

Schließlich stellten die oft schwierigen Diskussionen und die Verabschiedung der Erklärung zum Abschluß der Tagung – die Prozedur zog sich von frühmorgens bis spätabends hin – einen zu würdigenden Meinungsbildungsprozess dar. Die Anwesenheit des Experten der Sub-Commission, R.K. Goonaseke (Sri Lanka), wurde als hoffnungsvolles Signal für die weiteren Lobby-Aktivitäten bewertet. „... meine Probleme sind aber gewachsen“, erklärte er nach zwei Tagen im Hinblick auf die Ausarbeitung des Arbeitspapiers.

Jürgen Weber

Western India and the Indian Ocean

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The workshop brought together fourteen scholars from France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland and the USA, the majority of whom represented the disciplines of anthropology and history. Its overall aim was to generate new perspectives on the production of local culture in South Asia in the context of a globalising world. Until recently, India has been treated by many social anthropologists as a civilizational unit in virtual isolation from the rest of the world. Several contributors presented fresh historical data on different merchant communities operating in the Indian Ocean region from the 10th century AD onwards. Their cultural influence fluctuated with the changing networks of trade connecting the western shores of India with those along the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Other papers addressed the social and cultural consequences of translocal trade in western India, and the heterogeneous social and religious composition of South Asia at large. Most participants emphasised the necessity to consider the historical transformations of patterns of trade and migration as the background for an understanding of the contemporary embeddedness of local life in western India in global structures of economic and cultural exchange.

The papers presented covered diverse topics ranging from empirical studies to critical reflections of theoretical concepts commonly used in the study of the history and anthropology of the Indian Ocean region. Questioning familiar dichotomies such as 'Indian merchants and landed aristocracy', 'coast and hinterland', 'static East and dynamic West', René Barendse ('On the Arabian Seas in the Eighteenth Century') argued in favour of a broader historical perspective which takes into account pre-colonial forms of capitalism across the Arabian seas. According to Barendse, an understanding of India's pre-colonial economic transformations within the wider context of

the Indian Ocean economy is a necessary prerequisite for any further analysis of the development of colonialism in western India as well as for contemporary changes. Harald Tambs-Lyche ('Merchants in the Caste System: A Tentative Comparison along the West Coast of India') compared the regional diversity of Indian trading communities along the western coast of India – mainly in Gujarat and Karnataka – by looking at their religious and caste affiliations. He showed that social divisions amongst trading communities correspond to specialised functions (city bankers and brokers, long-distance traders, local merchants etc.) and were shaped in interaction with local and European competition. The dominance of the networks of the Gujarati merchants radiating out from the economic 'centre' in Surat in combination with specific regional historical constellations such as the rise of the port of Goa under the Portuguese generated changing power relations between merchants and local communities along the 'peripheral' southern coasts of western India. While the Vantias of Daman and Diu were involved mainly in Mozambique and continued to profit from accommodation with the Portuguese well into the 19th century, as Pedro Machado ('Making a Passage: Indian Shipping and Navigation to Mozambique 1770–c. 1830') showed, competition with the Portuguese was, on the other hand, at least partly responsible for the migration of the Bhatiya merchant community from Kutch and Saurashtra to Zanzibar since the 16th century. The development of a specific 'culture of migration' of the Bhatiyas under British colonial domination in the 19th century was examined by Edward Simpson ('The Mercantile Diaspora from Kacchh 1840–1886: Bhatiyas and the Culture of Migration'), who demonstrated that it was founded on the trade in African slaves. The question of the fate of African slaves after their arrival in western India was taken up by Helene Basu ('Perceptions of the Sidi in Gujarat'), who presented an analysis of the different political, social and religious roles assumed by former African slaves in the societies of the Deccan and Gujarat within specific historical contexts including the present. James Brennan ('Indian Nationalism in an African Context: The Case of Tanzania') showed that at the beginning of the 20th century tensions between Hindus and Muslims split the Indian communities in Africa which temporarily united in their fight for legal equality with Europeans as opposed to local Africans. The papers presented by Liz Holmes ('The Ancient Spice Trade and Current Labour Migration: An Historical Perspective on the Structure of Exchange between Kerala and the Middle East') and Brian Weinstein ('Jewish Traders in the Indian Ocean – 10th to 13th Centuries: A Review of Published Documents from the Cairo Geniza') illustrated the important influences of long-distance traders from the Middle East on local culture in western India.

The multiple historical ties connecting the societies of coastal western India with those across the sea are also reflected by symbolic representations of intercultural relations on the local level. Marine Carrin ('The Figure of the Foreigner in the Traditions of South Kanara') showed in her ethnographic study that in Karnataka notions of 'foreignness' are represented by spirits, or *bhutas*, classified as guardian spirits of the sea who appear as Chinese, Muslim or Gujarati traders, whereas those signifying autochthony are said to be spirits of the interior forest protecting the earth and the local territory. In a similar vein, Alexander Henn ('Ritual and syncretism in Goa') examined syncretic ritual practices in Goa that play with the figure of the 'foreigner' by mixing Hindu and Christian elements in religious ceremonies which may be better interpreted as processes of iconographic mimesis than as forms of symbolic communication.

Llyn Smith ('Sufi Networks and Saints' Shrines in the Western Indian Ocean: Shared Ideologies and the Constitution of a Global Islamic Community') discussed the interaction between global religious movements and their local manifestations. She found that in a contemporary branch of the Rifa'i Sufi order in Sri Lanka at the periphery of the Islamic world, conceptions of a global Islamic community are reproduced and created through the establishment of a regional 'orthodoxy' defined by its political control over a local shrine. Peter Flügel ('Jain-Vaisnava Syncretism in Western India') questioned the homogeneous concept of culture applied to India (South Asia) by analysing the notion of the 'gift' as it is used by a modern religious movement which combines modern Jain cosmology with Vaisnava *bhakti* practices. Spreading gradually from western India to the Gujarati communities in East Africa, Britain, and North America, the popularity of *bhakti* movements such as this heterodox 'Jain' tradition challenge an understanding of 'the Indian gift' that is primarily based upon the classical doctrines and rituals of scriptural Brahmanism.

Generally, the new data presented at the workshop drew attention to the fact that social life along the western coast of the Indian subcontinent is as much constituted through influences from other regions of the Indian Ocean rim as by influences extending from inland centres. In contrast to established anthropological theories of the uniform constitution of Indian culture, the participants of the workshop emphasised the heterogeneous character of diverse social settings in western regions of India and in East Africa.

Helene Basu / Peter Flügel