

# CSSH NOTES

Ann Anagnost. *National Past-times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Ann Anagnost's *National Past-times* is a collection of exceptionally perceptive essays addressing issues of governmentality: the language, workings and limits of state power; the formation of revolutionary subjects; the representation of national history in contemporary post-socialist China. The essays in this rich collection interrogate state discourse in a myriad of ways, drawing upon newspaper accounts, films, literature, and fieldwork encounters. Subtle changes in the language of state discourse are discussed in relation to how transitions from the superstructural determinism of the Maoist era to evolutionary notions of modernity in the post-Mao era are used to structure normative practice and transform the population into a disciplined labor force ready for global investment. An analysis of governance at the local level reveals how political rituals, such as the bestowal of status awards, actually distribute people into a moral hierarchy while simultaneously creating the appearance of the party and the people speaking in a unified voice. The controversial one-child family policy is interrogated in terms of state and popular understanding of 'population quality,' a notion drawing on eugenics, commodities as markers of social evolution, fears of disorder, and national progress. A film tracing a rural woman's search for justice is the departure point for probing the workings of rural governance structures, personalized power, and forms of agency enabled by the market economy. The contemporary theme park "Splendid China" is analyzed as a narration of national identity that erases the Maoist era and presents a seamless continuity between symbols of imperial antiquity and the socialist state.

In the most powerful essay, "Making History Speak," Anagnost explains the violence of the Cultural Revolution by "the politics of presence" in which the testimonials referred to as *suku*, "speaking bitterness," became identified as the motive force of history. Speaking bitterness took place when peasants recounted their exploitation and denounced individuals identified as 'class enemies' in public struggle sessions. These testimonials were used as models for reworking consciousness in order to revolutionize the population. As people narrated their experiences according to model scripts, they drew on a structure of feeling authorized by the state to create identities as revolutionary subjects defined by class. The state, in turn, used these local testimonials to establish socialist revolutionary culture and to narrate the history of the nation. However, these testimonials were not unproblematic, transparent conveyances of the truth, but rather selected accounts. Not all testimonials were sifted into nation-

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al history; in the Four Histories Movement of 1957, only seventeen out of seventy thousand narratives were chosen for publication. Significantly, model narratives portrayed an old and new society locked in a moral drama of good versus evil. The ensuing violence against individuals who “provided the human face of impersonal forces of imperialism and capitalism” could be attributed to the fusion of class positions and moral attributes.

Anagnost traces the socialist realism of the Maoist era to the realist literature of the May 4th Movement and colonial modernity. She makes intriguing connections, suggesting that realist literature of the 1920s and 1930s used characters to embody abstract forces, much the way that Maoist-era revolutionary struggle against impersonal forces of imperialism and capitalism was accomplished by attacking a local cast of characters who personified problematic class positions and their attendant evil. The language of colonial modernity, and the appropriation and alteration of realist literature, created a model for speaking bitterness narratives and for the envisioning of socialist realism. Anagnost suggests that both realist literature and socialist realism (enabled by speaking bitterness narratives) operate through the powerful “effect of presence.” People who ‘spoke bitterness’ embodied the voice of history. Putative eye-witnesses and their struggle targets gave a “materiality” to “abstract categories of social critique,” enabling linkages between local experience and “ungraspable effects of a dispersed global economic system.”

There are chilling resonances between “speaking bitterness” and the controversial “*testimonio*” of *I Rigoberta Menchu*, Hutu refugee narratives analyzed in Liisa Malkki’s *Purity and Exile*, and a range of problematic first-hand accounts claiming the ‘voice of history.’ While each of these cases needs to be understood with respect to cultural and historical specificities, Anagnost’s discussion of the “politics of presencing,” and her location of memories of the past in the conditions of the present, provide an analytic framework for understanding testimonials that takes us beyond facile pronouncements of their truth or falsehood. Attending the moment of testimonial construction, as well as how it represents the past, enables us to track projects of identity formation, the politics of representation, and contemporary constructions of imagined ethnic and national history.

These essays are at once ethnographic, historical, and deeply analytic in their close attention to language and micro-technologies of power. *National Past-times* stands at the intersection of literary criticism, history, anthropology, and cultural studies, enabling it to make an original and long-needed contribution to the theorization of power, subject formation, and nation fundamental to understanding contemporary China and other post-socialist contexts.

———Emily Chao

Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet. *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation 1804–1946*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. 304 pp., \$39.50 (cl.).

*Frontier Fictions* begins with the now famous scene of Muhammad Riza Shah's departure from Iran on 16 January 1979. It recalls his father's departure thirty-seven years earlier, and the similar reported stories, that each monarch "departed with a box of Iranian soil tucked away in their belongings"(3).

The question Kashani-Sabet asks, "What was the symbolic value of this simple gesture?"(3), forms at once the heart of her book, its tremendous strength and originality, as well as an analytic tension that is not resolved within its terms.

The author's argument is constructed around centrality of land as the notion at the heart of formation of Iranian modern nationalism, "a patriotism rooted in the land, or 'Iranzamin,' as they [Iranian nationalists] celebrated the nation"(3). It is in formulations like this that an analytic tension haunts the author's argument. Is this centrality one centered on what is seen as the tangible materiality of a piece of this earth, or is it that of a story about land, as "Iranzamin" would be, a national narrative centered on land as the essence of nationhood, much as, in other nationalisms, language, race, blood, or other contingent historical concepts may have provided the presumed material core for an essential nationhood. There is a tension and slippage between these two readings of the meaning of land and its centrality throughout the book.

Starting from Kashani-Sabet's reading of the departure stories, her notion of "[t]he symbolic value of this simple gesture" presumes the veracity of the gesture itself, and attributes meaning to the act and asks what historical significance the act symbolized. The question to ask, however, would be: what meaning has the circulation of stories about that gesture, a gesture centered on "that handful of soil" [*mushti az khak*], had for Iranian nationalism. After all, there are many stories about "that handful of soil"—in some versions the shahs carried it with them on departure; according to others, at least in the case of Riza Shah, he asked for it to be sent once settled in his exile. The central question, then, becomes what meaning the stories about that handful of soil has for articulation of Iranian nationalism. How is it that Iranian nationalism has been so deeply narrativized around a particular notion of land/soil (*khak*), as distinct from (though inter-related to) other possible notions of national essence, such as blood, race, and language. Although all of these are also present in Iranian nationalism, as in many other nationalisms, Kashani-Sabet's proposition that *khak* (taken as a narrative) has a contingent centrality deeply embedded in Iran's nineteenth-century history is powerfully and persuasively argued through the many rich chapters, the structure of the book, its chronological frame, and its illustrations. This is a book in which everything is carefully crafted, beautifully woven together, and a pleasure to read. It captures you and makes you think

with it. It is indispensable reading for students of modernity and nationalism beyond Iran and the Middle East.

The book contains ten illustrations (yet curiously for a book that is centered on land and frontiers, and quite convincingly argues for importance of geography as a central nineteenth-century science for formation of national imaginary, it contains no maps), two pages of chronology, one page of glossary, a four-page index (disappointingly thin for a rich book such as this).

————Afsaneh Najmabadi

John Dickie. *Darkest Italy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

To an Italian, *la questione meridionale*, “the Southern question,” is as inescapable as racism is to an American, or “the troubles” are to an inhabitant of the British Isles. But what do foreigners see when they look at the troubled relationship of the Italian South with the rest of the peninsula? In his interesting book, *Darkest Italy*, Dickie reminds us, first of all, that we face several “questions,” if we wish to use this term at all (13–14). The *Mezzogiorno* itself was, during the period he considers, 1860–1960, and remains to this day, comprised of diverse geopolitical, cultural, and social components. These appear to have become one in the minds of liberal modernizers, northerners and southerners alike (for example, Pasquale Villari, 55–63). They believed that building the Italian nation required changing cultural attitudes and values in the populace as much as in the elites (4–7); and they assessed the difficulty of their task in the degrees of deviance of various parts of the country from their own normative view of nationhood. “The South” was seen as highest on this scale.

To specialists of Italian history, *Darkest Italy* offers a sharp analysis of the role played by cultural production—academic and otherwise—in this process of enforced homogenization. Popular anecdotes, reports on natural disasters, novels, illustrations, and attempts at scientific assessment all seemed to come to the same conclusions, distressing in their substance, but comforting in their unanimity. Dickie improves our understanding of the role played by the problematization of the South in the construction of a national Italian identity at the political and institutional level. The struggle against banditry, for example, is as much an attempt to solve a concrete problem as a test for the unified Italian army (32–48).

Political theorists will appreciate Dickie's savvy contribution to cultural studies, as he dissects the dynamics of identification, reification, and negation of a culture that is made to play the role of the “other” (83–119). Orientalism and even racism inform to different degrees what Italian modernizers—politicians, the military, scholars, and journalists—did to, or said about “the South.” However, Italians can make the South play the role of the completely alien “other”

only with difficulty (10). One would wish that Dickie had detailed the “identification” aspect of the North/South dynamic, and not just the reifying one. Especially at the level of high culture, the South has contributed to Italian identity as much as any other part of the country, with pre-Dante Italian poetry, with the Neapolitan school of medicine, with Vico and Enlightenment figures, and on and on. This helps explain, by the way, why many southern intellectuals fully identified with the modernizing project of nineteenth-century liberalism.

Even when it comes to “negative” aspects, the South is likely to be perceived by other Italians merely as a more extreme version of themselves (132–39). Take localism, for example. “The North” was as fragmented as the South, Dickie remarks (11), so that the liberal elites that supported the Savoy dynasty set themselves a hard task indeed. The South was merely the test case for the project of building the Italian nation (63). I think it is fair to say that the project mostly failed, while localism appears to have been unable to provide a viable alternative, Carlo Cattaneo’s federalism notwithstanding: witness the imbroglio known as *La Lega*.

Liberal modernizers were successful, however, in congealing an image of the South that most Italians carry with them uncritically. Dickie reminds us that image-formation is at least in part under our control and that, if all we can produce is alienating and reifying cultural constructions, even the best-intended structural intervention is doomed to failure.

————Daniela Gobetti

Elizabeth Thompson. *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. xvii + 402 pp., \$49.50 (cl.); \$17.50 (pap.).

Recent scholarship on twentieth-century Syria has thrown new light on the popular movements that opposed the Arab nationalist government of King Faisal and then resisted the imposition of the French mandate in 1920, on state economic policy throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and on the workers’ organizations and radical parties that emerged as major political actors during the Second World War. Elizabeth Thompson offers a stimulating synthesis of this literature, and supplements it by devoting explicit attention to the way in which gender dynamics interacted with other factors. Specifically, she argues that a “crisis of paternity” (37–38) set the stage for French rule over Syria and Lebanon following the First World War; the mandatory authorities subsequently established a complex “paternalistic colonial civic order,” in which state officials manipulated the disbursement of material benefits to “a mediating elite” of local notables as a way of exerting “control [over] the unprivileged majority” (66). This system led to the emergence of a full-blown “colonial welfare state” by the late 1930s, which entailed an extensive network of state-funded schools

and clinics, along with rights of popular expression and association (163–69). Key elements of the mandate order even outlived the French presence: “Paternal republicanism—the refusal to democratize and expand the colonial welfare state, and the persistence of heterogeneous citizenship rights—would contribute to the causes of Syria’s successive coups beginning in 1949 and to the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1958” (286).

What remains unconvincing is Thompson’s repeated assertion that gender dynamics played a primary role in shaping the politics of mandate-era Syria and Lebanon. With a handful of exceptions—most notably the compelling analysis of the struggle among elite women, Islamist militants and the National Bloc government that erupted in the streets of Damascus in the spring of 1944 (261–70)—gender relations stand divorced from other aspects of the local political economy. An overview of the “subaltern” movements that appeared in the 1920s, for instance, includes separate sections on women and labor (94–103). Similarly, distinct chapters recount the women’s (chaps. 7–8) and workers’ (chap. 9) protests of the 1930s. Conflicts associated with trends in the cinema (chap. 12) and the popular press (chap. 13) provide the basis for informative, albeit conventional, feminist accounts. Whether the book’s discrete parts form a coherent whole may depend upon one’s understanding of the tricky term “paternalistic.” For Thompson, the concept implies not only a form of power that is based on patronage rather than rights, but also a kind of authority that is “essentially male, and passed down from one male to the next” (66–67). But if the connection between on one hand “system[s] of rule [in which] the ruler distributes benefits according to his [sic?] will, not by the right of the ruled” and on the other women’s subordination turns out to be contingent rather than necessary, it will require much tighter argumentation to persuade the reader that gender dynamics, not labor activism or sectarian mobilization, offer the best explanation for political developments in Syria and Lebanon during the mandate period.

———Fred H. Lawson

Robert Alun Jones. *The Development of Durkheim’s Social Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

This book, part of the “Ideas in Context” series printed under the editorship of intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, is an important contribution to the better understanding of Emile Durkheim’s sociology and social philosophy.

Jones has two primary goals. The first is to provide a better understand of the genesis and meaning of Durkheim’s “social realism.” This is the view, most clearly presented in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, that social phenomena are not merely an aggregate of the acts of abstract individuals but objective realities of their own type, subject to laws which can be discovered by the ap-

propriate application of empirical scientific method. Jones's second goal is to convince us that it is attractive to consider Durkheim's theory, and social theory generally, from a point of view Jones describes as historicist and pragmatic.

This second goal, inspired primarily by Collingwood, Skinner, and Rorty, frames Jones's analysis. Durkheim's social realism has always been understood to be a central tenet of his contribution to social thought. But most recent work, Jones argues, is interested in what Durkheim's social realism could mean for social scientists today, how we might (re)interpret social realism so that it makes sense to us and helps us answer the questions we are currently debating. Jones's interest, and indeed the interest of the "Ideas in Context" series, is to trace in detail the genesis and meaning of Durkheim's theory as a language of reality developed to meet the challenges of Durkheim's own era.

Jones makes the case that Durkheim became convinced that Cartesian metaphysics (and the deductive methodology it encouraged) was inadequate for at least two reasons. Most obviously, from the point of view of a founding sociologist, it was inadequate because it reduces society to metaphysical propositions about human nature, leaving little if any opening for a proper science of society as such. But it was also inadequate, Durkheim argued, because it could not help France develop a new morality, new moral and political conceptions needed to replace the decaying allegiances and common values of the past.

Jones's book benefits from the recent discovery of Andre Laland's lecture notes from Durkheim's class in philosophy given at the Lycee of Sens in 1883 and 1884, lectures in which Durkheim was still a methodological individualist in the manner of his teacher Renouvier. Jones gives a lucid account of development of Durkheim's social realism by tracing Durkheim's critical interaction with the thought of his professors at the Ecole Normale, especially Fustel de Coulanges, Emile Boutroux, and Renouvier, as well as his important encounter with German thought in Berlin, Marburg, and Leipzig (1885–1886).

This book will not go unchallenged. Stjepan Mestrovic, for example, would rather argue that Durkheim's strength was in balancing social realism and rationalism. Nor will every reader be convinced that the Rortian framework is as necessary as Jones believes it to be; the book could have been written by an intellectual historian who had never heard of Rorty if his or her primary interest were the debates of Durkheim's own era. But this does not detract from Jones's accomplishment. His careful analysis of Durkheim's thought in its own intellectual milieu is a very useful contribution everyone interested in the evolution of modern social science and social philosophy will appreciate.

————James S. Benton

Ida Altman. *Transatlantic Ties in the Spanish Empire: Brihuega, Spain, and Puebla, Mexico, 1560-1620*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Ida Altman has written a book that both probes deeply the significance of tying together Iberian and American domains under a common Crown government and brilliantly demonstrates how the comparative history of the first global age ought to be approached. Several recent works have shown the importance of bullion flows, especially those of silver. But for the development of a truly world economy and history, the resulting networks did not have the same impact on all of the localities that they increasingly connected. Altman does an outstanding job of exploring such differences, and their relationship to the interface between the macro-history of the period's new economic and political domains and the micro-history of locality, in ways that highlight human agency.

Instead of comparing large regions that were integrated into the process, without reference to possible direct connections among them, Altman focuses on the ties between two distinct places. One is the central Castilian artisanal, textile-producing town of Brihuega, with a population of about 4,000, that faced increasing economic difficulties. The other is Mexico's second city, Puebla de los Angeles. During a sixty-year period, over 1,000 *briocenses* (as residents of Brihuega are known) emigrated to Puebla de los Angeles. There they played significant roles in building large-scale cloth-manufacturing workshops (*obrajes*) that often used confined or slave labor of Native American and African origin, and supplied markets as distant as Peru. The first global age was characterized by the circulation of military, political, religious, and economic elites. But people of humbler origins, such as the *briocenses*, also used their skills and training as sources of capital that allowed them to take advantage of greater opportunities for wealth outside of peninsular Castile. Altman employs correspondence, notarial records, and an impressive variety of ecclesiastical, judicial, and municipal sources. With them she establishes how their Castilian context shaped the backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations that provided a foundation for *briocenses'* responses to what Puebla offered, without determining what the immigrants were like as *poblanos* (residents of Puebla). Throughout well-organized and well-written chapters on economic, political, religious, and social life (both kinship and intergroup relationships), the book underlines its methodological message: in order to understand the nature and impact of migration, researchers must focus on locality.

Because of the new geographical and political environments of the first global age, *briocense* migration connects and demands comparison of localities within regions—"Spain" (or "Europe") and "Latin America"—that are often reified into objective entities with autonomous histories. I am struck by the results of Altman's connected history, but also worried that few specialists will have the courage and training to undertake such research. I suggest that we



build collaborative teams to focus on world historical questions that go beyond our categories of conventional geographic areas and modern countries, and that demand attention to connections instead of artificially constructed comparisons.

———J. B. Owens