CSSH NOTES

Vassos Argyrou. *Anthropology and the Will to Meaning: A Postcolonial Critique*. London: Pluto Press, 2002. Vi + 129 pp., notes, references, index.

Working ethnographers know that cultural contradictions often hide in plain sight. We may represent such contradictions in our monographs as deep, dark secrets it has taken an expert to unveil, but such nods to the demands of academic theatre tend to violate the sense in which they are very much visible on the surface of daily life. Argyrou's argument focuses on one such contradiction in the culture of anthropology itself: quite obviously, anthropologists both make a living out of claiming that cultures and people shaped by cultures are different from one another while at the same time attacking those who propound racist and ethnocentric arguments by asserting that at bottom people and cultures are in the most important respects all the same. The burden of Argyrou's short, impressively well-argued monograph is to show that this contradiction is present in all versions of anthropology (Victorian, modern, post-modern) and that it dooms the discipline to a kind of incoherence, at least in theoretical and political terms, if not ethnographic ones.

By Argyrou's count, anthropologists have made two arguments for the fundamental sameness of peoples and cultures. One is the psychic unity argument of Victorian vintage and the other is the twentieth-century cultural relativist claim that all cultures have the same "value and worth" (p. 33). Claims of sameness founded on these arguments represent, he suggests, anthropologists' most fundamental commitments. Even positions that claim to undermine all of the discipline's foundations—postmodern and critical positions that he treats together under the rubric of "heterodox" discourses—speak in the name of these arguments, rather than against them. For all anthropologists, a world in which racist or ethnocentric claims held true would be a meaningless one, and thus they cling to sameness so fiercely because it is the image that gives their world the meaning to which the title of the book refers.

One problem with all this, as Argyrou sees it, is that anthropological practice never bears out these claims of sameness. As he notes several times, there has never been an anthropological paradigm that has not been accused of ethnocentrism, if not racism (e.g. p. 118). They are full of claims that the West differs from the rest, or, what may be worse in his eyes, that the 'natives' do not fully understand their own culture while the anthropologist does. In fact, the second kind of argument—that anthropologists tap a cultural unconscious unavailable to those whose unconscious it is—is simply a blatant instance of what Argyrou sees as an unavoidable aporia that besets all arguments for sameness.

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At the moment of claiming to recognize that all cultures are the same, anthropologists immediately set their own culture apart from all cultures that do not recognize this. Put otherwise, the very claim to know we are all the same privileges those who know as different. For Argyrou, this makes a real commitment to sameness transcendentally impossible—even the most well-meaning anthropological attempts to formulate one are doomed to fail.

As I hope the last paragraph indicates, Argyrou knows his way around a philosophical argument. Indeed, the book is full of intriguing set-pieces in which he brings standard but powerful philosophical styles of argument to bear on all manner of anthropological positions. Thus, for example, the familiar post-modernist claim that all analyses are interested and thus distort the truth is hung out to dry on the rack of the argument philosophers so often bring to bear on positions founded on an appearance (perception)/reality split: if no one can know the truth, it does not make sense to criticize anyone for not reaching it (and how would we know they did not reach it anyway—even if by chance—since we too do not know what it is). This is a far more intriguing line of argument than the simpler version of the self-refutation charge so often leveled at post-modernists (`you claim there is no truth, but you make an exception for your own assertion of this'), and the deployment of such sophisticated arguments is characteristic of the book as a whole. Indeed, it is one of the book's great strengths that is it always clearly and engagingly argued but almost never takes the beaten path—every turn of argument is surprising, and all readers will find themselves thinking about familiar issues in new ways.

Given the ingenuity of his argument, the crispness of his prose, and the demonstrably important topics he takes up, one is tempted to say that Argyrou has written a tour de force. And in some ways he has. But it is not clear exactly where he wants it to force us to go. The rhetorical frame around the argument casts it as a Mediterranean-style agonistic contest in which Argyrou's main goal is to show up anthropology's weaknesses. The book is surely challenging on this level and I cannot imagine any social scientist interested in the deep structure of paradigms of cross-cultural research who would not find it fascinating. But underneath all the agonistic jousting, one detects that Argyrou does not articulate much in the way of a solution to the problems he describes because if he did he would reveal himself to be partisan of just another avatar of the sameness doctrine—the one, long familiar outside anthropology but recently ascendant within it as well, that asserts that all people everywhere exercise or want the same kinds of power and that at bottom they all seek or should seek the same kinds of liberation from it. Indeed, at the end of the book Argyrou finally cashes in his titular allusion and (too) briefly contrasts the anthropological will to meaning on the basis of sameness with Nietzsche's will to power. If the universal validity of the latter is all he has to offer us (and he does not quite offer it explicitly, but in offering us nothing but agonistic exchange, and in sometimes referring to the realities of power that anthropologists overlook in their claims to sameness, he

comes close to doing so), then one is faced with the paradox of an exceptionally original book that leads it readers to extremely pedestrian conclusions. But even if this is the case, the journey to those conclusions is well worth taking. In the process of getting there, Argyrou has written one of the most stimulating and intellectually bracing books of anthropological theory in recent years.

———Joel Robbins, University of California, San Diego

Smriti Srinivas: *Landscapes of Urban Memory: The Sacred and the Civic in India's High-Tech City.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001

The subtitle of this book refers to Bangalore, "India's High-Tech City." Today, Bangalore is indeed best known as a kind of Silicon Valley in India. The author, however, has been ill-advised to put this in the title, since her book hardly touches on that central feature of contemporary Bangalore. Instead it offers a conventional historical account of the Karaga ritual and its performers, the Vahnikula Kshatriyas, a traditional caste of gardeners. The Karaga ritual is an annual performance, featuring an earthen pot carried by a priest. Priest and pot together are seen as a manifestation of the female power (*shakti*) of Draupadi, one of the main characters of the Mahabharata. The performance belongs to the Karnataka '*jatre*' genre and shares features with other Goddess cults in the region. A special and interesting element is the association of the Karaga performance with a Sufi Saint Cult in Bangalore. The procession of the Karaga can only continue past the Sufi shrine after paying respect to the Saint. Unfortunately, the author does not attempt to analyze this in connection with the growing communal tensions between Muslims and Hindus, even in the South of India. The Vahnikula Kshatriyas are seen as part of a larger community, called Tigala. As a result of the political gains of the backward class movement in Karnataka they claim the status of backward tribe. The author describes in detail the formation of a caste association of the Tigala, a political alliance of several communities.

The book does several things quite well. It gives a convincing description and symbolic analysis of the Karaga performance. It also offers a detailed description of the recent political history of the community involved in the ritual. The author's central argument that the community and its ritual performance make a crucial contribution to the definition of Bangalore's urban realm is well developed.

———Peter van der Veer, University of Amsterdam

Mary Weismantel. *Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

The history of the Andean region is permeated by violence of conquest, a violence that resonates through contemporary relationships of profound social,

economic, and political asymmetry in the nation-states of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Although scholars of the Andean region have analyzed colonial and post-colonial structures of power, they have tended to emphasize "ethnicity" and "class" to the exclusion of "race." In *Cholas and Pishtacos,* Weismantel brilliantly demonstrates the intertwining of racial and sexual discourses in the Andes. Drawing evidence from a broad range of popular and scholarly material, she integrates archival documents, folklore, festivals, classic works by novelist José María Arguedas and photographer Martin Chambi, and descriptions of the people and events from her long ethnographic fieldwork in Ecuador. As she notes, each of these genres "demands it own form of interpretation, and offers a different kind of truth" (p. xxiv). In weaving together these distinctive genres, Weismantel creates a powerful intertextual narrative that illuminates the complex discourses naturalizing economic inequality and grounding social hierarchies in the Andes and throughout the Americas.

Rather than describing a particular group of "Indians," Weismantel analyzes the complex ways the fundamental opposition between "Indian" and "white" is configured, as traced through the two figures named in the title (p. xxxii). The *chola* is a market women dressed in a full-skirted *pollera* and a distinctive hat; the *pishtaco,* on the other hand, is known throughout the Andes as a gringo or white man who sucks the blood and fat, the very life force, from other human beings. Horrifying yet familiar, the *pishtaco* acts as a contrast to the pleasant and romanticized icon of nativeness, the *chola.* Although Weismantel notes that the *chola* is a "real person" and the *pishtaco* is not, throughout the book she vividly illustrates the ways that both figures—like race—are mythical yet powerfully shape peoples' imaginations and actions.

Because the contrast between the *chola* and *pishtaco* drives her analysis, Weismantel might have fallen into reifying and essentializing the very categories that she set out to interrogate (of "Indian" and "white," or "woman" and "man"). But she avoids this pitfall, skillfully emphasizing complex processes of interaction (not "identities") in each of the book's three parts. The chapters in Part I, "Estrangement," map a social geography of race in which whites and Indians are not isolated from each other but are nevertheless constrained by social boundaries. Drawing on Freud's conception of the "uncanny," Weismantel describes the strangeness and familiarity of whites, and the fascination and terror engendered by *pishtacos.* She extends her interpretation of estrangement to the market at the heart of the city, a primarily female and Indian space. In Part II, "Exchange," the author focuses on the multiple interactions among people that complicate the binaries of Indian/white; woman/man; rural/urban; real/mythical. Using Bertoldt Brecht's and Judith Butler's theories of theater, Weismantel complicates understandings of market women's sexuality, gender ambiguity, and racial identification. At the same time, she writes a critical commentary on the sexual subordination and continuing rape of Indian women. Her analysis of exchange extends from peasant traditions of reciprocity to the dead-

ly exchanges of rape, murder, and theft that are also mythologized in stories of *pishtacos.* Part III, "Accumulation," examines how the accumulation of commodities and bodily habits are crucial to the dynamic processes of identifying, thus illuminating the practices through which maleness and whiteness are naturalized and denaturalized in *pishtaco* stories and in the cross-gendered performances of Mama Negra during an Ecuadorian fiesta. *Cholas and Pishtacos* is, in short, a beautifully written yet challenging account that will engage readers across disciplines of history, literary criticism, cultural theory, gender studies, as well as anthropology and Latin American Studies.

———Krista E. Van Vleet

Weili Ye. *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900–1927.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

This book is an insightful, carefully researched account of the experiences of Chinese students who attended college in the United States between 1900 and 1927. Ye examines how their experiences transformed their views of nationalism, politics, professionalism, race, gender roles, morality, and leisure.

In 1906, 300 Chinese students were in the United States, growing to 1,600 by 1925–1926. Some were self-funded while others were sponsored by the Chinese or American governments, or private philanthropists. Ye traces the trajectories of students' lives as they grew up in China, studied in the United States, and then returned to China to take up leadership roles in government service and in professions that they helped to define. The author portrays them both as agents and as products of complex processes of cultural and political change in both countries.

Chapter 1 examines Chinese students' associations. Though these were initially celebrated as experiments in democracy that would prepare students for future political leadership roles, they became less political and more social, as the government of the new Chinese Republic grew weaker and more chaotic. In chapter 2 we see how students who returned to China used their American education to legitimate themselves as professionals whose skills entitled them to authority and a degree of independence from government officials. Ye describes the founding of Chinese sociology as a case study of how American-educated students helped create a new profession in their country. Chapter 3 describes how the students chafed at white Americans' racism while reacting with an uneasy mix of solidarity and superiority toward other American minorities, and to impoverished communities of Chinese immigrant laborers and their descendants. American racism galvanized Chinese nationalistic sentiments, but also caused Chinese students to internalize American racial categories and hierarchies that were quite different from Chinese cultural and national classifications. Chapter 4 explores the dilemmas and triumphs of women students who

used their U.S. educations to emancipate themselves from oppressive expectations and, in some cases, to launch groundbreaking careers at home. Chapter 5 focuses on the agonizing dilemmas the students encountered as they explored the culture of romance and dating then on the rise in the United States. Many who they tried to participate were hindered by American racism, strict Chinese moral standards of chastity and gender segregation, and obligations to honor the betrothals their parents had arranged for them. These experiences made some students outspoken critics of the Confucian family and marriage system once they returned to China. Chapter 6 explains how the students participated in sports and theatrical productions while in the United States, and introduced to China a heightened respect for athletics and theater as nation-building activities. The epilogue presents the life stories of three American-educated Chinese men.

By drawing links between the students' personal experiences, the cultures of the Chinese and American communities they participated in, and the transformations they helped produce in China, Ye demonstrates how a historical perspective can inform understandings of cultural processes. *Seeking Modernity in China's Name* is a historical ethnography that will interest anyone concerned with modernization, nationalism, transnationalism, and cultural transformation.

———Vanessa L. Fong

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra. *How to Write the History of the New World: Historiographies, Epistemologies and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

At times in intellectual life the appropriate response can only be to stand and applaud. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's foray into the world of eighteenth-century historiography provides us with one such moment. He draws on archival and library research in Spain, France, England, the United States, and Mexico to challenge and revise dominant understandings of eighteenth-century historical practice. In so doing, he recreates the various historiographical tendencies, debates, and innovations existing on both sides of the Atlantic during this era. One result is the demolition of the notion of a unitary—and, explicitly or implicitly in this formulation, primitive and backward—"Spanish mind." However, Cañizares-Esguerra achieves far more than this as he leads us through an analysis of the various ways that the period's intellectuals, primarily in Spain and "Spanish" America, constructed knowledge about the pre-Colombian American past.

The book begins and ends with a discussion of Antonello Gerbi's classic 1955 study of the "dispute over the New World," a famous debate over the relative merit of American civilization, culture, and history. In general, this debate

pitted those with negative debates of the "New World"—for example, Georges-Louis Leclerc and Comte de Buffon—against defenders such as Thomas Jefferson (pp. 5, 347–48). Cañizares-Esguerra succeeds in demonstrating that "Creoles," or those of Spanish descent in the colonies, as well as intellectuals drawn from the diverse peoples of "Spain" itself, had a passionate interest in this debate. Indeed, they produced many substantial historical works on the nature of the pre-colonial past, a reality obscured to some extent by difficulties of publication and circulation in the eighteenth-century Iberian world. Cañizares-Esguerra's book makes it impossible to define this debate in exclusively North Atlantic terms.

From a Mexicanist point of view, one of the most interesting aspects of this study is the demonstration that eighteenth-century scholars also debated the validity and importance of indigenous language sources. Creole efforts to recover the Amerindian past went well beyond the trope of "our Aztecs and Incas were better than your Greeks and Romans." Ingenious efforts to reconstruct the indigenous past played a crucial role in the formation of Creole identity. In debates with Europeans, Creoles privileged "New World" experience and fluency in indigenous languages, culture, and historical sources. While recognizing this contribution, Cañizares-Esguerra also convincingly details the class and cultural contradictions of late-colonial Creole idealizations of the indigenous past in the midst of the harsh ethnic and racial inequalities of that era. Sadly, the tendency to extol the indigenous past while ignoring the indigenous present would have a long future in Creole nationalism.

In terms of comparative history and historiography, Cañizares-Esguerra demonstrates how eighteenth-century debates over the validity of sixteenth-century sources revealed new historiographical sensibilities that continue to resonate in modern and postmodern historical practice. The Bourbon-inspired creation of the Archivo General de Las Indias in the 1780s represented a definitive moment in the evolution of a historical epistemology that privileged "primary" (then termed "public") sources over printed ones (p. 133). The author succeeds in demonstrating how the evolution of historiography in Spain, and the "patriotic epistemology" of the Creole elite, helped create and respond to eighteenth-century intellectual trends across an enormous expanse of geographic space. This provocative and innovative study provides perceptive insights on the practice of history and identity formation throughout the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Bravo!

———James Krippner-Martínez

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