously increased his power. But this power has to be subordinated to ethical values which will not allow it to become a problem.

If this power is regarded as an end in itself together with a similar attitude towards change, floating on a hedonistic individualism, more critical problems will emerge than we already have. One instance is pertinent here, that is what Herman Kahn and B. Bruce-Briggs call the pernicious ramification of technology. This time it involves the identification of the fetus' sex soon after conception and its consequences on human society. "Advanced technology," they say, "can force us into increasingly undesirable moral dilemmas. Take, for example, an immediate problem which may arise from the combination of our increasing propensity to use social engineering and technological advances. Despite the opposition to abortion by most Americans, 'enlightened' public opinion favours permitting easy abortions on the grounds that 'a woman has an absolute right to do as she pleases with her body'. As a result legislatures and courts, perhaps more sensitive to the moral values of 'the classes' than 'the masses' have been easing abortion laws. But to our knowledge, no one involved in the abortion debate has volunteered the information that Israeli scientists claim to be on the verge of being able to identify the sex of fetuses very soon after conception. Now it is easily discovered by polling or casual conversation that more people prefer boy babies than girl babies, at least for the first child. This preference plus early sex identification plus abortion on demand may give us a substantial disparity of boys over girls in a generation. What will this do to society? Will we have widespread homosexuality or matriarchy or polyandry or perhaps collective

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property in women, or will we have some complex means of regulating who can abort what and when? Many people would rather not have to deal with such questions.”¹⁰

Another instance is what an enthusiastic advocate calls ‘artificial baby’. This is an idea going beyond test-tube fertilisation. “Already,” the enthusiastic author says, “embryos of mice and rats have been kept growing in an artificial environment until the main organs have formed and the heart is beating. After that, an artificial placenta is needed to provide the embryo with the right nutrients. An artificial placenta could save the lives of many premature babies, and is therefore quite likely to be developed by 1980. If so, artificial babies may be seeded by 1990. What is more, they might be healthier and more intelligent than ordinary babies, because the artificial placenta would provide the embryo with just the right nutrients, temperatures, and pressures at each stage in its growth. Some mothers of the 1990s might prefer to avoid nine months’ hard labour, and obtain a better specimen of a baby by sending the fertilised egg to be forcing-house, just as better plants can be raised in a hot-house than in the rigours of an open garden.”¹¹

The chaos that would result from the above can be imagined. The philosophical outlook behind it would welcome donation from males and females considered to be genetically superior. Such collection of couples would be able to donate hundreds of embryos without the ability to look after them all. They would either be distributed for adoption or brought up by the state or a social institution. A differentiated sense of identity would emerge between the artificially and the naturally confined babies.

¹⁰ Herman Kahn, B. Bruce-Briggs, Things to Come, pp. 208-209, Macmillan, New York, 1972.

¹¹ Desmond King-Hele, The End of the Twentieth Century? pp. 106-107, Macmillan, London. 1971.

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The effect on the female population is here ignored. With the elimination of the childbearing role, would it not influence the normal biological growth of the female organism? What about the legal and ethical aspects of paternity? Who would have the right to donate and the right to receive? Who would plan for what kind of babies? Clearly, this is a direction of change which would lead to many pitfalls. The underlying outlook is to strive for novelty, to extol man's power of manipulation, to give full reins to science and technology, to adjust and discard ethical principles that do not fit the purpose, to glorify rational and scientific engineering to the exclusion of its effect on human nature and society, and to consider moral values as secondary to scientific and technological possibilities.

Underlying this outlook is the fallacy that whatever is possible in science should be pursued. It has been common knowledge for decades that we know and have the technique to stunt the growth of man. But we do not do this. The case can be made that man can live happier if his size is decreased. A case can also be made for the reverse. We do not wish to tamper with human nature to this extent because of the risk involved, the numerous possible consequences, and the chain reaction such an ethical explosion is likely to cause.

A nihilistic superbomb has been exploded. We are now experiencing the fall out. It is entering our minds and unless we are vigilant, it will affect our spiritual health. The thing to do is to reinforce our organisms with the nourishing elements which has so far contributed to our health. These are our moral and spiritual principles derived from the belief in certain absolute values, one of which is that knowledge should not be pursued or

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applied without any restraint, any assessment of ethical relevance, any relation to its ultimate source, the divine entity. It is the perfect sufficiency of the creator and not the creature that becomes the cornerstone of our orientation.

This orientation has been strenuously questioned since the European Enlightenment in the 18th century. The emphatic rejection of religion had led to the exaggerated dependence on science to the extent that progress in science is directly correlated with the improvement of morality. The philosopher John Dewey was a clear embodiment of this tendency. The most pressing problem of the modern world in Dewey's opinion is to replace the authority of tradition by the authority of science.¹²

Dewey wants to replace the authority of religion with the authority of science as a system of belief governing human behaviour. He says, "The scientific method that we advocate is the antithesis of this method based in supernatural mystery. The scientific attitude places emphasis on fact, [this] follows observation and investigation of fact with a judgment about its value. Realism recognises only fact and judgments based in fact; it is loyal to fact, no matter where such loyalty leads. Thus, the first reconstruction in our ways of thinking calls on us to recognise only facts. Authority which cannot be justified on the basis of fact must be rejected, even if it has been operative for thousands of years. Speculation cannot provide authority of the sort needed in the modern world; observation and analysis of fact can."¹³

¹² Robert W. Clopton, Tsuin-Chen Ou (eds.), John Dewey – Lectures in China, 1919-1920, p. 167, The University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1973.

¹³ Ibid., p. 169.

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Science, in his view, influences moral life in creating hope for a better world and producing a new kind of honesty. “I do not mean,” he says, “that honesty, as such, is a result of the development of modern science; all of us know quite well that honesty is one of the most important of the traditional virtues. But we must recognise that it is not easy for us always to be honest, because in order to be honest we must have some truth to tell. All too often something appears to be true, but later experience proves it to have been false. The development of modern science enables men to pursue truth, to discover what things actually are true, so that they can be fully honest in talking about them. Before modern science developed, the universe seemed to be full of irregularities, and this circumstance often made the pursuit of truth impossible. Even when it was possible, men still encountered many difficulties. Consequently, there were many handicaps to honesty, even when men wanted to be honest. When nature was presumed to lack systematic order – an assumption which made man’s study of nature impossible – the desire to tell the truth was stifled under the pressures of selfishness, prejudice, partisanship, and other external forces.”¹⁴

It is apparent that the above is a one sided view of the influence of science. Science, by itself, is not an independent force external to man. It is the human beings that apply science whether it is for good or evil purposes. Dewey saw mainly the good sides. That contemporary science and technology can also introduce serious moral problems as we have shown earlier was played down by Dewey, not because of the time he lived in, but because of his bias towards science as the foundation of belief.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 242.

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His contemporary, Albert Schweitzer, writing in the same period offered a different view. He spoke of the decay of civilisation and pointed to many spiritual problems of the West. He did not talk of the improvement of morality. On the contrary, he was concerned with the collapse of civilization.¹⁵ It is his insight, and not Dewey's that portrays more accurately the condition of the modern world.

¹⁵ Albert Schweitzer, The Decay and Restoration of Civilisation, Part 1, C.T. Campion. Black, London, 1932.

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In Conversation with Michael Roberts

Interview by Sophia Rainbird
University of South Australia

Educated in the discipline of History at the University of Peradeniya and Oxford, Michael Roberts taught at Peradeniya from 1966 to 1976 before moving sideways into Anthropology at the University of Adelaide in 1977. His many publications encompass social mobility, social history, agrarian issues, peasant protest, popular culture, urban history, caste in South Asia, practices of cultural domination, and nationalism. His main focus has been Sri Lanka, but there have been ventures into Indian socio-political history, Australian myth making and the sociology of cricket; while his present concern is a comparative study of martyrdom. He is one of the central figures behind the new site <http://sacrificialdevotionnetwork.wordpress.com/>

Sophia Rainbird is an anthropologist with an interest in migration, particularly asylum seekers and refugees and their interactions with host communities. Her theoretical foci include speech acts, ethnicity, whiteness, identity, and social justice. She has worked with several NGO's both in Australia and in the UK providing consultancy, research, case work, and community education. She is currently a researcher based at the University of South Australia.

[Audio Part 1](#)

[Audio Part 2](#)

Sophia Rainbird (S.R.): Alright, so maybe we'd start at the beginning and you can tell me a bit about your background and how your background has influenced your interests.

Michael Roberts (M.R.): Well, yes, especially for a foreign audience, I think this is necessary. Now our family background is rather unusual in the sense that my father is a barbarian and came out to Sri Lanka way back in the British administrative service, and then after his first wife died, his second marriage was to an Anglicised Sri Lankan but her

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father, my mother's father was Sinhalese but had died way back, and her mother was a Burgher, so she was mixed, but was important that she was Anglicised, you know, Westernised English-speaking. So for one thing we were English speaking at home and my Sinhalese is just, at that stage, was just street Sinhalese, and you know basic Sinhalese. That's one aspect of the background. The other is that unlike the vast majority, virtually 99 per cent of the Sri Lankans, I didn't have any local ethnicity because Sri Lankans ethnically are divided into majority Sinhalese, Sinhalese-speaking, Tamil-speaking. Then there are the Muslims who are roughly 6 per cent, now 7 per cent, but 6 per cent then, Tamil-speaking at home, but an ethnic category in relation to Tamil and Sinhalese, although they are Tamil speaking. So here Muslims when we say Muslims, we are talking about Muhammad and Moors, who are also, also called Muslims or *Marakkala*, and so ethnic category when in the same sentence with the Sinhalese and with the word Singhala and Tamil. But there are also Malays, a very tiny ethnic community who are not Tamil speaking at home and who could be Malay or speaking Sinhalese and English, and there are Colombo Chetties, the Burghers, they are very tiny communities. There were also Malayalam speakers called Cochinese. And the Sinhalese language actually distinguishes between the Malays (called *Ja* or *Javun*) and the Yoni or Sonahar which is for the Moors; but in English that distinction disappeared under the word "Muslim." So anyway, that's the general background, but our family, being only made up of one lineage of West Indian descent on the patrilineal side we didn't have any ethnic group, because there were no other West Indians – well other than the Rock family. So in that sense in Sri Lanka I didn't think about my ethnicity when I was at

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school. So in that sense, you know, most Sinhalese would be Sinhala and Sri Lankan, right, and then Tamils would be Tamil and Sri Lankan. I didn't have that subcategory, but anyway it was not important for me. If I was asked what I was at the age of 16, I would have said I am a Roberts or that I am an Aloysian, which was the school I was at, you know, Aloysius, so Aloysian. So I would have said "Aloysian," because school identity was very important. And so I didn't have an ethnic category [that is, sub-category].

Again, I didn't have good Sinhalese-speaking ability, though I did Sinhalese as a subject. And the other thing was that in my time when I first entered school, all primary and secondary education was in the English language. So all around us we spoke English. It was only about 2 years behind my entry into the educational stream that they the school system started switching to the vernaculars and that English became a second language at school. "Vernacular" means either Tamil or Sinhalese. So I was ahead of that switch – hence my poverty in Sinhala knowledge then.

S.R.: So at that time you were at school, even the people who would consider themselves as ethnic Sinhalese, they were English speakers.

M.R.: Yes, generally all the time at school, even though some of them were not very proficient, but they went back home and they would have been speaking in Tamil or Sinhalese as the case may be with their kinfolk. And of course some of the Sinhalese and some of the Tamils were highly Anglicised too, you know. I mean even at home some of them spoke English. But that was at the top level, or upper levels; whereas the middle,

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lower-middle class, and working class would be doing their subjects in English, speak in English in school, but go back home and be speaking in the vernacular. I think that it is fairly important for those outside Sri Lanka to understand this.

S.R.: Yeah.

M.R.: And then I went to university from late 1957 and there again you know just as I was not political at school, I was not very politically aware at university, I was very heavily into sport, I didn't know much about the Sinhalese caste system, all that sort of thing; whereas most Sinhalese, the majority, 95 per cent of them would have been very familiar with some of the caste aspects. So would the Tamils, but I didn't even know the names of the castes, you know.

I did three subjects in my first year: Geography, Economics, History were my choices. Everybody had to do three subjects. You only specialised in the second year and most of my, well, most of my peers that did reasonably well in their first year, went into Economics because that was the way to get a better job. And I thought of it because I had got a B in Economics but I had received an A in History and I was more comfortable with that subject. So I did 3 years of History, and then I did fairly well in History and I got a temporary assistant lectureship, but then that...

S.R.: Was that in Sri Lanka?

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M.R.: In Sri Lanka, it was at the Peradeniya campus of the University of Ceylon, but it's now a university, so we say Peradeniya University. By the way our university was a campus university, so it was ... you got to know [people well]. Some of my best friends are from there. But again we were mostly English speaking in the campus, and as I said I was Westernised, so my knowledge of local politics was very limited, my knowledge of Sinhala was limited. But, then, when I was given this job, I had to teach in Sinhalese and it was a big struggle.

S.R.: Wow.

M.R.: And I was just a temporary assistant lecturer, but I had got a scholarship to England, I mean we [our family] didn't have the money to do that [finance education in UK], and I went on my scholarship to England, and the subject I pursued was History of course, because I had done my undergraduate speciality in that field. I went to Oxford and did my Ph.D. Now this is the other aspect of the background. History teaching in Sri Lanka were very much in the British empiricist tradition, right, fairly positivistic, but I think it was a good time that I went to University. We had some good teachers, right, very good teachers, and in fact my guru, so to speak, suggested, like other prospective University lecturers were doing, to take a British governor and cover his period, but I didn't do that. Very quickly, I switched to looking at what would be called "agrarian policy" and that was partly because of what we had done as our special subject. There was a big commission in 1832 that effected what was called the Colebrook-Cameron

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Reforms and we had specialised in studying those documents and from that I became interested in what can be referred to as “processes,” namely, the economic changes that were taking place, so I began to look at British agrarian policy – it was really intellectual history, it’s not really a study of impact.

So that’s what I did at Oxford over 3 years. The thesis is very full of data, I think, again highly empiricist, perhaps not sufficiently critical of the British, and totally difficult to digest for any reader. It’s not been published as a thesis [book]. But what I’m stressing here is that I didn’t focus on a narrow period of governorship. I looked at a longer stretch, I began to look at the intellectual history of that period, and then I wrote on the coffee plantations because Sri Lanka was first a coffee country, not a tea country. Tea came in the 1880s. There was a disease that wiped off coffee so I looked at that what’s called “the coffee period.” That took three years, and I enjoyed my time in Oxford, because I was playing cricket and soccer and rugger as well. And then I stayed on to do oral history on retired British civil servants. I got a grant through Sri Lanka, through the Asia Foundation in Sri Lanka and did that oral history gathering. For that I had to do some readings, so I got to know more about the 20th century. I did that for about four or five months in Britain. The Asia Foundation in Ceylon financed me for that [work], [using] one of these old-fashioned tape recorders. So I had to learn more about what happened in the 20th century. I already knew I had a job in Sri Lanka so I went back to that job and teaching in Sinhalese and that was again, a bit difficult, because one had also to mark scripts, 500 scripts a year.

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S.R.: So you were still learning Singhalese as well?

M.R.: I was still learning Sinhalese. Well, struggling, but I learnt enough Singhalese to lecture. My Sinhalese even now is not 100 per cent proficient. It's a kind of educated, stilted Singhalese that I utilise. Sometimes people at street level find it a bit, a bit, well, I suppose quaint – you know, unusual, good but quaintly good, yeah. So anyway teaching in Sinhalese, I improved my Sinhalese.

I never published my thesis but while I was waiting in England for my viva and also while I was doing this oral history project, I did more research. You see, my thesis stopped in 1871 which is not a good date, it's a census date, but it was not a good date to end on for the themes I chose. So I went into [that is, did more work on original sources up to] the 1880s, a decade when the coffee decline occurred and then the grain tax was also knocked off. The grain tax was one of my chapters, you know, what's called the paddy tax. So I'd done more research beyond my thesis when in England. Thus, rather than publishing the dissertation I was able to produce several spin-off articles, about six or seven of them, especially on the wastelands policy, which was a big issue, and on the paddy tax and so on and so forth. I suppose the distillation of my thesis comes in three chapters in what's called the *History of Ceylon*, Volume 3, which was published by University of Ceylon as it was called. This tome was edited by K. M. De Silva and I had to distil my research findings because that was Professor K. M. De Silva's order: that we had to distil it and avoid many footnotes. Therefore, I think what I know, what I learnt during the thesis...that came out in 1973.

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But note that I went back to Sri Lanka in 1966 you see: so those spin off articles from the thesis have come between 1966 and 1973 so to speak. But it was, I suppose, empiricist history but focusing on intellectual policies and agrarian policies. So it's a policy study analytically speaking. I suppose even there – and even with my work on nationalism – one of the simple metaphors I tend to use is strands, currents, trends, you know that sort of thing, because...those notions of process. Some of these [strands] can interweave and interlink and can overlap because they are not, they don't cover the whole span of any subject. They are a stream within a subject, so I tend to use that analytical tool, a metaphoric tool. But so that was agrarian policy understood as a sort of intellectual history, but with some attention to impact too but at a very broad level because it's very difficult [to decipher consequences in detail]; we don't have the data to look at the detailed impact and there are policy shifts as well which you can study because that is at the statutory level.

But because of that oral history project [that] started in England, I then continued it in Sri Lanka while I was teaching. This work of interviewing I did mostly in Colombo in Sri Lanka because it is the dominant centre and everybody retired there. So I began to look at, to interview retired Sri Lankan civil servants, having done the British guys. Then, while I was about it, I began to look at politicians – those guys never retire. Most of them were still active, because there was a period between 1931 and '48, '56, where there was a transfer of power taking place from the British to the Sri Lankans, but the administrators were fairly powerful then, but they had to cope now with this political influence, so [I focused on] this whole interplay between politicians and civil servants

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and with the British at the top, as well as the Sri Lankan civil servants who had to cope with the British as well as their local politicians. So in that way I got to know a lot of twentieth century politics and twentieth century history and obviously twentieth century nationalism because of the transfer of power. I did that intermittently between '65 and '69, a lot of interviews, a lot of effort, only some of [those interviews] have been transcribed. I started transcribing the recordings. Shona [my wife] was at home, didn't have a job for a while, so she was doing the transcription, but I had to check everything and I just didn't have time, so we stopped transcribing ...

S.R.: So I guess historically what you have been studying, you were working your way up to the...

M.R.: Yeah I did.

S.R.: So you had a very good understanding of their ...

M.R.: I wouldn't say "very good," it was actually, rather what I discovered from their responses. Interviewing was a very tiring process, but well, I think very good for my own education, because I was interacting with the whole breadth of political opinion; and I got to know more about the twentieth century politics. But then nationalism comes into my focus quite accidentally because some student journal asked me to write something, I dashed off something on the nationalist movement and they published it. Then I thought I

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should work that up and I gave this draft to my guru, Mr Labrooy – a teacher who had never ever published anything, you know, but he was a good scholar. He methodically tore it to pieces. So I decided I had to focus on the first part which was on the social background of the people in the 19th century who became nationalists.... 19th century and 20th century nationalists, so I began to look at the social background of those whom one could call the bourgeoisie. I didn't use that word then, [for] I don't think "bourgeoisie" quite captures it [the social formation] because I would use the word "middle-class" which is part of folk usage – a term which refers to those who are dominant but not because they necessarily had property – [since] the bourgeois category refers to property-owners who employ labour, but because they, the middle class, had the English language, they had powerful positions, they had status, they had style. So that's where the Burghers were also important in British Ceylon because they didn't have much property, but they had connections, they had the English language, and they had important positions, so I was really looking at the growth of the middle class, though the concept I used was just "elite," you know, which Marxist Sri Lankans didn't like and they challenged it but they're still using it now.

So I began looking at the processes of elite formation and I eventually focused on a particular Sinhalese caste, the Karava, who are "typically associated with fishing" – a phrase that must be used carefully [for] this didn't mean they were only limited to fishing way back in time. Anyway, the Karava produced a lot of the early entrepreneurs and plantation owners and some of the educated as well. But I didn't only look at them: it became evident that they were a key element in the early sort of middle class elite or

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bourgeoisie or whatever you call it, they were bourgeois and middle class, these categories kind of overlap. But from about 1968/69, I was looking at the process of elite formation and also examining the implications and effects this process was having on nationalism.

Thus, as part of that work – when was it? [1969 or so] – so that's what I began working on as my new topic, but interlinking with the nationalist movement. And then I, being a historian, I also studied what was then called the 1915 riots. At that stage, I still used the word “riots” which is a British legal term. In 1915 because of disputes over religious processions in some areas, they didn't attack the Malays, the Sinhalese had attacked the Moors, right, and attacked their mosques and all. I now call it a pogrom, but I didn't use the word “pogrom” then. I just used the historiographical language of that day, namely, “riots”, to refer to this event. This event took place in 1915 May, June, over five, six days, they [the Sinhalese] kind of terrorised the Moors except in a few localities where the Moors had some clusters you know, some muscle to prevent themselves from being assaulted. So I did some work on that then, I wrote some articles which were in a seminar series which I was heavily involved in, a series called Ceylon Studies Seminar, from 1968/69 at Peradeniya University.

We had this interdisciplinary seminar series held in the Sociology Department with Gananath Obeyesekere also involved, because he was head of sociology, but with historians, economists and others, so we were really interested in what was happening in Sri Lanka, past and present, sometimes it was very contemporary. We had scholars speaking on the Marxist movement and so on and so forth, some very lively debates, but

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totally interdisciplinary, hard-hitting too some of them. We also started a new journal: a group of the younger scholars started a new journal called *Modern Ceylon Studies*. So really we were very much into what was happening in Sri Lanka in the contemporary present as well as the recent past, not so much ancient past, all of us, and a very lively group. Therefore, that's I suppose what interested me in a whole range of subjects. This meant that you were crossing disciplines right! I suppose I was still very much in the empirical tradition, but I think being analytical on the basis of empirical data you see. And since I was interacting with people like Kitsiri Malalgoda, Obeyesekere, Seneviratne, and others,¹⁶ you know, I was picking up sociology as well.

And then I went abroad to USA on a Fulbright for one year 1970/71. After I came back, so you see all these stresses, you know, apropos to your questions is prior to the Singhala-Tamil conflict. I started a course called 'Nationalism and its Problems'. So I got interested in nationalism because I was studying what was called "Ceylonese nationalism" – that's what you call "Sri Lankan nationalism," rather than Sinhalese or Tamil. But invariably the Sinhalese and Tamil strands are in conflict [with that form of thinking, Sri Lankan nationalism of a trans-ethnic kind]. What happened in 1956 [was that] what was called Sinhalese linguistic nationalism, came to the fore in the elections of 1956 electorally. That meant there was always that conflict between Sri Lankan nationalism and Sinhalese nationalism. And with the Tamil Federal Party emerging as a political force, we knew that Tamil nationalism was also around. So I had got interested

¹⁶ All these names pinpoint lecturers at the Dept of Sociology, Peradeniya University. Gananath Obeyesekere then moved to Seattle, San Diego and Princeton and Seneviratne ended up in Anthropology at the University of Virginia, while Malalgoda moved to Anthropology in the University of Auckland.

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in nationalism partly because of that, but also partly because I was interested in the growth of Sri Lankan nationalism in the world context.

One cannot look at Sri Lankan nationalism without looking at, I was teaching European history as well, so we had to look at the growth of the nation-state in Western Europe. And one aspect of our History Honours course when I was an undergraduate had been a subject called “Southeast Asian History,” so because of that I knew a lot about Japan and China and Indonesia and other places and so on and so forth. So I had that background [to focus on nationalism in the global setting]. Of course, India was always very important. So the Indian nationalist movement was also encompassed by my course on “Nationalism and its Problems.” After I came back from USA in 1971, I launched this new course at Peradeniya in 1972 and it was one of the subjects I taught till I left in ’75.

S.R.: So that’s when you came to Adelaide?

M.R.: No, actually I first went to Germany on a Humboldt Fellowship from mid-’75 but by that stage, we were struggling financially [in Sri Lanka]. I didn’t have any property. By the way, my father may have been middle class but he didn’t have any property, at least not in my time, so we were comfortable but we didn’t have property. He had left for England [circa 1961] and was living with my elder sister in England. My mother had divorced long before I had left earlier... My other sisters, well, most of them were in Sri Lanka; they were okay, those who were married were okay [financially]. My spinster sisters were poor actually, but anyway we didn’t have property, and Shona and myself

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had two children. We knew we couldn't survive, so when I got this Humboldt award in 1975, we packed up all our furniture up and kept it in a store in Sri Lanka because I was looking for a job outside and luckily, ah yes, fortune I suppose, I had met Bruce Kapferer when he was researching in Sri Lanka, and yeah I'm jumping ahead a bit, but Bruce Kapferer and I had got together, on several occasions because he was working on a project with the Karava caste migrants from my hometown of Galle. That is, we had been exchanging information – [for he] was very open with his information. I gave him mine and he his. Then one day in passing he mentioned he had just got the job as a founding professor in Anthropology in Adelaide, and he said, "We might be interested in a social historian" which was what I was by then you see. So, when I was in Germany, by pure chance – Kapferer didn't tell me because he's not a good correspondent – I saw an advertisement in a British newspaper for a job in Anthropology in Adelaide. So I applied for that. It was a good time [to seek jobs in Australia] unlike now. It was a period when there were jobs available and they [the Department of Anthropology] already had – I did not know this – they had already planned a big urban study project in Colombo ...

S.R.: Oh right, from Adelaide anthropology...

M.R.: In Adelaide anthropology, Kingsley Garbett and others, 3 of them were going – I did not know this when I applied – they had this project on the drawing board, so I think they felt that it would be good to have a local guy in their team and therefore in the department, and so they didn't mind having a social historian as long as I moved in an

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anthropological direction. So that was my next stage. But I should emphasise that apart from doing that course on “Nationalism and Its Problems,” while I had stopped doing my interviews in 1969/70, they were all there on tape and so on and so forth – and by the way copies of the tape are in Barr Smith Library here and in the Rhodes House Library; that’s a different project, that was done later, copied into cassette but now we must get them onto DVD – but I want to say, the other aspect was that while doing this course on Nationalism at Peradeniya University and also doing a course on European history, I had got involved in editing the documents of the Ceylon National Congress. This was a mistake I made because I had, during my interviews, I had discovered these documents, one set with a chap called Gilbert Perera but the other set with J. R. Jayewardene who later became the President of Sri Lanka. Jayewardene had been the last secretary of the Ceylon National Congress, which actually went defunct only in 1950 – everybody thought it was in ’48 but actually that political association lasted till 1950. And I went to Jayewardene – he’s kind of related by marriage, but I had never met him – and asked him whether he had these documents. This would have been in 1969. He was a minister in the government then, and I said, well have you got these documents because you were the last secretary. He summoned a dispatcher and this fellow brought out boxes and boxes of stuff. Then he said, “When we were secretaries, we thought about editing these but we never got round to it.” He’s a very poker faced bugger. I said, “Can you, can you loan them to the Archives [Department of Government Archives] so that they can take microfilm copies.” He didn’t say anything. I couldn’t read his face, but then he said: “Will you edit them?” So I had to think quickly because I wanted to get them to the

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Archives. Like a fool I said “yes.” What I didn’t know was that he was in charge of the Archives, he was Minister of state, but he was also Minister of Culture, which meant the archives were also under him. I didn’t know that. So he arranged for it to be done and the next government¹⁷ continued to do it and they sent all the documents to the library in Peradeniya and they gave me a typist who used to come everyday and I used to supervise her copying the stuff so I was involved doing that for the Archives while I was teaching as well from 1971-75. So those, I will show you that...

S.R.: That must have been years work...

M.R.: That was about three-four years work. So but I got to know more about the nationalist movement in doing that and so that’s how I got involved. Also don’t forget I had done the 1915 riots, and so that’s the history side of things. Once I was in Heidelberg on the Humboldt Fellowship I concentrated on writing up the introduction to the congress documents, while also editing a book on the subject which brought together essays by others,¹⁸ I was doing all that, so from ’72 to late 70s I was heavily into the nationalist movement in my writing because [my] agrarian stuff was now out of the way, most of it.

S.R.: And that continued on...

¹⁷ The UNP lost the general elections in mid-1970 and a new ULF government came to power.

¹⁸ Roberts (ed.) *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Marga Publications, 1979).

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M.R.: Well no, but don't forget I was also working on elite formation so – looking back now – it was serendipitous, because I came here to Adelaide in early '77 and then I had to struggle to teach anthropology. So it was a whole new learning process and god knows when I was lecturing, what the students got from me! I don't think they got much. I was not one of the stars in the department, I was just a marginal figure [in the department] I think. But anyway, intellectually teaching anthropology made me more theoretically oriented, though I still I think I tend to work out of data, work outwards, rather than being the other way, having a theoretical issue and then looking for data. But what my shift to Adelaide anthropology did was, okay, it influenced to some extent my writings on nationalism, but what it helped was my writing about the elite formation and the rise of the Karava.

I don't call it the rise of the Karava. I had a paper long ago called "The Rise of the Karava Elite," not just the Karava, because it was just a small group within that caste formation that rose; but you see the Karava were low in the caste hierarchy, in rising, they [their leading elements] challenged the top caste [Govigama] who are also the majority caste, about 50 to 60 per cent of the population, they were literally the highest. The Karava are relatively small in numbers, well maybe 8, 9 per cent of the total Sinhalese population – certainly more numbers than some of the other castes, but they were still small relatively. In the late nineteenth century they began to challenge the superior Govigama caste and to say "we are superior, we are from the Kshatriya varna," "we are warriors," and so on and so forth. So there was a status struggle taking place, ... but the foundation for this push was economic strength and English intellectual capacity

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as well so it was not just the.... So while I was looking at the processes of the growth of the middle class I was always engaging the political implications. And a fair number of the Karawa were part of the Ceylonese nationalist movement as well you see, so there were leadership elements as well. So I began writing that up and that's the book that came out in 1982. I'll show it to you. I think it's called *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation*, produced by Cambridge University Press. So coming into Adelaide anthropology helped me to give my research work a more sociological and broader cast.

Actually when the manuscript was sent to Cambridge University Press, I got anonymous referees reports and you know it [the book] was mostly focused on Sri Lanka for obvious reasons. I mean it was a big subject because I was covering the period 1796 to 1931 – 1931 because universal suffrage came in 1931, and that gave the majority Govigama caste more power, so in a way, you know, it [the year 1931] was a sociological stopping point. But the Cambridge University Press' referees wanted me to link what was happening to what was happening in India. Now, I knew a fair amount about that topic but [the referee reports] forced me to do an extra chapter. I told them: "Look here, I can do that but then that will be another chapter, and it'll increase the volume and length." Normally they [publishers] like to keep books tight. But they, CUP, didn't mind that. So in a way their suggestion was good; actually I supposed it was good for me because some Indians may have read the book or may have at least read about the book. Anyway, I did what they asked and they accepted it and it came out in 1982. As a book, it addresses socio-historical economic processes, [and] there are economic dimensions to it, and that's where my earlier work on the plantations and on the economic processes also became

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very relevant to the research on elite formation. Thus, all those lines [of research] fitted together.

S.R.: Yeah and also the links between the Tamils in India and the Tamils in Sri Lanka?

M.R.: No, not that, the links were not that way. I had to look at the literature on social mobility in India and the processes of caste conflict in India, that sort of thing. I had to address the writings of people like David Washbrook, Chris Baker, Gordon Johnson; a lot of the Indian historians were looked at, and also Indian sociologists: Srinivas for example. I'd had to read a lot on India. I already knew a fair amount because of undergraduate studies in Sri Lanka [where] Indian history was always a major part of our undergraduate degree. But, and actually fortunately for me Susan Bayly who's a historian – she is American, no back then it was Susan Kaufmann, who became Bayly – she wrote a very critical review of my book, but focusing mostly on the Indian aspect. So, I was able to send a sharp review article responding to her and all that came in *Modern Asian Studies*. So some Indians know my book not because they read my book but because they read this little bout ...

S.R.: When you were talking about looking at the challenges in Sri Lanka, at the time that you were looking at nationalism, and the different forms of nationalism, and you were going through the material you were archiving, at that point were you, was it at that point the difficulties between...

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M.R.: The difficulties were growing even in the late 60s. When I came back from USA in somewhere around August 1971, there had been an insurrection, but that had been a leftist insurrection already well viewed abroad. This was the JVP [Janatā Vimukthi Peramuna, which means “the National Liberation Front”] insurrection which had failed. So I came back during a hot political period, but there was a new constitution in 1972 and the Tamils were up in arms about that. Now, you see, through the Ceylon Studies Seminar we all had a whole discussion in Peradeniya on the new constitution. From meetings [i.e. chats] with Tamil lecturers and Tamil students in Peradeniya, I knew the stirrings that were taking place and actually I began to lose hope in '73. I knew [the political divide] was very serious. I knew it was very serious partly because I was not Sinhalese and not Tamil. Sometimes Sinhalese and Tamils used to say things when I was there, when there were only Singhalese or only Tamils, but I was there, they used to make remarks [about the ethnic other]. Actually, one piece of evidence came from Shona because she was also an outsider. And when I saw that Christian Tamils and Christian Sinhalese were making [jaundiced] remarks about the other ethnic [community].... Note that many people in middle class circles never knew the situation was serious, because at that level there was a lot interaction between the Tamils and Sinhalese – especially amongst the Christians. There would be much less interaction among Buddhists and Hindus, except in big festivals, right, other than big festivals. But at the social level there would be less, so then, by 1973, I knew the political situation was serious and one or two others agreed with me. Therefore, we actually organised a whole day conference on “The

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Sinhala-Tamil Problem” in 1973 October. So I knew it was serious then because we in Peradeniya were engaged in Sri Lankan affairs, we were concerned.

But that gathering on the subject, that whole day conference, only deepened my pessimism, and I think one of the best articles I’ve written was about this issue. I wrote it in ’75, ’76 when I was in Germany. I call it the best article because I forecast that Sri Lanka would go the way of Lebanon and Cyprus. That I wrote in ’75, ’76, though the article came out only in 1978 – for in those days, in those times, it took 2 years for an article to come out. The main point is that the initial draft version was penned in 1976. So, I had lost hope then and I was, I ended with that note that it would go the way of Cyprus and Lebanon. Thus, I was pointing in the right direction but I was also wrong because the way it went has been far worse than Cyprus, Lebanon, far, far worse. But I saw that it was going in that direction, so I would say that was one of my best articles because I was looking at “Ethnic Conflict and Sinhalese Perspectives: Barriers to Accommodation.”

So I was really analysing Sinhalese nationalism and why they can’t make concessions in terms of the political structures that were in place, the ideologies that were in place. So I would say that it was one of the best pieces I’ve written. It has been republished in a book of my articles, but I still think it was pertinent what I said then. But let me stress that I wrote it before I came to Adelaide, before I had been influenced by anthropology, so, so there is something to be said for the British empirical traditions [that informed my researches when I was in Sri Lanka].

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S.R.: I just want to ask you a question about, you said that you had this Ceylon group which was multidisciplinary and that seems to be something that you're doing now as well with your speaking to, you know, on the internet, you're putting your work in newspapers in Sri Lanka and in journals you know around the globe. Is that ...

M.R.: I hadn't seen the connection but you're right I suppose: that my multidisciplinary background helps. Frankly when people ask me whether I'm.... this or that, I hesitate. I think the historians [in Adelaide University] see me as an anthropologist, but I suspect that the anthropologists in my department are not sure: I think they don't quite see me as an anthropologist because I hadn't done standard fieldwork. You know, I've done a bit, bits and pieces [of fieldwork], but in a sense my fieldwork has been my focus on the Sri Lankan middle class. I'm middle class, Sri Lankan middle class; so my fieldwork is out of being 50 years of [within the] Sri Lankan middle class. [Anyway], I don't think you can do history, do sociology or anthropology without bringing politics into it so you're automatically a political scientist as far as I'm concerned.

S.R.: But you're very engaged with other people and getting other people to join in the discussion.

M.R.: Ah yes, but I suppose that started out in the Ceylon Studies Seminar. We did that, because you see in Peradeniya, it was relatively a small university and there was a common room, an Arts Faculty common room. There were linguists there, you know, all

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of us [from all the humanities disciplines] were there, well at least not everybody – [not every single person in the Faculty] – but all disciplines were there. And we were chatting there, so there was no, there wasn't this compartmentalisation you get in Adelaide you see.

S.R.: Yeah, and also when you put these articles online and have discussions among Sri Lankans, that really opens up your work to anyone who wants to join in these kinds of discussion. That gets a bit of feedback, I suppose...

M.R.: It does. Well I mean I suppose in a way you're performing and trying to influence people but I'm not very optimistic that the political position I take – which is Sri Lankan middle-of-the road, I'm trying to bring some sort of modus vivendi for the present conflict – I'm not very optimistic because, you know, you might have some status and your articles might be published in Sri Lankan newspapers, but we [moderate, middle-of-the-road people] are at the margins of power in Sri Lanka. We just have very limited power, and I'm not optimistic about it [the public writing] having much effect. But anyway you're trying to – at least hopefully – educate a few people, [trying to] moderate their extremism in a context where you're having two extremisms, and I suppose you're trying to do that, but in my case not very hopefully or optimistically. But at the other level by doing that I do get feedback and that's one way actually of picking up on popular culture of at least the, some elements of the literati, including expatriates and migrant Sri Lankans who have opinions and you get some understanding of their thinking. And you

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see, I'm not in Sri Lanka so I'm not reading the local newspapers, if I was doing that I would get local newspapers in Sinhalese. I can't read Tamil which is a restriction, so I don't have that raw data [in Sinhalese and/or Tamil], it's missing, and I'm aware of that. But this way [by writing in English on web sites etc], I do pick up information on some voices. The only problem is they – those who write comments – are anonymous names, you do not know where they are residing, you don't know their background, but at least it's some voice of extremism that you see. You're trying, you're able to try and decipher their thinking, even though some of the comments are puerile. But the point is that these are guys with opinions, they have some clout, so seeing where they are coming from, you know, so really you're getting data for deciphering their thinking.

S.R.: And do you know if they are coming directly from Sri Lanka or are they part of [the diaspora]?

M.R.: Sometimes you don't know where they are. Some of them, a few cases they would be Sri Lankan [at home], and this would be true for cricket [comments] too. But many of them are expats. Some of them, in some of the cases they indicate where they are. There's one extreme Sinhalese guy I know in the States because he has given some biographical data; but a few could be from Sri Lanka. A few sometimes you can't work out where they are.

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S.R.: Yeah, I was reading your paper *Emotion and the Person* and in it you encouraged social scientists to use other modes of representation other than, you know, looking at the semiotics of, you know, interviews. You were talking about looking at different ways of capturing, you called it revealing agential engagement in ethnic violence. I noticed in your work you have a lot of really graphic photographs and also you're using this internet as another mode of representation. Is that kind of your way of capturing what you're looking for, or you're trying to understand the unrest in Sri Lanka through different modes?

M.R.: I have forgotten what I have written in that [article]. But, yeah, that comes I think, but I know the history of that particular piece, but I can't remember what I wrote there. Okay, third or fourth stage, I can't remember the precise periodisation [that is, the temporal stages in the development of my thinking], but my study of suicide bombers and others is very recent [that is, it is a recent development]. But I was always very interested in extreme expressions of Sinhalese nationalism like the 1915 anti-Muslim riots, right. The next stage comes in 1983 when the Sinhalese-Tamil conflicts peaked to a high level – it had gone to other peaks subsequently – but in 1983, there were what I [initially] called the “1983 Riots” in July. That event was an absolute disaster [for Sri Lanka]. It was actually counterproductive for the Sinhalese. Those riots involved some government functionaries, but there was a lot of popular support as well. So, it [was] a dual process. And it was a disaster for the country and it really saddened me, it angered me, right, but I

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was here [in Australia]. I was not there [in Sri Lanka] during the riot. And so I began getting interested in these extreme forms of ethnic expression.

But as I said, I was angered too: there was one occasion when we were camping in the Gammons, and I got up early in the morning. You know, sometimes you have very lucid moments when you get up early and your mind is really working. Well, it was dark [when I woke up early there in the Gammon Ranges] and you couldn't go out and it was cold. And I had that lucid moment. In that lucid moment if I had the power I would have taken a machine gun and shot the whole cabinet of Sri Lankan ministers. That was my lucid thought for that day. I was so angry: so that [sentiment] had been there. Thereafter, reflecting on that feeling and then connecting the July events with the 1915 riots, I followed some Sinhalese scholars like Shelton Kodikara and Newton Gunasinghe and others who began to use the word 'pogrom' to describe the July 1983 incidents. I began to use the word 'pogrom' after that. I was not studying '83, I was still working on social mobility and the rise of the middle class; while at that stage, because of the Adelaide project on Colombo, I was working on a book which came out [eventually] called *People Inbetween*,¹⁹ right, which is also about the rise of the middle class and the growth of Colombo as what I call "a hegemonic centre." Note here the sociological language like "hegemonic centre" – invoking Gramsci and all that. So I was working on that subject in the 80s and I continued to work on that. But while I was in Sri Lanka for a long span of about 14 months working on that topic and beginning to write it up (it came out in '89) in the year 1987 I think, Neelan Thiruchelvam – a good friend of mine, Tamil, moderate, constitutional lawyer, and by the way Neelan was assassinated by the Tigers in July 1999

¹⁹ *People Inbetween: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790s-1980s, Vol 1*, (Colombo: Sarvodaya Publishers, 1989).

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because he was helping the government to form a new constitution and the Tigers don't like Tamils working with the government so they have killed a lot of Tamils who worked with the government – but Neelan came to me in 1987 and said, look, "We're having a conference in Kathmandu on various things, can you give a talk on the 1915 riots?" I had to do some quick work, but it was an educational journey for me. So when I began to use the word pogrom to describe both 1915 and 1983, it brought me back to ethnic violence at the street level.

It was because of Neelan and that conference, where I got to know Veena Das as well as other scholars, [such as] Ashish Nandy, it was an interesting conference ... [The tasks taken on for that gathering] brought me back again to the 1915 ethnic violence. I began to rewrite that subject ... Ah, what else happened? Yeah after I came back to Adelaide [from Sri Lanka in early 1988], a little later I got a short-term fellowship at the University of Virginia. Again this was in a multidisciplinary group: there were people in English, History, Anthropology there, a small group at the Commonwealth Centre for Cultural Change actually, so I was not attached to anthropology at Uni Virginia. While travelling to USA I went to Sri Lanka first, and then picked up information on the 1983 pogrom. And it was in Charlottesville, Virginia that I wrote *The Agony and Ecstasy of a Pogrom*.²⁰ That piece was written and that was, as I said, in a particular mood, that is a particular frame of mind. I was living alone for a while till Shona joined me, and I was a bit [isolated, lonely]. I was living quite far away from the university area and I was on my own but I was in a very particular mood. Therefore, the article Agony was a kind of a

²⁰ See Exploring Confrontation. Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), chapter 13.

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personal statement, a protest. It was a literary piece, written differently from my normal articles.

S.R.: That's quite a powerful piece that you wrote.

M.R.: Yeah. Now the Tamils are translating it too. And that's where the photographs came in. I picked up the early versions of the two photographs that are part of that essay from printed sources. I didn't know who the cameraman was then, but subsequently I got better versions from the actual cameraman. He was a Sinhalese guy, a very brave guy.... His pictures were taken at the height of the riot, flash photographs at night, thus dangerous.

So composing work on that topic was where I began to get interested in the emotional commitment which leads people to violence. And that's when I also decided – again I suppose this was a step into the comparative [dimension of ethnic violence]. You know, you can't bury oneself in one cave – and I decided I should study communal violence in India and I went and spent four, five months in India. This was financed mostly on our own money, but I had a fellowship in Delhi which gave me formal status. There I worked with purely on English language sources. I was also looking for photographs there, similar photographs of communal violence, from the, so I was beginning, I wanted visual evidence of the sort I got from Colombo, but discovered that it was very difficult to get, very rare to get, such scenes captured on camera. But the point

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here is that I was, I think, alive to the visual dimensions of life [and thus attentive to visual ethnography].

I would argue that this focus derived in large part from my engagement with anthropology. Anthropology made me alive to the force of the oral dimensions of life. I think this is where Benedict Anderson has misled people. I mean he [in *Imagined Communities*] said an important thing. He focused on textual sources and print technology, which is very important, yes, it's very powerful, but in the process together with the postmodernists, and maybe some other postcolonial writers, they are all very textual. They are looking at texts and studying texts all the time. Some of them do look at pictorial texts, and representation, but there's been no study of violent representation. I'm not saying that it isn't there, but some of these scholars have got so focused on the written texts that they have forgotten that as far as I'm concerned ethnicity comes [that is, ethnic subjectivity and relationality is shaped] through predominantly oral interaction. The other thing is that there can be illiterate people who are very learned. Because I mean in Indian and Sri Lankan cultures, this phenomenon prevails. This finding on my part derives through my subsequent [that is, recent] work on Sinhalese nationalism. I have been going into the 17th and 18th centuries and looking at the war poems. But, you know, earlier I have through anthropology, and through looking at Africa and other places, I helped edit something on oral history in 1982 with a chap called Kenneth Brown for the journal *Social Analysis*. So because of my oral history project I was always interested in oral interaction, but I feel that in the moulding of one's ethnicity, one of the most powerful influences is oral interactions and such things as funerals. Funerals are very, very

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important, weddings maybe too, but funerals more important than that. You can't look at Irish nationalism without looking at Irish funerals.

S.R.: Why funerals in particular?

M.R.: I don't know. It's your, it's the emotional welding. It's at funerary moments where women come forward, at least in the Asian context. At such moments the women of the bereaved will attack the enemy of the dead person verbally. I know of incidents when that happened. This is not to do with ethnicity, this has to do with [that is, it could be the product of, as it indeed is in most cases] family conflict. You have died and that means, you know, when somebody who has been abusing you, but who's connected to the family comes to your funeral, it won't be a male relative, but it will be your mother, your sister who will attack them. That's in the Sri Lankan context. Culturally, it will be they who will step forward and abuse the enemies of the bereaved. When Bandaranaike was assassinated -- he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk in 1959, but he had been, he was prime minister then, he had been having a severe conflict with one of his Leftist ministers. Philip Gunawardena. This Leftist minister, who was part of the Cabinet came to the funeral house. Mrs Bandaranaike verbally abused him and chased him out, and he couldn't do a thing: he had to leave, he was absolutely humiliated in public.

S.R.: Ah, even though he had nothing to do with the assassination?

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M.R.: He had nothing to do with that act, he had nothing to do with the assassination. So that's a cultural practice, that's why culture is also important. I mean I know of another case in the university relating to two senior colleagues of mine where that happened too; where the sister of the dead man chased the head of the whole university out. I don't know if she chased him or I don't know whether he managed to slink away somewhere.

S.R.: And in that paper *Agony and Ecstasy* you recount the story of a friend who was Tamil, not Sinhalese speaking...

M.R.: No, he was Sinhalese-speaking, he was not Tamil-speaking...

S.R.: He was not Tamil-speaking but he was Tamil, and he got caught up in a group of Sinhalese who were looking for Tamils to attack and it came down to his language for one thing. And I'm just thinking when you said the way you were brought up, you were speaking in English and Sinhalese as your second language, in a way, if you were focusing on language, you could have been in the same kind of circumstances.

M.R.: Yes, to some extent. There was one occasion I can still remember actually a student of mine but he was a political activist, he was the head of the [students'] union, but he was a history student [being taught by me]. He was actually helping me repair my scooter which had suddenly broken down, but at one moment he treated me as not quite Sri Lankan. You know, not in a bad way, but you know, I became aware of that

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perspective and of course you know, you don't particularly care for that sort of attitude even though one may not challenge it. Anyway, it registered. So....yes.

But note too that on other occasions they [Sinhalese people and Tamils etc] would see me completely as Sri Lankan. Whereas there could be circumstances where you would be seen as de-nationalised or not quite Sri Lankan – because that's the nature of nativism or indigenism. You know, you have to be rooted, you have to have the argot of the people. [If you don't, you may be deemed not wholly truly native].

S.R.: Yeah. And do you feel in a way being outside of Sri Lanka and part of the discourse of the diaspora of Sri Lankans that in a way you have more of a connection to Sri Lanka or it's easier for you to make that?

M.R.: Well I suppose, this happens to all Sri Lankans, of whatever ethnic background. Not all, but it can happen to a large number. Being abroad, you know there's nostalgia, there is connectivity with the land, and so your depth of feeling can actually increase. Actually some of the most extreme Sinhalese nationalists, and some of the most extreme Tamil nationalists are those who are abroad. Because they don't quite face the circumstances of terror as Sinhalese [or Tamils] in Sri Lanka do. Actually, their extremism is kind of not anchored, you know. Or, rather, it's anchored in a very peculiar way, in extreme ways. They don't have to make the compromises that Tamils and Sinhalese living in Colombo make in interacting with each other. Residents in Sri Lanka [of different ethnic backgrounds] avoid talking about the conflict, whereas here, Tamil

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and Singhalese extremists don't talk to each other but they would move in their own little circles and their sentiments get intensified. Moreover, they don't have to face the consequences of their extremism whereas sometimes in Sri Lanka they do.

S.R.: Yeah, so they don't have to check themselves in a way. Yeah. And in saying that you were arguing against the use of the term rootlessness, and you were saying it's more about...

M.R.: Actually their rootedness increases, the sense of rootedness increases sometimes. This does not happen to everyone, every migrant. There are some who quite happily discard their ethnicity. That's fair enough. Again, there are a few Sinhalese and a few Tamils who try to retain their Sri Lankan identity and still maintain contact with each other across the ethnic cleavage. But they are, I think, probably in the minority. Then, there are other second-generation, third-generation migrants who lose their ethnicity as well as first-generation who sometimes discard it and quite happily become Australian, or Norwegian, or German. All these varied outcomes partly depends on their love affairs and other things as well, but...

S.R.: Was it because you had that basis of understanding that history, that it was easier for you to move forward into studying contemporary Sri Lanka, rather than starting off looking at contemporary Sri Lanka and then trying to understand the historical background.

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M.R.: Yeah I think the fact that I had worked on agrarian policy and the rise of Sri Lankan nationalism from the late nineteenth century and the whole process of constitutional agitation.... There was agitation, it may not have been like India [that is, as sturdy and as mass-based as India, but there was agitation for constitutional reform and for the British to grant *swaraj*]. Yes, the fact that I had that background of historical interpretation and then came to look at Sinhalese-Tamil conflict and the whole political process in the post-independence era. Yes, that trajectory helped, but you know working backwards doesn't always work. Take my recent book on Sinhalese consciousness [in the Kandyan period, 1590s-1815]. Because nationalism is a modern phenomenon and it's post-British. When I started charting that out in 1994, partly as a challenge to people like Jonathan Spencer and Qadri Ismail and Pradeep Jeganathan – challenging their notion of Sinhalese nationalism as totally a product of the British period – I was still beginning with the British period.

The original plan for my book was this: the focus was going to be 19th and 20th century, and that is still my focus. But I decided I had to have a chapter on what was there before the British and that was going to be Chapter 2, straight after the introduction. Therefore I had to go back into the 17th and 18th century, a period that is known as “the Kandyan period” because there was an independent Sinhalese kingdom from 1590 to 1815 centred on the capital Kandy. So I decided I needed to have a chapter on that. That chapter became a book.

Though I had done oral history before and was aware of the importance of oral processes, that journey for me, going back into the Kandyan period was absolutely, a

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kind of re-education. That's where I learnt the importance of such things as temple paintings in raising consciousness of the past: the importance of history, so the visual dimension, as well as the oral dimension of the war poems. Thus, though I was aware of the importance of oral history, this research into the Kandyan period was actually an eye-opener for me. The power of oral traditions, and of oral chanting, hit home. You see, it was only when I was working on war poems with a chap called Ananda Wakkumbura who is competently bilingual that... note that he's also a grassroots activist and actually communist, he's a staunch communist of the old school, my generation. We were working on some translations and he put that job aside and took up a Sinhalese newspaper, a written text, and he went into the chant mode. He read the text as a chant, and he said that most older generation of Sinhalese can do that. It's a chant, and he read the text as a chant, and it's very good, it helps you to memorise too. But you know it's a different mode, he went into a different mode of phonetic expression of that text, not reading aloud as he would in Sinhalese, but into a chant way. So that was an eye-opener – of having that [demonstration]... revealing the whole process [of transmission]

S.R.: Also you talk about history-making and using Sinhalese in particular, or the Sinhalese and Tamils going as far back as possible to work out who is more entitled to Sri Lanka now than the other.

M.R.: That's part of the political justification of their claims, but you know the issue is this: why is it seen as important, why is it a justification, you know. I suppose for

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aboriginal people to do that in Australia in a context where it's impossible for the dominant white Australia to deny it because there are all methods to prove that they lived here for eons. The aborigines then used that weaponry. But I think, I think Keating and company got around it by coining the term "First Australians" and so you know so that's...

S.R.: Creating a new chapter...

M.R.: Yeah a new chapter, but recognising implicitly that there are Second Australians who are still Australians. So yes, but history for the Sinhalese, I mean history is a problem too because they, many Sinhalese see Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese country. When they talk of "Sri Lanka" [or "Sri Lankan"] and "Sinhalese," they are more or less compressing the two. It's like some English say "British," but they really mean "English," right. Thus, it [this conflation of whole by part] is a very insidious, powerful and dangerous modality, a dangerous ideological configuration which people are not fully aware of. And I got unto that [point, argument] in the 1970s before I came into the anthropology department, before I became aware of the significance of oral processes of transmission via teaching and studying anthropology.

S.R.: Well, I guess in you looking back in history at the same time as you are getting a greater understanding of how Sri Lanka has changed and adapted to the different political changes from how it was, you know, when you were looking at the Kandyan period. At

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the same time, you can see that contemporary Sri Lankans or Sinhalese are looking back at that period as a way of justifying their rights to Sri Lanka.

M.R.: Yes, spot on. The founding father of the Sinhalese state is supposed to be a chap called Vijaya. Many extremist Sinhalese spokesmen today, you know, base their claims partly on the coming of Vijaya supposedly in the 5th century BC, before Christ. But then the Tamils have tried to say, well, he came from India and he couldn't have been Sinhalese speaking then because the Sinhalese language did not exist, but the Tamil language existed. So, he may not have been Tamil but the Tamils preceded the Sinhalese in the island. But they too, in challenging Vijaya, treat him as a historical figure. So they [accept his historicity]. However, I don't think that there's any proof that he existed. Vijaya means "conquest," so I think it's an Adam and Eve story: it's a primordial, you know, I've written a little pop piece – as I call it – on this issue: "Sri Lanka without Vijaya" or some such title. Because I think it's more a claim made in the 5th century by the person who wrote *Mahāvamsa* presenting through the Vijaya story an Adam and Eve genesis tale claiming that this [namely, Sri Lanka] is a country meant for Buddhism to thrive. I think there is no proof that he was a historical figure; so I'm challenging that historical view. But interestingly there are one or two extreme Sinhalese nowadays who say "Ah no, no, no we were there before Vijaya." So they take an Indian myth such as the Rāmā�ana and co-opt it and just fashion it out of the sky. But in jumping back to pre-Vijaya times, they treat the Vijaya story seriously too. Many of these spokespersons are not historians, but they are writing, they are creating a history. They are just making one

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up to confirm their political claims because the Indian epics also refer to Lanka, you know, and refer to Rāvana and Rāmā. This encourages them to take these figures seriously – as fact. So there's a whole crazy battle about the origins of the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples, something that is just out of this world but very seriously sustained, so...

S.R.: Yes. And then you're right in the middle of it because you're the one pointing out these differences...

M.R.: Yes, except that, one should note that I'm not a specialist in the ancient script, so I write as an historian but as a non-specialist historian. I can only write as a political activist like they are but in a different sense. But, you know, I'm not very hopeful that I would change them [their views] because as you know they reject my arguments and go on with writing in the same vein. Many of them are incorrigible.

S.R.: Yeah. Maybe we could turn to the term ‘sacrificial devotion’ that you have used?

M.R.: That's a new topic and a new move. I think you have to go back to how I got involved in looking at I was always interested in the Tamil nationalist movement and their resistance, and how they are moved to the separatist position. So that, from the 1970s I've been interested in that [development]. But when I was in India for 4 months doing research on communal violence [in 1995] and I focused in particular on the attacks on the Sikhs after Mrs Gandhi was assassinated don't forget that, it was the funeral of

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Mrs Gandhi and her death that led to the outbreak of violence against the Sikhs, because her Sikh bodyguards had killed her. I saw an item saying that when she was killed, about 20 of her Congress, pro-Congress people in the southern parts of India had committed suicide. Some had done it by immolating themselves. This was an item in English, I followed it up and got the details, just very small brief news reports. These acts of suicide had been done in sympathetic grief. But they took place only in the South, in the Tamil speaking areas, not in the North as far as I knew, because there were no such reports from the North.

That got me thinking. I thought the connection between the depths of Tamil commitment and religiosity at the extreme end – this is a tiny small group, 20 people – I saw some link between that sort of thinking and the Tiger use of suicide capsules and suicide bombers, you know. And I wrote a piece for an Indian newspaper, a short one, and then I made it into an article which.... oh yeah, there's a step in between: I was talking about this with a very good Indian historian who was the head of Teen Murthi Library, namely, [Professor] Ravinder Kumar, who's now dead. I mentioned this to him and he said, please look at Ramanujan's translation of the Sangam poetry which is called *Poems of Love and War*. In fact [in my view] the title could be changed to "*Poems of Interiority and Exteriority*" too. And this is what Ravinder Kumar told me about these poems: "I was absolutely chilled to the bone here." He talked about "filial devotion," the filial devotion of mothers praising their sons who had died in battle bravely, you know: "mothers exulted in this." He said this. He [Kumar] was speaking as an Indian, not as a foreigner. So I went to that [book] and from that [that is, inspired thus] I wrote an article,

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a very speculative, expressively speculative, one linking the Tamil cultural devotion to a cause – and therefore the Sri Lankan Tamil but also Southern Indian – to that background. So the stress was/is upon the cultural roots of extreme devotion. I wrote a very tentative academic article a little while afterwards and that got accepted by *Contributions to Indian Sociology* so that one year later in 1996 it was published.

But that was an excursion, just a tangential move you know. My main interest remained that of emotion. Here, emotion leading people to commit suicide in sympathy, not only for Mrs. Gandhi but when, it's like, a Tamil politician called MGR, (who can be compared to Ronald Reagan but a kind of Ronald-Reagan-magnified in the context of Tamil Nadu), when he was near death [from a heart attack], about 120 people either committed suicide or cut off their arms or legs. So you know, this is again a [case of a] minute number of persons [when viewed in the context of India's millions]. But, again, [the story is about] an expression of absolute commitment to some figure or cause. So I was linking that [the expression of devotion] to the capacity among the Tamils to produce not only attackers but also defensive suicide.

We'll come to that. So that was my 1996 excursion. But when the conflict had gone on and on and on, and then after I finished my work on Sinhalese consciousness in the pre-British period which came out as a book, I was free [to focus on other work]. By then of course 9/11 had occurred so a whole industry of academic work on suicide bombers began to appear in print. Some of the analyses were quite extreme, I mean puerile: linking suicide attacks to poverty and all sorts of things. I thought I needed to look at this [issue]. The problem is this: it's like making "poverty" the historical

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justification. The word “terrorism,” “suicide terrorism,” is also used as a justification for all sorts of things. And the focus and empirical material within the literature has always been on suicide bombers attacks. But the fact is that with the Tamil Tigers from '83, '84 onwards, after training, every recruit has to go through an initiation. It's a ritual, they chant something and they are given a cyanide capsule which they carry around the neck [thereafter]. So its defensive suicide; and the LTTE's emphasis began as defensive suicide. The first defensive suicide was in 1984, [while] their first attack was July 5th 1987. So you know, you can't look at one without looking at the other. Right. And then look at the Indian context of suicide in grief. Look at Vietnam, [where there was self-immolation in protest]. Look at fasting unto death: there have been two Tamils, two Tamil Tigers who have fasted to death. Also there's protest suicide. So there are all sorts of categories, so when you talk about suicide terrorism, how are you going to talk about [that is address] fasting unto death [as a practice within the same organisation]. As “suicide terrorism”? That's meaningless.

Thus, that's where “sacrificial devotion” is meant to cover that whole range of suicide missions.... I suppose, you could say “suicide activism,” yes. But yeah, there is a devotional aspect in it, and I'm trying to bring in the cultural roots of this devotion. I'm not saying that's the only factor. Clearly politics, economics comes into it. Take the kamikaze. It's a weapon of the weak, right, suicide attacks. It's a defensive attack. It's a kind of last resort. It's in a situation of political, military imbalance. Quite often, it's the weaker partner who initiates this, right. So it's a situation of imbalance, political imbalance. But you can't look at attacks without looking at all these aspects and the

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cultural roots. So there's a political military grounding for suicide missions, but there's also a cultural grounding. This cultural grounding would vary according to different countries.

S.R.: Yeah. And you're countering that comment, the description of suicide bombers as terrorists?

M.R.: I am saying: "not only as terrorists." You can't look at it that one-sided way only, yes. And I'm using the Sri Lankan Tamil case, or actually the Tamil case, [to press this tack]. The Tigers may have, okay used defensive suicide from '83, '84. But they were not the first to commit suicide. There was a guy called Sivakumāran and he comes into my first article in 1996. Sivakumāran was an embryonic revolutionary. He tried to assassinate a policeman and he failed. Anyway, he was cornered by the police and he, I do not know if he had a capsule, he had cyanide, he took cyanide, right, So that was in 1974. The Tigers then adopt him. I think he inspired Prabhākaran. But not only that, [it was not only the Tigers whom he stirred]. When he took cyanide, okay he died, and his funeral was a huge affair in the Jaffna Peninsula. The youth of that period declared a *hartal* [strike in protest] and declared that day to be a holiday. All the shops had to close, they had to, and they willingly closed. But not only that: note this – when the senior politicians, the lawyers, the eminent figures came to the funeral, they were hit with slippers. Now hitting with the slippers is like being spat on here in Australia. It's absolutely humiliating. They [these eminent people] couldn't do anything. They were hit with slippers by the youth, an

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action that showed the emotion of a funeral. So, that's emotion for you. These acts and expressions of sentiment, then, said: "Here was a dead hero now, a martyr." They didn't use the word martyr, but... [that notion was not far away] you know.

And Sivakumāran's sacrificial action inspired Prabhakaran and the Tigers. But again, he, Sivakumaran himself, was not the first [to commit suicide for political cause]. The anti-Hindi campaign in Tamil Nadu in '64, '65 [provided earlier instances]. In 1964 January at some stage a guy, a labourer who had 2 children – I do not know whether he was paid [to do this], whatever it is, he set fire to himself in front of a railway station [in protest at the supposed threats to the Tamil language from the Hindi language]. One year later, 5 other guys on the same day did the same thing. Symbolic protest against the dominance of Hindi. So here, those instances are protest suicides. Sivakumāran's was a defensive suicide, but an act which was acclaimed. In short, I am interested in the popular reception of this activity.

S.R.: And how it keeps being reproduced. And heightened.

M.R.: Reproduced, and it was heightened, not by all aggrieved Tamils, but by a significant number of Tamils. Take one Tamil Protestant I know, a young fellow – note he's Protestant, he's not Hindu, (and he is a scholar now, he got his Ph.D.) told me about the reactions in the early 1980s: "Oh, some of us looked at Tigers as fanatics, because of this willingness to commit suicide." But on the other hand, I was talking to an old gentleman in Adelaide, actually a Christian too, and he said, "Oh, their {the Tamil

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Tigers'] depths of commitment were, what do you call it, exceptional." He was saying this in an admiring voice, and he's an older gentleman, older, Tamil, Christian, but he clearly admired the Tamil Tigers.

S.R.: Do you think that comes back to what you're saying about the weapons of the weak and how it was strengthening Tamils and how they feel in relation to...

M.R.: But they feel proud. Yes, weapons of the weak because it was a precision weapon in a situation of weakness. You can use, you know, that commitment without using sophisticated weaponry, but it's also a precise guided weapon. Moreover, it's also something that you can admire – serving as a talisman, the sign of determination which makes people proud of you. Don't forget it was only the Tigers among the Tamil fighting groups who adopted this tactic. There were about three or four militant armed Tamil groups, though now only the Tigers are left [as a major force]. In 1983, '84 after the pogrom, there were about 30 groups actually, with four, five of them being fairly powerful. Only the Tigers adopted the suicide tactic and I think that ... gave them a certain advantage in getting popular favour for their cause. Mind you, they knocked off the others, they killed off the others, but then when some of them died, either because they were shot in battle or when one or two cases, actually the first defensive suicide by cyanide is supposed to be somewhere in May 1984...

But note that there was a guy named Seelan, who was second in command [in the LTTE], and he and others, three of them, ran into an army patrol and one was killed and

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the two were running away and he [Seelan] was shot and injured, and the army patrol was closing in on him. He ordered his junior to shoot him and then get away. So actually that was the first defensive suicide. “Shoot him.” So whatever it is Seelan – Seelan was his code name, he’s Charles Anthony, so you know that he’s Catholic Tamil. Therefore there’s no difference between Catholics and Hindus when it comes to the suicide amongst the Tigers.

So, I think, you know, they were admired for that. And yes, when Seelan died, and between ’83 and ’87, the LTTE was still an underground group who controlled certain areas in the Jaffna Peninsular. In this period, whenever a guy died, they took his body in procession along the streets, sometimes at night, but where they controlled areas it had been in the daytime. I have seen daytime processions. They used the bodies to get support. It was an advertisement, they are using the bodies to stir support for the Tamil cause, but the Tamil cause through the Tigers. The IRA does that too, look at some of their funeral processions.

S.R.: And that’s not just Tamils in Sri Lanka.

M.R.: Ah yes. There are these stories [about their brave dead] as well as films; and they are circulated amongst the diaspora. They have videos [of these funeral processions]. In fact the video I saw, I saw one in Sweden in the home of a pro-Tiger supporter in Sweden.

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S.R.: And then that goes to, what aspect does the, where does the ritualisation come in, is that at the funeral, or is that before the mission, or is that all part...?

M.R.: I think the ritualisation is there for recruits: it's like an initiation ceremony, right. But then on top of that, you have the funeral ritual of grief, commemoration, but also a certain celebration too, but that came [only] from 1989 onwards. Initially [in the 1980s] they were using the bodies to stir up fervour, but I don't think they [the LTTE] – because they were not in complete control of territory – they couldn't have the ritualisation that you have seen from 1990 onwards. Once they got hold of territory, they were able to do it much more systematically and they set up the Office of Great Heroes, though I think they did that in 1995. But, anyway, they then started having Heroes Week in November. November 27th is the peak, at 6.05, that's when the first Tiger who died, it is said to be 18:05 in 1982, 27th November. That was Shankar, who is one of the figures whose photograph is often used, and he actually died in Tamil Nadu because he was injured and he was taken across the Palk Strait. They got him to hospital [in Madurai] but he died in hospital there. So that's used as the moment of commemorating and grieving for the dead. But there's also a certain pride [in their sacrifice] and a celebratory aspect [in their rites of homage].

S.R.: Part of martyrdom.

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M.R.: Part of martyrdom, yeah.²¹

S.R.: That also you see in other countries as well, so when you use “sacrificial devotion,” you can also see that operating in different countries.

M.R.: Different countries – though I think the cultural roots would be different. There might be similarities as well as differences and don’t forget that the Japanese soldiers who died – not only the kamikaze, all the soldiers – are supposed to be at the Yasakuni shrine. The souls are supposed to be there. Alright, there’s a special, I suppose you can say Arc d’Triomphe, anyway, or the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier somewhere, but they have that aspect to it.

Ah, the other aspect in Sri Lanka is that Hindus, Hindu-Tamils, and all Hindus cremate their dead. Ah, not all Hindus, but most. There are some cases of burial, but as a broad generalisation with important exceptions, one can say that the general preference is for cremation. It’s also a higher status thing. It’s a bit more expensive but cremation is normal. Cremation grounds are always away from the centre of a village and they are polluted. You know, it’s a dangerous area; it’s where ghosts hang around. So people don’t like going to cremation grounds. [In contrast] Christian Tamils would bury their dead. The first Tiger dead, if they were Hindus, the bodies were returned, if possible. Where possible, it went to the kin, and the kin organised the ceremonies. The Tigers

²¹ Note that in some of their English writings, the LTTE translates its concept of *māvīrar* (meaning “great heroes” in strict translation) as “martyrs.”

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would have been there, but Hindus would have had cremations, [while] Christian Tigers would have been buried right. Okay, [what you found initially therefore was a] difference in mortuary practice. From '89 onwards, the Tigers said "No, these are our bodies, they are all going to be buried." That was a major change, and then they started having their burial sites which are now sacred grounds. They call it [each] a *tuyilam illam*, "sleeping grounds." They don't call them "cemeteries," but "sleeping grounds," "resting places." But they are also kind of sacred and they are not polluted.

S.R.: Right. Is that to...

M.R.: I think they are creating a sacred topography. But it's a big cultural shift, it's a big cultural shift.

S.R.: And how readily was that accepted?

M.R.: Seems to have been accepted. But it's possible [that is, this ready acceptance was rendered feasible] because in India, women who have committed sati, heroes who have died [in battle], they are usually buried. They [the stones marking their place of burial] are called *natukal* (*nadukal*) or the "planted stones." Okay, they didn't have the body available always, but maybe at other times, they put the body there. They then commemorate it through a stone. And many of these stones become gods, local gods. So there's the process of divinisation of humans.

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Therefore, the LTTE have used that I think to legitimise [their decision to plant/bury the dead even if they were Hindu] and make the new practice acceptable. You know those who died through fast or whatever become ascetics. In India, this is even in North India, if you become an ascetic, you are, what is it called, you're "burning away your previous life," that's how you describe it, you're burning your previous life. You have to go into [have ventured into] another life. Therefore, you're already dead, therefore they – the ascetics – are not cremated, [rather] they are buried. *Sanyāsins* are buried, and they might have stones marking them. So this is.... in a sense, there is a kind of exceptional cultural process which can be applied to the Tiger dead.

S.R.: And linking to that the idea of the hero and then...

M.R.: Hero, heroine, yeah. The other thing you see, you know, one difference between the Tigers and all the other groups: Japanese fighters were all men. Mind you, there were [Japanese] civilians who committed suicide too in some places like Okinawa and Saipan, and these would include women, but [those actions] were to prevent capture or being taken by the Americans, the women also committed suicide, but these were civilian women. But I think the Tigers have had a far higher proportion of women fighting and also dying than either the Palestinians or any other group I think, maybe even the Chechens. I'm not sure. Chechens might be similar, but other than that [case], [all other cases of suicidal political action] are different from the Tamil case.

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I think that again had to do with Tamil culture and the fact that many of the punishing deities, but powerful deities, these were women: Kannagi, Kali, Durga, and there are many other deities that guard villages – often female deities, very fierce ones. So I think at the divine level, there's female, active female participation. But again, you see in the Tamil Tiger case for manpower reasons, they had to bring the women into it. They just needed [more personnel]. They didn't have enough manpower, so there were pragmatic reasons too for the deployment of women in battle.

S.R.: Okay. And was that because some of the men were dying or...

M.R.: Yeah and some of them had gone away: there were many migrant men. It's just in terms of the numbers – because relative to the manpower available to the Sri Lankan state, you know, they, the LTTE, needed to mobilise their womenfolk. I will send you some, one or two photographs. Remind me.

S.R.: Yeah. That would be great. Maybe we should move to cricket, which is another passion of yours. And when you talk about nationalism, this seems to be, I think I was reading one of your articles about alienation and marginalisation as being one of the reasons for the, you know, strong support of cricket among migrant peoples in Australia and England, that kind of ...

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M.R.: Well, I think that that applies to a lot of migrants whether it's Indians, or Pakistanis, or Bangladeshis, or Sri Lankans. Having lived in Australia for 30 odd years, you see that among some migrants. And in fact, take Sri Lankan women who knew nothing about cricket, some of them come to cricket matches [in Australia] and get, and get interested in cricket partly as an expression of their Sri Lankanness right. Because they didn't know much about cricket then back home in Lanka, but watching it on TV they get hooked into supporting their country through cricket, sometimes in extreme ways. When I say "extreme ways," I am referring to incidents when sometimes they start abusing their own players when they are doing badly, right. That's sports nationalism. You can call that sports nationalism but a nationalism taken to extreme lengths.

S.R.: So cricket becomes like an outlet for nationalism.

M.R.: Yes. Because, you know, there are so many migrants who may be rich, they may have swimming pools, they might have Mercedes Benz cars, but they are just mere unknown cogs in our new world here in Australia. They have wealth but they have limited status; they don't really count much politically – well, most of them anyway don't. And then this becomes.... [a sore point]. Therefore, they might be wealthy, but they are still marginalised. So there's a sense of alienation and then, I mean, in the Tamil case there have been many professionals who have been violently supportive of the Tamil Tiger cause because they're concerned about Tamils back home and the status of Tamils. They are now willing to support what they see as a liberation movement, even though it's

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quite ruthless and even though it involves going against the laws of the state in which they are now living.

S.R.: And cricket moves from country to country, and there's kind of that interlinking, or something that links between the country where people are now residing and Sri Lanka as a homeland. Is that how...

M.R.: It's homeland, yes, it's nostalgia for homeland and it's expressing your roots actually. Where are you, you are identified with your homeland. Some cases, a few individuals don't; but many identify with their homeland. So, and where there are extreme, for whatever reason, whether personal history or whatever, where they're extremely alienated like the home-grown bombers in England or some other examples, those who actively work for the Tigers in Toronto or Melbourne or wherever, or the Muslims, a few Muslims who take up the Al-Qaeda route. This alienation leads to extreme political radicalisation of what's called, or what's generally called, "terrorism." In other cases, I think, especially among young men, their alienation takes the form of supporting their cricket side, or soccer side. It's usually the cricket side – sometimes, it could be soccer or whatever – but usually it's cricket in the case of South Asians. And their alienation encourages them to support their side in an extreme way where they get into argie-bargie [confrontations] with Australian or English home-country supporters in the crowd. Alternatively they sometimes may abuse their own players, verbally sometimes directly or alternatively on Internet. On the web, one often sees the chaps

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going to, into a sort of very vituperative style, criticising the batsmen from Pakistan, India, or Sri Lanka, who have failed, criticising their own players for not doing well, I mean going overboard, or criticising the selectors, or criticising the captain. The language they use in the web can be quite virulent.....

S.R.: And were they being more likely, the people doing the criticising were they more likely to be migrants, or...

M.R.: Quite a number of them are migrants. It's clear that through the history of the webs that many of them are migrants but I know one or two. I know there's one guy in cricket, I know that he lives in Sri Lanka from what he's written. So comments come from both those at home and those abroad, but a fair number of them are from migrants. And by the way cricket, I mean you're right, I have played a lot of cricket, but I got involved in cricket writing for political reasons. My first piece of writing was in 1989, 1990: the way the Sri Lankan cricketers were treated by the Australian cricketers. I was very angry at the way they were put down, so it was a political protest in a way.²² But I could not get it published in Australia. If I write something, it never gets published in any paper.²³ So I'm not known [in Australia]. Again, as you could see [from my publication list], where I could get it published was in Sri Lanka; but there you see, what's the point? In a way I

²² See "Bat, Ball and Foul Mouth in Cricket," in Michael Roberts, *Essaying Cricket. Sri Lanka and Beyond*, Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2006, pp.1-3. This article originally appeared in a Sri Lankan Newsletter in Melbourne.

²³ That is, there is no scope for feature length articles tho one can get short notes into "Letters to the Editor" if one is lucky.

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appreciate it [the exposure in Sri Lanka], but this [particular article in 1990 protesting against the verbal vilification of the Sri Lankan cricketers as part of on-field tactics] was written for the Australian public, but it's published in Sri Lanka where that's not the constituency that I'm aiming for. So the 1989/90 tour team the way they were treated: they were subject to what was actually almost imperial arrogance, the way the Australian cricketers and others treated them. And then of course with the way they treated Muralitharan in December 1995: calling him for throwing the ball. The newspaper reporters!! It is not just what the umpires did, and the Australian cricketers did, I'll come to it, but it was the biased media reporting that got me [that is, jolted me into] writing on cricket. That was the initial motivation. But then subsequently, I've been writing about Sri Lankan selections and other issues in cricket as well. However, my initial foray into cricket writing was in a sense in a form of migrant protest against Australian colonial attitudes. Note: I would be putting the word "colonial" in quotes, but...

S.R.: Do you see that as happening today?

M.R.: Less so now because India has got so powerful that it's much less so, but it was still there when the Australians treated the Indians in Sydney [in horrible ways].²⁴ But I must say [that on this occasion] there was a whole strand of Australian opinion which challenged, which did not like what the Aussie cricketers were doing. Thus, there is a

²⁴ Referring here to the recent Test Match in Sydney in early January 2008 with the clash between Symonds and Harbhajan Singh the most noteworthy of the incidents; but with other ugly scenes not worthy of the sport of cricket.

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protest within Australia, a critical voice within Australia shown this time. But in '95, '96 and on other occasions, there has almost been a blindness to their own assumptions, their cultural assumptions.

S.R.: And in one of your papers I was reading you were, which one is it, *Marginalisation in Britain and Cricketing Fervour...*

M.R.: No, that was a kind of foray, a ...

S.R.: But you were talking about how sports commentators need to work with and have that kind of communication where they were actually commenting in a way on, like you say, as happening now, that there's a kind of protest against the behaviour of cricketers.

M.R.: Yeah, but you see, England is a very interesting place because there are migrants from all over, from former Commonwealth countries. I think my point in that article is that England is a social laboratory to look at extreme cricketing fans from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. [Thus it is a good place] for sports historians to [undertake a comparative study] and maybe also look at early West-Indian fans. I think it's less so now, but in the 1970s I think first-generation West-Indian migrants were also very staunch West-Indian supporters. I'm not sure that the new generations are that involved because there are many West-Indian Brits who are now playing soccer, and not many of them are playing cricket.

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However, a comparative study of extreme fans in Britain [would be potentially revealing] because Britain has such numbers to make it a social laboratory by looking at [that is, researching, studying] extreme fans, extreme migrants. But then that extremism on the cricket field – actually round the cricket field, among spectators I was trying to say – that extremism around the cricket field also might provide a clue to extremism of, in this case Pakistanis and Bangladeshi Muslims, in the political field. Here, I'm thinking of the home-grown bombers right. I felt that both groups of extremists – they are very small groups, right, minute groups – but both come from – I mean, this is a standard [conventional] thesis – contexts of marginalisation, alienation. It's not a new idea or argument; it's the standard sociological thesis of migrants who feel marginalised and therefore alienated and they take to some form of extreme protest. So I feel that both groups could come from the same marginalised elements, and therefore there might be a profit to analysts, for sporting historians, sporting analysts, and political analysts to get together because there is some common ground there.

S.R.: I see what you mean...

M.R.: And the point is that I wrote that article in 2004, and this was before the July bombings.²⁵ I wrote that in 2004 because I was interested in the two guys from Britain – one from a public school, a chap who was married, aged 27, well-to-do – these two blokes they went on a suicide mission to Tel Aviv or somewhere Jerusalem somewhere.

²⁵ See “Cricketing Fervour and Islamic Fervour: Marginalisation in the Diaspora,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, June-Sept. 2004, 3 & 4: 550-63.

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Two Brits, they failed, one actually, yeah one carried out his attack, the other failed and he killed himself or something, but they were from Britain. So I used bio-data from that event to link up with my cricketing material.

S.R.: I see, and how do those paths how do they diverge?

M.R.: Yeah, how do they diverge? Some might express it at least on the cricket field. It's harmful though: there might be a few fists [flying] here and there, but others would take the political route because they feel...

S.R.: Do you have any ideas on how those paths differ?

M.R.: That I don't know. One would have to have detailed information for that. I'm suggesting that Britain would be a good laboratory but even only after being²⁶ on the cricket field. There are so many migrants from Asian countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, that I think there is enough [scope for further study]. There are possibilities for comparisons and then one could talk to West-Indians too, the West-Indians of the old generation who were involved in watching cricket in the 1970s – a period where there was Rastafarism: the whole Nottinghill Carnival which was a form of

²⁶ Clarification: that is long ethnographic immersion and participant observation among spectators at pertinent cricket matches.

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protest. I'd been in Britain then, so I know there were some stirrings then. However, I think the West-Indians, and the Black Brits have now got more assimilated.

S.R.: And on the other side to that, there's also the British nationalism as well and the English soccer fans.

M.R.: Yes that's right, but of course you see, yeah, Asians don't get involved in soccer in the way the Black Brits and others do. And the soccer scene [in Britain] is also changing because there are many foreigners playing. Do you know that – I just saw it today, there was an Australian guy talking about it – apparently roughly 60 per cent of the soccer players in the top British sides are now non-British, being Europeans and others, and when he said non-British, I think there are also not only Black Brits but also Africans, and Europeans, Germans, players from all over, you see, so now there's a real mixture.

S.R.: Yeah, and that doesn't happen in...

M.R.: Actually that's good in a way I think, but...

S.R.: Well it doesn't happen in cricket, does it?

M.R.: It won't, but once the IPL and 20/20 type games take off, then it will happen a bit to a certain extent in England. But, no, it doesn't happen in cricket. Well, the county

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cricket sides have a few foreign players, but they restrict that to one or two, there are restrictions.

Murder Murals: A Cultural Adaptation to Urban Violence

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Introduction

Many in the general public have little sympathy for those criminals who have been murdered in drug wars, turf battles between urban gangs, or in the general criminal violence which plagues many lower income neighborhoods in America's cities. Similarly, though sympathetic, the general public scarcely pays any extended attention to the innocent victims caught in this urban violence; they were simply in the "wrong place at the wrong time," and are quickly forgotten.

Yet both criminal and non-criminal murder victims have friends and family who are devastated by their violent deaths. In America's poorer urban areas, these survivors often remember and memorialise the deceased with a unique form of cultural adaptation and expression – they commission a graffiti artist to depict graphically a victim's life and death in some meaningful way. These graffiti forms typically are found located on factory walls, apartment facades, and sides of stores and businesses. Fundamentally, these murals give symbolic meaning to the victim's unexpected death, whether the victim "deserved what was coming to them," or not. We term these graffiti representations, "murder murals."

This article and photo essay briefly explores the underlying sociological fabric of murder murals and places them within the cultural context of life and death in lower income society in America's urban environments. Building on the work of Cooper & Sciorra (2002), it further seeks to familiarise social scientists with a particular form of graffiti which largely has been overlooked, even by those who write about the larger

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world of street art in the United States and elsewhere (N. Ganz, 2004). We offer a theoretical approach for understanding such communal tolerance in order to better orient general policy assumptions regarding graffiti, and provide causal insight into the community effects of and responses to urban homicide.

Perspective: Cultural Adaptations

Generally speaking, the social characteristics of collectivities provide evidence that social life is often constructed in ways that differ from dominant conceptions of reality (Lachmann, 1988). In particular, concentrations of ghetto poverty can foster conditions of social isolation (Sampson & Wilson, 1991) and promote cultural adaptations that undermine social organisation and the control of crime (Hagan, 1991). In an effort to consider such “cultural adaptations,” we adopt a community-level perspective which treats the individual as relational, avoids compositional or “kinds of people” generalisations, and proposes that some communal responses are adaptive subsets of broader cultural responses to significant life events.

The Memorial Wall and Murder Mural

Historically, European and New World Catholics have placed simple markers at the sites where accidental deaths occur (Sciolla, 1991). Memorial walls are the modern equivalent of this centuries-old mourning tradition, often commemorating those who have died as a

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result of accidents, arguments, fights, police killings, and drug-related turf wars (Sciorra, 1991; Cooper & Sciorra, 2002). From a criminological point of view, memorial walls represent a form of “ritual vandalism,” fixed and sometimes ceremonial occasions and settings in which property destruction is somehow accepted, condoned, or even encouraged (Cohen, 1984; O’Kane, 1994).

On an urban level, death markers have been a cultural tradition in New York City’s Latino neighbourhoods for decades. In general, people who survive the homicide of a loved one are indirectly victimised by the heavy emotional, social and economic costs they must bear. On the neighborhood level, a violent, public death can cause deep social fractures that may act to trigger communal displays of grief (Cooper & Sciorra, 2002). Poor people in particular are often saddled with burdens that may take years to overcome, if they are overcome at all (Jackson, 1979).

The prevalence of homicide across a community is one factor apparently driving a specific cultural adaptation and a particular type of memorial wall, the “murder mural.” The urban murder mural is a violent death marker which gives visual form to a particular communal grief response. It graphically and symbolically represents a public response to an individual or group of individual’s homicide. Murder mural images, like other memorial walls, contain traditional funerary imagery such as crosses, tombstones, flowers, candles, angels and doves. The phrases, “in memory of,” “rest in peace,” and “RIP” serve as standard textual motifs. Even epitaphs, and the names of family and friends are sometimes written and placed on painted scrolls (Cooper & Sciorra, 2002).

Theoretical Approach

The presence of such murder murals is now quite common throughout many American inner-city neighbourhoods, particularly in Latino communities. Viewed from the perspective of the “broken windows” theory of social decay (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), certain sectors of minority communities throughout New York City, in particular the lower-income neighbourhoods of East New York, Bushwick, Morrisania, and Hunt’s Point, appear to tolerate the construction and ongoing maintenance of murder murals. Ironically, the crime prevention policy prospects of “broken windows” are confounded by an implicit tolerance of murder murals, not only by communal residents, but also public authorities and police. To better account for such dynamics, it is worth outlining a general understanding of vandalism.

Vandalism is a form of human behaviour that lies on a continuum between full accommodation and full deviance, and its forms, contexts and peoples’ viewpoints vary with the conditions under which rule breaking is tolerable and normalised (Cohen, 1984). Not all rules prohibiting illegal property destruction are enforced by a community. Vandalism considered illegal in some communities is often tolerated, cherished and protected in others. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of graffiti must first locate graffiti types on a vandalism continuum and then document the specific cultural and social contexts from which such graffiti types originate (Ferrell, 1993).

For example, Hip Hop, once maligned, is now understood as a subculture that was created, perpetuated, and received mainly by urban African America and Latino youth in

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the United States (George, et al., 1985). Gradually, it has been accepted by dominant American culture, reflected in clothing style, mainstream music variations, and even the large American linguistic style. Urban memorial walls reflect one dimension of Hip Hop Graffiti (HHG). Researchers distinguish HHG from bathroom, gang or other kinds of graffiti (Brewer & Miller, 1990), and suggest the following base categorical forms: *tags*, *throw-ups*, and *pieces*. Tags are stylised signatures usually representing a writer's self-fashioned street name. Throw-ups are larger names written in expansive block or bubble styles, and pieces (short for 'masterpiece') are sophisticated and multicoloured murals depicting words or names with backgrounds, characters, comments, or symbols (Brewer & Miller, 1990). The core texts of pieces cover a range of human expression; from the celebration of the writer or another person, to the communication of social, political, emotional, proverbial or philosophical messages (Brewer & Miller, 1990). In general, most memorial walls can be classified as pieces.

In addition to classification schemes, murder mural construction can be approached from a "semiotic perspective," a perspective which considers graffiti writing a social act that cannot be understood in terms of the individual in isolation. To write graffiti is to communicate; one never finds graffiti where it cannot be seen by others (Bruner & Kelso, 1980). Approaches to vandalism and graffiti in general often examine the content of a subculture's self-expression, and view deviant subcultures as symbolic forms of resistance (Hebdige, 1979; Hall, et al., 1975; Willis, 1977). Viewed from this approach, members of subcultures challenge the larger society's hegemony by drawing

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from the particular experiences and customs of their communities, ethnic groups, and age cohorts.

Beyond considerations of content, motivational accounts theory (Mills, 1940; Sykes & Matza, 1957) helps explain the social psychological drivers of a community's tolerance of unauthorised murder murals. Motivational accounts theory proposes that any form of deviance is accompanied by "vocabularies of motive," or verbal constructions which serve to justify, excuse, rationalise, neutralise, or normalise an action. Such "negotiations of reality" (Scheff, 1968) may or may not be political and may or may not be honoured by the social control system. The outcome of this negotiation helps define a community's tolerance and is crucial in determining the way images and public policy are shaped (Cohen, 1984).

Community surveys of specific neighbourhoods represent one information gathering strategy. Another, more involved strategy would require conducting in-depth interviews with victim's families, friends, or acquaintances. Key informants such as merchants, a victim's peers, and police could be called upon to reconstruct the homicide scenario and the circumstances leading up to and surrounding it. Such information would provide a social context for structuring the meanings attached to specific murder murals.

In summary, a comprehensive methodological approach to murder mural research should attempt to properly classify vandalism and graffiti types, detail the content of sub cultural expression, and record the full range of "vocabularies of motive" and techniques of neutralisation (Sykes & Matza, 1957) surrounding a community's memorials. The validity of this information can then be compared to larger systems of control by

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examining how such motives are diffused and learned through subcultures and the mass media.

Policy Considerations

Vandalism appears more responsive to situational variations than delinquency as a whole (Cohen, 1984). It responds to ecological factors more directly than most other forms of delinquency, and its physical consequences are more physically obvious. Graffiti by nature is both sensitive to conditions of urban decay, and highly visible (Cohen, 1984). However, graffiti remains problematic for criminology, for although a memorial may increase public awareness of various social problems, it may also facilitate the widespread belief that nothing can be done about such problems.

Policy considerations involving vandalism invite political questions (Cohen, 1984; Bansky, 2005) that challenge whether all graffiti is a championed art (Mailer, 1974) or a part of the world of uncontrollable predators (Glazer, 1984). For decades in New York City and in other cities across the United States, politicians, transit officials, and corporate executives have treated graffiti as a political and economic issue (Ferrell, 1993), while others view graffiti as social problem (Castleman, 1982; Cooper & Chalfant, 1984; Lachmann, 1988). Ferrell (1993) suggests that decision makers often confuse types of graffiti with graffiti writing by considering both as vandalism and crime. Such overlapping condemnation of all graffiti as vandalism distorts informed public debate (Bansky, 2005).

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Past and current measures against illegal graffiti have been problematic because the social and cultural aspects of graffiti have not been fully considered (Brewer & Miller, 1990). New York City in particular has led a long, high profile fight against graffiti using traditional strategies which have emphasised the criminal nature of graffiti (Brewer, 1992). Efforts by other cities have entailed “target hardening,” paint-out campaigns (Brewer & Miller, 1990), and policies that ban spray paint sales to minors (Haberstroh, 1989). Frustrated with the results of such strategies, some communities have implemented strict sentencing for graffiti related offences (Martinez, 1989; KDKA, 2007).

Policy responses that strictly require the painting over of all graffiti, including memorials, may unintentionally invite negative reactions from community residents. The reactions of grief over a loved one murdered differ greatly from those over one who has died non-violently. Mourning for families of murder victims tends to be more profound, more lingering, and more complex than normal grief (Sprang, et al., 1989; Martin, 2002). If no organised strides are taken to constructively confront the varying dimensions of graffiti, perceptions of disorder will continue to prevail.

Conclusion

Law enforcement officials note that in places where the taking of a life is quick and easy, there is profound respect for the dead (Bragg, 1994). For many, memorial walls and murder murals in particular have become a place of healing for families and friends.

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Murder murals commemorate a violent death that was more or less public, and as a consequence may require public recognition. Neighborhood residents sometimes hold memorial services after a mural has been completed, and sometimes reunite on the anniversary of the person's death (Sciorra, 1991; Martin, 2002). Such patterns of behaviour suggest that murder murals function to confer a final identity. Memorials remind survivors that their friend or relative was admired, at least, by some in the community (Gonzalez, 1992). Ironically, the acceptance of murder murals and their general style has led to a more mainstream purpose for the commissioning of murals – commercial advertising requested by proprietors of grocery stores, fast food restaurants, and hardware stores. Such “graffiti for hire” is popular among business owners because customised styles can be selected, and neighborhood residents readily recognise and accept such styles.

Photo Essay

The photos in this essay are historical artefacts that offer the casual observer a glimpse into an inner-city grief subculture during the late 1980s and early 1990's, a noteworthy period of street violence that claimed approximately five times the number of victims as today. The first four photos were taken in the 41st Police Precinct, a high-crime area of New York City's South Bronx. This precinct represented the epitome of urban violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s when these murder murals were commissioned (O'Kane, 1994). The second set of photos were taken in Brooklyn's 75th Police Precinct

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during the same time period, a time when that precinct led New York City in murder and in other categories of criminal violence.

Almost two decades later, these murder murals continue to invite curious inquiry, and remain relatively untainted by vandalism or defacement; to do so would defame and dishonour the deceased. Rather, residents tolerate the murals as part of the streetscape, and some regularly care for certain murals, often placing lighted candles and flowers in front of them on meaningful anniversaries. Such collective and individual practices attest to a universal human grief response, the desire to remember and bestow respect upon the fallen.

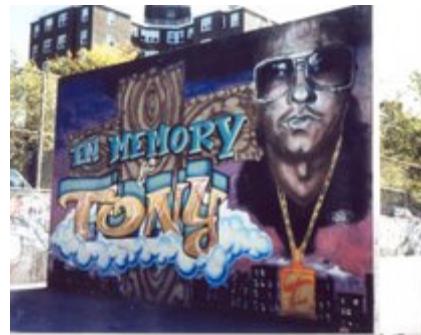


Photo 1: Tony Montana (street name). Alleged drug dealer shot six times in the head, 41st NYPD precinct.

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Photo 2: Carlos. A working class father with two children. Victim of a street shooting, 41st NYPD precinct.



Photo 3: Freddy. Alleged member of the Watson Family gang. At age 20, murdered in a heavy drug trafficking area of 41st NYPD precinct.



Photo 4: Happy Land Social Club. 87 victims died in arson fire set by jealous lover, March 25, 1990. The largest homicide death toll in NYC prior to September 11, 2001.

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The following photos are parts of a massive murder mural in the 75th NYPD precinct.

The mural runs an entire city block on the outside wall of a food processing plant. The entire mural is entitled “Choose Your Paradise.” It juxtaposes those murdered in drug-related violence with those leading “respectable” lives. All images were painted by “Archangel.”



Photo 1: Female drug pusher/user. Victim was stripped, tied to a chair and injected with air bubbles killing her. She reportedly came up short on drug proceeds.



Photo 2: Angel. Murdered in a drug war, surrounded by members of his crew, all of whom were also murdered in the 75th NYPD precinct.



Photo 3: Julio. Murdered on corner of Euclid and Fulton Avenue. He was shot in his left eye, depicted in mural. The “Choose Your Paradise” theme is primarily about him.



Photo 4: Victim’s street name was El Loro, so named because his gang thought he looked like a parrot. Murdered on same corner as Julio.

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The 14th Sardinia International Ethnographic Film Festival (Nuoro, Sardinia, 15-21 September 2008).

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There are a growing number of International Film Festivals these days that showcase ethnographic documentary films and videos. Some have been running for decades already, like the festival founded in 1979 by the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA), which is held in different locations in the Nordic countries each year, and will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year. Then there is the Bilan du Film Ethnographique, held annually since 1982 in the Musée de L'Homme in Paris, and recently renamed the Jean Rouch International Festival in honour of its founder, who

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occupies such a special place within the genre. Equally well-known are the Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival in New York; the Royal Anthropological Institute's Festival and Conference in the UK, started in 1985 and now biennial; and the Beeld Voor Beeld Documentary Festival of Culture and Representation in Amsterdam. The growing interest in this genre is evidenced by the fact that there are now also regular Festivals in Göttingen and Freiburg (Germany), Norway, Poland, Budapest, Belgrade, Ljubljana (Slovenia), Sibiu (Romania), Tartú (Estonia), Joensuu (Finland), Moscow, Montreal, Quebec, Vancouver, and Taipei. This year, for the very first time in India, there will be a festival organised by the Department of Sociology of the University of Delhi, to take place in November and planned to be repeated biennially.

The Sardinia International Ethnographic Film Festival (SIEFF), hosted by the Higher Institute of Ethnography of Sardinia together with the Ethnographic Museum of Nuoro, under its director Paolo Piquerreddu, is one of the longest running of these organisations. Like the French one, it was started in 1982. The occasion is known for its especially warm hospitality and wonderful local food. This year was the fourteenth Festival, with a total of 38 films screened in the course of a week. The films were distinguished by their extraordinary diversity, as well as their technically high quality, providing ample confirmation of the power of the visual medium to tackle all manner of subjects in a sociologically revealing and thought-provoking way. As is common at these events, some of the films were made by independent filmmakers, some by professional anthropologists and some by students of visual anthropology, though independent filmmakers remain the largest category. A group of twelve degree students, both

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international and Sardinian, had also arrived a week early to take part in an intensive video workshop run by renowned ethnographic filmmakers David and Judith MacDougall, who have had a long and close connection with this Festival.

The schedule was arranged without parallel sessions, so that one is able (stamina permitting) to view all the films – sometimes as many as nine in one day, with sessions running late into the evening. An opening address by David MacDougall, ‘The Camera and the Mind’, raised with an admirable brevity and lucidity a number of searching questions about the nature of film as a medium, and why it is different from text. Observing that consciousness is made up of much more than the rational arguments of speech or writing, and that in certain respects film is especially suited to convey something about these extra dimensions of the mind’s existence, MacDougall argues forcefully for a relationship between ethnographic film and anthropology that is complementary, rather than supposing that film should, or could, be merely imitative of writing. The camera produces meaning in a number of different ways; by choosing what to look at, it already suggests an open-ended attentiveness which is in itself a form of enquiry essential to doing anthropology. Its distance from or closeness to the subject, and how it moves or does not move in some rhythm with the person being filmed, all reveal clues to the viewer about the relationships and degree of empathy formed between the filmmaker and the participants.

This year’s Festival programme was arranged under various themes: ‘Globalisation, Factories and Change’; ‘Migrations and Encounters’; ‘Rituals and Religions’; ‘Children’; ‘Women’s Stories’, ‘Places – Worlds?’, ‘Music and Poetry’,

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‘Travels’, and ‘After the War, Conflicts and Hostilities’. These were themes which had emerged out of the final selection, and the fortuitous juxtaposition of films from very different locales which happened to share similar themes was one of the most thought-provoking aspects of the festival as a whole. There were films from every continent, ranging from the most urban to the most remote locations, as well as several that dealt with transnational topics. Moreover, some space in the festival is always reserved for films made in Sardinia itself, and these in particular draw a substantial and keenly interested local audience.

The film that won the festival’s main prize this year was *Losers and Winners*, made by two German filmmakers, Ulrike Franke and Michael Loeken (2006). Over a period of eighteen months, they follow the dismantling of what had been Germany’s largest coke producing plant, which has been bought by a Chinese company and is to be shipped to China for reassembly there. The filmmakers grew remarkably close to workers from both countries: the Germans who had originally constructed the plant and now are being retired from their jobs, and the Chinese who are working gruelling 60-hour weeks far from home, saving and dreaming of a better life. Frequent conflicts arise over safety issues and working methods, and there are some revealing interviews and sequences with the Chinese managers also. As a remarkably intimate and penetrating depiction of the effects of globalisation, the film is a powerful accomplishment (Photos 1 and 2). *Losers and Winners* was mirrored in a curious way by Robert Nugent’s *End of the Rainbow* (2007), which depicts the dismantling of an enormous gold mine and processing plant in Kalimantan (Indonesia), whose machinery is to be shipped to a remote region of Guinea

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(West Africa). The poor villagers of this region, who traditionally have supplemented their incomes during the hungry season by digging and panning for gold in family groups on a tiny scale, at first welcome the mine as a potential source of jobs. Only gradually does the massive scale of this operation, and the extent of their own resulting dispossession, become apparent. Again, the filmmaker spent considerable time with the participants and succeeded in presenting both sides in close-up: the white mining engineers who live in their own cultural bubble on the site, without significant contact with the inhabitants of the area, and the local villagers who reflect eloquently on what is happening around them. The mine functions on its own timetable, as though outside of nature; workers are young men mostly brought from other areas, and when difficulties arise, the mine security calls in the local military. Local alluvial miners are arrested when they break into the site to carry out their traditional panning activities; there are problems when villagers protest their relocation, and when people looking for work are suspected of trespassing on the mine site. A huge lake is formed of tailings from the mine, so poisonous that any bird attempting to drink from it will die. By the end it becomes clear that the benefits villagers originally hoped for are illusory.

Another pair of films which strongly complemented each other concerned indigenous Indian peoples of Brazil. *Pirinop, My First Contact*, a collaboration by Karané Ikpeng and Mari Corrêa (2007), tells the story of the Ikpeng people of Mato Grosso, Brazil, since their first contact with Whites in 1964. What makes this film remarkable is the degree of involvement in the filming (on both sides of the camera) of the Ikpeng themselves. They are the ones deciding what to make a film about, and how to

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do it. They re-enact and reminisce about their original experience in the light of what they now understand about the potentials for maintaining their own culture in the future. When first contacted by the Villas Boas brothers in 1964, who feared for their safety in their own territory, they agreed to be hastily moved into the Xingu Indian Reservation; today, younger members of the community have grown up there and consider it home, but the older ones hanker to return from this exile to their traditional territories. I found this film's mixture of humour and sorrow extremely moving, while its historical depth and indigenous perspective make it an exceptional document. Resonating with it was *Juruna, Spirit of the Forest* by Armando Lacerda (2008), a tribute to Xingu activist Mário Juruna, who died in 2002 having spent his life fighting for the rights of Brazilian Indians, and who became the first ever indigenous federal representative in the Brazilian Parliament. The film recalls his life and records the funeral rituals and stirring orations by other Indian leaders lamenting his loss (Photos 3 and 4)

Three films which dealt with transnationalism were *Licu's Holiday* by Vittorio Moroni (2006), *Mimoune* by Gonzalo Ballester (2006), and *A Working Mom* by Yaron Kaftori and Limor Pinhasov (2006). The first is about a Bangladeshi migrant worker in Rome who goes home for an arranged marriage to a bride, Fancy, chosen by his mother. He brings her back to Rome, and we follow them as she begins to adapt to Italy and they try to adapt to each other. The second concerns one of the many illegal immigrants from Morocco living in Spain, who since he cannot go home, sends a video letter to his family, whom he has not seen for many years. The filmmaker delivers the video to them in Morocco, filming their reactions to it. *A Working Mom* is the story of a Bolivian woman,

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Marisa, who like many other Bolivians migrated to find work in Israel, leaving her children to be brought up by her parents while she worked long hours as a cleaner in order to send money home to give them a better life. After 15 years, she returns home, only to find her parents distrustful and her children cold and distant. She is dismayed to find that the money she remitted has been squandered on an extravagant, barely half-finished house. This was a really heart-wrenching story that vividly portrayed the human costs of immigrant labour and the inequities of the global economy.

There were several films that shed a refreshing light on societies of the Middle East: *Satellite Queens: Behind the Scenes of a Prime Time Arab Talk Show* by Bregtje van der Haak (2007) focused on four glamorous women TV presenters, each from a different Arab country, who have broken new ground with the runaway success of their popular show ‘Women’s Talk’, which discusses all sorts of hot and taboo topics and has come to have a formative role in shaping public opinion in the Arab world. *A Road to Mecca: The Journey of Muhammad Asad* by Georg Misch (2008) told of the remarkable life of the Austrian Jew Leopold Weiss, who in the 1920s felt drawn to convert to Islam and became a well-known political figure, striving to act as a mediator between the Arab world and the West. Another prize-winning film, *Yoel, Yisrael and the Pashkavils* by Lina Chaplin (2006) is the first ever depiction on film of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem belonging to the radical anti-Zionist sect Neturei Karta. Rejecting of many modern technologies, they usually refuse to be filmed.

Two films by anthropologists dealt with ritual and used their already long-established closeness to the participants to show the political dimension of rituals, which

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rather than simply enacting an established template, tend in practice to be a site of struggle for precedence, influence and prestige. *Morokapel's Feast: The Story of a Kara Hunting Ritual*, by Steffen Köhn and Felix Girke (2007), concerns a Kara rite for a young man who has successfully hunted a leopard. However, the circumstances surrounding this particular event give rise to disputes by various interested parties as to whether the participant truly qualifies to have the ritual performed for him. Ton Otto's *Ngat is Dead: Studying Mortuary Traditions* (2007) is part of the anthropologist's decades-long fieldwork with the people of Baluan island in the South Pacific. When his adoptive father passed away, Ton had a duty to participate in the funeral arrangements, and in the process of filming them, produced a fascinating visual document of the elaborate negotiations that go on between different groups of relatives before such a ritual, with its all-important accompanying exchanges, can be satisfactorily carried out (Photos 5 and 6). My own film *When the Sun Rises: A Toraja Priest of the Ancestral Way* is also the result of a long-term fieldwork relationship sustained over thirty years, and tells the story of the decline of an indigenous religion, the Aluk To Dolo or "Way of the Ancestors" of the Toraja people of Sulawesi, Indonesia, in the face of massive conversion to Christianity (Photos 7 and 8).

Truth, as the saying goes, is stranger than fiction, and some films in the Festival told such extraordinary stories that they stand as quite unique. One of these, Dan Alexe's *Cabal in Kaboul* (2007), has an elemental quality of life as theatre about it. It shows the lives of the last two surviving Jews in Afghanistan (the rest having fled during the Taliban years), who share living space on different floors of the courtyard of Kabul's now decrepit old Synagogue. The two men have developed a consuming hatred of each

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other and live in a bizarre state of co-dependent feud. *Between Heaven and Earth*, by Frank van den Engel and Masha Novikova (2007), tells the story of two circus families in Uzbekistan. Achat and Tarsun, childhood friends who are now in their late fifties, were so impressed by a tightrope walker who performed in their village when they were seven years old, that they both apprenticed themselves as acrobats and went on to establish their own family circus acts. Both also became involved in the banned opposition party ERK ('Freedom'), organising against Islam Karimov's dictatorial rule of Uzbekistan. But after Tarsun's son drowned in mysterious circumstances, he took it as a warning and withdrew from the party, broken-hearted. Achat meanwhile has remained active in a human rights organisation. This has introduced a certain estrangement into the formerly close friendship, which the two men nevertheless struggle to preserve. This story too seems to have all the qualities of a novel about it, but was fascinating precisely because it is documentary (Photos 9 and 10).

There is not space here to do justice to all the films shown in the Festival, but this brief account will suffice to give some idea of the wealth of ethnographic subject-matter fascinatingly revealed in this feast of documentaries, whose images linger in the mind long after the last reel is played out.

Note:

For anybody who is interested in learning more about upcoming Ethnographic Film Festivals, the NAFA Newsletter is extremely informative (<http://nafa.uib.no>); to receive

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the newsletter by email, write to nafanet@hum.au.dk). VisualAnthropology.net (<http://www.visualanthropology.net/fest.php>) is also a useful site. CAFFE (Co-ordinating Anthropological Film Festivals in Europe) is an organisation of festival directors set up to improve co-ordination and communication among the European festivals. You can view its website at: <http://www.anthropological-filmfestivals.eu/festivals.html>



Photo 1: Gerd Seibel, German assistant project manager, on the site of the coke plant whose dismantling is depicted in the film *Losers and Winners* by Michael Loeken and Ulrike Franke (2006) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmakers).



Photo 2: Chinese workers on the site of the coke plant whose dismantling is depicted in the film *Losers and Winners* by Michael Loeken and Ulrike Franke (2006) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmakers).

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Photo 3: Mário Juruna, the first Brazilian Indian ever to become a federal representative in the Brazilian Parliament, whose life and struggle on behalf of his community is celebrated in Armando Lacerda's *Juruna, Spirit of the Forest* (2008) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmaker).



Photo 4: Amazonian Chief Salvador Sereurásaré recalls the life of Mário Juruna. Still from the film *Juruna, Spirit of the Forest* by Armando Lacerda (2008) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmaker).



Photo 5: Filmmaker Ton Otto and his adoptive Baluan sisters mourn the death of their father. Still from the film *Ngat is Dead: Studying Mortuary Traditions* by Christian Suhr

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Nielsen, Ton Otto and Steffen Dalsgaard (2007) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmakers).



Photo 6: Sakumai, leader of the Sauka clan, distributes shares of money as a final compensation to relatives of the deceased, from both his mother's and his father's clan, in recognition of their work in raising him to adulthood. Still from the film *Ngat is Dead: Studying Mortuary Traditions* by Christian Suhr Nielsen, Ton Otto and Steffen Dalsgaard (2007) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmakers).



Photo 7: Tato' Dena', special priest of the Toraja indigenous religion (Aluk To Dolo) puts the final touches to a temporary altar he has built as part of the traditional *merok* ritual at Nonongan, Tana Toraja, August 2005. This ritual is now rarely held and on this occasion nearly all of those participating were already Christian. (Still from the film *When the Sun Rises: A Toraja Priest of the Ancestral Way* (2008) by Roxana Waterson).

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Photo 8: Tato' Dena' chants as he makes the offerings on the final morning of the merok ceremony, Nonongan, Tana Toraja, August 2005. (Still from the film *When the Sun Rises: A Toraja Priest of the Ancestral Way* (2008) by Roxana Waterson).



Photo 9: Uzbek circus artist with his monkey. Still from the film *Between Heaven and Earth*, by Frank van den Engel and Masha Novikova (2007) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmakers).



Photo 10: Practising on the high wire. Still from the film *Between Heaven and Earth*, by Frank van den Engel and Masha Novikova (2007) (reproduced by kind permission of the filmmakers).