

of Derluigian's book, she would certainly be impressed by his insight into one the most significant episodes of twentieth-century world history. The core of Derluigian's investigation, however, takes the reader far beyond the domain of sociology, dealing with the broader consequences of the failure of those states employing developmentalist ideologies and strategies.

Derluigian's attempt to open a new window of opportunity for further investigation into the evolving nature of concepts such as ethno-cultural diversity, socio-political change, and global unrest is, indeed, praiseworthy. If his study does not stretch enough to answer all the lingering questions about the nature of these massive socio-political changes in the dying years of the twentieth century, it allows us to address several other related concerns, the importance of which may well transcend the mere study of *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*.

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BREMAN, JAN. *Labour Bondage in West India from Past to Present*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi [etc.] 2007. xi, 216 pp. Rs. 525.00.; £18.99; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008063360

In *Labour Bondage in West India*, Jan Breman returns to many of the issues which have been raised in his earlier writings, but with a difference. By going back into the historical antecedents of bondage in the pre-colonial period and tracing the politics of reform and abolition in the colonial period he deepens and sharpens many of the arguments which appeared in his classic work, *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India* (Berkeley, CA, 1974), more than thirty years ago.

In the opening chapter Breman traces the processes by which agrarian expansion and colonization led to the expropriation and marginalization of tribal groups. While the agrarian classes were concentrated in the central plain area of Gujarat, tribal groups like the Chodhras, Gamits, and Dhodhias continued to practise shifting cultivation in the hilly region to the east well into the colonial period. The Dublas, a category of farm servants in south Gujarat, were in contrast subjugated and de-tribalized much earlier. The extension of agricultural cultivation in the south Gujarat plains, long before colonial rule, was based on the increasing subordination of Dublas to the dominant caste of Anavil Brahmins. The Brahmanization of the latter, Breman emphasizes, was predicated on the servitude of the former. In the course of the eighteenth century a group of Anavils, categorized as Desais, acquired dominance in rural society through their role as intermediaries or revenue farmers. Conditions in eighteenth-century south Gujarat, Breman argues, were typical of a frontier society with an over-taxed peasantry continuously on the move, fleeing from the burden of taxation.

In his analysis of the system of labour bondage in chapter 2, Breman reiterates an argument powerfully made in *Patronage and Exploitation*: the original contract of bondage, he emphasizes, was not made under duress. The Dubla consents; he accepts an advance from the landowner and thus commits himself to working for the master: "By accepting the advance the Dubla became a *hali*, (servant) committing himself to work for the master." He cultivates his master's fields and does any other work the master requires. The contract of bondage included the entire family of the *hali* – his wife and children had to also serve the master. A contract once made was impossible to revoke. The *hali* could

only survive through a system of advances, thus perpetuating his bondage. The consent of the Dubla in Breman's argument is premised on the basic economic security the relationship provided. Economic changes in World War II and the postwar years meant an erosion of the old basis of the master–servant relationship: *balis* were no longer deferential and patrons did not provide the kind of protection they had in the past.

Breman develops his arguments through a critique of Gyan Prakash's history of rural bondage in Bihar, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1990). Prakash, argues Breman, underplays the economic dimensions of the relationship of bondage, and overemphasizes the significance of the ideology of patronage and dependence in mediating the relationship between masters and the agrestic servants. In Breman's view this focus on ties of vertical solidarity between Anavil patrons and their servants, tends to blur the violence and arbitrariness with which power was exercised, and the degradation and de-humanization of the Dublas. And finally Breman sees in Prakash's narrative a valorization of the colonial discourse on freedom.

Chapters 3 and 4 give important insights into the politics of peasant mobilization and the relationship between nationalists and landless rural groups. In standard accounts of nationalist politics, the particular system of land revenue in Gujarat (*ryotwari*), with peasant proprietors paying revenue directly to the state instead of through intermediaries, lent a greater unity to struggles against colonialism than other regions. Elsewhere, struggles over rent against *zamindars* (tax collectors) made unity very tenuous. Breman pushes Hardiman's argument further, bringing out the tensions and conflicts in the relationship between nationalists and the peasantry. Any radical-reform agenda addressing the problems of landless village servants was consistently opposed by conservative Congress leaders like Patel. Gandhian initiatives to carry out a programme for educating Dublas had to be abandoned because of furious opposition from upper-caste landowners. After this, the Gujarat Congress leaders were wary of any programme which would alienate the dominant landowning classes. In fact, Breman shows how the Congress leadership tried to concentrate its mass campaigns in areas where it felt less threatened by the demands of a vocal and oppositional peasant underclass.

Outlining the sharpening of differences within the Congress over the question of agrarian reforms in the 1930s (in chapter 4), Breman elaborates on how several Congress radicals joined organizations like the Congress Socialist Party and the All-India Kisan Sabha (All-India Peasant Congress) actively to take up the demands of peasants and workers. Growing peasant militancy and pressures for abolition of the system of bondage from nationalist leaders like Indulal Yagnik and Dinkar Mehta led to the adoption of resolutions proposing abolition. The discussion on the politics of reform brings into focus the complicity of the state and political parties in perpetuating the system of bondage. In the final chapter, Breman points out that even in post-independence (post-1947) India there was no serious effort to improve the position of bonded labourers. However, he ends on a note of "cautious optimism": by the 1970s *balis* were no longer willing to accept the domination of higher castes in the way they had in the past. The opening up of a labour market in urban areas allowed bonded servants to move out of the village farm.

This argument, however, is somewhat problematic. There seems to be a framing assumption that the spread of the market had a dissolving effect on the system of bondage. Breman may not explicitly endorse such a view but this seems implicit in the logic of his argument. His own discussion on politics in fact suggests that social movements were

important in corroding the legitimacy of the system. Clearly, the market does not have the same effect in all social contexts.

In looking at the longer narrative, one is also curious whether Breman is moving away from a focus on the cultural and symbolic meanings of bondage in his categorical emphasis on its economic basis. Possibly, in distancing his own framework from that of Gyan Prakash, there is an assertion of the economic in a way that is not really sustained by his larger argument.

And finally, Breman's discussion on labour bondage raises larger issues that historians are grappling with today. How do we define the shift from unfreedom to freedom? When traditional and non-economic obligations weaken, does a labourer become free? Coming at a time when there is a renewal of a debate on questions of "free" and "forced" labour, Breman's study of labour bondage in West India is of crucial significance.

Three decades ago, *Patronage and Exploitation* charted new directions for studies on agrarian labour; this present work forms a major sequel by locating bondage in a historical perspective.

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ROCKEL, STEPHEN J. *Carriers of Culture. Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa.* [Social History of Africa.] Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH 2006. xix, 345 pp. \$29.95; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008073367

"The omnipresent porter has become almost invisible – part of the scenery. History has relegated him or her to the background – to the 'enormous condescension of posterity' – like E.P. Thompson's English croppers, hand-loom weavers, and artisans" (p. 5). The image of portly, sweaty, sunburnt, pink Europeans, wearing solar topee hats and safari suits, followed by rows of grinning African porters, bearing boxes on their heads and tramping through the jungles and savannahs of Africa in single file, has become the stereotypical and popular image of European exploration in Africa.¹ Associated with this image of caravan porters is the representation, derived primarily from nineteenth-century anti-slavery discourse, of the porters as slaves. Concentrating on the porters that plied the trade routes of east Africa, Stephen Rockel sets out to trounce and revise the representation of the African porter as an unthinking shackled beast of burden, and to bring to the fore the independent specialist wage-labourer. Essentially Rockel has sought to take slavery out of, and introduce wage labour into, the African caravan trade.

Stephen Rockel begins his work by noting that for a wide variety of reasons the bulk of transport in Africa, prior to the introduction of motorized transport in the early 1900s, was conveyed by human labour; indeed, "Without porters, nothing would have moved" (p. 4). In the late nineteenth century transport routes powered by human power reached their furthest extension and sophistication. Rockel argues that the relationship between labour and transport that developed was such that "in sub-Saharan Africa, caravan porters were the first migrant labourers" (p. 4). Hitherto, according to Rockel, the manner in which African porters worked, organized their labour and employment, and saw and represented themselves, were all obscured by perspectives on Africa's past that were dominated by

1. An image that finds its contemporary representation and manifestation in tented luxury safari camps catering for well-heeled tourists across central and east Africa.