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Review

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migrated to Nuevo León. On more than one occasion, this ethnographer ran into historians who declared there were no Jews who settled in Nuevo León because there is no official written record of their existence. The disparity between “text” and “word” created a space that Hernández calls “*le réel*,” after de Certeau (1988). *Le réel* is ineffable and, thus, to enter its space is to experience delirio because language cannot provide orientation.

The use of *le réel* makes explicit what is sometimes implicit in ethnographic writing: the mystery of the informant’s subjectivity. Of course, *le réel* is a construction that comes from theory and rests on the informant’s presentation of meaning. As in many fieldwork projects, serendipitous presentations of meaning probably influenced Hernández’s understanding of the space between “text” and “word.” She became acquainted with Horacio Alvarado Ortiz, who produced a television program on Nuevo León history and culture that ran for 18 years. Like the ethnographer, he also ventured into the same space as he searched for “unusual stories and disappearing myths” (p. 85). Hernández read the stories her deceased relative, Irma Sabina Sepúlveda, wrote about the village of San Isidro del Potrero. The ethnographer concluded that Potrero must be the place where “past and present are hidden, chaotically joined together, and hold the surreal nature of Nuevo León’s history” (p. 121). She settled in Potrero for 13 months to carry out what appears at first glance to be the most traditional phase of her fieldwork project. However, her stay in Potrero turned out to be a disappointment because her relatives preferred to talk about their struggles with land and the economy rather than the ghosts and *lechuzas* (lit., “owls,” but here “witches who turn into animals”) that appeared in some of Irma Sabina Sepúlveda’s stories. Her journey to find the radical Other took Hernández to Sepúlveda’s home in Monterrey and to the desk where the author wrote many of her stories. The house, described as a tomb, recalled the stories of priests’ mistresses rumored to be buried in the walls of a structure near or under the cathedral.

What can one make out of this book described as a departure from “traditional ethnographic writing” (p. 257)? I wondered if her way of writing ethnography is an artifact of her way of doing ethnography. Did her way of locating informants, subjects, or relatives lead her to those who were unable to explain the distinction between the oral words and the official text of Nuevo León’s history? What might have happened had she been able to befriend and interview the deceased Sepúlveda, and ask her about the inspiration for her fantastic stories about the *lechuzas* in Potrero? These skeptical questions aside, Hernández has a wonderful ability to describe people and places and provides a vivid photographic record of her ethnographic journey. She moved skillfully from written to oral sources and included liberal doses of popular culture and folklore. I wanted to go to Nuevo León after reading this book and that is why I think *Delirio* is a compelling ethnography.

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Violence and Vengeance: Discontent and Conflict in New Order Indonesia. Frans Hüsken and Huub de Jonge, eds. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken GmbH, 2002, 163 pp.

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Violence, which used to be an incidental subject in anthropology, and an ingredient in the study of war, witchcraft, feud, or criminality, has recently become something of a subject in itself. Studies of its forms, its effects, and, most especially, its sources are by now a bit of a cottage industry, one that the appearance of “terrorism,” “ethnic cleansing,” “rogue states,” and “leveling crowds” as everyday phenomena on the world scene has done nothing to discourage. Some places (the southern Sudan, interior Colombia, western Afghanistan, Algiers) seem hardly more than continuous killing without end or direction; in some, the very idea of state monopolization of legitimate violence (Zaire-Congo, Palestine, Georgia) seems a cruel joke.

Indonesia has yet to arrive at so grave a condition, but it has been moving toward it with strange determination and alarming speed in recent years. The independent *Republik* was born, in the late forties and early fifties, amid a cacophony of youth gangs, military irregulars, religious insurgents, leftist guerillas, and regional separatists—wars within wars. Brought only narrowly under control for a few years by the power of Sukarno’s rhetoric and a postrevolutionary surge of nationalist hope, popular rage exploded again in 1965–66. Following a failed coup in Jakarta, an army-guided popular blood bath took place in which somewhere between a quarter and three-quarters of a million people perished. Lieutenant Colonel, later General, Suharto, whose direct involvement in the coup and the killings remains a much debated matter, displaced Sukarno and fastened an iron grip on the whole society—a grip which lasted for 33 years of economic growth, pervasive corruption, and military severity. When Suharto’s beleaguered regime finally collapsed in the Asian Crisis of 1997–98, the gangs, irregulars, insurgents, guerillas, and separatists returned in force. A collapse of civility, which the terrible last days of Indonesian East Timor and the ethnoreligious explosions in Ambon, Sulawesi, Aceh, and Kalimantan only served to make visible to the world.

The present small book consists of eight brief and, for the most part, rather sketchy chapters by European scholars (Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, French, and English) on aspects of violence during the Suharto period—urban riot, village rough justice, collective punishment, vigilantism.

The most recent return of more general disorder—weakness in Jakarta, anarchy in the provinces—has sometimes made that period look, in retrospect, like a quieter, better managed time, when at least someone was in charge. Some voices are even beginning to be heard regretting, or half-regretting, its passing and calling for a return to its discipline, albeit with less corruption and more inclusion. What is needed is a firm hand. The writers here, anthropologists and historians who worked in Indonesia during the nineties, are concerned to show that this notion of “strongman tranquility” is a myth. Suharto’s “New Order” was anything but orderly. It was marked by a wide variety of state-licensed, often state-encouraged, sometimes state-sponsored criminality: “Like the colonial regime from which it borrowed many characteristics,” it was “a ‘state of violence’” (p. 4).

The authors have little difficulty demonstrating this fact. Focusing their attention on the so-called mysterious killings in the early eighties (four or five thousand vigilante-style midnight executions), they trace, if again rather generally and without much in the way of theoretical conclusion, the direct interplay between national politics and local criminality. The religious-political “witch cleansing” campaigns of the mid-nineties, the anti-Chinese riots of 1980, and the swirl of atrocities and provocations surrounding Suharto’s final days are similarly, and similarly cursorily, reviewed. Any notion of the Suharto period as one of “paternalistic quiet” can hardly survive such an accounting.

It is then, something of a pity that the authors did not take more time to look more systematically into at least some of the matters they here but deplore, and produce some conclusions beyond the likes of “the threat of and use of violence ... was a common practice ... among all sections of society” (p. 4). Only Elder Bråten’s acute analysis of some specific incidents in a Javanese village around the time of the “mysterious killings” and Stephan Eklöf’s nicely balanced account of the 1965 massacres in Bali add much to our understanding. There is also an interesting, if elusive, piece by Huub de Jonge on a Madurese pattern of private justice. For the rest, there is not much beyond hand wringing. “Violence” remains beyond the event horizon, a dark hole.

Local Democracy and Development: The Kerala People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning. T. M. Thomas Isaac and Richard Franke. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002. 241 pp.

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This book is a carefully documented and extremely thorough account of the Indian state of Kerala’s People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning, one of the most ambitious efforts to decentralize planning and promote participatory democracy in the developing world. T. M. Thomas Isaac, an economist and one of the key architects of the

campaign, and Richard Franke, an anthropologist who has authored a number of important books on Kerala, provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex institutional and political dynamics of the campaign.

Launched in 1996 by a newly elected Left Democratic Front Government led by the Communist Party of India, Marxist (CPIM), the campaign quite literally moved the state by granting local governments (village *Panchayats* [councils] and municipalities) direct control over 35–40 percent of the state’s planning budget. But as the authors show, the campaign represents far more than a simple decentralization of governance powers to lower-level elected bodies in this state of 31 million. In both its political and institutional design, the campaign has the socially transformative ambition of dismantling entrenched forms of bureaucratic domination and patronage politics by reinvigorating Kerala’s tradition of direct, movement-based political engagement and fundamentally democratizing the institutional character of the state. In this way, it resembles the renowned Brazilian case of Porto Alegre.

The book begins with a particularly fascinating account of how the political logic of the campaign emerged, on the one hand, out of a rethinking within the CPIM of its traditional state-centric approach to development and, on the other hand, out of various grassroots experiments in local planning carried out by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), a mass-based NGO with a long history of social and educational reform. Born at the confluence of a party with a long history of large-scale mobilization and an NGO that epitomizes the politics of civil society, the campaign has been marked by the creativity and logic of a social movement. This is reflected in the institutional design of the campaign’s core institutions *Grama Sabhas* (ward-level assemblies), development seminars, task forces, and mass capacity-building programs. All are designed to facilitate direct citizen participation in the annual cycle of budgeting and implementing development projects. It is also evident in the concerted efforts by the State Planning Board (the lead implementation agency) and its civil society partners to directly mobilize participation.

If the heart of the book consists of a fine-grained institutional analysis of the actual workings and impact of the campaign that can seem somewhat tedious at times, no less is required to document what is undoubtedly one of the most far-reaching projects of governance reform ever undertaken in India. The authors document both with aggregate data and a series of local case studies the devolution of authority and resources, which has not only created institutions of local democratic decision making but also led to large-scale participation, including historically marginalized groups such as women, *adivasis* (tribals), and *dalits* (untouchables). If the process has been much more inclusive and democratic than the politician and bureaucrat nexus that has traditionally dominated development planning, the output has also been much more effective. The authors make a convincing case that the some one hundred