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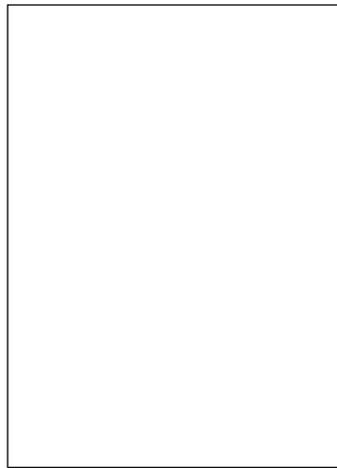
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Esther Fihl
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Introduction :
The study of cultural encounters in
Tharangampadi/Tranquebar

Esther Fihl
Stine Simonsen Puri

The present volume of *Review of Development and Change* takes the reader to the small coastal village of Tharangampadi, literally ‘the village lashed by the waves’ and known as Tranquebar in European discourse. Located in the Nagapattinam district of Tamilnadu, its unique history as a former Danish trading post, site of foundation of the first Lutheran church in India and the cradle of the Indian print history makes this village a privileged setting for the study of cultural encounters. In the past Tranquebar was the locus of interesting encounters related to colonial politics as well as missionary activity; today the area is integrated in a wider global context especially due to the export of fish, migration of labour, tourism and not least the presence of international NGOs in the aftermath of the tsunami in December 2004.

Both names—Tharangampadi and Tranquebar—are today in use locally and they reflect the long history of the place. This volume will employ both: Tharangampadi when working with a local Tamil perspective, and Tranquebar where the focus is on Tamil church traditions or on colonial or post-colonial relations. In this introduction we will use the name Tranquebar, since internationally this name is more widely known, as it is associated with the rich historical sources archived mainly in India, Denmark, Norway, England and Germany.¹

Today, Tranquebar is a village of less than 10,000 inhabitants and about half the population is employed in fishing. With its impressive town gate, the former Danish Fort on the seashore and linear streets with Lutheran churches, it has recently

¹ From an inscription dating from 1305 AD on the local Hindu temple, Masilamaninathar, one more name of the village is known, Sandankanpadi. The inscription relates to sailors and a guild of ‘traders of eighteen countries’ (Subramanian 2003 p. 2f; Nagaswamy, n.d.), see also www.tharangampadi.dk.

been designated a heritage town in India. An obvious cultural encounter takes place in the definition of the history of Tranquebar; thereby also of the modern use of buildings and the control over life and land. In addition there are encounters at the level of cultural and religious practices in the village today as well as back in history.

From the vantage point of different disciplines—history, social anthropology, religious studies, literary studies and the history of ideas—this relatively small geographical place of Tranquebar will be examined to let it grow in depth, revealing the multi-layered processes of change related to cultural encounters.

Tranquebar: Past and Present

Tranquebar is situated on the Coromandel coast which derives from the Tamil term *Cholamandalam*, ‘realm of the Cholas’, known to have been the rulers of most of South India between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Since the early fourteenth century, at the time of the Pandyan Kingdom, Tranquebar has been known has also been known for its Siva temple, Masilamaninathar, which bears inscriptions referring to the place as a trading port with merchants and soldiers stationed for their protection. During the Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1646), the place, with its location close to Tanjore (Thanjavur), was part of the Tanjore Province, which in 1535 was granted independence with the rule of the Nayaks lasting until 1673 (Subramanian 2003 p. 2ff).

The colonial history of Tranquebar begins in 1620 with the arrival of the Danish envoy Ove Giedde on the Coromandel coast as the head of the first Danish trading expedition, with the hope of signing a contract between the Danish King Christian IV and the King of Tanjore, Nayak Ragunatha. After some months of negotiations, the Danes were allotted Tranquebar and along with the already present Portuguese given a monopoly on all Tanjore’s trade with Europe (Fihl in this volume).

Assisted by the Dutch merchant Roland Crappe, who became the first Danish governor of the trading station in Tranquebar, Giedde founded Fort Dansborg, which served as the residence for the governor and other officials (Hjelm 1987; Subramanian 2003). From here silver, lead and guns were exchanged for Indian textiles and pepper. For the Danes, Tranquebar was a military stronghold and it functioned as a warehouse for commodities acquired also at other Indian localities and at places in Southeast Asia. In 1845, the trading post was sold to the British (Feldbæk 1969; Fihl 2008).

For the use of Tranquebar as a trading post, the Danes paid a yearly tribute to the Tanjore king thereby becoming part of a complex political system in South India based on reciprocal exchange of gifts and tributes between princely states (Fihl 1984). By the early nineteenth century, between 1808 and 1815, however, Tranquebar was occupied by the British military as a consequence of the wars in Europe. This complicated the payment of the tribute, which was of great symbolic and political importance for the Maratha King of Tanjore at that time, Rajah Serfoji II. Whereas

the British saw the payment purely as an economic transaction, for the king of Tanjore, it was a matter of prestige and a symbol of his power (Rastén in this volume).

During the reign of Raganatha (1612–1634) and in the following centuries, Tanjore court was a centre for performing arts, and it patronized the *devadasis*, female dancers serving at temples not only in Tanjore, but also in larger towns such as Tiruvarur, forty kilometres south-west of Tranquebar, where an important *devadasi* temple was located and from where dance steps as well as dancers were exchanged with the Tanjore court (Kersenboom-Story 1987). There were *devadasis* in Tranquebar as well. In 1623, an Icelander, Jon Olafsson, serving the Danish king in Tranquebar for a year as a soldier, observed temple dancers during processions outside the Masilamaninathar temple opposite Fort Dansborg, where he was on guard. Olafsson's notes of recollection are a unique historical source on the dance, which after Indian independence has been declared one of the national classical dances and through which today young women of various backgrounds, can encounter the dance of the *devadasis* as a method of crosscultural understanding (Puri in this volume).

The first protestant church was founded in India in 1706, and happened to be located in Tranquebar. The Danish King Frederik IV had in that year sent two German missionaries from Halle, Bartholomæus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau to Tranquebar in order to establish a Lutheran mission among his Indian subjects (Gross, Kumaradoss and Liebau 2006). The missionaries soon found themselves to be in deep conflict with the Danish officials and traders sent by the Danish trading company and who, besides when it came to trading activities did not invest much time in taking part in the daily lives of the local Indians (Nørgaard 1987). The Danish–Halle mission, however, put much emphasis on social work and cultural understanding (Fihl 1988, Jeyaraj 1996).

Some years after their arrival in Tranquebar, the Lutheran missionaries set up a print station. At this print station, the first full translation of the Bible in Tamil was printed, which was the first translation of the Bible in any Indian language. The first Tamil grammar and dictionary books were also issued by the Danish press, which constitute a landmark for both future Tamil literacy and modern European understanding of Indian cultures (Venkatachalapathy 2003). For the early missionaries, the printing press became a new way of approaching the Tamil people of not only from Tranquebar and but also from much further beyond (Venkatachalapathy in this volume).

After the establishment of the Lutheran church, many different Christian protestant churches followed and spread out all over Tamilnadu (Bugge 1994). There was fierce competition among the various Christian denominations, and by 1845, when the Danish trading post was sold to Great Britain, the congregations had mostly been taken over by the Anglican Church. In this context, the newly formed German Lutheran Leipzig Missionary Society made an effort to proselyte among the

Anglican Christians as well as among the Roman Catholics in the Madras Presidency, with a more accommodating attitude towards the caste traditions. Thus, the Anglican and the Lutheran church tried to gain influence among the local population by adopting different strategies. One was to accept the caste system, the other was to reject it, and in doing so, both sought legitimacy by referring to the praxis of the first missionary in Tranquebar, Bartholomæus Ziegenbalg (Schönbeck in this volume).

During this time another Christian mission—The Danish Missionary Society—also rooted in the Danish–Halle mission, found its way to South Arcot district, a little north of Tranquebar. As social workers and educators, the missionaries mainly dealt with families in economic and social distress. Children were of great importance to the missionary project, yet when interfering with parenting issues however, the missionaries did not challenge the patriarchy of the Indian fathers (Vallgård in this volume).

For Ziegenbalg as well as the later missionaries, establishing a school system became a key to a dialogue with the Hindu and Muslim communities. Even today, Tranquebar and its surrounding areas have a strong educational tradition, which is associated with the work of the different missions, and with the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church dominating the scene today (Grinder-Hansen in this volume).

Around the time of Indian Independence, a Danish school teacher Sophie Petersen wrote on Tranquebar on her return from a short visit. Aimed at a broad Danish audience she wrote in a romantic manner on the beauty of Tranquebar while stressing the ethical standards of its people. Simultaneously, she presented the loss of Tranquebar and other former Danish colonies in India, Ghana and West India as tied to the high ethical and moral standards of the Danes. Through this representation, she was thus indirectly legitimizing Denmark's remaining colony, namely Greenland, a Danish colony as late as 1979 (Thisted in this volume).

In Tranquebar today, the memory of its Danish colonial past (1620–1845), even if it brings to light the injustice towards the locals, is not particularly apparent in the collective consciousness of its inhabitants. The memory of this past seems mixed or closely interlinked with the colonial experiences during the British reign which followed it. Therefore when trying to evoke or re-establish a memory of an Indo-Danish common history, one is confronted with the perception of the British rule in India. Local villagers encounter the past through a memory emphasizing certain events and leaving out others; here the myth of Ziegenbalg has a significant role to play in the construction of a colonial past (Nonbo Andersen in this volume).

The southern part of the village is framed by the remains and contours of a former town wall from the seventeenth century built as part of the Danish trading post. Within the town walls are streets with Danish names, the Fort Dansborg, churches with Danish gravestones, and kids selling Danish coins to tourists—Indian as well as Danish, and other Europeans (Kryger & Gasparski 2003; Hansen 2005). As this particular part of the village has been designated a heritage town by the

Indian authorities, historical buildings are under renovation, some in cooperation between Indian and Danish institutions and NGOs. Yet, there are differing interests at play in the renovation work, related to ideas of social development and aesthetics. It illustrates that the past is a contested space, which is brought to the present through the battle between different interest groups over the definition of the past of certain constructions (Jørgensen in this volume).

In December 2004, the tsunami struck Tranquebar. Close to 600 people died, mainly from the community of sea fishermen, who call themselves Chettiar fishermen (officially registered as Meenavar Pattinavar), and who live in the northern part of the village. As many fishing villages were destroyed along the southern Coromandel in the tsunami, the Tamilnadu state subsequently passed laws that banned rebuilding of housing close to the shore. Consequently, approximately 2,500 fishermen dwellings in Tranquebar have been moved inland to newly built relocation houses at the margins of the village. This has hampered the traditional use of the beach as a working area for drying fish and entails an anxiety among the fishermen concerning the future use of the same space due to the recent establishment of hotels and the arrival of an increasing number of Indian and foreign tourists (Swamy in this volume).

Also other kinds of markers of geographical boundaries of life and land occur as Hindu, Christian and Muslim religious processions take place in the streets of the village. These religious processions emanate from the high number of churches as well as several Hindu temples and a mosque within Tranquebar. From these different places of worship in and around Tranquebar, several religious processions are held, where the gods and holy objects are taken out of their place of worship to be exposed to people and to pay visits to neighbouring places of worship. As such, these religious processions have an integrating function among people of different faiths and they reflect the pluralism of religions. Of the total population of Tranquebar, approximately 85 per cent are Hindu, 8 per cent Christian and 7 per cent Muslim (Andersen in this volume).

In today's Tranquebar, the inhabitants belong to approximately twentyfive different *jati* (caste) communities. On the periphery of the village, resides a large community involved in different kinds of manual jobs, and who by other caste groups is designated by the derogatory term Parayiar (scheduled caste). Among them a single family of *vettians* employed as graveyard attendants and funeral drummers still resides, despised and avoided by everyone both outside and inside the community. The gradual disappearance of the *vettian* profession illustrates changes in the social, economic and symbolic status of low castes in Tranquebar. As the feudal organisation of labour has been replaced by capitalist market forces, and as the traditional system of *tholil*—work imposed as duty on the low caste communities—has been prohibited by the Indian state, new opportunities for the *vettians* have come forth. However, one *vettian* remains indirectly forced to do the duties of his caste, but is determined to become the last *vettian* in Tranquebar (Lillelund in this volume).

On the concept of cultural encounter

The encounters which are dealt with in this volume exist on several levels: political, religious, aesthetic, economic and material, to name the most obvious. The distinctions are not clear though, as they overlap and spill over. Yet in each of the encounters, there is an important element of something 'cultural' and therefore we term it cultural encounters. In the following theoretical considerations, we argue that at a conceptual level, culture will always entail cultural encounters.

With the recent anthropological conceptualizations of culture, it is not to be understood as an essential entity or as an island in an ocean with other islands, each with an assemblage of inhabitants sharing homogenous worldviews and social habits. Rather, culture is always seen from a certain social position and thus worldviews and habits within a cultural group are never similar, but rather negotiated among themselves and in relation to outsiders (Marcus & Fischer 1999). The implications of this are twofold. On the one hand, culture does not exist without people, as it is people in specific social positions and situations who by their very dispositions and aspirations make culture, by explicitly or implicitly framing culture. In this social negotiation of culture, power is involved (Bourdieu 1977). On the other hand, cultures exist in relationship with other cultures through which people mirror themselves and construct cultural borderlines. People will draw borders of cultures from perceived differences and similarities in social habits and worldviews, which in this process will be highlighted as special to them or attributed to others. Culture can thus be studied as a mental construct. Yet it is also a well of embodied social experiences and historical memories, which has significance for the experience of one's own culture and history as well as those of others (Barth 1969 & 1987; Hastrup 1992). Therefore culture in itself implies encounters, and cultures at an abstract level are also comparative, as they are defined in relation with other cultures.

A single person will most often not feel a part of just one culture, but of several cultures depending on contexts. Some of the actors described in the articles in this volume can be said to be in part a European, Danish, Christian or an occupational culture on the one hand, or an Indian, Tamil, Hindu, caste or royal culture on the other. Which one of the above perspectives on culture will be activated depends on the actual social situation in which he or she will draw cultural borders.

Thus the starting point for the academic study of cultural encounters in this volume is to a great extent made up of events rather than of cultures as such, and the perspective on culture depends on the analytical context and time scale defined by the researcher. When cultural encounters are studied on the basis of events, the cultural significance in the encounters can be grasped and framed, without necessarily being simplified as a clash between predefined cultures. Cultural encounters can be studied by depicting the practical social situations in which agents with completely different agendas and visions will practice or work together in what can be designated an alternative space, where the significance of their own

cultural backgrounds are negotiated and often find ways to interact are found despite differences (Fihl 2002; Tsing 2005).

At these events, agents with different cultural backgrounds meet, clash, and grapple with one another. This space might also be designated as a 'contact zone' and invokes the spatial and temporal co-presence of persons, ideas, traditions and things previously separated by geographical, mental or historical disjuncture and whose trajectories now intersect (Pratt 1992).

Recent studies on cultural encounters in an Indian context have to some extent been dominated by post-colonial theory. These often draw on the work of Edward Said. In his influential book *Orientalism*, Said argues that in the west, a Eurocentric image of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures has been constructed as an exotic 'other' which legitimized the political domination of the area. Therefore, working from a post-colonial perspective one tries to examine, on the one hand, how the cultural otherness of the colonized is constructed in such a way that they are made inferior to the colonizers, and on the other hand, the attempt of the colonized to reclaim their identity and worth is also examined. Ronald Inden (1990) and Nicholas Dirks (2001) have framed a post-colonial perspective that critically examines the British perspective on India as well as the Indians' own view on their culture and society. Post-colonial studies in India have focused on the impact of the British during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. However, as this present volume will illustrate, cultural encounters in India have a much longer and more diverse history and also take place in modern life today. That said, cultural encounters between Indians and outsiders did not start with the coming of the Europeans. Over the millennia, the Indian subcontinent has encountered various cultures through invasions and diffusions.

Three centuries of Mughal rule—which however did not reach Tranquebar—the immediate predecessor of the British, for instance, had a profound impact on administrative structures, art and architecture, to name only a few of the more fruitful encounters. The co-existence of Hindu, Muslim and Christian groups of Tranquebar today is a result of former cultural encounters with Arab traders as well as impulses relating to the medieval Chola colonization of South East Asia and finally later encounters with the Christian missionaries from primarily Germany and Denmark. At some levels, the overall history of India is one of cultural encounters, between various cultural groups as India by itself is extremely heterogeneous.

M.N. Srinivas, the Indian social anthropologist/sociologist, has dealt with both the cultural encounters related to the Mughal Empire, the British Colony as well as the caste system. He is probably most known for his concept of Sanskritization, which describes the process of imitation of the practices and value system of the Brahmins and other powerful castes, through which people of less influential castes have aspired for an upward mobilization (Srinivas 1972). In these cultural encounters, the boundaries become blurred, and consequently it is difficult to pin

point who is the 'other'.

Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street (2000) provide a critical reflection upon academic discourses, which define and exaggerate the 'other' in studies of cultural encounters. Ann Laura Stoler (2002) has argued that the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized, which post-colonial theory is often based upon, can be very problematic. As we go deeper into the details of cultural encounters of Tranquebar past and present in this volume, it will become obvious that the 'other' is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but made and constructed in a process involving both power and negotiation (Fabian 1991). Recent writings on the cultural history of India have also shown the wealth of insight gained through detailed and grained studies of everyday phenomena (Venkatachalapathy 2006). This again points to the importance of examining the social, cultural and political institutions, events and processes where actual cultural encounters take place. These can be read as condensed situations, where cultural otherness has been constructed in terms of race, caste and gender. Thus studies of cultural encounters can move beyond traditional conceptions of the 'west' and 'India' towards multi-directional and polyphonic angles taking into consideration the perspective of representatives from the communities, which take part in the encounters. Regardless of how difficult intercultural translations this might involve, the goal is to be faithful to the cultural representations on both sides (Sperber 1996).

The various theoretical sketches above offer frameworks to understand the impact of cultural encounters from a perspective that goes beyond fixed cultural categories. The assumption is that from the cultural encounters, persons move beyond their ascribed identity. This is not to say that one mixes one's identity with the identity of those one interacts with. Rather, a 'mutation', which is something in its own right, might evolve from the encounters (Arce & Long 2000). In other words, cultural encounters are not just a mix between social and cultural forms, but they can create new forms, and therefore they are closely tied with questions of development and social change.

On the study of one place

This volume contributes with varied examples of cultural encounters in one particular geographical place in India: Tranquebar. The examples come both from the past and from the present. They highlight events from the early seventeenth century, through the eighteenth and nineteenth century, till today's cultural encounters in the village and beyond.

As a whole, the present volume is an example of inter-disciplinary research on cultural encounters as well as social and cultural change at a single location through time. Together, the articles provide a basis for comparison of the implications of cultural encounters at different levels; the social, religious, material, economic, aesthetic, political, etc., and at different times. The volume therefore contributes to the general discussion on the methodology and theory of the study of cultural

encounters and intercultural exchange.

As Tranquebar is not and never has been a closed community, the articles extend outside the borders of the village and also describe cultural encounters at a regional, national and even an international level. Yet the starting point is a demarcated geographical place, Tranquebar. When examining a place rather than a community, a culture, or a theme, the space opens up for a study of cultural encounters from various perspectives. As we find during colonial times, encounters took place between Danish officials and missionaries on the one hand and various representatives of Tamil society, such as dancers, parents and princes, on the other. The collection of articles illustrates different kinds of cultural encounters related to various events, institutions and situations and thus different spheres of cultural and social life.

The cultural encounters of today's Tranquebar sheds light on the heterogeneity of the village, as the encounters are not so much a matter of outsiders versus locals, as they take place within communities based on religion, class and caste. In this setting, outsiders are just as much Indian politicians or NGOs as they are Europeans and Danes—all with interests in Tranquebar's development after the tsunami and the classification of Tranquebar as a heritage town. Therefore the cultural encounters of today are not analysed mainly as encounters between 'the Indians' and 'the Europeans', but rather between groups of Indians divided along the lines of religion, caste and class, and thus the study of cultural encounters in Tranquebar is also a study of encounters among different groups of 'locals'.

Whereas the analyses of past Tranquebar are mainly based on letters, diaries, and reports from Danish officials and missionaries, the analyses of cultural encounters of today mainly rest upon interviews and participant observation carried out during long-term ethnographic field work in the village. Some contributors combine the two, moving into the space between history and anthropology.

Rather than working from a single definition of cultural encounters, the articles reveal the scope of cultural encounters and its significance in development and social change. This may provide us with a framework from which methods that support sustainable development in Tranquebar as well as in other locations could develop, where cultural encounters are and have been a part of daily life.

The study of cultural encounters ideally takes into account the perspective of representatives from the groups which take part in the encounters. However, when dealing with past encounters, sources are not always available. Part of the post-colonial critique of the one-sided construction of the Indian other has to do with methodology. In Tranquebar, the local population has overall been illiterate, and therefore the sources on cultural encounters between Europeans or Danes and Indians are often limited to the Danish or British perspective, written in letters, diaries etc. and the Indian perspective can be teased out from these sources only by reading against the grain. These 'indirect' Indian perspectives can mostly be traced to the

more powerful social layer (kings of Tanjore), and those receiving a Christian education, or to Brahmins discussing with the early missionaries. This illustrates the fact that it is rather difficult to speak of an Indian or a Danish perspective as Indians and Danes, in the past or present, among themselves perceive their respective culture and history differently.

Even when the emphasis is on Tranquebar as a former Danish trading post, the cultural encounters go beyond the question of Indo-Danish relationships. People from places as diverse as Iceland, Germany, France and Great Britain have come to Tranquebar as soldiers, tradesmen, or missionaries. Yet, national identity is not always the most relevant difference established between the groups present in Tranquebar and it is important to note that 'cultural' in cultural encounters, does not *per se* refer to national cultures.

As a trading post, not only goods and money were being exchanged, but also ideas, values and customs. From this exchange, new things, forms, social structures, and ideas developed. That said, cultural encounters do not necessarily imply change in the direction of something new. First of all cultural encounters create an awareness, consciously or unconsciously, of oneself and what one is part of through a categorization of what is different from oneself. In this way the construction of culture, history and national identity are lucid in cultural encounters.

However, if instead of thinking of cultural encounters as a matter of separate groups existing at a historical time in opposition to one another, we let the investigations unfold as examinations of how these encounters crisscross over places, groups, spheres of life and time, we may get a more complex understanding of the unique forms and connections that grow from the encounters. These issues can be approached through a two-pronged methodology that combines descriptions of empirical data connected with particular historical junctures past or present on the one hand, and analytical reflections on how these data are shaped and informed by cultural encounters on the other. Together, the articles in this volume will show how a small village like Tranquebar is connected to places, people, religious ideas, things etc. through past and present cultural encounters.

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Shipwrecked on the Coromandel: The first Indo–Danish contact, 1620

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Abstract

This article focuses on the complications involved in the very first Indo–Danish cultural encounter leading to the establishment of the Danish trading station in Tharangampadi or Tranquebar as it was called by the Danes in 1620. The analysis is based on the report sent to the Danish King Christian IV by his envoy Ove Giedde on his return from India. It begins with a description of the voyage to the East Indies in order to introduce the reader to the troubles, aspirations and actors from the Danish side. The friction created when the Danes encountered the aspirations of Raghunatha Nayak of Tanjore and the role of the gift is analysed next. The conclusion is that the South Indian partner of the encounter is rather cross-culturally experienced and actually eager to make the Danes settle in the area. The analytical perspective on the encounter is concentrated on events described by Ove Giedde. The focus is on the actual meetings in 1620, of agents with disparate cultural backgrounds and aspirations and who in their grappling with one another create a contact zone of new forms of social interaction.¹

Introduction

In the National Archives of Denmark is kept Ove Giedde's lengthy report dated 1622. It is addressed to the Danish King Christian IV, who in 1618 had sent him to the East Indies as an admiral of a fleet consisting of five ships and around 500 men. Upon leaving, Giedde had sworn his oath of allegiance to the king as a royal envoy. Giedde's report is rather detailed and authored in a matter-of-fact style in Danish. The report provides almost a day-to-day description of the manifold actions and events on board and in land during the long sea voyage from 1618 to 1620 when they finally arrived at their original destination Ceylon

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(Sri Lanka). The report is divided into three parts and describes the voyage, the negotiations in Ceylon and finally the interactions with the Nayak in Tanjore (Thanjavur) (Giedde 1622, printed by J.H. Schlegel in 1772).

The first contact with the Indian mainland took place in the spring of 1620 when one of the ships from Giedde's fleet was wrecked on the southern coast of Coromandel. Only a dozen members of the crew survived and made it ashore. That the first Indo–Danish contact should begin with a shipwreck is not without symbolism, which I shall attempt to illustrate in the following pages. In his royal report, Giedde recorded the following on the shipwreck:

1620. On the 4th of June, after we the 18th of Mai had arrived at Ceylon, the first mate on the ship *Øresund* who was named Jan Peitersen, came on land to us at Cotiaram. This prescribed first mate brought 2 letters and he told how the Portuguese had killed two crew members from the ship and even placed their heads on poles on the beach.²

This tragic event took place at Karaikkal, north of Nagapattinam where the Portuguese were already well established. In an attempt to defend some captured *sampans*³ in the strait between Ceylon and India, the Danish ship *Øresund* was wrecked after a sea battle with the superior Portuguese fleet. Most of the crew on board the ship were killed or taken prisoners by the Portuguese, who even had the heads of two members put on poles at the beach, probably as a warning to the Danes. The Portuguese had laid a claim to monopoly on the European trade with India.

However, fourteen members of the Danish crew, including the director of trade Roland Crappe escaped and managed to flee ashore, where they were arrested by the Indians and sent to the local Prince, Raghunatha Nayak of Tanjore. In the city of Tanjore they were well received by the Nayak, who responded to their interest in trading and promised to entrust the coastal village of Tranquebar to them as a future trading station. The surviving first mate of the ship was sent as a messenger with two letters to the main Danish fleet in Ceylon. In the early fall, admiral Giedde also arrived in Tanjore. In the following months, negotiations between the Nayak and the Danish delegation lead to a treaty giving the Danes similar rights as the Portuguese regarding trade within the Tanjore principality. In addition, the Danes were granted permission to build 'a stone house' in Tranquebar and collect rent from the village land. In return the Danes were to pay a yearly tribute to the Nayak.

At the time of the first Danish naval expedition to the East Indies, the European trading activities had already taken on a certain pattern. The Portuguese and gradually the Dutch and English companies had each built trade stations at strategically important trading places along the coast, many of them with fortifications. Like pearls on a string, trade stations emerged along the coast of the Bay of Bengal as well as in other parts of Asia. The fortifications functioned

mainly as points of support, centres for networks of trade and as storing places for the much coveted spices and textiles until ships could set sail to Europe. As military strongholds, impressive especially from the sea, these fortifications with their moats, cannons and gun slits served as military warnings both to foreign nations and to the locals (Fihl 1984: 56).

Before I embark on a detailed historical description, based primarily on Giedde's report, a few preliminary conceptual remarks are in order.

The notion of contact zone

Inspired by Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), I use the notion contact zone to signify a sort of social arena created when agents with completely disparate cultural backgrounds meet and grapple with one another (Pratt 1992, p. 4). However, as I shall try to demonstrate, the cultural encounter described in Giedde's royal report is not to be understood as colonial or as seen through imperial eyes. The encounter cannot be characterized as involving any highly asymmetrical relation of domination and subordination. In this first Indo–Danish cultural encounter there are surely signs of power, honour and authority, but these are seen on both sides.

The contact zone is characterised by practical, fluctuating social situations in which the Danish delegation explored different possibilities for future trade in South India (Fihl 2002, p. 644). I define the contact zone as the cross-cultural reaction arising from the meeting of different agendas, aspirations, ideas, and understandings of words or actions creating the possibility of producing new forms of social interaction and cultural meanings. In this sense, the contact zone appears as a zone of awkwardness because of constant differences in the cultural understandings of the events and actions taking place. This awkwardness speeds up action and gives place for creativity in the interactions. The cultural encounter might thus best be characterized by the metaphor 'friction' (Tsing 2005, p. XI). I shall try to identify the sometimes rather awkward engagements where time and the gift meant different things to the agents involved in the first Indo–Danish contact thus causing friction. These engagements do not necessarily consist of conflicts, but make the agents interact even during misunderstandings. In agreement with Anna Tsing (2005), I prefer to use the concept 'friction' rather than 'clash', since the latter implies that the partners in cultural encounters consist of closed and relatively stable cultural entities whose essence could be described on beforehand, implying that the contents and results of cultural encounters can almost be envisioned and predicted in advance. Contrary to this, my point is that cultural encounters consist of creative ways of understanding or misunderstanding, as well as new social forms and revised agendas and aspirations. These elements will constantly crop up in the contact zone and they constitute friction or what we often more broadly use to designate as cultural encounters.

In this way I shall try to analyse the first Indo–Danish cultural encounter as a process of friction produced between Indian and Danish agents whose aspirations and projects are different but complementary. In the following description of the background of this first Indo–Danish contact, I will introduce also the Danish agents capturing the scene in the contact zone along with Raghunatha Nayak of Tanjore.

Before the scene

On 29 November 1618, the Danish fleet left Copenhagen with anxiety and excitement, since never before had any Danish expedition been sent out on such a long and costly journey. King Christian IV had spent huge sums of money equipping the ships and had also privately invested a large amount as a shareholder in the newly established Danish East Indian Trading Company.⁴

The unfamiliar form of organisation of merchant capital in the modern and impersonal share holding company made the work of formation rather difficult for the king. Not many Danish merchants were ready to invest in this way and in what they also considered a risky adventure. The king therefore also urged noblemen, academics and outstanding citizens to join as shareholders. The king even offered some of them private loans to secure investors. The company was organised almost as a duplicate of the Dutch East Indian Trading Company, since a couple of Dutch immigrant merchants dissatisfied with the Dutch company assisted the Danish king and also invested in it (Willerslev 1942, p. 614; Feldbæk 1986, p. 320ff).

The background for the king's effort was that he wanted his kingdom of Denmark–Norway to take part in the lucrative European trading activities in the East Indies, from which the Portuguese had already prospered, and in which the Dutch and the English had also embarked on recently. A concentration of capital was necessary, since neither the king nor any single Danish merchant could muster such a huge trading project (Fihl 1988, p. 32ff). The purpose of the whole endeavour was to purchase from the East Indies merchandise such as textiles and spices such as pepper, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, etc. which were much in demand in European cooking. Heavily seasoned food was held important for several reasons. Herbs and the exotic spices imported from the East Indies since the early Middle Ages and even before had a positive effect on the digestion of the meat and fish which were often heavily salted or strongly dried. The spices helped also to disinfect spoiled meat and fish as well as to soothe the taste of it. However, the seasoning not only served practical purposes, but also high fashion, as revealed by Danish cookbooks from the seventeenth century; for example, the listing of a recipe on fresh strawberries seasoned with ingredients like pepper, ginger, galangal, saffron, and vinegar coloured by the roots of alkanet (Fihl 1984, p. 24f).

A month ahead of the departure of the Danish fleet, the cutter *Øresund* was

sent to prepare the arrival of the main fleet. The destination was Ceylon, because in the spring of 1618, a Ceylonese envoy, Marcellus de Boschouwer, a Dutchman and former trade assistant in the Dutch East Indian Trade Company, had turned up at the Danish court. Boschouwer wanted to negotiate on behalf of ‘the Emperor of Ceylon’ who was seeking alliances against the Portuguese, since they were getting too powerful on the island. Having probably heard of the Danish efforts to initiate trade on the East Indies, Boschouwer travelled to the Danish court where he presented himself as no less than ‘Prince of Migromme, Kockele Corle, Ananagepore, Miwitigael, Lord of the Golden Sun’s Decoration, President of the High War Council, Second Seat Member of His Majesty’s Secret Council and highest Admiral’ (Abd-el Dayem 2006, p. 21).

On 30 March 1618, a trading and war alliance was signed in Copenhagen between the Emperor of Ceylon and the Danish King. It stipulated that the Danes should help the emperor to chase away the Portuguese from the island. For this purpose the Danish king had to support the emperor with a warrior ship and 300 soldiers for seven years. In return the Danes would obtain monopoly on all foreign trade in Ceylon for twelve years (Abd-el Dayem 2006, p. 14).

With this fixed prospect, the king and his government officials proceeded with the preparations for the expedition. The king delivered two ships himself which were renamed as *Elefanten* and *David*, and both ships were rebuilt from freighters into battleships. The former functioned as the admiral ship for Ove Giedde, and the latter was the warrior ship to be delivered to the emperor, and on which the Ceylonese envoy Boschouwer, his wife and their huge domestic staff were to board, on the voyage to the East Indies. The two warrior ships were to protect the freighters in the Danish fleet from any foreign attacks. The three freighters in the expedition, *Christian*, *København*, and *Øresund*, were owned and equipped by the Danish East Indian Company. A smaller provision ship was also equipped to follow the main fleet as far as Cap Verde on the coast of Africa from where it was to return to Denmark. From the records in the Danish National Archives it is clear that the ships were fairly well equipped with food, guns and canons as well as silver coins and iron bars for trading (Abd-el Dayem 2006, p. 42ff).

The crew was a mixture of European nationalities and social groups. Most of the soldiers were German mercenaries. The lower ranking sailors were merely Danes. The mates, skippers, and navigators as well as the tradesmen were experienced Dutchmen who had visited the East Indies. The captains and lieutenants on board the ships were Danish noblemen, none of whom had ever before set foot on non-European soil, and some of whom the king had difficulties to persuade. The king even released a couple of these noblemen from lifelong prison and pardoned them for their piracy in Danish waters, to enrol them for the expedition. Roland Crappe was appointed as trade director of the Danish East Indian Trading Company. He was a Dutch merchant who had earlier made the

journey to Ceylon and India. On *Øresund*, Crappe left a month ahead of the main fleet to prepare the realization of the contract with the Ceylonese emperor. As admiral of this most colourful gathering of 500 men, the king had selected the 24-year-old Danish nobleman Ove Giedde, trained in diplomacy and a faithful servant of the king. But also he had not travelled outside Europe.

The voyage to the East Indies

Ove Giedde began his expedition report, which he handed over to King Christian IV in 1622, by praising his lord, who had appointed him as his royal envoy and admiral, and equipped the five ships. The description of the expedition begins with the listings of the rations of food and liquid handed out once a week to each person on board. Giedde describes how they had agreed on certain predetermined meeting places along the European sailing route south of Africa and in the Indian Ocean, in case the ships got lost from the main fleet on the long voyage. At these geographical spots, the ships should wait three weeks. Moreover, before leaving they should raise a wooden cross with the king's monogram, and five foot inland from this cross and two feet down they should bury a box with letters listing useful information for Danish ships to follow. Listed in Giedde's report are also precautions of how the ships should signal to one another en route and how they should follow the light of the leading ship at night. A council was founded on each ship lead by the captain and a broad council of all ships as well, lead by the admiral. The council was empowered to fine, imprison, and impose corporal punishment or death on those who obstructed the code of conduct and behaved or acted careless on the ships.

The voyage from Copenhagen to Ceylon took one and a half years, and Giedde's report provides details on the capture of two pirate ships at Cap Verde and their annexure to the Danish fleet after distributing the pirates among all the ships, adding to the even so motley crew. At the coast of Senegal in East Africa, thirty crew members were taken prisoner by the inhabitants when trying to get fresh water for the ships before entering the Atlantic Ocean.

However, twelve of the crew members did not manage to get back to the ships and had to be left behind. After ninety-one days at sea, the fleet finally reached the Cape of Good Hope. 200 men had died, mostly of scurvy and many of the survivors were so sick and exhausted that they had to be carried ashore. One of the ships wrecked on the coast in front of the Table Mountain, since the first mate was too weak to steer and also too sick to participate in the ship trial that followed. He died the day after the trial.

After a month of recreation at the Cape of Good Hope and repair of the ships, the expedition was ready to cross the Indian Ocean. As in the Atlantic Ocean the ships had difficulty staying together; or perhaps rather, as Giedde suspected, the Dutch part of the crew, especially the tradesmen including the Ceylonese envoy, tried to escape from the main fleet in order to find their own

way to the East Indies and do business by themselves. The former pirates also caused a series of troubles and after an attempted mutiny along the eastern coast of Africa, the pirate captain was sentenced to death and hanged from the bowsprit.

Contact with *David* was lost shortly after Africa and so Giedde was heading towards his destination without the Ceylonese envoy Boschouwer. Later, contact was also lost with the ship *København*. However, on arriving in Ceylon, Giedde was happy to be informed that both ships had arrived safely, but he was soon to receive bad news.

16th of May, in the morning we saw (the Promised Land) Ceilon with great joy.... In the evening [next day] we anchored off a place called Panva, where we learned from our people in the two boats that we had sent ashore, that the Emperor had accorded with the Portuguese three years before, and also the Emperor, who they spoke of as the King of Candy, was not the most distinguished king in this land.

The logical consequence of this information was that there was no need of Danish battleships any more to chase away the Portuguese. Moreover, from the ship *David*, Giedde was informed that the imperial envoy Boshouwer had died eight months earlier, just after the ship was lost from the main fleet near Madagascar. Boshouwer's corpse had been preserved and was later shown to delegates from the Emperor of Candy who confirmed that he had been part of the staff of the emperor.

The last sad story to reach Giedde's was the news of the wreck of the scout ship *Øresund* on the Karaikkal coast. Only fourteen men had survived, including Roland Crape, but they had all been taken prisoners by the locals and sent to Raghunatha Nayak in Tanjore. Crape's letter also passed on an invitation from the Nayak requesting Giedde to come to Tanjore to discuss future trade.

After having tried in vain for some months to get the Danish–Ceylonese contract confirmed in order to establish a trading relation and build a Danish fortification in Ceylon, Giedde decided to depart for the Coromandel Coast to meet Crape and learn more about the Indian opening for trading possibilities. During the journey to the East Indies, Giedde had sanctioned the full right for himself as admiral to read all letters leaving and entering the ships. From Crape's letters to Boshouwer (now deceased) and to prominent Dutch tradesmen in the expedition, he learned that a coastal place by the name 'Trangebare' might be offered as a trading station by the Nayak of Tanjore. Alarmingly, Giedde also learned from the letters that Crape recommended that the Danish and Dutch East Indian trading companies should merge.

Before embarking on his ship *Elefanten* to go to the Coromandel Coast, Giedde took with him the two money chests from *David*. The former pirat ship *Pathentia* conquered at Cap Verde was ordered to follow with a *sampan* bringing

an elephant, a gift from the Emperor of Candy.

On 13 September 1620, Giedde anchored his ship *Elefanten* near the town 'Trangebare' which *København* had already located. Soon after, *Pathentia* also arrived, however without the elephant which had completely destroyed the *sampan* and had to be brought back on land.

At anchor

Remaining on board *Elefanten* riding at anchor near the coast of Tranquebar, Giedde tried to get into contact with Raghunatha Nayak and hold on to the indirect invitation received through Crappe's letter. Giedde sent some of his servants off to Tanjore with letters to the Nayak and to Crappe whom he ordered to come to the fleet. In his letter to Ragnunatha Nayak, Giedde told about his mission in a straight forward manner, but also requested an indication of interest from the Nayak:

14th of September [1620], after we yesterday arrived at the Coromandel Coast, we found the ship *København* before us off the town Trangabari, where we later built Dansborg. I sent one of my servants up to Tanjore with a letter to the Naik. It said that I had come to his land on his request to enter into and to conclude various contracts on behalf of my Lord. I would also come to him, if he would first send to the fleet some of his distinguished men, which I requested as an opening gesture.

In his royal report, Giedde stated that Raghunatha Nayak answered by sending to *Elefanten* a letter to Giedde inviting him to come to Tanjore to negotiate future trading possibilities. From the manner in which Giedde in the above citation related this initial contact with the Nayak and the fact that the report was delivered two years after the actual event, it seems quite clear that Giedde saw the Nayak as a partner whom he was going to meet on an equal footing and that they matched each other culturally.

We also understand from Giedde's report that the Nayak was willing or even eager to invite the Danes to settle within his territorial area of political influence. At this point, I use the term 'political' for want of a better term and recognise the requirements not to read the present into the context of the past. Instead, we should search for appropriate terms and think about the past in a manner that matches attitudes and ways of behaviour then (Lowenthal 1985). It is of course difficult to impose the term 'political' on a pre-colonial South Indian situation in which ritual and political forms fundamentally seemed to be interwoven or confluent (Dirks 1987).

The invitation of the Danes by the Nayak probably had to do with the fact that the Danes might prove to be a handy and convenient counter power to the Portuguese who had already settled in Nagapattinam. Also, internally in the Nayak's principality there seem to have been power struggles among the local

magnates over the control of agrarian and mercantile resources and the Nayak might have seen it as a political advantage to have fixed contracts with foreign allies. A balance and status quo of power and influence might be maintained by playing off foreigners against one another or local magnates and foreigners against each other (Fihl 1984, p. 58).

Giedde did not in his report reflect on the agenda of the Nayak nor on the fact that the local Tamil society seemed to be rather hierarchical. The upper ritual-political-economic levels represented ever more powerful magnates ending at the top with the Nayak in Tanjore.⁵ This political system differed, however, from absolutism and the feudal system that Giedde knew so well from European kingdoms. In the South Indian context, there seem to be no clear signs of coronation charter, prescribed or fixed tributes from noblemen to their king, or formal procedure of sworn fidelity by oaths. It was a much more decentralized and fluctuating political system which was ruled by political and military alliances from the top Nayak to the lower Nayaks and all the way down to the local village headmen. These alliances had to be constantly orchestrated in a ritual manner with gifts, ceremonies and alliances through marriage (Fihl 1984, p. 58f).

It was a dynamic system based on relations of obligations to perform services and traditional rights to receive protection and portions of the agricultural production, and mingled with kinship, caste, lordship, gifts, and performance of rituals, military power and domination (Fihl 1984, p. 60f). In the following months, Giedde learned how vital these matters were during his cultural encounters with the Tamil way of life. Exposed to the caste system through encounters with Brahmins and learning about the Nayak's 365 wives as an effect of alliances through kinship must have been a new cross-cultural experience. In his interactions involving the meaning of the gift, friction especially seemed to emerge.

In one of Crappe's letters to Giedde, the former tried to share with Giedde his understanding of Tamil good manners as he was more experienced cross-culturally. Crappe instructed Giedde to hold out the prospect of offering to Raghunatha Nayak and other persons close to him a larger sum of money. In yet another letter Crappe advised Giedde to receive the Nayak's servant well and shower him and the Nayak himself with presents. However, at this initial stage Giedde seemed to neglect Crappe's advice to play the Tamil way in the contact zone. Giedde was rather reluctant to use the company's and his king's money and goods on what he considered as extravagances:

21st [of September 1620], one of the Naik's distinguished servants sent me as a present a pig, some goats and other things for eating, while I returned as gifts something of small importance.

On 23 September Giedde was asked to come ashore from *Elefanten* to receive from the Nayak yet another gift brought by messengers. The gift should be received within a 'particular process' as it was reported by Giedde. However,

as admiral of the fleet, he wanted to remain on board the ship as long as possible, so he made excuses and sent instead two of his captains ashore to receive the gift. The situation became awkward and they returned empty handed as they were not entrusted with the gift.

According to Nicklas Dirks there is in the Tamil language and pre-colonial way of understanding a clear differentiation between *danam*, meaning gifts rather freely given and without expectation of a fixed return and *sampalam* meaning salary, demeaned to receive, and rendering it less than freely given (1987, p. XXXf). In comparison with contemporary European meaning systems known by Giedde, the differences were more sharply drawn and linked with also notions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. In this way, *danam* was associated with honour, charisma, authority, and respect whereas *sampalam* was associated with disrespect, salary, and power.⁶ From the transactions between Giedde and the Nayak, I shall try to demonstrate that even though they might have had different understanding of the concepts of gift and trade items, they kept mingling and interacting, sometimes in a rather creative way.

Ove Giedde ashore

It was not until 11 October, that Giedde finally got ashore and he thus let the Nayak's delegates wait for more than two weeks to gift him in the prescribed ritual manner with 'five or six pieces of textile, each worth in this country no more than ½ a Daler (old Danish currency)'. Apparently, Giedde took the textiles to be valued more in face of their local sale price, and less as an honorary performance and a gift to be received within a particular process, e.g. in a ritualised or dramatized way as to demonstrate openly in public the honour of receiving a gift from the Nayak. It was apparently meant to take place in front of an audience of locals and royal messengers. But in spite of the friction from the encounter between different meanings of object exchange and the cross-cultural misunderstanding it entailed, interaction preceded in the contact zone.

Still on board, Giedde sent a second letter to Raghunatha Nayak. Accompanied by a Tamil–Portuguese translator, whom Giedde had borrowed from the Ceylonese Prince Madonne, he sent his assistant tradesman Morten Finche to Tanjore:

2nd of October, I sent Martin Finche, an assistant merchant, accompanied by my translator with a letter to the Naik, where I first let him understand the reason why my Lord had sent his ships to India in relation to what had happened in Ceylon. Because of the prescribed Ceylonese accord, my Lord had not provided us with money for cargo and I requested that he (the Nayak) would provide us with cargo for two or three ships and otherwise in all ways would favour my Lord's subjects. In case he wanted to agree to any of this and would provide secure shepherd, I would myself travel to him. I adverted to the Director [Crappe] that if he did not within seven days

arrive at the fleet, I would have to set sail, since I had for so long time waited for him to come, and I demanded that he and the surviving crew members should come down to us within the prescribed time, if they wanted to talk with me.

A few days later, Giedde's delegates returned with the message that Crappe resided only a few miles outside Tranquebar and that he requested Giedde to pay him a visit accompanied by only a few men. However, Giedde ordered him to come out to the ships to discuss matters, but Crappe made excuses and tried to escape. But near the town of Karaikkal, Crappe was finally caught. Apparently Crappe feared a hanging because of the loss of *Øresund* and also due to accusations of intent to gain the trading station Tranquebar for private Dutch mercantile purposes.

In the contact zone, Giedde had to cope not only with the fact that he had come almost empty handed to trade in a foreign country, but also had to relate to the fact that the trans-culturally more experienced Crappe, who by now had stayed in the Tanjore principality for almost eight months and apparently had learnt to speak Tamil, would not of his own free will join him and that as a Dutchman, he might have made special and private arrangements to the disadvantage of the Danish enterprise. Crappe demanded that Giedde should come ashore to meet him on neutral Indian ground. Giedde assembled his council of ships and it resolved that Crappe could not demand anything of Giedde, his admiral, his superior, and also a nobleman.

9th of October, Hans Mars returned with a letter from Crappe. 1) that by coming he feared to make the Naik suspicious. 2) that he did not dare trust me, because he was threatened by the gallows and therefore demanded that I would follow good advice and accompany his translator and come up to him. For this reason, I sent Peder Nielsen with a letter granting safe passage on my noble honour. In addition I gifted his translator with some pieces of textile. 3) that he demanded that I would dismiss him from his service.

Giedde handed over a gift to Crappe's Tamil translator. By now Giedde grasped or maybe even took advantage of his knowledge of the Tamil meaning of gifting textile. However in relation to Crappe, a European moral code had to be activated in which a promise given by a nobleman on oath was about the safest and most trustworthy one could ever receive. After being caught by some of Giedde's men, Crappe was more or less willingly brought to Tranquebar from Karaikkal, but he was still hesitant to go out to the fleet. On 11 October, Giedde came ashore and had a long talk with Crappe and they settled some of the dispute. A week later, Crappe sent Giedde some money which was the rent for the first seven days at Tranquebar 'and it was my Lord's first rent of the Indies'.

On 21 October, Giedde received a letter from Raghunatha Nayak who

requested Giedde to come up to Tanjore to visit him. 'He sent horses down to me, since he looked forward to talking to me'. Already the day after, Giedde arranged catamarans to transport two cannons ashore as well as one hundred matching canon balls as gifts for the Nayak as suggested by Crappe. Also, Giedde's private luggage and the personnel he planned to take with him on his journey were transported ashore. 1000 Daler (old Danish currency) were handed over to Crappe to be used for accommodation and gifting. All healthy crew members who had been ashore to recover from their sickness were ordered to embark the ships for protection while he was away. Before leaving, Giedde also broke the royal sealed letter originally addressing the 'Emperor of Ceylon' and took King Christian IV's letter of credit in case the Nayak wanted to see it. Again, Crappe encouraged Giedde to pay attention to gifting:

24th of October Crappe wrote to me 1) that it is was advisable to bring an assistant merchant along to Tanjoure, 2) that he had bought nothing to gift away up there, 3) that he requested that I should bring my golden armour and large gun equipment with me to Tanjoure, or whatever else spectacular I had, if I could do without it.

Arrival in Tanjore

On 27 October, Giedde and his entourage embarked on their journey to Tanjore. Two days later, one senses in his report the impressive spectacle Giedde and his entourage witnessed as they were taken to a temple to see its stock of pepper. Finally and for the first time, they encountered large amounts

of the merchandise that they came for:

29th (of October 1620) at noon we reached a large town called Pætte, where the inhabitants in their temple let us see two storage rooms with pepper and showed us twelve or sixteen similar storage rooms which were reinforced with strong locks, so we could not enter those, since the owner was not present, though they were all filled. And they also told that they within four months could provide us with 2000 barrows (old Danish measurement) of pepper at the beach from a place located in the land of another Naik, thirty miles from there in the interior on the north side of the high mountain from where the Portuguese received all their peppers to Cochin.

The following day, they entered the suburb of Tanjore and at the gate they were received by one of the most distinguished officials of the Nayak and whom Giedde in his report designated as the 'Type-Naik'. The otherwise very level-headed Giedde had no difficulty being impressed. The official was carried in a palanquin followed by eight of the Nayak's elephants:

He got out and welcomed me on behalf of the Naik and asked me to mount the biggest of the elephants which was huge. It had a fine blanket across the back and stomach and on which a red velvet cushion decorated with

golden braids was laid. But I made excuses on behalf of the injury I had in my leg from the journey up and I continued to be carried in the palanquin belonging to the Director (Crappe). The above mentioned Type-Naik followed me to the lodge and asked when I desired to talk with the Naik. It was necessary that the day before I should talk with the highest 'Bramene' (Brahmin), who is their high-priest. To this I answered that I had nothing to talk to the latter about, but the sooner the better I could have a talk with the Naik, it was dearest to me.

Again, it is only with reluctance that Giedde met the invitations to follow the local rituals prescribed before meeting the Nayak. To him it was awkward and a waste of precious time. At the Tranquebar Roads, several hundred men in the fleet were waiting for him to do the necessary business with the Nayak in Tanjore. Time meant money for Giedde. The crew had to be paid and fed each day of waiting.

In the Tanjore principality, Brahmins seemed to play an important role at court and at the big temples in the city as well as in the larger temple villages in the countryside. The Nayak, his relatives and high officials allocated numerous grants of tribute from villages to the Brahmins in order to run temples and to support them as temple priests and as the dominating caste in some of the villages based on the intensive growth of irrigated wet rice along the River Cauvery and in its huge delta. In order to supply the material goods and labour, these grants were required for the daily worship services dedicated to the Hindu gods (Frykenberg 1969; Fihl 1984; Kersenboom-Story 1987). As also indicated by Dirks, Brahmins in pre-colonial South India seemed to be heavily supported by some of the kings and princes which points to a caste system that was profoundly grounded in political power relations (Dirks 1987, p. 10). The Nayak's support of temples both in the city of Tanjore and in the countryside might be intended to visually rank himself and others close to him on par with the legendary Chola kings, their kin and officials. The big temples reflected a sense of the Chola ruler's extraordinary military feats and their support of dharma. They wanted to cast themselves as processing the special dharma of saviours of their kingdoms (Asher & Talbot 2006, p. 65). This relation between the caste system and the upper economic-politicalritual power structure of later empires of the South Indian rulers is not to be first and foremost associated with religious themes. Rather, the relation between the rulers and the caste system is to be associated with politicalritual themes connected to the endless processions essential to the royal celebrations of the ruler and the military, providing an important insight into the concept of pre-colonial South Indian kingship and its connection to the politics of the people, and thus enacting intensive interaction between the ruler and the ruled (Guha 1989, p. 274 & 307; Asher & Talbot 2006, p. 63; Spencer 2007, p. 17).

Rituals, feasts and processions

The agenda of Giedde was to enter into a lasting contract with Raghunatha

Nayak on Danish trade rights within the Nayak's principality and in the short term to return to Denmark with considerable cargos of pepper without actually having any money or goods to purchase this coveted merchandise. The Coromandel Coast was rather famous for its pepper and Giedde had on his way to Tanjore seen huge stocks of it in the temples. Before he had actually met the Nayak, Giedde, however, seemed impatient and reluctant to play by the rules of the Nayak who was also eager to make a contract, but who was determined in addition to make it happen in the proper atmosphere of rituals and public procedures related to establishing political and economic alliances in a fluctuating and dynamic political system. Giedde was slowly learning that he was not encountering anything similar to a European absolute monarch or a feudal system based on oaths. Having just set foot on Indian soil, these intermingled and intertwined political, economic and religious sides of South Indian society were naturally not fully transparent to him.

I shall now try to demonstrate that the friction created in the encounters between the Danish and Indian agents with different cultural backgrounds and different means and ways to realize their respective agendas, consisted of a certain kind of creativity that emerged in the contact zone. It happened in the process of interacting with each other in order to reach goals and realise agendas in disparate manners that seemed natural to each of them respectively, but which caused awkwardness and finally made Giedde quite impatient because of time consuming rituals, feasts and public processions. However, the differences did not create non-communication and clashes. On the contrary, they seemed to have a spin-off in the form of creativity and to have promoted a certain sense of cross-cultural understanding or reflection. Mirrored in the cultural other are Giedde's own native customs as reflected in the following citation from his royal report:

1st of November the Type-Naik asked me, if I would like at noon to talk to the Naik. And when I answered yes, he said that since the cannons had not yet arrived I should according to the customs of this country present the Naik with sugar and some silk cloth which we could buy there. To this I answered that I had arrived here according to the letter from the Naik and not to hand out presents, though I would hand out such according to the customs of my country. By this he seemed to be content. At two o'clock the interpreter came to me and asked if I this evening or the following morning would like to talk to the former and I answered that it was up to him.

Finally, Giedde was fetched and accompanied for an audience with the Nayak, but it was not before noon the following day. The Nayak received him, however, with pleasant words and promises.

But I had to stand some time in an old hall before entering his palace, where

he was lying on a ladder on a velvet mattress and pillow. The high-priest was sitting at his feet with a bishop's hat embroidered with pearls. I was not allowed to get any closer than eight or ten feet, but had to stand on the upper part of the steps where he asked me to sit down later.

Giedde seemed to sense that he was treated in a particular manner which not necessarily had to do with economic or political rank, but something else. Giedde stated that as a Christian he was considered different and not allowed certain things both during the audience and also in relation to entering people's houses.

However, in spite of him being treated as somehow ritually polluted or polluting, we see that this did not entail the end of communication and interaction. On the contrary, the Nayak and Giedde had a common goal, to negotiate a contract on the best possible terms, respectively.

One of the following days, the Nayak invited Giedde to accompany him on a spectacular tour (procession) in Tanjore to see some friends. Four horses were sent to fetch Giedde in his lodge and take him to the palace where he was to be present at a puja which the Nayak performed in front of what to Giedde presented itself as a 'devil's-picture on the wall'. Giedde was shown to the lower part of the steps. Around the Nayak's neck, the two attendant Brahmins placed two 'chains made of herbs'. The Nayak next gave them some presents in the form of bundled textiles.

After this he came down the steps and saluted me in their way as he did before ascending the steps. Next he had the Type-Naik take me to the horse and we rode out to the suburb: And here he dismounted the horse and went inside (a house) and I was taken to the door which he was to enter and there he always saluted me, so I had to stay there until he returned: (since no Christian is allowed to enter their houses) and he entered four houses, though only stayed inside for a short while. First he let himself be carried in a palanquin, later he rode a horse and then an elephant. And as we rode back, he let his people step aside, so that I could ride beside him lying in the palanquin. As we came inside and dismounted, he stopped the palanquin to let me know that I could take rest and that I would the next day be able to depart (with the contract).

The very same evening, on 11 November, the Type-Nayak informed Giedde that Raghunatha Nayak would provide Giedde with 500 barrows of pepper in case he would leave a dozen of cannons 'at the office' in Tranquebar as a collateral for the goods until proper payment for the pepper. Giedde expressed his thankfulness and later the Nayak sent a Brahmin to notify Giedde that the Nayak was satisfied and invited him to attend an exercise with battling elephants. The following day, Giedde was taken to the palace and led through the gardens which he remarked were nicely tended and they ascended a building where the Nayak

joined them. From there they watched not battling elephants, but a bull fight. When they descended, the Nayak told Giedde that the following day he would seal the deal.

The time factor

What is evident from the following events is that a certain kind of creativity developed in relation to the time factor. When the day dawned, the Nayak sent his excuses and cancelled the appointment, because it was his birthday. A few days later, Giedde once more visited the Nayak who again promised him that things would be settled the following day. By then, however, the Nayak was apparently not feeling well and that appointment was cancelled as well. The next appointment was similarly cancelled and Giedde was told that the day was an inauspicious one to do business. Then Giedde was fetched to court to see the jewels of the 365 wives of the Nayak, and they settled for an appointment the following day, but Giedde was later informed that the Nayak had visitors from out of town, and the day after, the Nayak was apparently too busy. Then Giedde's two ship chests with silver coins were inspected and Giedde found the rate of exchange too low, but accepted at last.

In this way, days went by for Giedde who was by now almost exploding with impatience. Moreover, Giedde also had to deal with other complications, since he and Crappe disagreed on the wording of the contract they were to enter with the Nayak. According to Crappe, the trading company was not sufficiently visible in the contract, since too much emphasis was put on the rights of the Danish Crown in future Tranquebar. Besides, Crappe also argued that the rent of Tranquebar should be given to him and the shipwrecked crew as the Nayak's way of paying compensation for the loss of the crew's wages and for loss of possessions in the wrecked ship *Øresund* which went to the Nayak according to the customs of this principality. These demands were denied by Giedde who reminded Crappe that he had sworn an oath of allegiance to the trading company, but Crappe answered that the company had not been obliged to the oaths given, since he had not been paid any wages. In addition, a Portuguese Catholic priest apparently also pulled some strings behind closed doors at the Nayak's court and Giedde was again called upon to alter an item in the contract negotiated.

17th of November in the evening, I visited the Naik, and he said that he could not accept the item about the Portuguese, since they had long resided in his country and that he received more than one thousand Daler from them yearly and that he did not hope that we wanted him to suffer because of the profit we sought. Also he had heard that we would not remain in his country to trade, but would leave again and of course we were free to do that and if so he would be helpful and show us all respect. And if we intended to leave, he would help us to obtain pepper and also show us all sorts of honour. And when I had answered him, I asked him, if there were

more subjects on which he disagreed in the contract and if I could have a fair copy of the contract made. He agreed and assured me that I could leave the following day at noon. He asked at the same time, if I intended to return and if anyone would stay after me in the country. And what could he send along as gift for my Lord, were rubies and cat's-eyes estimated stones at our place?

Giedde answered the Nayak that he would let twenty to thirty men stay in his country to trade. This worried the Nayak, who asked how the town of Tranquebar would prosper and grow with so few people present. The Nayak wished Tranquebar to become bigger than Nagapattinam and had hoped that eight to ten ships would stay permanently to trade. Giedde tried to explain that this was the first Danish journey to the East Indies, and that was why the Danes could not leave more men, but that he actually expected to leave three ships for trading. In the following days, more complications arose not only regarding new requests from the Nayak but also complaints from Crappe. Giedde seemed to sense that he had to act resolutely, if he were not to lose the contract completely.

Immediately I changed the three items, and since every day new troubles popped up, and as I feared even more would arise, I left town at three o'clock, and stayed two and a half miles away during the night. I had bid the Director (Crappe) farewell and instructed him that if the Naik hereafter would present any sort of complaints, he should use my absence as an excuse (not to make any more changes). And if he could not get it (the contract), he should hurry and warn me at night. So, on 21st of November (1620) I returned to Trangabari.

Giedde's plan seems to have worked and the same day he received a letter from Crappe that the contract was signed in Tanjore. And when Crappe also returned to Tranquebar a few days later, he brought, in addition, yet another letter in which the Nayak had given them a contract on the rent of the Tranquebar village area, even though Crappe had not requested this.⁷ A few days later, the Nayak's specialist on cannons arrived in Tranquebar to inspect the cannons which the Danes had promised to leave behind as a security until payment for the pepper had been realised. And now the same story began all over about the delivery of the pepper and the value of the Danish cannons and the silver coins for which pepper should be purchased.

13th (of December 1620) I bid the Naik's cannons specialist farewell after having nicely presented him with gifts and a letter to the Naik telling how I had with great difficulties let twelve of the fleet's biggest cannons be transported ashore, as I hoped that he would stick to his promise and lend us 600 barrows of pepper.

Giedde received a letter from the Nayak who was happy to learn that the cannons and merchants were now brought ashore to stay behind, and he promised

to help with what the Danes needed. Crappe was busy trying to purchase pepper in Patte, but found the prices too high and returned with the payments he had brought in silver coins and bars of lead. Parallel discussions took place with the Nayak about the value of the cannons, and thus how much money he was going to lend the Danes for purchasing pepper. The Nayak wanted twelve of the biggest cannons brought to Tanjore and demanded another security in guns which should remain at Fort Dansborg that was by now almost completed under Giedde's supervision.⁸ At the same time the Nayak expressed his wish to receive as a present a complete set of bed linen from Giedde's ship, a wish that was immediately fulfilled.

Since time was running out and 'daily a lot of expenses have to be met', Crappe was instructed to finish the deal with the Indian pepper merchants from Patte who had come to Tranquebar and finally, fourteen to fifteen barrows of pepper began to arrive for the ships to take home, but not the quantity required. Thus, some of the ships were ordered to go to other places to trade for the money and few bars of lead they had left.

Finally, Giedde had to accept that in Tranquebar 'no cargo can be expected for the ship *Elefanten*'. Then on 13 February 1621, Giedde decided to set sail and Crappe and a crew of soldiers and merchants were left behind in Dansborg to continue trading the cargo for the ship *København* which was to return to Denmark when the ship was fully loaded. Afterwards they would keep on purchasing pepper while awaiting the arrival of additional ships from Denmark.

Conclusion

For the documentation of the historical cultural encounter in 1620 between the first Danish expedition to the East Indies and the South Indian Nayak in Tanjore, we have a description produced by only one of the partners. As such Ove Giedde's report to the Danish king can be read as an asymmetrical account depicting his vision of the world, his presentation of the specific contact and events he found worthy of revealing to his lord. Unfortunately, we do not have any Tamil accounts of this first Indo–Danish contact. The intercultural exchanges, the frustrations and feelings of awkwardness constituting the friction in the cultural and social processes in the contact zone were related by Giedde in a straightforward manner almost without any moral judgements on the cultural other he had encountered. From his descriptions we can conclude that the friction involved was not characterised by highly asymmetrical relations of dominations and subordination. Giedde's report gives the impression that he found them to be cultural equals who met and matched each other.

However, it is also possible from Giedde's report in some ways to get an impression of the meaning that the Tamil agents in the contact zone put into words, actions, and interactions. At least as demonstrated during the rituals, there was friction even though Giedde actually did not pay much attention to the

ritual or maybe chose to ignore it as unimportant all together. Or maybe he did not really find it as awkward as we might imagine it from today's perspective. Awkwardness and friction taken as ethnographical objects are not self-evident.

Seen from the position of Raghunatha Nayak, ritual purity versus ritual impurity and auspiciousness versus inauspiciousness might very well have situated Giedde in a relatively lower cultural position or outside the borders of the culturally acceptable or ordinary. As such it might reflect asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination even though Giedde did not sense this or chose to ignore it.

In a certain sense we might conclude that Giedde is metaphorically wrecked on the Coromandel and had relatively more difficulties navigating socially during the cultural encounter than Raghunatha Nayak who was crossculturally more experienced. Ages ago, South Indian trading relations were initiated in relation to South East Asia during the campaigns of the Chola kings. For generations, the Portuguese had arrived on the Coromandel Coast and the Nayaks and their courts had been interacting with these Europeans. As might be read between the lines in Giedde's report, Raghunatha Nayak had little trouble in grasping the agenda and reactions of the Danes and can be seen as even taking advantage of what the time factor actually meant to Giedde. Thus the initial Indo–Danish encounter in 1620 can be described as a first contact between a cross-culturally much experienced and clever elephant, and a foreign and much less experienced but culturally rather selfconfident mouse.⁹

Friction in the contact zone and the awkwardness and creativity involved are only visible in the moments of the actual events taking place, at the time of their emergence as friction, and before their normalisation and legitimacy. What looked like friction, awkwardness and creativity might not be so for the other part, however.

Regarding the concept of 'first contact' in relation to the Danish expedition to the East Indies, there are other instances to consider as well, since it is possible to question who actually discovers whom first. Did the Danes discover the peoples of the East Indies or was it actually vice versa? In relation to the Ceylonese emperor, we may certainly conclude that through his Dutch envoy Boshouwer, he actually discovered the Danes in Copenhagen long before they set foot in Ceylon. Also the Nayak of Tanjore in fact invited the Danish envoy Giedde to come to the Coromandel Coast to do business before the latter even knew of the Nayak. This happened because of the shipwreck of *Øresund*.

In this way, the contact zone opened up long before the Danes actually arrived in the East Indies or set foot on Asian soil. Even before Giedde knew of the South Indian field, he tried to act and interact in a creative way, using the little knowledge he had of East India and the cross-cultural experiences he had gained on the long sea journey and in Ceylon.

Before Giedde physically landed at Tranquebar, he acted through letters and through his men in the contact zone understood as a social arena where agents with disparate cultural backgrounds met and grappled with each other. These agents are not representatives from two specific and different cultures that clash and can be described in general terms. Rather than *representing* a culture these agents are *presenting* and *creating* new cultural meanings and social forms thus producing friction as they intermingled with one another.

End Notes

- 1 For useful response on an earlier draft of this article, I would like to thank especially Martin Grünfeld, Stine S. Puri, Daniella Kuzmanovic, Denise Gimpel, and Asger F. Simonsen.
- 2 All translations from Ove Giedde's report are mine.
- 3 A sampan is a small boat typically with an oar or oars at the stern, much used in seventeenth century sea trade in South Asia.
- 4 The Danish East Indian Trading Company became the first share holding company in Denmark (Willerslev 1942 p. 636).
- 5 For more detailed descriptions of the pre-colonial and early colonial political relations between nayaks, warlords, and different kinds of less influential magnates, see Sastri 1976 p. 315; Stein 1969 p. 188ff; Fuller 1977 p. 101; Olafsson 1932 p. 122; Hemingway 1904 p. 170f; Niekamp 1755 p. 51f, 54f; Frykenberg 1963 p. 136f.
- 6 Unfortunately, space does not allow for a more thorough discussion of the meaning of the gift which has been subject of a huge debate in anthropology ever since Marcel Mauss wrote his famous piece *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (1923- 24) later published in English as *An essay on the gift: the form and reason of exchange in archaic societies* (1954). Mauss demonstrated that there is no such thing as a neutral and free gift and that reciprocity and the gift represent the most fundamental social phenomenon in human life in both modern and ancient times.
- 7 In the National Archives of Denmark is kept a letter of friendship written in Tamil on a golden leaf and signed in Telugu by Raghunatha Nayak inviting the Danes to settle at Tharangampadi. The foil is 40 cm long and 2.5 cm wide. In the text *Rulangkalappai* refers to Roland Crape and *karpithar* is Captain. *Ulandeesu Chennaral* refers to a General from Holland. Some later translators have translated *Ulandeesu* as Ove Giedde and some date it to 1620 and while others date it to 1621. The letter reveals that Tranquebar was given to the Danes through Roland Crape. The text states that a port called Tharangampadi has been established for Danes to settle (web-site established by P. S. Ramanujam: [http:// www.tharangampadi.dk/](http://www.tharangampadi.dk/)).

- 8 In his report to King Christian IV, very little is mentioned about the construction of Fort Dansborg.
- 9 The metaphor of mouse and elephant is inspired by the Danish book *The rich mouse and the poor elephant – 45 years of Danish economic support to India* (translated from *Den rige mus og den fattige elefant – 45 års dansk bistand til Indien*) edited by Steen Folke and Jesper Heldgaard, 2006.

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The Tranquebar tribute: Contested perceptions during the reign of Rajah Serfoji II

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Abstract

With the establishment of Tranquebar as the first Danish trading post in India, the Danes became part of a complex political system in South India based on the reciprocal exchange of gifts and tributes between princely states. Until Tranquebar was sold to the British in 1845, an annual tribute was paid to the Rajahs of Tanjore — a payment that was closely connected to ceremonial honours and symbols at the court. Rajah Serfoji II (r. 1798–1832), who had been placed on the throne by the English East India Company, considered the receipt of the tribute from a European power particularly honourable and received it in public with great ceremonies every year as an important symbol of his sovereignty. By closely analysing a dispute over the tribute which arose in the aftermath of the British occupation of Tranquebar in 1808–1816, the paper explores Indian, British and Danish perceptions of the Tranquebar tribute. The paper seeks to understand Tranquebar in a South Indian context by focusing on diplomatic relations and disagreements. It is argued that the right to define the significance of the tribute was constantly being negotiated and contested in this colonial encounter.¹

Introduction

The Danish trading post Tranquebar on the Coromandel coast was established in 1620 by agreement with the Nayaks of Tanjore, and the Maratha rule which in 1676 succeeded the Nayaks, assumed the right to receive a yearly tribute or *peshcash* from Tranquebar.² Though the political power balance in South India had changed much since the early colonial period especially with the expansion of the English East India Company's control, by the early nineteenth

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century the tradition of paying tribute by the Danish Government to the Tanjore court had continued. This paper examines the different perceptions of the Tranquebar tribute by analysing a dispute which arose in the aftermath of the British occupation of Tranquebar in 1808–1816. The dispute led to extensive correspondence, the exploration of which offers a unique insight into the ceremonial context of the tribute as seen from Indian, British and Danish perspectives.

The payment of tribute often led to conflicts between Tanjore and Tranquebar and in contemporary Danish sources, the tribute is mostly described as a troublesome kind of extortion and the Rajah as a classical example of a greedy despot trying to gain as much wealth as possible for himself. The standard works on Danish colonial history more or less repeat the same sentiment (Feldbæk & Justesen 1980, Olsen 1967, Rasch 1967, Struwe 1967). The historian Kamma Struwe, for example, writes about Tanjore that ‘cunning finance ministers were tireless in inventing occasions for special granting of presents: in relation to accessions of new Kings, travels and mutual visits, the guests of the state had to express their acknowledgement by presenting gifts’ (Struwe 1967:8).³ By looking at the tribute in a broader perspective, as more than a Danish problem, the picture seems to be of a more complex matter. Payment of tribute was an important mark of honour and an integral part of the ceremonial practices that formed the relationship between different Indian states.

According to tradition, the Rajah of Tanjore always received the tribute from Tranquebar on the tenth and last day of the *Dasara* festival which, since the Vijayanagara rule, was considered the most important annual ritual occasion.⁴ *Vijaya Dasami*, the day of victory, was of special importance to nobles and Kings and it was celebrated with great processions and pujas to goddess Durga. Through the King’s public worship, he confirmed his sovereignty, which was further strengthened by the receipt of tributes and gifts from subordinate persons and states (Dirks 1987:39–43). At the same time, the King distributed or shared his sovereignty by the granting of emblems and titles to landlords and subordinates. As pointed out by Nicholas Dirks, sovereignty is always shared and there is interdependence between the overlord and the subordinate, both in terms of relations and hierarchy (Dirks 1987:47, 87, see also Price 1996:29ff). This is an important aspect in the understanding of the transformation of South India during the colonial period and the role Europeans came to play here.

The British developed a system of indirect rule where they made use of the existing political structures to collect taxes and control areas far too large to look after by the relatively few Company employees. The development took place gradually with each new treaty transferring an increasing amount of power to the Company. In the case of Tanjore, the treaty from 1799 with the young Rajah Serfoji II, who had been placed on the throne the year before by the Company instead of Rajah Amar Singh, left only formal power to the Rajah within the

palace walls.⁵ As a compensation for his resignation, an annual pension together with one fifth of the net revenue were allowed. With the reorganisation of the administration of Tanjore, the English East India Company placed a Resident close to the court to handle all affairs related to the Rajah and pass on important information to the Governments in Madras and Calcutta. As shown by Michael H. Fisher in his studies of this Residency system, the Residents came to play a crucial role in the development of the British Empire (Fisher 1984, Fisher 1990). As the Company's envoys they were often closely involved in the political and ceremonial life at the princely courts and acted with a considerable degree of autonomy.

In Tanjore all official correspondence to and from the Rajah went through the Resident, who read the letters and, if necessary, had them translated before they were forwarded. This arrangement made it possible to monitor the Rajah's doings closely and the Resident sent frequent reports to the Government of Madras. However, not everything was reported to Madras and the correspondence between the Rajah and the Resident often offers a different understanding than the official memoranda. Rajah Serfoji wrote his letters either in English, which was strongly encouraged by the British Government, or in Marathi with Modi script then commonly used by the court (Strandberg 1983:11). A number of these original letters sent to the governors of Tranquebar are now part of various Danish collections and have been translated and analysed by Elisabeth Strandberg, whereas the contemporary translations, on which this paper is based, are found in the British Tanjore District Records in the Tamil Nadu State Archives (Strandberg 1983).

So far, the Tranquebar tribute has not been dealt with as a separate object of study. Apart from the introduction in Strandberg's 'The Modi Documents from Tanjore in Danish Collections' there is little literature on the subject, just as the overall history of the Maratha rule of Tanjore needs further investigation.⁶ However, Serfoji II as an individual and Tanjore as a South Indian centre of learning and culture have lately drawn some well-deserved scholarly attention (Peterson 1999a, 1999b, 2008, Nair 2005). Serfoji II was a remarkable person: educated by the German missionary Christian Friedrich Schwartz, he was a well-known practitioner of western science and medicine, and an enthusiastic collector of books and artefacts—both European and Asian.⁷ At the same time Serfoji was an orthodox Hindu, who did not convert to Christianity despite his close relationship to Schwartz, as well as a devoted keeper of Indian traditions. It is not the objective of this paper to investigate the idiosyncrasies of Serfoji's personal life, but as will be demonstrated, he had an ability to act both within the framework of the colonial administration and against it.

Similarly, the encounters between the Danish authorities of Tranquebar and the Indian population have only recently been subject of comprehensive study, as a part of Niels Brimnes' analysis of conflicts between right and left

hand castes in South India. Brimnes argues that ‘the colonial encounter is best conceptualized as a *dialogic process*, in which colonialists and indigenous people sought to incorporate each other into their own social structure and conceptual universe’ (Brimnes 1999:1). This understanding constitutes a useful backdrop for the following analysis of the different perceptions of the Tranquebar tribute. Instead of seeing the colonial encounter as a clash between two fixed entities, it is more rewarding to note this *dialogue* between colonialists and Indians as a constant process of negotiation. Encounters took place among many different players within all levels of society and found expression in a wide range of ways. Focusing on the diplomatic relations at a political and official level, more than on the common people, the present study demonstrates how the significance of the Tranquebar tribute was continually being negotiated according to different perceptions. The study relies mainly on British sources from the Tanjore District Records and it is expected that research in the Danish archives may yield further insights especially with regard to the Danish perceptions of Tanjore and the tribute. Thus, the paper at hand should be read only as an initial case study of a hitherto underexposed aspect of the encounter between Tanjore and Tranquebar.

The 1815 restoration of Tranquebar

The conflict during the Napoleonic wars that led to the British occupation of Denmark, including the Danish settlements in India in 1801–02 and 1808–15, was rooted in European high politics rather than affairs in the overseas colonies. Thus, life remained more or less unchanged in Tranquebar under the British administration, as everyone expected that the situation was only temporary. On 14 January 1814, the peace treaty was signed in Kiel, and in June 1815 the British Government in Madras received orders to surrender Tranquebar to the Danes. Subsequently, a special commission was appointed to take care of the formalities.

The official transfer of sovereignty took place on 20 September when the newly arrived Danish Governor, Gerhard Sievers Bille took command of Tranquebar. Before the actual transfer came into effect, several details were subject to discussion in the commission. In relation to a survey on the ownership of the villages surrounding Tranquebar, the commission brought up the question of the annual tribute to the Rajah of Tanjore. Following a thorough investigation of his records and an inquiry amongst ‘persons well informed upon the subject’, the somewhat puzzled district collector of Tanjore, James Hepburn, informed the Government that,

The Danes do not however hold these villages in sovereignty, as they are liable to the yearly payment of a Peshcash of two thousand Chuckrums to the Rajah of Tanjore, as sovereign of the country, and this Peshcash by the 14th article of the Tanjore treaty, is expressly retained by the Rajah as a mark of his sovereignty (Foreign Dep. Sun. Vol. 2, 10 July 1815).

The tribute is described by the collector as a symbol of Danish recognition

of the Rajah's sovereignty over the Tranquebar villages. He refers to article 14 of the treaty from 1799 which states:

Whereas a certain annual peshcush, amounting to two thousand Chuckrums, is payable by the Danish Government of Tranquebar for lands held of the Rajahs of Tanjore in the vicinity of that place, it is stipulated and agreed that the said peshcush shall continue to be received by His Excellency the Rajah, without any deduction from His Excellency's proportion of the revenue, as hereinbefore stipulated (cited from Aitchison 1864).

The commission report suggests that although the tribute was explicitly mentioned in their own treaty with the Tanjore Rajah, it was not until the restoration in 1815 that the British realised the special status held by Tranquebar. The commission did not, however, take any further steps to repay the tribute, which had apparently been neglected from 1808 to 1815, and during the course of the negotiations the Danes did not mention it either.

The Rajah's claim

The issue did not resurface until October 1815, a month after the restoration, when Rajah Serfoji II himself approached the British Resident, William Blackburne. As the two men met in person, a letter from the Rajah is not available, but Blackburne recorded the events and later sent his report to Madras (Pol. Dep. Vol. 99, 5 October 1815). Serfoji wants to know whether he is allowed to resume the contact with the new Government in Tranquebar. Furthermore, he wants to know if he should contact the Danish or the British Government in order to claim and receive the arrears of tribute from the time of occupation. Blackburne replies that he will have to take up the matter with his superiors in Madras and that he will not be able to answer the Rajah's questions until he has done so. Serfoji agrees to wait, but, according to Blackburne, the Rajah has pressured him to write immediately and 'expressed considerable solicitude for the recovery of the arrears of tribute' (Ibid.).

Blackburne, in effect, sets out to argue against the claims of the Rajah. Firstly, he points out that the Danes cannot be expected to accept the claim unless the British agree to compensate them for the taxes they have lost during the occupation. Secondly, he adduces the following interesting argument:

The tribute was paid for protection, or as an acknowledgement of superiority, but protection was withheld by the Rajah, and His Highness was, actually, in consequence of His alliance with the British Government, a party in the war with Denmark (Ibid.).

According to Blackburne, then, it is the Rajah himself who has broken the treaty—not the Danes or the British. He interprets the tribute in two ways: Firstly, as a kind of *protective duty*, and secondly as a *payment to a superior power*. According to the former interpretation, the Rajah has not lived up to his

obligations; in 1808, rather than protecting Tranquebar against the British, he entered into an alliance with them. Furthermore, Blackburne explicitly dismisses the other interpretation, stating that it is ‘obvious that any claim of tribute from the superior and controlling part in the alliance must be utterly inadmissible’ (Ibid.). Clearly, one would never pay tribute to an inferior power and Serfoji appears to have been persuaded by Blackburne’s line of reasoning:

The Rajah said that he understood perfectly the spirit of His alliance with the British Government, that he did not demand, as a matter of right, the arrears of tribute from that Government, but wishes to make an appeal to its generosity, and its consideration for a faithful and approved friend and ally for a remuneration for the loss with which he was threatened (Ibid.).

Serfoji, in other words, recognised his part in the alliance with the British as an inferior power, unable to make demands. Nevertheless, he brings forward his claim on the arrears of the tribute. To begin with, he does not lodge an appeal with any legitimate claim, but rather addresses the *generosity* of the British Government.

Serfoji’s proposition, however, was clearly rejected at first by Blackburne and later by the Government in Madras. In his answer to Blackburne, Chief Secretary Strachey from Madras asserts that it will be impossible at any given time for the British Government to pay tribute to the Rajah (Pol. Dep. Vol.99, 27 Oct. 1815). Furthermore, he argues that the revenue from Tranquebar had decreased drastically during the occupation, and it would not be reasonable to claim any of it. He has no doubt that the Rajah will retract his appeal once he is properly informed of the case.

Strachey’s predictions turned out to be true. On 24 November 1815, Blackburne informed him that ‘the expectations of His Highness the Rajah of Tanjore of obtaining the Tranquebar tribute [...] were not very sanguine. They were discouraged decidedly by me’ (Pol. Dep. Vol. 101, 24 Nov. 1815). In the same letter, however, Blackburne reveals that he has not been able to dissuade Serfoji from contacting the British Governor in Madras directly regarding his claim. Nevertheless, Blackburne assures Strachey that the Rajah has already accepted the expected negative response, without showing any sign of disappointment. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find this letter from Serfoji to the Governor, and thus, Blackburne’s assurance is the only testament to the reaction of the Rajah. One must keep in mind here that Blackburne’s special role as Resident left him with the responsibility of controlling the Rajah and reporting on him. As noted, only the information that Blackburne considered important would make it through to Madras and the majority of his correspondence with Serfoji remained in Tanjore.⁸ These tend to tell of a more humble Blackburne or at least of a Resident who did not always have the upper hand on his Rajah. Without exaggerating the significance of these circumstances, it needs to be pointed out

that Blackburne had an obvious interest in letting the central Government believe that he could control the Rajah at any given time. Needless to say, Serfoji's approach regarding the arrears of the Tranquebar tribute did not resonate with this impression. If we are to believe that the Rajah's claim was not really as explicit as he had initially presented it, his decision to contact the Governor directly seems rather odd, as this was by no means standard protocol.

Revival of the Tranquebar–Tanjore contact

The Resident's job of controlling the Rajah's communication entailed that he kept the Rajah from contacting foreign powers directly, as this involved a considerable risk of conspiracies against the English East India Company. Hence, Serfoji was severely criticised on the rare occasions when the illegal correspondence came to light (TDR 3473-4, 3481, 3524, 3434, Strandberg 1983:20).

After the restoration of Tranquebar, Serfoji was anxious to know if he would be allowed to contact the Danish administration again. At the above mentioned meeting, Blackburne had already issued the permission to do so, and Strachey later ratified this decision. Blackburne describes the diplomatic relations as 'ancient and regulated intercourse', and states that the British will not interfere as long as they are able to monitor the contact (Pol. Dep. Vol. 99, 24 Oct. 1815). Thus, on 19 November 1815, Serfoji sent his *Vackeel*, a personal agent, to Governor Bille with a letter of congratulations and a number of gifts as a symbol of the re-established relations between Tranquebar and Tanjore (Pol. Dep. Vol. 102, Cons. 22 Dec. 1815).⁹ As tradition dictated, letters were also sent by the *Sirkele*, the prime minister, to both the Governor and to Peter Hermansen, second member of the council.¹⁰ According to Blackburne, Serfoji's *Vackeel* was greeted in exactly the same manner as he had been prior to the British occupation: 'A guard was appointed to attend him, and salutes were fired at his entrance into and departure from the port...' (Ibid.). At the beginning of December, the answer from Tranquebar reached Tanjore court. In January, additional gifts followed and a comprehensive list of the specific items was handed over to the Resident, who forwarded it to Madras.

The British interest in monitoring the Rajah's foreign contact was based on the colonial need to control Indian affairs. Additionally, there was an economic aspect, since Serfoji was suspected of taking advantage of his contacts in Europe to import costly goods in the form of gifts, thereby avoiding the taxes required by the East India Company. This explains, for instance, why the list of gift items from Tranquebar was considered important enough to be forwarded to Madras (TDR Vol. 3437-8). Both the Danish Government of Tranquebar and the Rajah were of course aware that all letters exchanged between them were being carefully studied by the Resident. This added another dimension to the correspondence, since the letters addressed a concealed recipient in the form of the British authorities, and it underlines the fact that the diplomatic relations between Tanjore

and Tranquebar in the nineteenth century cannot be treated without including the influence of the British.

Internal controversies

Following the unequivocal rejection of Serfoji's claim on the arrears of tribute, the case took an unexpected turn. On 17 April 1816, a lengthy letter from the Supreme Government in Fort William, Calcutta, reached Madras. Whereas the Governor General agreed that Tanjore could effortlessly resume contact with Tranquebar, his view on the matter of the arrears of the tribute was somewhat different: '...the arrears in question appear to his [the Governor General's] judgement to rest on very strong grounds, and such as render it in his opinion an indispensable act of justice to admit it' (Pol. Dep. Vol. 104, 2 Mar. 1816). He agrees with the Government of Madras that tribute cannot be paid to an inferior power such as Tanjore and that this claim must be expressly rejected. However, with reference to article 14 of the 1799 treaty, he maintains that the British have made a commitment to ensure the payments from Tranquebar. Said document describes the payments as tribute or 'peshkash', but it also states that the amount in question is paid 'for lands held of the Rajahs of Tanjore in the vicinity of that place [Tranquebar]' (Aitchison 1864).

In other words, the Governor General interprets the tribute as payment for *the rental of lands* and not as a tribute in the traditional sense. Hence, there is no reason why the British should not pay the Rajah. Furthermore, the Governor General regards Strachey's claim that the amount is no longer on par with the tax income as irrelevant, and seeing as it would be unreasonable to claim the money from the Danes, he orders the Government of Madras to take care of the payments to Tanjore. Consequently, Strachey issued the order to Blackburne in Tanjore on the very same day and asked him to acquire a separate receipt for the payment from the Rajah. In a very brief message, Blackburne subsequently informed Serfoji about the decision (TDR Vol. 3520, 30 Apr. 1816). The answer was prompt; Serfoji expressed his unreserved and spontaneous joy at hearing the news and thanked the Governor General heartily (Pol. Dep. Vol. 108, 30 Apr. 1816).

The ruling undoubtedly represented a loss of prestige for the Government of Madras and especially for Blackburne himself. In a subsequent memorandum he refers with some irritation to the intervention from Calcutta as an 'unexpected and spontaneous liberality' (TDR Vol. 3518, 9 June 1816). Furthermore, he clearly states that the decision is solely based on the judgement of the Calcutta Government and that any other possible demands in the future thus must be referred hereto instead of to Madras. Disagreements like this between Madras and Calcutta were common within the British administration. Madras had been the first British centre in India and the Government continuously tried to maintain an extent of autonomy in relation to both the Court of Directors in London and the Supreme Government in Fort William. The argument was that South India

was different and could not be governed from the outside, without a proper understanding of local conditions (Washbrook 2004:488).

The correspondence can also be seen as an example of the typical way of arguing with reference to ancient rights, starring the East India Company as a just protector of these (Ibid.:487,503f.). After the British occupation of Tranquebar in 1801–1802, where the payment of tribute had also been omitted, Serfoji II had raised a question regarding arrears of tribute, and his statements subsequently constituted part of the 1815 case. In 1803 Serfoji referred to the time-honoured custom, stating that ‘the tribute has been paid from time immemorial without the exception of a single failure’ (TDR Vol. 3423, 11 Jan. 1803). He further pointed to the official treaty with the Company, ‘As your Lordship [Governor Clive] cannot have a doubt of the justice of my claim, and as my receipt of the tribute is expressly stipulated in the treaty between me and the Honorable Company...’ (Ibid.). Though the arrears of tribute were limited to one year, the case dragged out since both the Danes and the British refused to acknowledge the claim (GRTD Vol.3475–3481). In 1804 the Danish Governor, Peter Anker, consented to pay the arrears, but the decision came only after heavy pressure from both Tanjore and Madras.

Serfoji’s reference to justice and the treaty appealed to the selfperception of the British as just and civilised rulers as opposed to what was considered the despotism of the East (Brimnes 1998). The protection of legal rights and maintenance of law and order were often used as the main arguments to legitimate further British intervention in Indian states (Price 1996:52, Dirks 1987:27). Thus, the treaties with the princely states came to play an important role in the construction of British legitimacy in India, since they proved that the Company’s presence was based on mutual agreement and friendship. This was essential both in order to demonstrate the continuity of the new rule to the Indian population and to maintain support for the colonial project in Europe at a time when criticism began to rise, e.g. in the form of the growing abolitionist movement. Thus, when Serfoji took up the matter of the Tranquebar tribute and referred to the treaty and his legal rights, he not only challenged the colonial administration, but also questioned British legitimacy in India per se.

Compensation or tribute: a struggle of definition

In the definitive ruling from the Supreme Government of Calcutta, the Governor General had asked for a separate receipt for the payment. It was made clear that the British Government could by no means pay tribute to Tanjore, and that the payment must be seen as ‘compensation’ only, the word being clearly underlined (Pol. Dep. Vol. 112, Cons. 22 June 1816). However, as Serfoji had already noted in 1803, in former receipts and letters ‘the tribute is invariable called *tappa*,¹¹ which signifies a sum paid in acknowledgement of sovereignty’, and a disagreement about which words to use in the receipt now postponed the

actual payment even further (TDR, Vol. 3423, 11 Jan. 1803).

The first receipt Madras received from Serfoji was rejected and Blackburne was instead asked to draw up a new one under the following criteria: ‘the sums (...) may not be stated as tribute and rent due by the British Government, but as a compensation granted for the loss of revenue’ (Pol. Dep. Vol. 112, Cons. 22 June 1816). In this interpretation the compensation is solely for lost revenue and on the new draft receipt made by Blackburne the word ‘tribute’ is completely omitted, whereas ‘compensation’ is written in the heading. Nevertheless, Serfoji returns a second receipt without any mentioning of compensation, and Blackburne again has to reject it. This third time, Blackburne composes the receipt in Marathi as well, since he assumes that the whole affair is rooted in a misunderstanding, though Rajah Serfoji was undoubtedly able to both read and write in English.¹² Serfoji finally signs the receipt and the payment is thereafter authorised by the Government of Madras.

As seen from the outside, this dispute over a single word on a receipt may seem peculiar, especially since the decision to pay the arrears of tribute had already been taken. However, the case cannot be understood without taking into account the important role that honour played in the negotiations. It was a struggle about who was going to *define* the context and significance of the tribute, and in this struggle every little word was important. The word ‘tribute’ was loaded with symbolic meaning and closely connected to the Rajah’s honour and sovereignty, whereas ‘compensation’ was more neutral and referred only to a money transfer. The case thus illustrates how even the smallest mark of honour was constantly negotiated in this colonial encounter.

British perceptions of the Tranquebar Tribute

In the end the Rajah’s claim of lost tribute had been reduced to an economical compensation for lost revenue, and the Government of Madras had stated that the payment should be carried out as any regular money transfer. In practice, however, the procedure took a different form.

From the beginning, Blackburne had observed that Serfoji attached great importance to the payments of arrears and he informed that ‘His Highness [...] is unwilling that it should be treated as a matter of account merely’ (Pol. Dep. Vol. 112, Cons. 22 June 1816). Despite the above mentioned dispute and the clear orders from Madras and Calcutta, Blackburne seems to have accepted that the matter was of a somewhat special character. In a memorandum written prior to the delivery of the compensation money, he offers a detailed account of the arrangements to be followed in connection with the payment:

The Resident will leave his house in his palanquin a little before to all escorted by his own guard, and by any party, which may be directed by His Highness to accompany him. The compensation money will be in charge of

the Head Servant of the Office, who will deposit it at the foot of the steps of the Durbar, as soon as the first civilities shall have passed between His Highness and the Resident. The Resident will request His Highness to accept of the compensation money, as an unequivocal proof of the friendship and respect of the British Government. The Resident will then take leave (TDR Vol. 3518, 3 Sep. 1816).

This procedure was quite similar to the normal way of receiving tribute, albeit with the important exception that the money was not paid during the *Dasara* festival and that it was laid at the steps of the Durbar hall and not at the feet of the Rajah. The payment can be seen as a pragmatic compromise that saved the honour of both Resident and Rajah. A close relation between the two was the basis of the British system of indirect rule, but local practices were not always fully understood by the central Governments, which often passed laws with the aim of regulating and controlling the posted officers.

Another example of this is an act passed from London in 1817, which forbids the Company officers to exchange presents with the native princes of India (TDR Vol. 3435, 28 Sep. 1817). Serfoji requests Blackburne to take up the matter with the Government since he wishes to continue the practice which, he emphasises with reference to the same claim as earlier, has existed from very early on. Blackburne recommends the proposal, noting that it has always been customary and adding that the Rajah's dignity in the eyes of his subjects depends upon it. As an unusual exception, the Government of Madras agrees to the proposal on condition that in the future all presents to and from the Company officers have to pass the Resident who shall see to it that the Rajah receives presents of the exact same value. Naturally, the *raison d'être* for the act in the first place was the fear of corruption and the concern that wealthy princes should attain influence through the presents.

In this case, Blackburne refers to the Rajah's dignity and honour only, but it is clear that he is concerned with more than that. As demonstrated by Fisher, Residents and British officers often regarded it most honourable to take part in the life at Indian courts, attracted as they were by the exotic splendour (Fisher 1990:431ff.).¹³ To a considerable extent, they accepted Indian symbols and traditions and over time found their place in the court rituals. However, the traditions were not merely static, but were indeed open to negotiation. The correspondence related to important celebrations and the exchange of letters and presents offers an insight into the detailed discussions between Rajah and Resident about which procedures to follow. Disagreements were common and from both sides accusations of 'misconduct' and 'disrespect' were frequently reported to Madras.¹⁴ Though the Residency from the British side had more or less explicit intentions of controlling the Indian princes, by the early nineteenth century it had also become a symbol of status for the said princes (Fisher 1990:453f). Thus, proposals to withdraw the Residency were widely met with

opposition by the Indian princes, who felt that the Company would reduce them to simple landholders. Serfoji was especially worried about what would happen to his inexperienced son if he could not seek the Resident's support (TDR Vol. 4438, 19 Nov. 1831). This once again confirms the Resident's entanglement in life at the Tanjore court.

The different British attitudes towards the Tranquebar tribute were based on a typical centre-periphery conflict characteristic of the colonial system of administration. The distance between central Governments and the officers posted in more remote districts was large and the standardised laws and orders etc. coming from the centre were often difficult to implement locally, since they did not take into account the differences that existed e.g. in social structures, culture and traditions. This also applies to Tanjore where the Resident, through his involvement at the court, had a better basis for understanding local practices and the Rajah's concerns than the central Governments in Madras, Calcutta and London.

Serfoji II and his European tribute state

The Rajah, considering the receipt of the tribute from an European power as particularly honourable to him, is desirous to give it all the publicity as possible, and has so timed his demand as to anticipate the return of his Vakeel with the tribute on the last day of the Desserah [Dasara] Feast, and it is intended that when His Highness shall be actually receiving the visits and compliments of all the public authorities and of the principal inhabitants of the province, the Vakeel shall be introduced and the tribute laid at the feet of His Highness (TDR Vol. 3434, 5 Oct. 1817).

The description by Blackburne refers to the procedure in 1817 for the receipt of the first tribute from Tranquebar after the British occupation. He points out that the Tranquebar tribute was of very special importance to the Rajah, an understanding that is confirmed by their correspondence. As shown, Serfoji had gained permission to continue the exchange of presents and honours with British officers, which meant that all important persons and 'public authorities' were gathered in Tanjore on the last day of the *Dasara* festival to pay homage to the Rajah. On this occasion, with all eyes on him, Serfoji received the Tranquebar tribute at his feet in the great Durbar hall. Not just by any state, but by a *European* state.

The ceremony evokes evident reminiscences of the traditions of the Vijayanagara rule, with Serfoji representing the great Hindu King, though the de facto political order looked much different by the early nineteenth century. Serfoji, however, not only adheres to ancient rituals, but also is capable of reinventing tradition. By incorporating the colonial administration in the court rituals, he manages to appear in public as the rightful ruler of Tanjore with all the royal symbols of honour, e.g. elephants and umbrellas. The British officers came to

take a position much similar to that of the earlier Indian nobility, and through the exchange of presents they placed themselves in a state of dependency on the King. Fisher puts it thus: 'by incorporating the Resident into its world, the court gained some measure of control over him' (Fisher 1990:457). It was exactly this kind of relationship that was looked at with concern by the central colonial administration.

Indira V. Peterson has referred to Serfoji's rule and his reinvention of tradition as 'improvised Kingship', in the sense that Serfoji, despite all the formal limitations set forth by the British Government, tried to preserve his symbolic power as King in a number of ways (Peterson 1998 & 2005). For instance, she describes Serfoji's great pilgrimage to Benares (Varanasi) in 1820–22, which was much in keeping with tradition. The trip had to be planned thoroughly by the British to make sure that the Rajah, whose freedom of movement was normally limited to the palace, did not take advantage of this rare opportunity to travel throughout India. Apart from conducting rituals in various temples on the pilgrimage, he visited other Indian princes and even met the General Governor himself in Calcutta. Peterson points out that Serfoji's pilgrimage can be seen as a testing of power relations and as a part of his self-presentation. In accordance with this interpretation, one might argue that Serfoji was very successful and that he expanded his liberty considerably. At other times, he seems to have crossed the line and in an interesting correspondence regarding a land dispute, Blackburne reprimands the Rajah for his arrogance:

I did not expect, I own, to be answered [...] that Kings can do no wrong, that they are bound by no laws human or divine, and that they may break the promises and recall the gifts of themselves or their forefathers (TDR Vol. 3520, 24 March 1816).

However, when the Rajah showed appropriate conduct towards the Company, his demands for ceremonies and honours were widely supported especially by the Resident. In 1815, for instance, Serfoji was honoured with the title of 'His Highness' and Blackburne arranged a procession through the 'principal streets' of Tanjore with the letter from the Court of Directors carried upon the back of an elephant. Serfoji expressed great joy on the occasion and noted that the new title would 'exalt his dignity and strengthen his authority' (TDR Vol. 3434, 23 Dec. 1815). The Tranquebar tribute must be seen in the same context, with a symbolic value to the Rajah that clearly exceeded the actual value of the 2000 Tanjore *Chuckrams* the Danes paid yearly.

Costly ceremonies

In September 1816, at the beginning of the *Dasara* festival, the Rajah sent a delegation led by his *Vackeel* to Tranquebar to collect the resumed tribute according to tradition. Blackburne requested Serfoji to give an exact account of the related proceedings including all the rituals performed. The subsequent

account thus offers an exceptionally precise description, as seen from an Indian perspective, of how the payment of the Tranquebar tribute normally took place.

At the border of the territory of Tranquebar, the Rajah's party was received by the Danish Governor's *Dubash*, a personal native servant, who 'sent music, dancing girls, the Cavellgar's people, Tomtoms, Trumpets etc.'¹⁵ After taking rest for two days, fifty to sixty sepoy were sent to lead the party into Tranquebar town. The letters from the Rajah together with the *Khilaut*, a robe of honour, were placed in an ivory palanquin with gold fringes and inlaid silver. The *Vackeel* further narrates:

On our arriving near the Fort of Tranquebar, a guard of soldiers came out and having surrounded the ivory palanquin, which contained the letter and Khilaut, we entered the Fort Gate, drums beating and fifes playing. As we entered, the usual number of eighteen guns were discharged, the guard at the gate turned out and saluted, drums beat etc. etc. The ivory palanquin was carried up the principal street, to the Government House, when the Dubashee Tundacheepilly took out of it the letter and Khilaut, the other two Dubashees attending upon me, went into the Admiral's house. On seeing the Rajah's letter the Admiral, Hermanson and Koefoed [members of the council] rose from their seats, the Dubashee then placed the letter and Khilaut upon a chair in front of them. The Admiral and the other two immediately exchanged salams with me, and then a chair was given me to sit down on (...). The whole of them then got up and offered their most respectful compliment to the MahaRajah. The Governor next presented us through his dubashee, with sandal oil, flowers, rose water, beetle and dresses (Pol. Dep. Vol. 114, Cons. 21 Oct. 1816).

After this, the party stayed two more nights before returning to Tanjore with tribute, presents and letters, timed so the procession entered the palace on the last day of the *Dasara* festival, in time to lay the tribute at the Rajah's feet. Blackburne later noted that the proceedings 'were regulated with strict conformity to established rules, and appear to have been conducted in a manner which gave entire satisfaction to His Highness the Rajah of Tanjore' (Ibid.). The account shows how the Danes at Tranquebar knew very well how to act at the Indian ceremonies. The newly arrived Governor, Sievers Bille, must have been advised by the experienced members of the council and former Governor, Hermansen, who, together with the *Dubash*, seems to have played an active and central role in the ceremonies.¹⁶ However, the Danish officers were not just actors in a theatrical performance aiming to please the Rajah. The ceremonies and processions through the streets of Tranquebar were a part of life in the South Indian town and represented a way of manifesting to the public the Danish legitimacy, as a subordinate state under Tanjore.

During the American war of independence and the Napoleonic wars in

Europe, Tranquebar had profited from the possibilities of trading, due to Denmark's neutral role in the conflict (Feldbæk 1969). This changed completely with the two British occupations and it was an impoverished town that was surrendered to the Danes in 1815. Though some steps were taken to reestablish Tranquebar's position, it was clear that the Danish Government no longer profited from the settlement (Brimnes 1999:194 ff.).

In 1825 a new Governor, H. D. Brinch-Seidelin, arrived in Tranquebar with orders to make a report on the state of the trading post. The aim was to investigate the possibilities of reducing public expenditures and Brinch-Seidelin discovered that the annual receipt of the Rajah's delegation was a major entry in the accounts. Hence, he proposed that the tribute should be paid directly into Serfoji's treasury in the future, in order to avoid the expenses related to the ceremonies.¹⁷ After consulting the Resident, Serfoji agreed to the new proceedings, but his decision seems to have been based on a misunderstanding. At the time of payment, Serfoji was surprised to discover that the Danish Government had authorised their agents at Madras, the company Messrs. Arbuthnot, to pay the amount of tribute into his treasury. This kind of payment obviously removed all ceremonial substance of the tribute and was not accepted by Serfoji. Through his prime minister, the *Sirkele*, he objected strongly to the Governor's new attitude, which he describes as being against the usage and criticises for not taking into account that the tribute is 'a mark of respect' to the Rajah. The *Sirkele* stated that 'the matter is not of a mercantile nature and ought not to be entrusted to a house of agency' (TDR Vol.4433, 7 October 1825). Instead he sent a *Vackeel* with a delegation to collect the tribute in the usual manner. Again, with reference to custom and the treaty, the British supported the Rajah and the new Danish Governor, disappointedly, had to comply with the earlier agreement.¹⁸

The issue did not resurface until after the death of Rajah Serfoji II in 1832 when his son, Shivaji II, succeeded him to the throne. The Danish Governor contacted the British Government directly to learn whether he could now discontinue the practice of paying tribute. Appealing to a common European identity, he argued that the British themselves were against such a practice, based as it were on native traditions (TDR Vol.3421, 15 March 1832). However, with reference to the treaty, the proposal was once again rejected and the payment of tribute thus continued until Tranquebar was sold to the British in 1845.

Conclusion

The case of Rajah Serfoji II and the Tranquebar tribute can be seen as an example of colonial encounters in early nineteenth century South India. Though the political position of Tranquebar after the British occupation in 1808–1815 was insignificant, it still played a part as a European—and therefore highly unusual—tribute state in India. The Danish settlement, financially pressured, complained about the cost of the practice, but the annual tribute from Tranquebar

to Tanjore was much more than an economical matter; it was an important mark of Rajah Serfoji II's ceremonial assertion of his sovereignty as an Indian King. With great celebrations it was received in public every year at the *Dasara* festival, an occasion where Serfoji managed to incorporate the local British officers and the Resident in the royal ceremonies. The Resident William Blackburne was closely involved in life at the court and he gained an understanding of the Rajah and local customs that differed from that of the central Governments. This explains the different British attitudes towards the tribute and illustrates the typical disagreement within the colonial administration between centre and periphery.

At a time when Serfoji had lost most of his formal power, the symbols and rituals came to gain even greater importance in his self-presentation as the rightful King of Tanjore. In the words of Michael Fisher,

court ritual sometimes remained one of the few arenas where a Ruler could demonstrate his sovereignty. Thus, an Indian Ruler often clung to symbolic statements of rightful place in the world, even – or especially – when little else had been left to him by the British (Fisher 1990:457).

The description applies to a considerable extent to Serfoji's position, but it is, however, important to note that the ceremonies should not merely be interpreted as a cog in a political power game. As Dirks puts it with reference to Clifford Geertz, 'the symbolic aspects of power are not, as the saying goes, "merely" symbolic' (Dirks 1987:402). It is, in other words, impossible to differentiate between a real and a symbolic world. The ceremonial appearances in public were not only part of Serfoji's political staging as a Rajah, but also had the religious purpose of installing or reinstalling him in the cosmic order, as was the tradition during the Vijayanagara rule (Dirks 1987:42).

Sovereignty was distributed by the Rajah to his subordinates in many ways, and apart from the described rituals he would, for instance, exchange royal portraits with the Danish Kings.¹⁹ In this way, the diplomatic relationship between Denmark and Tanjore was maintained, the importance of which was acknowledged by the Danes in Tranquebar. As pointed out above, even though the tribute in Danish sources is mainly referred to in negative terms and at best as a necessary evil, the experienced officers in Tranquebar knew the Indian codes of conduct well and acted properly, i.e. according to the Rajah's expectations, when they presented the annual *peshcash* with all the ceremonial honours. However, with the increasing financial problems, and the necessity of reducing public costs, the attitude towards the tribute gradually changed. Thus, by the 1820s there was a wish from the Danish side for the conversion of the tribute into a simple economic transaction, without the costly ceremonies. Two aspects were not taken into consideration by this new rational approach: Firstly, the British role as protector of the Rajah's rights and, secondly, the importance of symbols and honours in early nineteenth century South India (Fisher 1990:453). Serfoji claimed

the ceremonial tribute with reference to both ancient, pre-colonial customs and the legal terms of his treaty with the English East India Company. Thus, he simultaneously appealed to a number of coexisting perceptions of the Tranquebar tribute and, as demonstrated, the dispute in question shows how traditions and rituals were constantly revisited, reformulated and reshaped in the colonial encounter.

Notes

- 1 Research for this paper was conducted in 2005–2006 and is mainly based on primary sources from the Tanjore District Records in Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai. European names and spellings are used, as they occur in the quoted sources, e.g. *Tanjore* and *Tranquebar* instead of *Thanjavur* and *Tharangambadi*.
- 2 On the history of the Nayaks of Tanjore, see Vriddhagirisan 1942.
- 3 Author's translation from the Danish. See also Gunnar Olsen's description of the Nayak rule (Olsen 1967:74,97,103,168,199).
- 4 The *Dasara* festival was and still is celebrated across India in different forms and under different names like *Mahânâvami*, *Durgôtsava*, *Navarâtra* and *Durgâpûjâ* (Dirks1987:39ff, See also Strandberg 1983:21). For a description of the Vijayanagara rule, see Stein 1993.
- 5 For this and other treaties relating to Tanjore, see Aitchison 1864.
- 6 However, an overview of the history of the Tanjore Marathas is found in Subramanian 1928. The late Rajah Tulajendra, descendant of Serfoji II, has also contributed with valuable information from the court records, especially on the cultural significance of Tanjore (Tulajendra 1995).
- 7 On the life of C. F. Schwartz, see Frykenberg 1999. Serfoji's collection of arms and armour is described thoroughly in Elgood 2004.
- 8 For instance, Blackburne notes a number of letters which Serfoji has received from Tranquebar in 1815: '...the papers are not of importance enough to make their transmission to Madras' (TDR Vol. 3434, 13 October 1815).
- 9 '*Vackeel*', '*vakil*' or '*wakil*' stems from the Arabic meaning 'one entrusted' (Fisher 1990:425).
- 10 For details on the protocol for the exchange of letters between Tranquebar and Tanjore, see Strandberg 1983:13f.
- 11 By the nineteenth century, the word 'tappa', also spelled 'tappaul', was, according to Henry Yule, used in South India with the meaning 'post office'. However, in this case it seems to be used by the Rajah as a synonym of *peshcash* or tribute (Yule 1903).
- 12 William Blackburne himself knew Marathi well and had worked as a Marathi

- interpreter in Tanjore from 1787, before his appointment as British Resident in 1801 (Stephen 1886).
- 13 For instance, Blackburne is extremely offended when he is not invited to take part in the birthday celebrations for the Rajah's son (TDR Vol. 3497, 20 February 1809).
- 14 TDR Vol. 3436 and 3511.
- 15 *Dubashes*, meaning literally 'a man of two languages', came to play an important role in early colonial South India as intermediaries between Europeans and Indians (Brimnes 1999:92ff).
- 16 Peter Hermansen arrived in Tranquebar in 1777 and held various posts with the Danish Government in India until his death in 1822 (Larsen 1940:76).
- 17 At the same time, Governor Brinch-Seidelin wished to put an end to the custom of firing salutes at the receipt of letters from Tanjore. The Rajah could explain to the Governor that it is not usual to fire a salute on all occasions when letters are received, but that this mark of respect should be shown on all ceremonial occasions (TDR Vol. 4433, regarding the salutes see also Strandberg 1983:20).
- 18 Governor Brinck-Seidelin not only had a falling out with the Rajah, but his ignorance on local matters seems to have made him widely unpopular throughout Tranquebar (Larsen 1940:52).
- 19 Serfoji II presented at least two miniature self-portraits painted on ivory to King Frederik VI (1808-1839). After the decease of the Danish King, his successor, Christian VIII, transferred them to what would later become the Ethnographic Collection at the National Museum of Denmark where they are still kept today. On the significance of royal portraits at the Tanjore court, see Peterson 2008.

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The schools of Tranquebar: An educational field of cultural encounters and conflicts

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Abstract

The arrival of the missionaries from the Halle Mission to Tranquebar in 1706 deeply influenced the educational development of southern India. Education was a central element in the pietistic strategy of the Danish-Halle Mission to convert the Tamils to Christianity. The mission established within a few decades an effective school system in Tranquebar and its territory, which made it possible for a broad segment of the Tamil youth to receive basic school education. The educational success of the missionaries soon spread from the Tranquebar area to other parts of South India, where the missionaries established a number of schools. The school activities of the missionaries among the common Tamil population were the first steps towards the creation of a general school system in India and a precondition for the development in the nineteenth century, where the public authorities took responsibility for the teaching of Indian children. The legacy of the Danish-Halle Mission is still evident in Tranquebar, not least in the field of education, where the town holds an unusually large number of private schools, including two teacher training institutes, of which all but one are owned and run by Christian organizations.

Introduction

Even though more than 160 years have passed since the Danish government sold the colony of Tranquebar to the British East India Company, the traces of the Danish presence are still visible. The traces tell a story of the encounters between European and Tamil cultures, which has had a decisive influence on the development of the area up to the present and left a lasting impression on the social and cultural/religious structures as well as the physical layout of Tranquebar town. When one enters through the Mühldorff town gate and walks

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up King Street, one passes by a number of Danish buildings in colonial style. They testify to an asymmetrical cultural encounter, where the Danes defined the contact based on a solid political and military base of power, symbolized by the impressive Fort Dansborg. However, the two evangelical churches in King Street—the church of Zion and the church of New Jerusalem—show that it was not trade and profits alone which attracted the Europeans to Tranquebar. When the Danish King Frederik IV in 1705 sent out two German missionaries Bartholomæus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, the goal was to convert as many of the local Tamil population to Christianity as possible. The goal was not necessarily in accordance with the commercial interests of the colonial authorities and could not be carried through without bringing the mission on a collision course with existing religious and social structures.

The arrival of the mission initiated a transformation process, which in decisive areas changed the religious, social and cultural patterns and sketched out some main tracks, which can be followed continuously through the next 300 years and thus constitute a key to the understanding of present-day Tranquebar. This transformation process was not initiated only through cultural encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans or between Christian missionaries and non-Christian Tamils. A description of the development process based solely on the basis of such simplified dichotomies does not do justice to the complexity of social life in Tranquebar.¹ The Christian missionaries did not interact with a homogenous Tamil population, and were confronted with a multi-faceted society with distinctly divided caste and religious communities, political and economical interest groups. Hence the Christian missionaries entered into a complex pattern of cross-cultural communication and interaction that formed the particular development in Tranquebar.

Traditionally research into the history of missions has focused on how the missionaries tried to win the native population for Christianity, and the cultural consequences of creating enclaves of Christian communities within Indian settings. However, this perspective is Eurocentric and the development is described as a one-way communication from missionaries to converts. Recent research has pointed out that the process involved a much higher degree of reciprocity between missionaries and converts. The result of this dialogue was not that the European Lutheran Christianity struck root in South India, but rather that its special Indian variation emerged.²

The arrival of the missionaries also deeply influenced the educational development in Tranquebar. The mission introduced free public schooling and vocational training for Tamil boys and girls. Education was a central element in the pietistic strategy of the Danish-Halle Mission to convert the Tamils to Christianity and conversion was intended to happen through a personal revival on the basis of the Bible. Thus, as a precondition for conversion, it was necessary that the converts received a basic education that would enable them to read the

Bible by themselves. Within a few decades the mission established an effective school system in Tranquebar, which made it possible for a broad segment of the Tamil youth to receive basic education. Especially for boys from the low castes and the untouchables, who had been denied the possibility of reading the holy books of Hinduism, and for girls who with few exceptions had been deprived of any kind of schooling, the mission schools opened new perspectives and possibilities for social mobility. This development was welcomed neither by the Hindu high castes nor the Muslim segments of the population, or for that matter by the European population. But the school initiative made a great impact and founded the position of Tranquebar as an outstanding schooling town; a position it still occupies, and the heirs to the Danish-Halle Mission, the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) runs several educational institutions in and around Tranquebar.

The aim of this article is to describe the mission schools of the Danish-Halle Mission as a forum for cross-cultural communication and interaction. What was the purpose of the mission schools and how were they framed in the cross field between European and Tamil school traditions? What were the consequences of their educational efforts in relation to the challenging of existing social, economical and cultural/religious patterns in the Tamil society, and from a broader perspective, what did the mission contribute to the later developments of Christianity, schooling and education in Tranquebar and to India as a whole?

The Francke Foundations and the missionaries

The initiative to begin a Lutheran mission in Tranquebar emerged in pietistic circles around the Danish King Frederik IV. The first two missionaries Bartholmæus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau were recruited from the pietistic Francke Foundations in Halle, which became the spiritual domicile, while Copenhagen became the formal, administrative centre for the mission.

From the beginning the Christian aim of the mission was on a collision course with the mercantile interests of the Danish East India Company and the first years after the arrival of the missionaries in Tranquebar were dominated by severe conflicts between missionaries and the secular authorities in the colony. It was not until the establishment of the Mission Board (*Collegium de cursu evangelii promovendi*) in Copenhagen on 10 December 1714, that a *modus vivendi* between the two parties was reached. The Mission Board was placed directly under the king's authority, which ensured the Danish-Halle Mission a legitimate and privileged position as a kind of 'state in the state' opposite the East India Company.³ The independent status of the mission in the local surroundings was an essential precondition for the successful proceedings of the mission not only in Tranquebar, but also gradually in greater parts of South India. .

The enterprises of the Danish-Halle Mission were financed through contributions from the Danish State (3000 rdl. per. year) and from the Francke

Foundations in Halle. Large amounts of money were provided from Halle to cover new areas of enterprises and contributions to cover the expenses of orphanage children was received from private benefactors in Germany, Great Britain and Denmark. Some of them signed 'paternity contracts', where they paid 10 rdl., which covered all expenses for a Tamil child—food, clothes and education— for a year. It was not unusual that the benefactors signed up for several children. Most of the benefactors from Denmark were noblemen, who were closely related to the royal court.⁴

The aim of the mission was to lead the Indians to conversion to Christianity, according to the principles of the pietistic theologian and pedagogue August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) who had put his principles into practice in his foundation in Halle.⁵ The upbringing and education of the youth were central elements in his teaching and in his foundation he kept school for a considerable number of children and many of them received full board and lodging as orphans. Several hundred theological students, who received their education from the Francke Foundation, helped the teachers educate the children in the classrooms. The future missionaries in the Danish- Halle Mission in Tranquebar were picked out among the theologians. They brought academic knowledge, the conversion theology of Francke and a certain amount of teaching experience from their work as preceptors in the schools of the Francke Foundation to their new job in India. Thirty eight missionaries came to Tranquebar in the period 1706–1818; three were born in the Danish-Norwegian Monarchy; one in Sweden and the rest came from Germany. The average number of missionaries in Tranquebar was between eight and ten. They came to Tranquebar after having completed theological study in Halle at the age of twenty three to thirty years. Most of them travelled to Copenhagen, where they were ordained, and thereafter embarked the first ship to India. Some of the missionaries began the study of Indian languages in Halle and one had even made so much progress that he was able to preach in Tamil on his arrival in Tranquebar. However, for most of the missionaries it took years before they could master an Indian language, but in return most of them stayed with the Indian mission for the rest of their life.⁶

The town of Tranquebar including the fort at Dansborg together with the smaller towns of Tillali, Poreiar, Olugammangalam and Weleapaleiam, as well as a number of smaller villages and fishing hamlets were all part of this area. The population was dominated by Hindus, with a strong minority of Muslims. The dominant occupational groups in Tranquebar were farmers, artisans, fishermen and merchants.

Judged by the house census in 1730, some 3000 inhabitants lived inside the walls of Tranquebar town and sixty six houses were owned by Danes, which could indicate a total Danish population of around 200–250 persons including soldiers, which the census did not register. Thirty eight households (approx. 200 persons) belonged to the 'Indo-Portuguese'. This group included genuine

Portuguese and other Europeans, along with different mixtures of 'blank' (white) and Tamil persons (e.g. slaves). 570 houses were owned by Indians, forty of which belonged to Muslims, and the rest to the Hindu population.⁷ In the census from 1790 there were fifty seven Danish households in Tranquebar, with eighty nine adults and sixty eight children, and additionally eleven European households. Of the 3721 persons that lived in Tranquebar town 94 per cent were Indians. The Muslims constituted the single largest group with seventy nine households (585 persons), followed by the dubashes, that is the servants and managers of the Europeans, who occupied seventy eight houses (525 persons). In the land districts 20,135 persons were counted.⁸

It was in this mini-society that the missionaries began the Lutheran world mission and sowed the seeds of the development of a common, public school system in India.⁹

The educational system of the Danish-Halle Mission

Ziegenbalg and Plütschau were the avant-garde of the Lutheran world mission, but they were not the first Christians who made an attempt to baptize the Indians. Already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Catholics and members of the Reformed Church mission were in India. The Danish-Halle Mission approached the assignment with much more consequence and transferred the principle of mission from a German University town to an Indian trade centre. The Indians should be convinced to believe in Christianity and work for God, just like the missionaries did. In return the missionaries would place all their technical skills and scholarly knowledge at the disposal of the Indians. The missionaries were also determined to use education as a path to conversion among the youth, as Ziegenbalg stated it: 'If one aims to do something among the heathens that will have a lasting effect, the most of the plans must be directed at the youth'.¹⁰

However, the missionaries had arrived in an area where a system already existed based on village and temple schools. A surprised Ziegenbalg noted that 'In all cities, small towns and villages one finds schools in which young people are taught to read and write'. But the results of the education did not impress Ziegenbalg much: 'among a thousand people who can read and write, one finds very few who can write and spell correctly and read without faltering. Girls do not learn to read and write except for those who will serve the idols in the temples and are called servants of God'.¹¹

The traditional school system did not provide education for all children. The only boys who received instructions in writing, reading and arithmetic were the ones who were intended for a job in the local account or administrative sector. The schools were stratified. There existed special schools, 'gurukula', for the boys from the Brahmin caste, where the boys lived up to ten years under the same roof as their teacher (guru) and experienced a family-like relationship, where

they were taught Sanskrit, the high language of the Brahmins, which the greater part of the Hindu population was prohibited from learning. As Ziegenbalg noted, education was not meant for girls, apart from the small exclusive group, who were selected to become temple dancers (devadasi). These girls should be able to read and recite from the poetic books and were instructed in the temples. Among the Muslim population education was also limited to the group of boys, who were chosen for religious offices as adults. These boys were either taught by house teachers or in the mosques.¹²

The missionaries had another starting point for establishing schools and therefore had to distance themselves from the exclusiveness of the Hindu and Muslim schools. Christian teaching should be accessible for all and the schools were chosen as the most important medium for the presentation of the Gospel. The missionaries tried to keep up the contact with the local village schools throughout the eighteenth century, even though they established their own schools in the hope that they, through dialogue with the teachers, could influence them in a Christian direction. In 1725 all the traditional village schools around Tranquebar were placed under the supervision of the mission and the children took part in the regular examinations, even though they were left in their familiar surroundings and taught by their teachers in the traditional manner. But already in 1727 this attempt was abandoned. During the eighteenth century several short-lived attempts to revive the practice of supervision by the Danish-Halle Mission over local Hindu schools were made.¹³ However, the encounter with the Hindu schools had consequences for the design of the mission schools. The missionaries were for example inspired by some of the teaching methods used in the Hindu schools and applied them to the teaching in their own Christian schools (see below).

Soon after their arrival in Tranquebar, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau established mission schools in their own houses. Plütschau set up a 'Portuguese' school in which Danish and German were also taught, while Ziegenbalg set up a Tamil school. The school activities grew fast and soon education had to move from the private houses of the missionaries to separate buildings. In 1716 the mission school complex in Tranquebar town consisted of five schools: 1) a 'Malabar' boys' school, 2) a 'Malabar' girls' school, 3) a 'Malabar' boarding school, 4) a Portuguese boys' and girls' school, 5) a Danish boys' and girls' school. Forty of the total of 104 pupils in the five schools received full board and lodging by the mission. In addition to the primary schools the mission had founded a training institute for Indian adults, where they could learn 'theology, catechization, language and other sciences'.¹⁴

This organization reflects a number of basic principles for the school activities of the Danish-Halle Mission: European and non-European children were taught separately and there was a different syllabus for each group. The teaching in the schools was based on the mother tongue of the pupils. The main

language of the children decided, if they were placed in a ‘Malabar’, ‘Portuguese’, or ‘Danish’ school (later in the eighteenth century an ‘English’ school was also established). As in the Halle Foundation they followed the principle that girls and boys should be instructed separately, apart from the ‘one-teacher’ schools, where it was necessary for all the children to be educated in the same class room. The parents should—in principle—pay for the education of their children, but in reality it was only some of the parents in the European schools who could afford it. A considerable number of the children in the Tamil schools received not only free education and free school materials, but also free food, clothes and lodging at the expense of the mission.¹⁵ The latter was an important part of the strategy of the mission to get in contact with the poor Tamil population and motivate the parents to conversion.¹⁶ At the same time the mission could among the supported pupils pick out suitable candidates, who as adults could work for the spreading of the missionary activities. The mission set out with a determined effort to educate skilled pupils in order to get them to work as teachers, catechists and pastors and they founded a training institute for this education.¹⁷ It was remarkable that the mission from an early date also aimed at the education of women, so they could function as catechists among the female population. The first Indian woman was employed in the service of the mission in 1732 and the missionaries referred to her as a deaconess. This initiative was not only a violation of existing patterns regarding gender in India, but it also stirred up some negative reactions in Europe. The missionaries nevertheless continued to recruit female catechists, trained female instructors and teachers to supervise the girls in the schools, and employed women to ‘teach the girls handicrafts’.¹⁸

Within a few decades, the activities of the mission had considerable impact on the society in the Tranquebar area. In 1732 the Portuguese congregation included 247 (117 adults and 120 children). Fifty two children attended the mission’s Portuguese school. Three missionaries were attached to the Portuguese congregation, supplemented by one catechist and one teacher for the Boys’ School and one female teacher for the Girls’ School. Twenty eight of the children stayed with the missionaries and received free board and lodging. The Malabar or Tamil congregation in Tranquebar town consisted of 596 members in 1732¹⁹ (377 adults and 219 children). 156 children attended the mission’s Malabar school. Only thirty six pupils lived with their parents, the other 120 were provided for by the mission and lived in its orphanage. Around one-thirds of the pupils were girls—a remarkable figure. There were four Indian teachers, and two helpers for the boys. They each had to stay on the school premises once a week and received education from the missionaries themselves. One Indian female teacher instructed the girls and used two of the oldest girls as her helpers. Most of the children who attended the schools were members of the Christian congregations, but nonbaptized children were also admitted. Outside the walls of Tranquebar the mission ran a Malabar school in Poriyār with one teacher. In the rest of the territory the Mission was unable to run permanent schools, but eight catechists,

who were attached to the Christian land congregation (645 members), also tried to educate the children, when they visited these villages.²⁰

The school activities had by the end of the 1730s grown to such an extent that it was necessary to build a new school complex in Tranquebar town. The mission chose a large ground in 'Admiralsgade', where Ziegenbalg had built his own private house in 1716. A new impressive building was erected in 1738–41, which was greatly influenced by the mother institution of the mission in Halle. The complex contained school buildings, boarding school wings and living-quarters for three missionaries. The latter reflects the emphasis which the Halle-Mission put on the principle that the teachers and the pupils should be on intimate terms even outside the school. This principle corresponded with the traditional Indian gurukula system, where they were expected to live under the same roof.

The school was constructed as a cross-shaped building, which towards north, east and west was connected to the other buildings in the complex. The dormitories were gathered around two separate yards: one each for boys and girls. A great assembly hall was situated in the middle, with four rooms for the boys on the one side and two rooms for the girls on the other. In both yards was a pent roof, where most of the instructions, eating and needlework took place, if the weather allowed it.²¹

The mission soon expanded across the borders of the Tranquebar territory and founded schools in other parts of South India. In 1735 the mission controlled schools in the districts of Mayavaram, Tanjavur, Mahādevipattanam, Tiruppālatturai, Mannārgudi and Marrawa.²² More schools followed during the next decades, where the Halle-missionaries, sponsored by the British Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, founded a number of mission schools in the area of the British East India Company, e.g. in Madras, where the mission put a lot of effort into establishing schools for the local Tamil children.²³

Charity schools as cultural breakwater

Many schools that the mission founded and financed were not planned as traditional Christian schools, but were displayed as charity or free schools. The charity schools were aimed exclusively at non-Christian children. The idea behind these schools was explained by Schultze in 1723 as one of hope that the Hindu children would get a general positive notion of Christianity, lose their aversions towards Christians and learn important moral principles; also the ability to read would give them access to Christian literature.²⁴ Education was thought of as a 'cultural breakwater', which in a more indirect way should lead the Indian children towards Christianity. 'Cultural encounter before conversion' as the strategy could be summarized, points forward to the secular Indian school system of the future, where freedom of conscience is the firmly established principle, but where private Christian schools nevertheless continue to teach non-Christian pupils.

A strategy which takes reality into account, where the mission primarily recruited converts among the poor and weak groups in the Hindu community—slaves and untouchables, who were drawn towards Christianity through material needs and the fact that the mission offered to feed and clothe their children. It was an exception, when the mission succeeded in recruiting converts from the more wealthy parts of the Hindu community or among the members of the higher castes. The social consequences of a conversion were too high and accordingly the higher castes kept their children away from the mission schools. The direct missionary activities in and outside the schools were potential sources of conflict between both the Muslim and Hindu communities and the Danish-Halle Mission.

In the charity schools the situation was different. Even though the pupils had to learn about Christianity and read the Bible, they were not forced or even expected to convert to Christianity. The schools enjoyed a good reputation among the Hindu population because of their fairly high educational level, and quite a few prosperous Hindus, even among the Brahmin caste, chose to place their children in a charity school because of the improved job opportunities a good education would provide.²⁵ In this way, the charity schools succeeded in creating a forum for cross-cultural and religious encounters. The conflicts in the charity schools did not arise between the Christian pupils on the one side and the Hindu pupils on the other. The fractures emerged inside the Hindu community itself, when pupils from different castes met in the classrooms. The missionaries had to take the existing caste differences into consideration, when they organized the activities of the schools and placed the children according to castes in different classes. The Indian teachers, who taught the literary subjects or were in charge of the vocational training, also had to be used in accordance with the existing caste system, since the parents of high caste pupils would not allow their children to attend the same classes as untouchables or allow a low caste teacher to instruct their children.²⁶

Education was a centre of the activities of the Danish-Halle Mission and holds the key to an understanding of its considerable impact on the South Indian society. Though the main aim of the mission was to convert the Tamil population to Christianity, the missionaries soon realised that direct conversion created more confrontations than converts. The majority of the population should be reached indirectly through the social programmes and education. By focusing on education as it also involved local experiences, they could begin a process of transformation in dialogue with different parts of the Indian society, which perhaps in the long run could lead to the desired result.

That the missionaries attributed great value to education and emphasized the importance of getting access to learning reflects a progressive way of thinking, which the majority of Europeans, both at home and in the colonies, were not ready to share.²⁷ This created another point of potential conflict, this time between the mission and the European inhabitants in Tranquebar, since the missionaries

insisted on teaching the Tamil boys and girls to read and write, while the greater part of the stationed European soldiers and artisans were barely capable of writing their own names. Visionary civil servants in the colonial administration could on the other hand see the advantage in employing Indian helpers with good writing and reading skills and recommended on several occasions that the Indians placed their children in the mission's charity schools.²⁸

The 'rise and fall' of the Danish-Halle Mission

The heyday of the Danish-Halle Mission fell in the period 1720–80. One important precondition for this lay in the fact that the relations between the mission and the colonial authorities went frictionless, even though the authorities probably kept their doubts about the use of the missionary activities. The two parties had different fields of interest and clearly defined management and organizational structures. The mission was supported by the Danish king and reported to the Mission Board in Copenhagen, while the colonial authority was appointed by the East India Company. They took care of different tasks in everyday life, but their interests could overlap and create tensions, e.g. when the mission appeared as the spokesmen for the Tamils regarding the question of slave trade,²⁹ but they minded their own businesses and were supported in their activities by each of their organization back home in Denmark. This equilibrium was decisively displaced, when the Danish State in 1777 took over the management of Tranquebar. Now the mission and the colonial administration were placed under the same authority and this proved fatal for the mission. The colonial authority had neither as 'trade authority' nor as 'royal authority' much sympathy for the affairs of the mission. The governor Peter Anker who was influenced by the ideas of the enlightenment, expressed in a letter to Heinrich Ernst Schimmelmänn in 1790 a strong criticism of the work of the Danish-Halle Mission in Tranquebar:

'The way the Christian teaching is propagated among the heathen does not credit Christianity much; thus it seems as if it is more important for this holy mission to spread the name than the morality, upon which it is based. In the time of dearth the best catching takes place; thus the Christians are bought for rice, which is the most distinguished food among the Malabars, in numbers, but as soon as the food can be bought better, the converts return to their Malabar customs. The Mission sees no other way to keep them from leaving the rest of the flock than by strokes and blows with the result that I am constantly being overwhelmed with complaints, which I try as much as possible to settle in order not to make myself an enemy of the holy mission.'

Anker summarized his views on the activities of the mission in this way: 'I do not see, that the Lutheran Mission by the spreading of the Gospel in this part of the world in any way has contributed to the intention.' The intention was an

attempt 'to educate diligent and good citizens'.³⁰ Thereby the intention reflects the educational ideals of enlightenment and foreshadows the contents of the main article in the first general Educational Act in Denmark from 1814. Faced with such massive criticism it became increasingly difficult for the mission to stand firm, especially as it was weakened internally by rationalism and outwardly lost its independent economical base due to the bankruptcy of the Danish State in 1813. The mission was now placed directly under the colonial authority both economically and with regard to the administration and the road to the abolition of the mission was cleared.³¹

At the same time when the relations with the colonial authority decreased in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Danish-Halle Mission had to put up with a potential competitor settling down within its territory. In 1760 fourteen members of the Moravian Brethren³² arrived in Tranquebar and founded a station called the Brüdergarten (Brothers' Garden) just outside the city walls of Tranquebar, where they began to learn Tamil and Portuguese. This competition was not to the liking of the Danish-Halle Mission and they complained to the governor. However, nothing came of this because the Moravian Brethren had avoided the Mission Board and gone directly to the king, where they had obtained privileges and the right to settle down in Tranquebar. The king allowed the Moravian Brethren to worship god 'in the way of the Moravian Brethren', while they prepared for the planned mission to the Nicobar Islands. In 1768 they began their activities on the Nicobar Islands, where they founded a station. They continued their congregational life in Tranquebar till 1802, but apparently without making real attempts to force their way into the activities of the Danish-Halle Mission. Nevertheless their presence in Tranquebar was a thorn in the side of the Danish-Halle Mission.³³

Content and methods of instruction

The missionaries brought a fully developed educational design from the Halle Foundations, where they also had obtained practical experience with teaching. The school system in Tranquebar thus had a European starting point, but when it was converted to Indian conditions, the missionaries took the existing South Indian educational system into account as well. The result was a school system that contained elements from both worlds, both in content and in the methods of instruction.

The schooling was placed in a firm framework according to the principles of the Halle Foundations. The pietistic education was tough and the education demanded a lot from the pupils. The school days were long and carefully scheduled. The daily timetable for the Tamil school was as follows:

The day began at six o'clock in the morning for all children. The boys and girls gathered in the assembly hall, where one of the missionaries catechized. Afterwards the instructions continued till twelve o'clock. The older pupils started

with reading training in the New Testament and biblical Scripture texts, followed by catechism and Portuguese spelling. The most talented pupils would also be taught church history, geography and languages such as Portuguese and German. Meanwhile the beginners took lessons in spelling and reading, followed by training in shorter Scripture texts and catechism and finally a lesson in knitting. The pupils had a break between twelve noon and two o' clock. Between two and four o' clock the older boys were trained in calculation and writing, followed by Scripture history from the Old Testament and a lesson, where 'non-offensive heathen books' were read. The beginner classes had lessons in arithmetic, reading and writing, along with a lesson in the shorter catechism, where everything should be memorized. The girls participated in the catechization in the morning together with the boys, but followed their own schedule the rest of the day. The girls had lessons in writing in sand and reading from the Old and New Testament, besides learning shorter catechism, biblical language and the hymns by heart. Finally the school day ended for both groups with a reiteration of the catechization of the morning. All children attended church twice on Sunday.³⁴

The discipline in the mission schools was severe. The missionaries were strict teachers, who in the tradition of the prevailing pedagogical paradigm in Europe considered discipline and control as the preconditions for the teaching process. The surviving sources only give away few glimpses from the everyday life of the schools and it is not possible to know, if the missionary Christian Friedrich Schwartz, who was a teacher in Tranquebar in 1750–62, was 'popular among everyone for his cheerfulness and high spirits'.³⁵ In that case he certainly must have been the exception that proves the rule!

The main subject on the syllabus was Christian education, which was brought to the pupils in different ways. Catechization was, just like in the European schools, the basic component in the religious training, supplemented by prayers, singing of hymns, reading of the Bible, recitation and meditation. Christianity was the defining framework of the school and everyday life for the pupils was filled with constant repetition and memorizing of dogmas and passages from the Bible. In 1716 a special training institute was set up for the most literary talented pupils from the highest forms, where they received further Christian instructions. The graduates from this training institute were first used as amanuenses and were then appointed as teachers, assistants and catechists in the work of the mission.³⁶

The methods of instruction as a means of cultural encounters

Writing was a major subject in the 'Malabar' school, and a good example of how the missionaries included local Indian methods of instruction in their schools. The teaching of writing followed a precisely planned system. The small pupils wrote the letters with their fingers in the sand, while they named the single letter in a sing-song tone. This was a memo-technical method, which in the local Tamil

schools had proved very effective as it stimulated the children's ability to remember what they learned. The children worked together in groups. A child wrote a letter or a number in the sand, while simultaneously singing it aloud. The other children copied letters on the sand, and sang its name as well. Then the process was repeated with a new letter. The missionaries were impressed by the speed with which these exercises were carried through. The older pupils learned to engrave the letters with a steel stylus on dried and prepared palm leaves. Also the Indian catechists and helpers used this technique and wrote their reports on palm leaves. The European missionaries seemed to have preferred paper, ink and feather for writing and the pupils, who had made satisfactory progress in the process of writing, were in the end allowed to write with ink on the expensive paper.³⁷

The teaching of mathematics was also based on indigenous principles. Boys were instructed in the practical application of mathematical rules for dealing with accounts, measures and weights. The Tamil method of calculation differed considerably from the European method and was preferred by the pragmatic missionaries as the basis for math-teaching in the mission schools: It would be easier to teach the Tamil children the local method of calculation and it corresponded to the need of everyday business life in Tranquebar. Natural sciences were not included on the syllabus until introduced by Christoph Samuel John in the 1760s, as a reflection of the new educational ideas that was formed by enlightenment and rationalism. The teaching of natural sciences grew in importance in the last decades of the century and the missionaries included different kinds of teaching aids like maps and globes in the lessons, just as collections of plants found their way into the classrooms for teaching biology.³⁸

The teaching of languages differed from school to school. The basic principle was that the pupils should be taught in their mother-tongue, but they could also be introduced to one or more of the European languages; in the beginning primarily Portuguese, German and Danish in the local Tranquebar context, but during the eighteenth century English gained ground as the dominant European language in the schools.

According to the pedagogical principles of Francke, who emphasized the need for combining book-learning in the classrooms with practical skills, great importance were ascribed to vocational training whose aim was to provide the pupils with a livelihood. The missionaries took into consideration the local needs and the traditional distribution of trades according to caste and families in the Hindu society. Experienced Tamil teachers were in charge of the vocational training and taught the different trades. Girls and boys were taught different crafts as a rule; the girls in the Tamil school in Tranquebar were trained to work as household helps. They also learned to spin, weave mats, knit socks and make threads and ropes from coconut fibre. Their teachers were local Tamil women. Some boys received a similar training, others learned basket-weaving or were trained to

become dyers or accountants. The most gifted pupils learned a trade, which the mission was in need of: e.g. typesetters, bookbinders and teachers or a trade, where they could get employment by the Danish colonial administration e.g. as clerks, accountants or policemen. The girls stayed in school until they were married, while the boys left school when they were admitted to Holy Communion or were in a position to earn their own living. The vocational training also included special medical training and personal hygiene. Once a week the children were taken to a well outside Tranquebar, where they had to 'wash and clean their bodies in the local manner'.³⁹ The syllabus of the schools in Tranquebar did not contain any independent sports activities, in contrast to the Halle Foundations. The missionaries did not find it necessary to exercise, if the only aim was to strengthen the physique or the wellness of the pupils. Instead the pupils were brought to the mission's gardens, where the missionaries combined the physical exercise with gardening and instructions in biology.⁴⁰

From 1771 to his death in 1813 Christoph Samuel John was the leading missionary in the Danish-Halle Mission, who especially was innovative inside the educational areas.⁴¹ John was absorbed in pedagogical questions both on a theoretical level and in practical execution. At the end of his career he collected a number of his main viewpoints on the Indian school conditions in the essay 'On Indian Civilization', which points towards the creation of a public school system in nineteenth century India.⁴² John emphasized the role of the school as the mediator between different cultures and religions, and the secular value of education for the development of Indian society. In the mid-1780s he broke with the principle of keeping the European and Tamil pupils apart in the mission, when he got permission from the Mission Board to establish an 'integration school', where Tamil and European children lived under the same roof and were taught together. Through the daily relations with the European children in school and during leisure the Tamil children could obtain a thorough knowledge of the European lifestyle and thereby contribute to 'a civic education of the Indian'.⁴³ In that sense this was a cultural missionary project rather than a Christian one. The school did not succeed and closed again. John had more success in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when he realized his idea to establish a number of 'free schools' in South India—twenty in all. These schools were directed towards all strata of the Indian society regardless of gender, caste or religion. The pupils should primarily be instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic and they should be taught in both Tamil and English, as an acknowledgment of the growing importance of English as the colonial language in India. The teaching in the schools were based on the then very popular method of instruction, the Bell-Lancaster Method—or the 'mutual instruction method'—which originally was developed in the Madras area, but now went from strength to strength in Europe. This teaching method was based on the principle, that the abler pupils were used as 'helpers' to the teacher, passing on the information they had learned to other students. The method was found very useful by

nineteenth century educators, as it proved to be a cheap way of making primary education more inclusive, thus making it possible to increase the average class size.⁴⁴

The financing of the schools was not exclusively in the hands of the mission societies. The public authorities of the British East India Company took an economical joint responsibility for the running of the schools.⁴⁵ John's 'free schools' point towards the cooperation between them in the creation of a general school system in British India. School enterprises could not any longer take place solely on the initiative of the Lutheran Mission, with the colonial authority as a careless or even slightly hostile spectator as in eighteenth century Tranquebar.

Mission and education in the Danish policy of expansion

The direct interest and support of the Danish king to the Danish-Halle Mission was an important precondition in its success in South India. One could question whether this agreement between the royal power and the mission was unique to the colony of Tranquebar, or it can be found in other colonies as elements in a special Danish concept of expansion.⁴⁶ The missionary and educational activities in the Danish colonies have not yet been subjected to a thorough research,⁴⁷ but it is still possible to detect some common features from the way the colonizing initiatives took place and the prominent position which the missionary and schooling enterprises had in the process.

Denmark had since 1755 owned a small trading station north of Calcutta, called Serampore or in Danish Frederiksnagore. It became a very important trading station for Denmark in the second half of the eighteenth century, but it was in the field of education that this small place earned its lasting position in Indian history. Here the first Asian university, the Serampore College, was founded in 1818,⁴⁸ and raised to a position as a genuine university through a diploma issued by King Frederik VI in Copenhagen in 1827. An important assignment of the Serampore College was to educate vicars and missionaries for the Asian mission field, while it simultaneously produced a number of translations of the Bible into Asian languages from Sanskrit to Chinese.⁴⁹

British Baptists turned Serampore College into a centre of mission and education in India,⁵⁰ but it was the Danish king who provided the frame for this development. When British East India Company in 1800 prohibited any kind of missionary work in their territory, the Danish king allowed the Baptists to settle in Serampore. The Serampore Mission was not only interested in higher education, but established a number of local boys' and girls' schools for Indian children.⁵¹

The Serampore Mission made a remarkable effort in the field of education from the level of primary schooling to the level of university. The Danish royal power played a small but important role in this process.

The Moravian Brethren began their missionary activities in the Danish

West Indies in 1732. It was the Danish King Christian VI, who gave permission to begin a mission among the slaves on the island of St. Thomas and later on St. Croix and St. Jan. The Moravian Brethren concentrated their efforts on the personal conversion of slaves. Education was looked upon as less important, but made a translation of the Bible and the shorter catechism into the Creole language.⁵² The continuous royal interest in education can be seen in the 1780s, where the local West Indian government tried to establish a system of slave schools with the Moravian Brethren as the teaching force. The Moravian Brethren declined however, because they did not want to be engaged in secular education. The project was realized fifty years later. The governor Peter von Scholten established a number of slave schools in the 1830s, and persuaded teachers from the Moravian Brethren to be in charge of the instructions.⁵³

The Moravian Brethren also played a significant role in Greenland. The pattern was the same as in the Danish West Indies. The king granted permission in 1733 and the Moravian Brethren began their mission among the Inuits in New Herrnhut outside the Danish colony Godthåb. A mission was already in progress when they arrived in Greenland. The Danish Church had in 1721 sent the Norwegian vicar Hans Egede to Greenland. This double missionary enterprise created tensions, but both continued their work for centuries. At the same time the missions were on a constant collision course with the strong Danish trade interests in Greenland.⁵⁴

The mission and school activities in the Danish colony on the Gold Coast were of a more limited nature where the royal power did not support the presence of a mission society. This could be due to the unhealthy climate, where the Europeans died like flies, but also that the Danish territory on the Gold Coast had a very limited extent. It was the Danish governor and vicar who were in charge of the mission and school activities. Their efforts were directed towards the relatively small groups of mulatto children, who were brought up among the Danes, and who increasingly made up the basis of recruitment for the garrisons near the forts. The first mulatto school was established on Fort Christiansborg 1722, followed by a school on Fort Fredensborg. The instructions had a Christian starting-point and were based on Danish textbooks.⁵⁵

With the Gold Coast as an exception there seems to have existed a certain pattern in the way the Danish policy of expansion took place, where the acquisition of a new colony was followed by a royal-supported mission and educational enterprise. Although the main driving force was economic, the pietistic Kings Frederik IV and Christian VI also found it essential to convert and educate the native populations. The development in Tranquebar was in a Danish colonial perspective not exceptional, though the effort of the Danish-Halle Mission in the areas of missionary work and education earned it a special position in the history of India.

The legacy of the Danish-Halle Mission

The last missionary August Friedrich Cämmerer died in Tranquebar in 1836, lonely and isolated from Europe: ‘Now I find myself all alone, left with 1400 souls from the congregation and about 300 school children.’⁵⁶ 230 years of missionary engagement in India came to an end with him. This development was foreshadowed in the preceding decades. The period since 1777, where the royal power had taken over the administrative control in Tranquebar, had not been in favour of the Danish-Halle Mission. Moreover, in the years 1808–15, when Tranquebar was occupied by the British, the mission had been forced to turn to the British Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) for economic support and it had gradually transferred a part of its activities to the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). The Danish-Halle Mission was weakened and debt-ridden from the Napoleon Wars, and discovered that their main benefactor, the Mission Board in Copenhagen, had lost its capital after the Danish State Bankruptcy in 1813. In order to survive, the mission had to depend solely on the mercy of the Danish state. The state covered the debts of the missionaries and a commission was set up to make decisions on the future of the Indian mission field. This work was delayed and new subsidies were not granted to the mission in the following years. The missionaries therefore had to stop their activities outside the Tranquebar area. Finally in 1825 the proposals for the reorganization of the activities of the mission meant its de facto abolition. The mission should no longer be a society for conversion. Instead it should focus on its school enterprises. The school system should also be reorganized, so the mission no longer supported the pupils economically. The Portuguese school should be closed down. Instead the schools should emphasize Danish and English languages. Finally the mission should be placed directly under the colonial government. The proposals were turned into an act by the Danish Chancellery.⁵⁷ The Act of 1825 decided that the vicar and the bell ringer from the church of Zion should continue to lead the Danish school, which primarily aimed at the few Danish and other European children left in Tranquebar. The instructions took place in a classroom, placed under the organ gallery in the church of Zion.⁵⁸ A timetable from 1838 shows that the school held the following lessons: four lessons in biblical history, eight lessons in Danish reading and writing, five lessons in English, four in arithmetic and three lessons in other subjects. The school could offer lessons in French in return for increased payment.⁵⁹ Schools still existed for the Tamil children as well. The number of pupils increased from 307 in 1827 to 399 in 1838. The teachers were Tamils, but it is remarkable that the pupils should receive instructions in Danish as well.⁶⁰ This does not seem to have been the case in the Tamil schools of earlier days, but it is probably an expression of the growing sentiment of nationality in Europe, which is now also to be detected in the schools of the colonies. It is ironic that this development happened at a time when Tranquebar was languishing and the sale of the colony to the British was imminent. The same development can be seen in

the Danish West Indies, where a determined attempt to make the schools Danish—which up to that point had used an English syllabus—took place in the last decade, before the colony was sold to USA.⁶¹

The Danish-Halle Mission disappeared in 1825, and the Danish colony in Tranquebar was not much better off. It never recovered from the isolation during the Napoleonic Wars and languished slowly. The colony had become an embarrassment for the Danish state and as a consequence Tranquebar was sold in 1845. The East India Company had in 1833 made the first colonial government in British India, opening India for more German mission societies. The new-founded Dresden Mission—from 1848 the Leipzig Mission—began its activities in India in 1839 and received the rights to all the church, mission and school buildings in Tranquebar from the Danish state, including the school complex in Admiralsgade and several school buildings outside Tranquebar in 1847.

The Leipzig Mission became the successor of the Danish-Halle Mission, and carried on the mission and school activities in India. The Leipzig Mission wanted to promote the independence of Christians in India and form an Indian Church in its own right. It took more than seventy years to accomplish this. The Leipzig Mission also focused on general education in India and ran basic free schools for Indian boys and girls, as well as teacher training institutes, e.g. in Tranquebar. The Leipzig missionaries carried out important scholarly work on Tamil culture, literature and Hinduism,⁶² consciously modelled on the early Halle missionaries' work on the history of religion.⁶³

Tranquebar became a centre for the Leipzig Mission and from 1961 for the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC), because of the strong legacy from the Danish-Halle Mission. The Leipzig Mission continued to run Tamil schools in and around Tranquebar up till 1950, when TELC took over. TELC had since the 1930s been in charge of the teacher training institute in Tranquebar.⁶⁴ Even today the insignificant small town of Tranquebar presents itself as a regular school centre, with four primary schools, two secondary schools and two teacher training institutes. There are no government schools in Tranquebar. All the schools are private and run by Christian organizations, except the modest Muslim Elementary School. The direct successor of the Danish-Halle Mission, TELC, runs Plutschau Elementary School, TELC Boys High School and the TELC Teacher Training Institute for men. The Catholic St. Theresa's Convent is also in charge of three educational institutions: St. John's Primary School; St. Theresa's Girls Higher Secondary School and the St. Theresa's Teacher Training Institute for women. Finally the Christian Hope Foundation established a new school in Tranquebar after the tsunami in 2004: the HOPE Foundation English Medium School. All the above mentioned schools are so-called 'management schools', which are led by private institutions. The schools receive public grants, and are supervised by public school authorities. As in the public schools, the private schools have to bind themselves to admit all pupils, regardless of religion and caste, and not

force any pupil to participate in the instruction of religion, if the parents are against it.⁶⁵ Christianity is visible in the everyday life of the schools, e.g. by the morning assemblies, but still the vast majority of the pupils come from Hindu families. The modern schools do not separate themselves from the schools of the Danish-Halle mission in that sense. The Christian segment constitutes less than 10 per cent of the population in Tranquebar in spite of 300 years of missionary enterprise. The Christian aspirations of the schools are not only running up against Indian law regarding secular schools with freedom of conscience, but they are also as in the time of the Danish-Halle Mission met with resistance from the Hindu community, which still expels converts from their family and caste. Thus the schools have to be 'free schools', if they want to be in dialogue with the Hindu community and provide general education for the pupils. The approximation to Christianity can only take place indirectly in the schools. That TELC still engages in the running of schools can without doubt be seen as a reflection of the legacy of the Danish-Halle Mission.

Conclusion

The deputation of two German missionaries Bartholomæus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau to Tranquebar in 1705 by the Danish pietistic King Frederik IV reflects a strategy of expansion, which can be found in other Danish colonies as well, e.g. in Greenland and West Indies. Economy and trade were the driving force behind the expansion, but the royal power wanted at the same time to change the societies which were placed under Danish jurisdiction, through conversion and education of the native populations. The missionaries came to Tranquebar with clear intention to convert. The encounters with the local population were not without problems. However, the missionaries soon succeeded in establishing Christian congregations among the Indo-Portuguese population, the slaves of the Europeans, low caste and untouchables, but it proved nearly impossible to convert among the Hindu high caste and the Muslim community.

The educational efforts of the mission became a key to the dialogue and cultural encounters with the Hindu community and to a limited extent with the Muslims, but were at the same time a constant source of conflict. The missionaries brought plans to establish schools for both the European and the Tamil children. They were surprised to find a Tamil society with a developed though socially classified school system. The missionaries included elements from the local Tamil schools when they established the mission schools, but broke at the same time existing social rules in the Tamil society, when they opened them for all children regardless of gender and caste, which placed these schools in opposition to the existing social and religious patterns in the Tamil communities. The regular Christian mission schools appealed primarily to the children of the Christian congregations, but were capable of 'luring' poor children to the schools through promises of free board and lodging. The conversion activities among the Muslim and Hindu communities in and outside the missionary schools were carried out

with modest success in Tranquebar. Therefore from an early date the missionaries experimented with ‘free schools’ for non-Christian pupils, where they focused on conveying useful knowledge to the Tamil pupils and thereby establishing a cultural bridge through education, which only indirectly and perhaps in the long run would lead to conversions. The strategy was ‘cultural encounters before conversions’ and it proved very useful as the charity schools were received well in Tamil society.

The education in the schools emphasized Christianity through recitation, singing hymns and reading the Bible, but the pupils also learned to write and calculate—both through Tamil methods of instruction—and they were also introduced to Hindu books, which traditionally were reserved for the children from the high castes. Finally both girls and boys received vocational training, where they learned a trade that suited their caste background and could secure them a job. The educational success of the missionaries soon spread from the Tranquebar area to other parts of South India, where the missionaries established a number of schools. The school activities of the missionaries among the common Tamil population were the first small steps towards the creation of a general school system in India and a precondition for the development of nineteenth century, which led to a situation where the public authorities took responsibility for the teaching of Indian children. When the Danish-Halle Mission in India in the beginning of the nineteenth century ended, the Leipzig Mission took over the buildings and activities of the mission in Tranquebar and carried on the work for more than seventy years, until the TELC was founded in 1919. The legacy of the Danish-Halle Mission is still evident in Tranquebar, not least in the field of education, where the town holds an unusually large number of private schools, including two teacher training institutes, and all but one are owned and run by Christian organizations. The direct successor of the Danish-Halle Mission, TELC heads a primary and a secondary school along with a teacher training institute. Most of the pupils come from Hindu families, but the schools are not allowed to make open attempts to convert the pupils, but have to do so indirectly through the presence of Christianity in the everyday life of the schools, as in the ‘free schools’ of the eighteenth century.

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- 11 HB 3, Continuation, pp. 127 ff. Translated in Liebau, op.cit. ref. 10, p. 1183
- 12 Heike Liebau, Das Schulwesen, Pädagogen und Schüler, Indo-Europäische Synthesen, in *Geliebtes Europa/Ostindische Welt. 300 Jahre interkultureller Dialog im Spiegel der Dänisch-Halleschen Mission*. Jahresausstellung der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle 2006, 136–56.
- 13 quoted in Liebau, op.cit. ref.10, p.1185.
- 14 Kurtze historische Nachricht aus den Berichten der Königl. Dänischen Missionarien in Ost-Indien zu Tranquebar..von dem Bekehrungs-werck der Ost-Indischen Heyden, 1730, p.16.
- 15 Liebau, op.cit. ref. 11, p.1189
- 16 Jvf. Ziegebalgs Letter of 27 August 1709, HB 1, p. 16.
- 17 The first Indian pastor Aaron was ordained in 1773.
- 18 HB 47, Continuation, p. 1331.
- 19 The Malabar town congregation continued its growth through the eighteenth century and counted more than 1200 persons in 1776.
- 20 Struwe, op.cit. ref. 5, p. 111ff.
- 21 Henrik Günther, samlingssal i skolen i Admiralsgade, i *Architectura* 9, 1987, s.163–66.

- 22 HB 42, Continuation, p. 784 and 792.
- 23 Liebau, op.cit. ref. 11, p. 1197–1204
- 24 HB 19, Continuation. p. 344
- 25 Liebau, op.cit. ref. 11, p. 1186 ff.
- 26 HB 30, Continuation, p. 673
- 27 The first more ambitious attempt to establish public schools for the general population in Denmark was made by King Frederik IV in the period 1721–27, where 241 so-called cavalry schools (rytterskole) were erected on Royal territory in order to provide education for the children of his cavalymen. This initiative was not well-received in all parts of the Danish society.
- 28 Liebau, op.cit. ref. 11, p. 1186.
- 29 Nørgaard, op.cit. ref. 4, p. 159–61.
- 30 Kommercekollegiet. Schimmelmansske Papiere vdr. Tranquebar 1790 16/7, RA. The Danish national Archives.
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- 32 The Moravian Brethren was a Lutheran religious community, consisting of lay brothers, which from its starting point in the small Town of Herrnhut in Germany, carried on missionary work and teaching activities in colonies from the beginning of the 1730s, starting in the Danish West Indies, Hartmut Beck: *Brüder in vielen Völkern: 250 Jahre Mission der Brüdergemeinde*, Erlangen 1981.
- 33 Thomas, Ruhland, *The Moravian Brethren and the Danish-Halle Mission in Tranquebar—the ‘Garden of the Brothers’ at the Centre of a European Conflict*, vol. II. *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, Halle 2006, p.743–766. Nørgaard, op.cit. ref. 4, p. 178–82.
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- 35 Struwe op.cit. ref. 5, p. 125.
- 36 Liebau, op.cit. ref. 11, p. 1191.
- 37 Liebau, op.cit. ref.13, p. 151
- 38 Liebau op.cit. ref. 11, p. 1193 f.
- 39 HB 4, Continuation, p. 159.
- 40 HB 4, Continuation. p. 160. School Regulations of 1709.

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- 42 John, Christoph Samuel, 'On Indian Civilization', published 1812, reproduced in vol. III, *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, Halle, 2006, p.1467–94.
- 43 Liebau, op. cit. ref. 13, p.142.
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- 45 John, op.cit. ref. 42.
- 46 Ole, Feldbæk, Indledning: Kolonimission og Koloniskoler, in *Skoler i Palmernes Skygge*, Odense 2008, p.13–17
- 47 The school development in the Danish West Indies has recently been examined in the anthology: *Skoler i palmernes skygge*, (ed). Julie Fryd Johansen, Jesper Eckhardt Larsen og Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen, Odense 2008
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- 49 Erik Gøbel, Det Seramporske Collegium. Skoler og College i Serampore 1800–1845. in *Skole-Kirke-Arkiv. Tilegnet Erik Nørr på 60-års dagen den 11. november 2004*, København 2004, p.27–39; Østergaard, Uffe, Universitetet i Serampore, i *Det begyndte i København*.165–175.
- 50 Potts, E. Daniel, *British Baptisk Missionaries in India, 1793–1837, The History of Serampore and its Missions*, Cambridge 1967, s.114–129.
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- 61 Grinder-Hansen, Keld, Danskhed og didaktik i Dansk Vestindien, i *Skoler i palmernes skygge*, s. 171–91.
- 62 Nehring, op.cit. ref. 58.
- 63 See e.g. Hans-Jörg Hinze, Christian Missionaries and their Perceptions of Hinduism: Intercultural Encounters; Israel Selvanayagam, Encountering the Hindus: The Legacy of Ziegenbalg; Will Sweetmann, The Prehistory of Orientalism: Colonialism and the Textual Basis for Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Account of Hinduism, in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, vol. III; Halle 2006, p.885–902: p. 903–922 and p. 923–950.
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**Between consent and coercion:
Danish Missionaries and Tamil parents
in late nineteenth century South India**

Karen Vallgård^{*}

Abstract

The article explores how parental authority was negotiated in a cultural encounter between Danish missionaries and low-caste South Indian parents in the 1860s and 1870s. It documents the subtle means of coercion, which missionaries employed to gain authority over Indian children and enforce a long-term separation of the children from their parents. This resulted in both confrontations and exchanges between members of the two internally heterogeneous groups, and it took place within an ambiguous cultural space organized by different social hierarchies. The article shows that while the encounters unsettled certain axes of power, others were left unchallenged.

Introduction

In 1863, almost two decades after Tranquebar was sold to the British, the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) took up the thread of the Danish- Halle Mission as it became engaged in its first mission north of the former trading colony in the small village of Melpattambakkam in the South Arcot district.

Since the establishment of the very first Protestant mission in India in the early eighteenth century, schooling and education had been given high priority in most Protestant missions.¹ Like other Protestant missionaries in India, the DMS missionaries also spent a great deal of time, energy, and financial resources raising and educating Indian children. From the time the German missionary Carl E. Ochs and his wife Sarah Ochs founded the station in Melpattambakkam, they ran a boarding school on the mission premises.² Until Carl Ochs died in 1874, there were between 40 and 60 children at the boarding school, most of them aged four to sixteen. Upon acceptance to the boarding school, the children were

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immediately baptized and henceforth lived a life in separation from the surrounding society. By enrolling the children in a detailed daily schedule of school, labour, prayer, and sermons, the missionaries sought to make them into good Christian men and women.

The education of non-Christian children was thus a central element in the DMS' mission, but it was a controversial aspect of the cultural encounter with low-caste Tamils. Education, broadly understood as not only the institutionalized schooling of children and youth in specific subjects and disciplines, but also as the often tacit transmission of intangible social knowledge, which leads to the adoption of particular habits and inclinations, is essential to the social reproduction of any society and culture.³ It is, therefore, almost invariably "a contested terrain," and "an arena of social conflict."⁴ In the encounter between groups with as different social, moral, and cultural norms as those between the DMS missionaries and Indian parents, the intensity of such battles was heightened.

Intervention in the processes through which Indian children acquired social knowledge was a crucial instrument in the missionaries' attempts to transform what they perceived as "heathen" society. In order to gain control over children's education, the missionaries sought to replace their parents as the primary authorities. As historian Satadru Sen has pointed out, the practice of orphaning children – both literally, by killing or otherwise removing parents from the child's life, and discursively, by declaring a child as without (capable) parents – was a potent mode of colonial domination, as it was simultaneously an active affirmation of power and a way to facilitate the exercise power.⁵ However, as I argue in this paper the act of orphaning was often a complicated affair. The majority of low-caste Indian parents with whom the Danish missionaries interacted, were neither immediately or automatically interested in the kind of transformation that the missionaries offered, nor were they keen on having their authority over their children undermined by foreign interference.

Using a number of concrete encounters, this article examines the subtle means of coercion, which Danish missionaries used either to influence or achieve full control over the education and upbringing of Indian children. It furthermore traces some of the creative and sometimes desperate ways in which Indian mothers and fathers responded to missionary encroachments on their parental domain. Embedded as they were in the social formation of late colonial India, power relations in this encounter were organized along lines of religious and racial identity as well as age and gender. Importantly, asymmetric economic conditions constituted the very foundation for the negotiations. The Tamil parents, most of whom belonged to socially and economically underprivileged groups, generally went to the missionaries in times of distress and found that getting support entailed permanent loss of parental rights over their children. The study shows that while the missionaries generally considered it their right and duty to interfere

in native parenting, they were less inclined to do so when it involved challenging the patriarchal prerogatives of Indian fathers.

The Carriers of Tomorrow's Moral Culture

On the immediate micro-level one can detect several reasons for the missionary preoccupation with the education of "heathen" children. On the one hand, the missionaries were disillusioned by the difficulty of converting adult "heathens." As the following account illustrates, on his tours around the local villages, missionary Carl Ochs met mostly open resistance and mockery:

In a village, a group of people had gathered around me to listen. One of them in particular paid attention and showed interest so I hoped that the Word would make an impression on him. To his question about what he should live off, I read Matthew 6, 24-34 [which states that one cannot both serve God and mammon, that one should not worry about one's material life, but if one seeks the heavenly Kingdom, one will be provided for]. Suddenly, he jumped up and exclaimed: 'I'll become Christian, if you give me 3,000 rupees.' The others laughed, and the sermon had to end. Such instances are not seldom.⁶

Carl Ochs interpreted such expressions of indifference, contradiction, and ridicule as signs of the deep "heathenism" of the "natives." The "heathen" adults, he noted with scorn, were generally more concerned with optimizing their material situation than with saving their souls.⁷

Although poverty was perhaps not the only reason for Indian hostility, it is not unlikely that material concerns also played a role. The majority of the Dalits and low caste people had to live on extremely limited economic resources, working as landless labourers or getting by on a small piece of land.⁸ Moreover, making a livelihood could become even more difficult following conversion to Christianity, which often resulted in stigmatization or even complete exclusion from one's community. Carl Ochs' negative view of what he perceived as "heathenism" combined with his own relatively privileged economic position prevented him, however, from seeing any other motives in the response of the subalterns than pure greed.

Even when Indian adults did accept baptism, missionaries rarely trusted the veracity of their conversions. Carl Ochs frequently expressed anxiety about the genuineness of adult conversions in letters to mission friends in Denmark.⁹ Indeed, according to the missionaries, Indians would never reach the same spiritual level as Europeans. "Awakenings, as one finds them among Christians, cannot be expected among the "heathen" where there is not a spiritual sleep, but a spiritual death."¹⁰ For the missionaries, conversion always implied more than the baptism itself or even praying and attending sermons. They were deeply suspicious of Indian cultural customs and insisted that, in order for Indians to

become true Christians, their moral reform had to go hand in hand with substantial changes in many different aspects of their existence. Pierre Bourdieu once defined “conversion” as “the complete substitution of one habitus for another.”¹¹ The DMS missionaries implicitly operated with a similar understanding of conversion. They aimed at transforming beliefs, desires, inclinations, and what we might call embodied social practices in the proselytes.¹²

The criteria for genuine conversion were, therefore, nearly impossible to live up to and, at least in the eyes of the missionaries, such conversions rarely, if ever, occurred among adult heathens. Missionaries therefore turned to children as viable recipients of the gospel.

One is inclined to return to the circle of people among whom one finds more fruit of one’s work, less evil, hypocrisy and deception than among the old, namely to the children. (With respect to) the generation which has grown up and has become old in heathenism, there is but little to do and in order for the following generations not also to become like it, the youth must be educated and properly raised.¹³

By targeting children, the missionaries tried to reach the heathen” before they had become too fully corrupted on their souls and bodies. The earlier the DMS could begin to shape individuals into civilized Christian beings, the greater the chance that the conversion would be thorough, that the evil of the “dark depths of the rotten human heart”¹⁴ would be eradicated and that the proper sensibilities could be sufficiently nurtured.

As Carl Ochs declared in a language which registered contemporaneous visions of the progress of civilization as the process of taming wilderness: “He who fights heathenism only in the hearts of the old, is like a man who seeks to wipe out a forest and cuts down the old trees, but lets the undergrowth stand.”¹⁵ Like other missionaries, the Ochs couple were aware that targeting children rather than adults was both a more efficient and a more future-oriented strategy. Converting and educating children was a natural step in ensuring the viability and growth of a properly organized Christian society.

Missionary Projections of Native Parenting

The childrearing that occurs in the family is one of the most important elements in a child’s acquisition of social knowledge as well as a critical area in the securing of his or her physical and emotional welfare. As a consequence, it has often been a site of surveillance and intervention on the part of state and religious authorities.¹⁶ Historically, the most severe accusations of parental incapacity or insufficiency most frequently affect already underprivileged sections of society. Notions of bad parenting are often linked to the perceived cultural or racial inferiority of that particular social group, and since mothers tend to be principally responsible for the education of children in the domestic realm, such

allegations have a clear gendered bias.¹⁷

Colonial authorities in the late nineteenth century were not unambiguously critical of native parents. As Satadru Sen has argued, “Motivated by sentimental Victorian formulations of familiarity, they hesitated to disrupt irreversibly the ‘natural’ relationship between parent and child.” Indeed, many colonial experts viewed the parent-child relationship as more important to Indian children than to their European counterparts.¹⁸

It would seem, however, that this is an area in which missionaries diverged significantly from secular colonial authorities. At least according to Eliza Kent, missionaries in nineteenth century India perceived the home and family (especially the mother) as particularly detrimental in their impact on children’s moral development.¹⁹

The Danish missionary literature in this period is not uniformly disapproving of Indian parents. Images of an apparently universal “mother’s heart” are occasionally invoked as a commendable element in Indian parenting.²⁰ Some descriptions of parenting were neither decidedly positive nor negative in their evaluation. The great majority of letters and articles, however, depict Indian parents as not only inadequate, but also as directly harmful to their children. In these portrayals, Indian parents were at once too careless, exposing their children to all kinds of sinful talk and behaviour, and too strict, for example in forcing girls to marry at an early age. Parents were emotionally cold and egoistic, willing to abuse and even kill their children for the sake of their “heathen” religion or to extract their children’s labour at the expense of their well being.²¹ Often the labeling of Indian adults as incapable parents was not accompanied by any specification, as authors relied on their readers’ imagined ability to connect “heathenism” to failure in that domain of life.

Importantly, in this missionary literature, unsuitability for parenthood was not just a matter of religious affiliation. Rather, the missionaries implicitly connected it to the racial or national character of Indians. They noted that even Indian Christians, whom they tellingly classified as “heathen Christians” [*Hedningechristne*],²² often neglected their duties of ensuring their children’s proper moral, religious, and intellectual education. Sarah Ochs deplored the fact that many Christian children did not have access to schools, and that their parents often made them herd cattle all day without even letting them off on Sundays or holidays. She added, “[there] are Christian parents who do not care in the least that their children grow up like the cattle they herd.”²³ Again, although she seems to have been aware that the families’ material situation often necessitated children’s contribution to the household economy, she interpreted what she considered children’s excessive work as a sign of bad parenting. Her plea was not for material support of poor Christian families, but rather for interventions in their parenting. Here, one might say, class prejudice intersected

with religious and moral condemnation.²⁴

It should be noted that the genre of mission literature was marked by the necessity of securing support and funding for their projects, or in other words of propagandizing the relevance and importance of their endeavours. Therefore, although there can be no doubt that racial ideologies conditioned the missionaries' perceptions of Indian parents and that cultural differences between the two groups created a "parenting frontier,"²⁵ which made the missionaries see low-caste Indian parents as harmful to their children, one should also remember that the genre conventions of the mission tracts may have induced the missionaries to emphasize what they perceived as problematic elements in parenting, while leaving out more admirable qualities or commonalities. Moreover, although it may not have been the conscious intention of the missionaries, their negative evaluations of Indian parents helped frame the domain of native parenting as a terrain of legitimate interference, not only for their readers in Denmark, but also for themselves.

As has been amply documented, similar projections of failed childrearing have often served as a context for various types and degrees of interventions by governments, missionaries, philanthropic organizations, etc. in parenting practices not only in colonies, but also in metropolitan societies, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.²⁶ Hence, although the Christian missionary impulse combined with the racial thinking of colonial India gave shape to these particular encounters, the propensity to intervene in the upbringing of low caste South Indian children can also be seen as part of a greater bourgeois project of civilizing the lower classes.

Acquiring "Heathen" Children

The DMS's missionaries in the 1860s South India appear to have felt obligated to try to save Indian children from the negative influence of their parents. The ways in which missionaries in various colonial situations depicted and attempted to transform native family life have been manifold and often contradictory. As Nicholas Thomas has argued, they have varied from the decrying of the non-familial nature of native society, over interventions in supposedly imperfect but potentially improvable families to the complete dissolution of native families through the establishment of the mission station as "a sort of macrofamilial institution".²⁷

The missionaries in Melpattambakkam used different methods of influencing the child rearing practices of Indians. One way of doing so was to monitor and admonish Indian Christians, whom they believed disregarded their parental duties. This was, for example, what they attempted to do with Mariastasen, originally a convert to Catholicism who had joined their congregation. When the missionaries discovered that Mariastasen had failed to have one of his sons baptized due to conflicts with the Catholic priest, Carl Ochs rebuked him severely in private as

well as in front of the congregation.²⁸ This public correction procedure furthermore served to indirectly remind the rest of the adults in the Christian community of their own parental obligations.

The most common form of intervention, however, was also the most dramatic and effective, namely, to completely remove the children from their parents and raise them in a boarding school. Since the DMS was not at liberty to forcibly remove Indian children from their parents, in order to acquire children for the school, the Ochs's had to rely on their voluntary submission by the parents. Indeed, parents or other guardians did frequently bring children to the school. Yet, as I will show below, getting parents to admit their children to the boarding school often required different types of persuasion.

First it is necessary to get an idea of why Indian parents approached the missionaries to begin with. This is not an uncomplicated task. Few if any of the Indian parents could write and even if any of them had written about the encounters with Danish missionaries, they have not been preserved in the archives. Thus, as is the case in most representations of historical subalterns, and indeed of most historical subjects altogether, reconstructions of actions taken by Indian parents have to be founded on accounts written by others, in this instance the highly biased missionary literature. To think that we can retrieve from the texts an authentic voice of these parents is both naïve and ethically problematic.²⁹

One might ask whether subaltern consciousness is ever semantically available to the modern Western academic. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that any attempt to translate the subaltern mentality into a language comprehensible to academia, infested as it is with Enlightenment rationalism, inevitably does violence to the former.³⁰ But this raises the question of what comprises a semantically insurmountable social or cultural boundary? For Chakrabarty's argument could equally well be made with regards to the missionaries, since they, too, are foreign to the Western academic in time, culture, social position, and perhaps most importantly, religious conviction. Indeed, the apparent transparency of their texts could make a modern reader less guarded about making assumptions about the meanings of their texts. However, the logical final consequence of this line of reasoning would be that one can never know that which is different from oneself in this very moment, or in other words, a kind of silent solipsism. This is not only an untenable position for any researcher; the insistence on the fundamental incommensurability of different rationalities or cosmologies, I believe, relies on an essentialist reinscription of difference predicated on cultural categorizations that are in fact historically constituted. Cultural horizons are not finished, fixed, or objectively existing. Rather, they are a product of historical processes and constantly in the making. Instead of an absolute break between different historical realities, there is a continuum, which renders possible a degree of understanding, flawed and incomplete as it may

be.³¹ Although understanding may never complete, neither should it be shunned as an impossibility *per se*.

One approach to the challenge is to combine hermeneutic immersion with a critical engagement with the sources in a way that constantly confronts the limits of our possibilities of knowledge. It is important to recognize the conditions for the very production of the sources, to attend to the categorizations that structure them, to what truths are produced and to whom, and to try to imagine which positions and what hopes, motivations, and desires are silenced or excluded.

So why did Indian parents choose to submit their children to the missionaries? Missionaries described low-caste parents as driven by material necessity to bring their children to the school. In 1865, Carl Ochs thus wrote, "It rarely happens that parents who are able to support their children bring them to us. It is usually one or other kind of distress, which moves them to do so."³² Such claims have often been uncritically reproduced in historical writings on missionaries. In her study of mission education in South India, Heike Liebau has for example noted that, "the reasons for non-Christians sending their children to mission schools differed. For poor Hindus material considerations were important, since the schools often gave the children food and clothes. People from higher social strata had an eye to the professional prospects of their children."³³ However, it is problematic simply to reproduce this image of the parents' motives, even without a negative evaluation. The conjectures, which missionaries made about Indian parents' motives were not only founded on a culturally specific idea of individual rationalistic agency, it was also influenced by particular stereotypes pertaining to religion, class, caste, and race. As Eliza Kent has pointed out, "it is striking how, in the Indian context, written representations of conversion reproduce existing class distinctions by stressing the interior dimension for elite converts and the exterior dimension for low-caste converts."³⁴ Keeping in mind, furthermore, that the missionaries' portrayals helped legitimate particular interventions in native parenting, the missionary claims about Indian parents' motives should be read with a great degree of caution.

It is not likely that even low-caste parents, who submitted their children hoped to ensure a better future for them by getting them an education. Perhaps they aspired for social mobility for the whole family, or perhaps they were moved by a (usually unfulfilled) promise of greater social equality and less humiliation from upper-caste groups. At least in other parts of contemporary South India such motivations seem to have caused lowcaste Indians to convert to Christianity.³⁵ Nor should the possibility that spiritual or other motives drove some parents to take their children to the school be discarded off-hand. Unfortunately, the nature of the sources does not allow us to go beyond speculation regarding their motives at this point.

Yet, although it may not have been the only or even the primary reason for

seeking out the missionaries, the majority of parents and other responsible guardians who did so, do appear to have been incapable of supporting their children economically. As such, submitting the children to the school could be a strategy of survival. Very often one or both of the parents had died. At other times the parents had become incapable of making ends meet due to sickness, physical accidents, imprisonment, or simply because there was no work to find. That economic factors played a part in parents' decision to approach the missionaries can not only be summoned in the missionary descriptions, but also from number of children admitted at the school in different years. Thus, in 1866, a year of a devastating famine in Orissa and other parts of India, which affected the whole country in the form of food shortage and painfully high food prices, enrolment at the school increased dramatically.³⁶ While in the school's first years, the number of students remained relatively stable, in that year alone, it rose from 40 to 56.³⁷ In 1866, due to limitations on their own resources, the missionaries occasionally even had to reject parents who brought their children.³⁸ In the following years, the number of students once again stabilized.

But even before 1866 parents could find themselves in situations in which keeping their children with them was not a viable option. This was the case with a mother who brought her two boys to the school in late 1864. The children's father had lost his eyesight in an accident and was unable to support his family. He had therefore instructed his wife to take the children to the missionaries. Had she done so willingly? Certainly, when asked if she would not also become a Christian, according to Carl Ochs, she had defiantly declared with what the missionary described as "fatalism" that she would only do so if God willed it.³⁹

At other times, parents in desperate situations tried to sell their children to the missionaries. Carl Ochs assured DMS: "Naturally, we do not engage in any trade in humans. However, in order to save them from other harm lying ahead of them, we did several times accept such ones, who had been offered for sale at our door."⁴⁰ Whether in such situations the missionaries were willing to pay for children remains unclear. Although the quotes indicate that such practices might have taken place, I have not found any instances of missionaries actually paying for children in the sources. Certainly, if they could avoid doing so, and still get hold of the children, they did. That was the case when in 1866 a pregnant woman brought her six-year-old daughter to the school and tried to sell her for a rupee. She had been widowed four months earlier and had become so impoverished that, according to Carl Ochs, her simple widow clothing was hanging in rags on her body. The missionaries accepted the child, but refused to pay for her, which the mother eventually accepted.⁴¹

In short, the Indian parents' poor material conditions may not explain the specificity of their choice, that is, that they sought out missionaries instead of for example selling their sons to landlords or give up their girls as Devadasis (indeed, we have no way of knowing whether some of them tried to do so before

contacting the missionaries). However, it does seem indisputable that unless they were incapable of economically supporting their children, few parents admitted their children to the mission boarding school.

Between Consent and Coercion

Tied to the challenge of obtaining the children was that of keeping them at the boarding school over a longer period of time. In order to do so the missionaries relied on an approach, which straddled the murky line between consent and coercion. The missionaries did not allow parents or guardians to enrol their children in the boarding school temporarily. They demanded that they permanently relinquish legal authority over their children. Parents were asked in the presence of witnesses whether they had properly considered their action, they were informed that their child would be baptized and brought up as a Christian, and they were required to commit themselves to leave the child with the missionaries until he or she had reached 16, at which age, according to Carl Ochs, the child was no longer under the legal authority of its parents. If parents were to change their minds, (or if their economic conditions were to improve) and they sought to reclaim their children, they were met with the demand of reimbursing the missionaries all expenses for the period that the child had been in the school. The cost of one child was set at two rupees a month, so the sum accrued would in most cases be insurmountable.⁴²

The requirement of significant financial compensation meant that parents, even if they may again have become able to support their children on a daily basis, were generally prevented from taking their children back. Moreover, in order for the arrangement to be more than just “empty words,” the missionaries required that guardians or parents, the majority of whom were illiterate, and witnesses signed a legal contract confirming the conditions of their child’s enrolment in the school. This method of gaining full and permanent control over “heathen” and “heathen Christian” children proved very efficient. As Carl Ochs noted with pride, “By these measures we have succeeded in keeping the children that have once been entrusted to us for the entire previously defined period of time.”⁴³

This enforcement of parent-child separation might seem at odds with concurrent sentimental notions of motherhood in British India, which held that a child ought not to be nursed or raised by anyone but his or her biological mother.⁴⁴ Among the Danish missionaries, however, the question of parentchild separation did not become a matter of contention until the 1880s, probably reflecting an increased attention to the question in the Danish public at that time.⁴⁵ Besides, there has often been a conflict between ideology and practice on this point, among Danish as well as other European missionaries and colonial officials. At the same time as a version of these motherhood ideals started to gain currency in Denmark, Danish missionaries began to follow the practice of many other

Europeans in India, of leaving their own children behind in Denmark.⁴⁶ As Susan Thorne notes, “The missionary compulsion to displace colonized parents was rendered all the more ironic by the dispatch with which their ‘own’ children were repatriated away from their happy Christian homes.”⁴⁷

Yet, even though the Danish missionaries were largely successful in rendering permanent the severance of low-caste Tamil children’s ties to their parents, as I show in the next section, their power was not unlimited, nor did their methods remain uncontested.

Desperation and Creativity

In general, parents had been stripped of any authority over their children and could not intercede if they felt that their children were being treated unfairly or in conflict with their own notions of proper upbringing. Many seem to have simply accepted the situation, and it is not beyond reason to believe that the loss of their child sometimes also entailed a bit of a relief since it meant one stomach less to fill. Unsurprisingly, however, many parents of children who had been enrolled in the school showed interest in maintaining contact with their children and at times also in regaining authority over them.

Sometimes children were allowed to visit their parents or relatives over the holidays or they could be given leave on special occasions, but the parents’ best chance of maintaining daily contact with their children was to convert to Christianity and become a part of the congregation which surrounded the mission station at Melpattambakkam.⁴⁸ This could be a reason why the pregnant widow, who had tried to sell her daughter to the school for a rupee in 1866, also decided to convert to Christianity. At first, according to Carl Ochs, she unequivocally rejected the suggestion that she, too, be converted, saying that she preferred the religion of her fathers. When Carl Ochs had stated that they had been pagans and that pagans go to hell, she had ostensibly answered: “Well enough, then I will also go there.” But eventually, she did let herself be persuaded to convert and settled in the community, thereby staying close to her daughter.⁴⁹ After her baptism, Carl Ochs nonetheless sent her back to her village. Immediately upon her arrival there, she gave birth to a second child, but because she bore the stigma of conversion, her relatives chased her away. She then returned to the missionaries who gave her a job so that she could provide for herself and her baby.⁵⁰

Parents who resented the missionary practices creatively found ways to regain control over their children’s upbringing. In 1867 Carl Ochs complained about one such mother:

Because of her bad conduct a woman had to be expelled from the [mission] station, but she was expelled not once, but probably ten times until she realized that she could not assert her will. She then secretly took her two children, whom we had admitted to the boarding school, with her and has

not been heard of since. It pains me so much more for the sake of the children, because they will be lead to corruption by their mother, if she does not come to her senses and returns.⁵¹

Although we cannot know for sure, this mother may have stayed at the mission station to be close to her children. When that was no longer allowed, she decided to take them away with her.

Other parents, relatives, or guardians used children's visits home during the holidays to reclaim authority over them merely by keeping them at home or, more ingenuously, by marrying them and thereby ensuring their rejection from the school or mission station.⁵² Yet others simply waited until the children had turned sixteen and then came to get them, sent for them, or interfered to influence their children's further education, marriage, occupation, etc.⁵³

At the age of sixteen, parents' potential authority over their children was limited by the fact that the children had by then already been raised according to the missionaries' social and moral norms that usually differed substantially from those of their parents. As Judith Walsh has shown, many conflicts arose between (elite) Indian parents and their European-educated children, who had often undergone a "cultural conversion," which turned them away from the norms of their family.⁵⁴

This may also have been the case, when in 1866, the widowed non-Christian father of a young man in the boarding school sent for his 16-year-old son, asking him to return home to support him. Although the son willingly did so, he also joined the mission in a nearby village.⁵⁵ The freedom from missionary control at the time a child reached the age of sixteen did not necessarily entail an end to conflicts of authority.

Protecting – and Contesting – Patriarchy⁵⁶

Thus far I have treated the encounters between Indian parents and Danish missionaries as exchanges between two discrete and internally homogeneous groups. However, power relations are rarely binary, and certainly not in colonial situations. As Mrinialini Sinha has pointed out, in the colonial social formation in India power was exercised along "multiple axes" that determined an individual or group's social position and political options in various ways, and alliances were made across as well as along these axes.⁵⁷ The low-caste Tamil parents and the Danish missionaries as groups were also internally differentiated, particularly along lines of gender.

Most confrontations with parents happened with mothers rather than fathers. In South India as in so many other places women were culturally situated as the primary caretakers of children and this may be part of the explanation for why they were involved in more conflicts than were the children's fathers. It may also be due to the fact that missionaries were more hesitant to challenge fathers

and husbands than mothers and wives.

There were instances where mothers brought their children to the missionaries asking not only to have the child accepted into the boarding school, but also for themselves to be baptized and yet were rejected by the missionaries. In 1865, Carl Ochs recounted:

A heathen woman from Nellikuppam came and brought with her a little girl, whom she wanted to be in our school; personally, she also revealed herself to be inclined to become a Christian. But in the course of the conversation it became clear that she had run away from her husband. The only advice I could give her was to first return to her husband. True conversion does not begin with running away from one's spouse.⁵⁸

Tellingly, in the reverse situation, in which a husband wished for conversion without his wife, he would not necessarily be rejected. In one such situation, the missionaries merely expressed hope that the wife would follow her husband or that, at least, she would not tempt him away from the right path.⁵⁹

There can be little doubt that missionaries generally disapproved of divorce. Yet, it was not so much that divorce as such was an unpromising beginning of a conversion, as Carl Ochs had stated. Rather, the missionaries did not wish to encourage Indian women to challenge the gendered order of their society. In the event that their wish for obtaining children for the boarding school or members for the congregation would compromise what they considered to be the father's legitimate patriarchal rights, the missionaries tended to favour the latter over the former.⁶⁰ But there were differences between what the Indian men and the missionaries viewed as legitimate patriarchal rights and the missionary notion of proper marital relationships at times placed a limit on Indian men's conjugal prerogatives. On one occasion, a *pater familias* came to the congregation, bringing his children and two wives. The missionaries demanded that he parted with one wife and sent her away from the community.⁶¹ In this case, divorce constituted a precondition for acceptance into the congregation.

While in intra-familial conflicts, the missionaries tended to favour husbands over wives, there was at least one instance in which the mother was able to temporarily assert her will, against the missionaries as well as her husband. In late 1871, a father brought his son to the school, but when the contract was to be signed, it was revealed that the mother did not sanction the transaction. In order for the contract securing the transfer of the child to be legally valid both parents had to sign. Therefore, the mother was brought to the school so she could see that the boy would be in good hands there. When she came a "violent ["hæftig"] dispute" took place as the mother refused to give her son over to the school. According to Carl Ochs, the boy himself wanted to stay and the father would also have liked him to, but as the missionary lamented, the mother succeeded in (forcibly) taking her son home with her. The incident shows that even when

aligned, missionary and patriarchal power was not unchallenged, nor always successful. But eventually the boy returned to the school and his mother allowed him to stay.⁶²

Conclusion

As a means of transforming the religious, moral, and social order of native society, the Danish Missionary Society made great investments in Indian children's upbringing and education. Taking advantage of the dire economic situation of Indian adults, the DMS missionaries were able to secure almost absolute power over a large number of Indian children. Yet, their interventions did not remain uncontested. Indian parents had their own motivations for seeking out the missionaries in the first place, and they did not passively accept the missionary encroachment on their parental rights, but used various more or less creative methods for maintaining contact with or regaining control over their children.

While missionaries were interested in transforming the social organization of South Indian society and even of trimming certain elements of the gendered order, they did not seek to challenge its fundamental patriarchal structure. They were less inclined to encroach on the parental rights of Indian fathers than of mothers and in instances of conflicts in Indian families, they usually sided with the fathers. However, even when the forces of racially conditioned privileges were allied with gendered prerogatives in the intersection of male Indian and missionary interests, Indian women continued to look for ways to assert their will and were sometimes successful in doing so. These exchanges, which made children into a battleground between different groups of adults, epitomize the multifaceted nature of power relations in colonial India.

Notes

- 1 See e.g. Heike Liebau, "Faith and Knowledge: The Educational System of the Danish-Halle and English-Halle Mission Vol. Iii," in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, ed. Andreas Gross et al. (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2006).
- 2 C. H. Kalkar et al., "Fra Vore Missionærer I Indien (Juni 1873)," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 8:11 (1873), 167. Carl and Sarah Ochs had in fact established the mission station in 1861, but only in 1863 did the DMS take over the financial and institutional responsibility for it. At that point, Carl E. Ochs had already worked in India for some 30 years, most of the time for the German Leipziger Mission, but since 1861 as an independent missionary. Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 32:6 (1865): 33-38.. The couple broke with the Leipziger Mission because of disagreements over policy regarding the caste system Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1994), 65.. The Leipziger Mission was one of the very few Evangelical missionary societies of the late nineteenth century, which had a

- “conciliatory attitude” towards caste. Geoffrey Oddie, “Protestant Missions, Caste and Social Change in India, 1850-1914,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 6 (1969).
- 3 Such a view of education has been put forward most notably in Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1977)., In her study of education in colonial Banaras, Nita Kumar subscribes to a similar view Nita Kumar, *Lessons From Schools. The History of Education in Banaras* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000).
 - 4 The expressions are from Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, “Introduction: The Contested Terrain of Education,” in *The Contested Terrain. Perspectives on Education in India*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, Ltd., 1998) and Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest. Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 164.
 - 5 Satadru Sen, “The Orphaned Colony: Orphanage, Child and Authority in British India,” *Indian Economic Social History Review* 44, no. 4 (2007), 463.
 - 6 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Ochs,” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 1 (1866b), 197- 98. All translations are mine.
 - 7 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Ochs,” 195.
 - 8 According to Henriette Bugge, some Pariahs in this area did own small pieces of land. Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*, 35.
 - 9 Carl E. Ochs, ‘Brev Fra Missionær Ochs’, *Dansk Missions-Blad* 31 (1864), 88.; Carl E. Ochs, ‘Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs’, 33.; Carl E. Ochs, ‘Beretning Fra Ochs’, 196.
 - 10 Carl E. Ochs, ‘Beretning Fra Ochs’, *Dansk Missions-Blad* 2 (1867b), 62.
 - 11 Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 44.
 - 12 An excellent analysis of conversion as a mode of domination can be found in Jean Comaroff, and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*. Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in *South Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). For a more thorough discussion of the concept of conversion, see Karen Vallgård, “Continual Conversions. Narratives By Henrik Pontoppidan and Johannes Jørgensen,” *Scandinavian Studies* 78, no. 3 (2006): 303-32. And Karen Vallgård, “Omvendte Omvendelser. Om to Danske Missionærers Møde Med Indien I Første Halvdel Af Det 20. Århundrede,” *Historisk Tidsskrift* (2008): 389-426.
 - 13 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs,” 34.
 - 14 “fordærvede Menneskehjertes dunkle Dybder” Unknown, “Om Missionen I Ostindien (Af Et Missionsforedrag),” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 32 (1865), 34.

- 15 Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Om Vaisenhuusskolen I Bethanien," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 5 (1870), 173.
- 16 In Denmark, as Anne Løkke has argued, one can speak of a modern breakthrough in childcare in the late nineteenth century where children's welfare became a matter of public concern. Anne Løkke, "Forældrebilder," *Social Kritik* 5, no. 25-26 (1993), 16.. The state intensified its surveillance of and interventions in Danish parenting in the 1930s and 1940s. Signild Vallgård, *Folkesundhed Som Politik. Danmark Og Sverige Fra 1930 Til I Dag*. (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2003), 67-82.
- 17 Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," in *Tensions of Empire*, ed. Frederick Cooper, and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)..
- 18 Satadru Sen, *Colonial Childhoods. The Juvenile Periphery of India 1850-1945* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 12.
- 19 Eliza Fitts Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Eliza Fitts Kent, "Tamil Bible Women and the Zenana Missions of Colonial South India."
- 20 Unknown, "Af En Ostindisk Missionærs Dagbog," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 31:7 (1864), 55.
- 21 See e.g. Unknown, "Af En Ostindisk Missionærs Dagbog (Sluttet)," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 31:8 (1864): 57-60; Unknown, "Kaljana Rama," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 32 (1865): 77-78.
- 22 The apparent oxymoron "Hindu Christian" was frequently used, not only in the Danish missionary literature, but also British colonial and missionary discourse more generally. See e.g. Robert Eric Frykenberg, "Constructions of Hinduism At the Nexus of History and Religion," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* xxiii:3 (1993), 525.
- 23 Quoted in Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs," 35.
- 24 For similar examples in other contexts see, Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood"; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives. The Politics and History of Family Violence* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 82-83.
- 25 The expression is inspired by Kathleen Brown's concept of a "gender frontier." Kathleen M. Brown, "Brave New Worlds: Women's and Gender History," *William and Mary Quarterly* 50:2 (1993): 311-28.
- 26 Among the most drastic interventions is the forcible removal of mixedblood children from Aboriginal mothers in the first half of the twentieth century in Australia. See e.g. Fiona Paisley, "'Unnecessary Crimes and Tragedies'. Race,

- Gender and Sexuality in Australian Policies of Aboriginal Child Removal,” in *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Routledge, 1999), 137. This intervention has a “small” parallel in the abduction by the Danish authorities of 22 Greenlandic children in 1951, when Greenland was a Danish colony. Although these children were not mixed-bloods, part of the intention was to teach them Danish cultural competencies. See Tine Bryld, *I Den Bedste Mening* (Nuuk: Atuakkiorfik, 1998). For a case from the metropole, see Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” 1997.
- 27 Nicholas Thomas, “Colonial Conversions: Difference, Hierarchy, and History in Early Twentieth-Century Evangelical Propaganda,” *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 34 (1992), 384.
- 28 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Ochs (Sluttet),” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 1:15 (1866): 185-90.
- 29 See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson, and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 308.
- 30 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Translating Life-Worlds Into Labor and History,” in *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- 31 A similar conceptualization has been expressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. See e.g. “The Historicity of Understanding,” in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer.
- 32 “Carl E. Ochs, “Brev Fra Ochs,” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 32 (1865), 12.
- 33 Heike Liebau, “Faith and Knowledge: The Educational System of the Danish-Halle and English-Halle Mission Vol. Iii,” 1187.
- 34 Eliza Fitts Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India*.
- 35 Geoffrey A. Oddie, “Christian Conversion in the Telugu Country, 1860- 1900: A Case Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavery-Krishna Delta,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* xii, no. 1 (1975): 61-79.. For a debate over the relative importance of economic, social, and spiritual motives in low caste Tamils’ mass conversions to Christianity (including at the Danish missions) in the late nineteenth century, see Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*, 163. and G. A. Oddie’s review of that book, Geoffrey A. Oddie, “Review,” *Pacific Affairs* 69, no. 4 (1996): 592-94.
- 36 Estimations of the death toll are based on insecure data, but according to Bidyut Mohanty, approximately 8 % of the total population died in 1866 due to the famine. The causes of the famine are a also point of controversy, but it appears that a severe drought, which led to a failure in rice harvest played a part as did increased exports, hoarding, and a *laissez-faire* policy on the part of the colonial government. Bidyut Mohanty, “Orissa Famine of 1866.

- Demographic and Economic Consequences,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (1993), 55.
- 37 Carl and Sarah Ochs had brought 26 children from their previous boarding school to Melpattambakkam and soon after the school was established, the number children had increased to 40, at which number it remained more or less stable until 1866. Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs.”
- 38 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Ochs,” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 1:6 (1866a): 75-77.
- 39 Carl E. Ochs, “Brev Fra Ochs,” 12.
- 40 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs,” 36.
- 41 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Ochs,” 96-97. In his first account, although Ochs describes her physical appearance, he does not mention that she was pregnant. This appears from Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Ochs,” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 1:22 (1866b): 249-54.
- 42 Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs.”
- 43 “Carl E. Ochs, “Beretning Fra Missionær Ochs,” 35.
- 44 Satadru Sen, *Colonial Childhoods. The Juvenile Periphery of India 1850-1945* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 12.
- 45 See e.g. A. C. L. Grove-Rasmussen, and Adalbert Ihle, “Efterretninger Fra Siloam,” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 17:20 (1882): 307-21.. The debate recurred in the 1890s. See DMS’s archive, The Danish National Archive, private file 10162-245, Letter from N. P. Hansen, Thabor May 2nd 1893. For the Danish case, see Anne Løkke, *Døden I Barndommen. Spædbørnsdødelighed Og Moderniseringsprocesser I Danmark 1800- 1920* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998), 332-333 and 351-356. and Bente Rosenbeck, “Kvindekøn. Den Moderne Kvindeligheds Historie 1880- 1980,”), 155-214.
- 46 Carl and Sarah Ochs kept their children with them in India, but as was also common for families who could not afford sending their children to Europe, in the hot summer months, Sarah Ochs often went to a hill station with their children. See e.g. Carl E. Ochs, “Brev Fra Missionær Ochs.” Thus, separation was also a feature of their family life. British missionaries at this time would usually leave their children in Britain or send them home at a young age.
- 47 Susan Thorne, “Missionary-Imperial Feminism,” in *Gendered Missions. Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, ed. Mary Taylor Huber, and Nancy C. Lutkehaus (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 55. For discussion of the effects of the prolonged separation on British colonial families in India, see Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families. Britons and Late Imperial India*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 48 On the second DMS boarding school, established in Tirukoilur in 1870, parents were allowed to visit their children at the school. Peter Andersen, “Beretning Fra Siloam,” *Dansk Missions-Blad* 6:14 (1871): 201-06. We do not know whether

this was also the case in Melpattambakkam, but since such visits are not mentioned, it is likely that there were at least not encouraged.

- 49 Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs," 197..
- 50 What her job was and who looked after the baby while she was working is unclear. Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs."
- 51 Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs 4de Kvartal 1867 (Sluttet)," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 3:6 (1868): 49-51.
- 52 See e.g. Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Om Vaisenhuusskolen I Bethanien," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 2, no. 15 (1867), 94.; Carl E. Ochs, and Sara H. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs Angaaende Vaisenhuusskolen I Bethanien Af 17de Juni 1869," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 4:10 (1869): 145-55.
- 53 See e.g. Carl E. Ochs, and Sara H. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs Angaaende Vaisenhuusskolen I Bethanien Af 17de Juni 1869," 147.
- 54 Judith E. Walsh, *Growing Up in British India. Indian Autobiographers on Childhood and Education Under the Raj*. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 45.
- 55 Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs," 195.
- 56 As Deniz Kandiyoti was the first to argue, patriarchy is a hopelessly imprecise concept in that it has been used to describe very different gender orders. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining With Patriarchy," *Gender & Society* 2:3 (1988): 274-90. When I use it, rather than e.g. "gender ideology" which has been suggested by ** it is to describe a gender structure that places not only men, but specifically fathers, in a privileged social position.
- 57 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The Effeminate Bengali and the Manly Englishman* (New Delhi: 1995), 1.
- 58 "Carl E. Ochs, "Breve Fra Ochs," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 32 (1865), 69.
- 59 Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs," 251.
- 60 It should be noted that, on other DMS mission stations, missionaries acted differently. Thus, in a particularly notable case, a woman, who was one of two wives, came to the DMS station at Tirukoilur, asking for baptism of herself and of her two children. When her husband protested and argued that his wife ought to be at his disposal, the missionaries rejected his claim. As the man asked, "Are the children not mine either?" the missionaries had replied that the children were his, but that being a good father meant letting them be baptized, thus favoring the will of the mother.
- 61 Carl E. Ochs, "Beretning Fra Ochs," 253.
- 62 Carl E. Ochs, and Peter Andersen, "Beretning Fra Vore Missionærer I Ostindien," *Dansk Missions-Blad* 7:4 (1872), 51.

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The legacy of Tranquebar: The ‘Ziegenbalg myth’ and the debates on caste¹

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Abstract

The aim of the article is twofold: to illustrate aspects of cultural encounters, and to show how ‘history’ and ‘history writing’ may be enlisted with the purpose of providing legitimacy, not least in the conflicts that sometimes are the result of cultural encounters. More specifically, the article shows how the foundation narrative of the Lutheran Church in South India, centred around the German missionary, Bartolomäus Ziegenbalg (the ‘Ziegenbalg myth’), has been used till the present day with various purposes. This was also the case in the latter half of the nineteenth century when a harsh conflict broke out between the Lutheran missionaries who took a lenient and more accommodating stand concerning the caste institution, and the Protestant (Anglican) bishop and missionaries, who preferred to exclude people from the church rather than tolerate discrimination based on caste. The conflict thus was the result of cultural encounters on two levels: one between European missionaries and indigenous South Indians, and the other between two competing groups of European missionaries. Reference to Ziegenbalg was made by both parties of the latter, but for opposing purposes. Finally, it is argued that the high esteem Ziegenbalg holds till this day is not least a result of this returning reference to his name through the centuries.

Introduction

On the occasion of the 2006 celebration of the tercentenary of the Tranquebar Mission, the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) pastorate of Tranquebar issued a celebratory publication in which the tenth TELC bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. T. Aruldoss, stated the following: ‘I appreciate the congregation of Tranquebar pastorate for releasing a souvenir in commemoration of ter centenary

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[sic] celebration of Tranquebar mission. It is a special and a great privilege to Tranquebar, for the history of Christendom in India started on the sands of Tranquebar shores.' In what was obviously a slip, the bishop nevertheless expressed some of the awe with which persons with relations to the TELC view the landing of the two German missionaries, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, on the Coromandel coast on 9 July 1706.² This awe is also reflected in the official title of the TELC president and bishop—the Bishop of Tranquebar—although the official residence of the bishop has right from the first creation of the position in 1921 been Tiruchirappali and not Tranquebar.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate various aspects of cultural encounters in the nineteenth century Madras Presidency in connection with the activities of Lutheran missionaries continuing the work of the Tranquebar mission initiated by the two mentioned above. The cultural encounters dealt with took place on two levels, namely that of the European missionaries with the Indian people of South India, and those of the former dealing with colleagues from competing mission societies. The focus is on the use of what I shall refer to as the 'Ziegenbalg myth' understood as a narrative that describes the way problems were dealt with by 'the founder' of the Tranquebar mission during its constitutive period and thus presumed to set a normative standard for posterity.³ In many cases a simple reference to 'Tranquebar' or 'Ziegenbalg' without further elaboration has been assumed to provide sufficient legitimacy for various approaches and procedures, but as we shall see neither 'Tranquebar' nor 'Ziegenbalg' are uncontested terms. On the contrary, history is constantly being rewritten—today no less than in the preceding centuries—and celebrations of anniversaries are obvious occasions for such rewriting. The tercentenary was the occasion of a number of publications, all of which added a certain spin to the foundation narrative of the Tranquebar mission.

In Denmark, a volume including articles by a number of international scholars appeared with the title 'It began in Copenhagen. Junctions in 300 years of Indian–Danish Relations in Christian Mission' (Oommen & Iversen 2005). The title is a play on Lehmann's 'It began at Tranquebar' (2006 (1956b)), and one endeavour of the book was to emphasize the Danish contribution to the formation of the Lutheran mission in India. Thus in the introduction of the book we find the following:

It is generally agreed that Protestant Christianity in India began at Tranquebar in 1706 ... The historians of German pietism, centred in Halle, could add that without the pietist [sic] missionary movement to which Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau and most of the early missionaries to Tranquebar belonged, there would have been no beginnings at Tranquebar whatsoever, and certainly not on July 9th 1706. This book adds one further small beginning: The one on November 29th 1705 in Copenhagen, when Ziegenbalg and Plütschau embarked on the company

ship, Sophie Hedwig, to be Royal Danish Missionaries to the Danish colony at Tranquebar. This was prior to the beginning of Protestant Christianity in India; in fact it was the beginning of Lutheran World Mission! (Iversen 2005:4)⁴

On the same occasion, three volumes with the title 'Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India'—also including articles by a number of international scholars—were published by Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, Germany, and once again the publication *inter alia* served to underline one particular party's share of the credit, that of August Hermann Francke and the institution he founded. In the foreword we read:

In 2006 Protestant Christians celebrated the 300th anniversary of the beginning of the first Protestant mission in India. This mission is closely linked with the work that August Hermann Francke began at the end of the seventeenth century at the gates of Halle. (...) Bartholemäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, two students of August Hermann Francke, were the first who, on the orders of the Danish king Frederick IV, left Europe in 1705 for South-East India and landed in the small Danish trading colony of Tranquebar on 9 July 1706 to fulfil their missionary task. Out of this small beginning there arose an active Evangelical-Lutheran Church in South India. (Müller-Bahlke 2006:xx)

In the following preface, one of the editors concludes, '... the mission in India would not have lasted very long if August Hermann Francke had not become involved with the mission. In other words: the mission in India would have been impossible without the active participation of Halle.' (Gross 2006a:1) Other writers even refer to Francke as the 'father of the Evangelical mission'.⁵

In his introduction to volume 1, part 3, Andreas Gross further discusses how the missionaries from the very beginning of their work extended this to many other towns and villages beyond Tranquebar and established independent congregations which in time became known as the 'English stations' (e.g. in Madras, Cuddalore, Calcutta, Tiruchirappali and Thanjavur). In other words, Denmark and Germany are not the only nations to be credited.

These stations have hitherto been dealt with in the context of the so-called 'Tranquebar Mission' or the 'Danish-Halle Mission'. Both these names, however, prove to be inappropriate, since these mission stations were neither in Tranquebar, nor were they part of the cooperation between Denmark and Halle. Although the missionaries in these places had also been trained and selected in Halle, they were appointed by the [English] Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). Denmark was not involved in the development of these communities. Corresponding to the Danish-Halle mission this mission can be called the English-Halle mission. The first Protestant mission in India can not be called 'Danish-English-Halle mission',

since Copenhagen was not at all involved in the mission at the English stations. (Gross 2006b:291f)

While there is of course a general agreement that the two German Lutheran missionaries, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau, landed in Tranquebar on 9 July 1706, and that they were the first Protestant (Lutheran) missionaries in India, there appears to be less agreement as to which nation deserves more credit for the developments that followed: Denmark, Germany or England. Each of the writers quoted refers to the same narrative of the arrival of Ziegenbalg and Plütschau in India while at the same time embedding it in his own particular agenda.

In 1956, TELC celebrated 250 years of the same ‘primordial’ event of its founding as well as the consecration of the fourth Bishop of Tranquebar. The secretary of the first Church Council of the TELC formed in 1919, J. D. Asirvadam, used the opportunity and the name of Ziegenbalg to strike a blow for ecumenical (Evangelical) mission:

July 9, 1706 marks a momentus [sic] event in the history of protestant [sic] missionary work in the east. For on that day Ziegenbalg and Plütschau [sic], commissioned at Copenhagen as missionaries to India on October 31, 1705, landed at Tranquebar after a voyage of 222 days. Though not the first heralds of the gospel, the evangelical missionary movement that began with their advent to India pioneered the way for evangelical methods being adopted for missionary ministry which has resulted in the establishment of evangelical churches all over the east and in Africa. (...) The ecumenic [sic] character of this event [celebration of the Jubilee] was foreordained by the cooperation of Denmark and Germany and of England in their common task in India. (...) There can be no doubt that Ziegenbalg would rejoice that all Church people in Tamilnad as well as in the whole of India should hold together in common worship and in united evangelistic effort. May we be obedient to the challenge of the Ziegenbalg Jubilee, and march forward with an overwhelming sense of the greatness of the treasure committed to us, and a love that constrains us to carry the message far and wide within and outside India. (Asirvadam 1956:103–108)

Almost like a Catholic saint, Ziegenbalg is here being evoked to bless the worldwide enterprise of Evangelical (i.e. non-Catholic) mission. On this particular occasion, all Evangelical Christians should come together and rejoice, and no mention is made of the many bitter conflicts between the various missions through the centuries in India as elsewhere. Notice how the name of Plütschau, who left Tranquebar in 1712, disappears in the second part of the quotation and how the jubilee is being renamed: Ziegenbalg is synonymous with Tranquebar.

On 14 January 1956 Rt. Rev. Dr. J. Sandegren, a Swede and President and third Bishop of Tranquebar, to some degree used Ziegenbalg in his sermon at the consecration of his successor, Dr. R. B. Manikam, to legitimize the office of

bishop, which was introduced in the TELC by the Church of Sweden Mission in 1921, much to the dismay of their German partners and a significant number of the Tamil members of the Church (Österlin 1967)⁶

So it was 250 years ago when Ziegenbalg and Plütschau landed at Tranquebar. Who could be more weak and defenceless than those pioneer missionaries! But to-day we see that their work and life was not in vain but has borne much fruit. Ziegenbalg did not have the title 'Bishop'. He was made Provost, i. e. a full-time and a life-time President. After his death there were different arrangements in the Mission organisation until as a good fruit of the evil World War 1, the TELC on 14-1-1919 emerged as an Indian self-governing Church. This Church was consolidated under its first two Bishops, Ernst Heuman [a Swede] the good and David Bexell [a Swede] the wise. And now I am given the privilege of consecrating an Indian, a worthy son of the TELC and of India, as the fourth Bishop of Tranquebar. (Sandegren 1956:141)

Need it be said that the opposition in 1921 among the Tamil congregation of the young TELC—among them the above mentioned J. D. Asirvadam—to the introduction of the office of bishop in their church was caused by a fear that it would infringe upon the independence of the Church? The words of Bishop Sandegren, although uttered more than thirty years later, were clearly meant to stress the final successful result, the fruit so to speak, of that decision enforced decades earlier and here described as being in full accordance with the work of Ziegenbalg himself. True, Ziegenbalg himself was not a bishop—Sandegren had to acknowledge that much—but almost. So in that sense, the Swedish bishops and presidents of the TELC were to be considered true sons of Ziegenbalg, and after three decades of 'consolidation', Sandegren was finally able to pass on the heritage to a true son of the soil. Again we see the original narrative reiterated and actualized but with a twist in order to make a specific point. Once again, Plütschau's name is mentioned just in passing and Ziegenbalg and Tranquebar have become almost synonymous.

In the following, focus will be on one of the more spectacular cases of application of the 'Ziegenbalg myth'—i.e. the narrative of the Ziegenbalg's alleged founding of the so-called Tranquebar mission—for the justification of a particular view of the Hindu caste system held by German Lutheran missionaries during the so-called 'caste conflict' (Handmann: 'der Kastensturm') in the nineteenth century. In this case, the cultural encounters involve missionaries vis-à-vis local Indians or competing missionaries. First, however, a brief historical outline is called for.

Historical outline

Denmark, Germany, and England—as we have seen, all three nations were involved in various aspects and degrees in the development of the early Protestant

mission in India. Later on, with the English missionary societies becoming increasingly taken up with their own endeavours on the Indian mission field, Sweden was to play an important part and in some respects took over the part played earlier by England. The first missionaries did not limit their work to Tranquebar itself, and soon more or less independent mission stations sprang up along the Coromandel coast as well as in the hinterland.

The first of these new stations was in Madras, or Fort St. George which Ziegenbalg had visited as early as 1710. However, the first missionary activities here were started by Benjamin Schultze, who had left Tranquebar in 1726 due to conflicts with his fellow missionaries there (Gross 2006c:313f). Schultze was on good terms with the East India Company and from 1728 became an official missionary of the SPCK (founded in 1699; Sherring 1875:5).⁷ However, this was not the beginning of the involvement of the society with the Tranquebar Mission. Already in 1709 Anton Wilhelm Böhme, a member of the society, published an English translation of ten of Ziegenbalg and Plütschau's letters (Walls 2006:112), and in the same year a Malabar committee was formed by the society just as Ziegenbalg and Plütschau were made corresponding members of the SPCK.⁸ After this, financial support for the mission in India continued to flow as the latter expanded.⁹

In the 1730s two missionaries, Sartorius and Geister, were sent out from Halle at the request of the SPCK to assist Schultze in Madras, and in 1737 they started the mission in Cuddalore (Fort St. David; Estborn 1952:9; Gross 2006c:382f).

In 1737, the Swede Kiernander, a former student and teacher at Halle, was sent out on the request of SPCK (Estborn 1952:10), and in 1740 he started working in Cuddalore together with Geister.

In 1758 Kiernander went to Calcutta and began mission work there (Estborn 1925:10; Gross 2006d:423). This division of labour—England supplying funds and Halle the manpower—continued for a number of years, when all the SPCK missionaries in India were Lutherans, including also the period when the Church Missionary Society (founded in 1799) started its activities.¹⁰ The pattern is repeated in the case of the two important mission stations, Tiruchirappalli (Trichinopoly) and Thanjavur (Tanjore). Both stations were developed and consolidated by C. F. Schwartz, perhaps the most illustrious of all the 'Tranquebar missionaries'.¹¹ Taking care of both Tamil and Portuguese (of mixed origins) congregations hitherto serviced by Tamil catechists, Schwartz turned Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur into prospering missions while at the same time functioning as a military chaplain for the East India Company's troops (from 1768; Frykenberg 2006:476f). From 1767 he was on the payroll of the SPCK while maintaining close connections with his former colleagues in Tranquebar.¹² In 1778 Schwartz laid the foundations for the important Evangelical community in Tirunelveli (Tinnevely; Frykenberg 2006:481).¹³

Madras, Cuddalore, Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli ... within decades of Ziegenbalg's death in Tranquebar in 1719, all these important mission stations had come into being and were being maintained through English resources. By 1740, what has traditionally been referred to as the Royal Danish Tranquebar Mission had reached its zenith (Fenger 1843:198), but in reality Denmark played only a nominal part in the expansion and development of the mission outside Tranquebar itself. In 1815, Governor Bille of Tranquebar recommended that the mission be transferred to an English mission society (Nørgaard 1988:229), and in 1820 the eleven country congregations ('Landgemeinde') belonging to Tranquebar and totalling some 1300 Christians were taken over by the SPCK (Neill 1985:214). In 1845 the colony of Tranquebar, with about 2000 citizens of which 1500 belonged to the Lutheran Church, was taken over by England, and in 1847 the Lutheran mission, which since 1825 while still termed a mission was no longer considered a mission proper ('Bekehrungsanstalt', Nørregaard 1988:232), was transferred to the German Dresden mission society—from 1847 called the Leipzig Missionary Society (LMS) (Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Mission zu Leipzig).¹⁴ Of the fifty five Evangelical missionaries serving in the Madras presidency as Danish-Halle or English-Halle missionaries between 1706 and 1845, some served for fifty years or more (e.g. Fabricius and C.F. Schwartz) while others served only for a few years (e.g. Kistemacher and Früchtenicht), with the two pioneers who arrived in 1706, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau, serving thirteen and six years respectively. Surely this immense accomplishment has to be viewed as a result of the combined efforts of a large number of individuals including the Indian pastors and catechists and the wives of the missionaries as well as the many dedicated employees and donors in Germany, Denmark and England. In spite of all his remarkable accomplishments, Ziegenbalg was only one of many. Nevertheless, he has been continuously singled out as the one individual whose contribution made all the difference and who set the standard for all future.

The caste conflict

In the following, an attempt will be made to describe aspects of the turmoil created by the different approaches of the Lutheran and Protestant missionaries to the problems which the institution of caste presented in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While the Protestant (Anglican) missionaries took an increasingly strict stand against any form of caste distinction in the churches, the Lutheran missionaries continued a more lenient attitude, the tradition of which had been established during the preceding century. In the heated debates that followed, the 'Ziegenbalg myth' played a significant part.

By the time the Dresden mission society in 1847 (renamed as the Leipzig Missionary Society) took over the Lutheran mission in Tranquebar, the East India Company had long (since 1813) given up its resistance to missionaries being active in the territories it controlled. As a consequence of the evangelical revival in the Church of England during this period it was no longer impossible to

find able and willing missionary candidates among British subjects,¹⁵ and one obvious result of the establishment of an Anglican bishopric with Calcutta as the seat of the diocese (Bishop Middleton consecrated as first Bishop in 1814) was the growing influence of the Church of England in South India.

Bit by bit, one after another, Lutheran congregations, hitherto administered by the private Low Church SPCK, were taken over by the chartered High Church Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), whose head was the Archbishop of Canterbury. These congregations by 1826 also included the important English congregations in Madras (Vepery), Cuddalore, Tiruchirappalli, Tanjavur, and Tirunelveli (Handmann 1903:37f).

Up until that time, the services conducted by the Lutheran missionaries in these congregations had mainly remained Lutheran, but Bishop Heber, who arrived in India in 1823, soon made a point of changing the ‘anomaly’ of having Lutheran ministers serving under the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Anglican Church (Handmann 1903:37).¹⁶ In 1826, the first batch was confirmed according to the Anglican liturgy by Bishop Heber, Middleton’s successor, in Vepery. But already Middleton had tried to attain control over the Vepery congregation.

The Anglican bishop, however, who more than any other came to epitomize the conflict between the Anglican Church and the Lutheran mission, was Bishop Wilson, fifth bishop of Calcutta,¹⁷ and the spark which set the conflict ablaze was the role of caste in the lives of the Indian Christians.¹⁸

Already Bishop Heber had paid some attention to the discrimination against the pariah (outcast) Christians by the shudra (caste Hindu) Christians in the churches and had consulted Indians on the matter, without himself however taking any kind of action.¹⁹ Wilson, on the other hand, took firm action and in 1833 issued a circular which in translation was to be read from the pulpits in all the Protestant churches. The circular made it clear that ‘... distinction of castes then must be abandoned, decidedly, immediately, finally; and those who profess to belong to Christ, must give this proof of their having really put off concerning the former conversation the old, and having put on the new man in Christ Jesus.’ (cited in Kuriakose 1982:118). No catechumens were to be baptised without submitting to the renunciation of caste.²⁰

The circular caused uproar among the caste Hindu Christians in many churches—according to C.F. Schwartz more than two thirds of the Tamil Christians belonged to the shudra caste (Handmann 1903:29)—but nowhere more than in the congregations of Thanjavur and Vepery.

In Thanjavur, where the majority of the congregation consisted of caste Hindus who from the days of C.F. Schwartz had been accustomed to a lenient attitude towards caste distinction, the reading of the circular was followed by disorder and commotion. Eighty employees of the Church and 1700 caste Hindu Christians left the congregation (Handmann 1903:41). The Church responded by

discharging a number of its employees who refused to submit to Bishop Wilson's demands.²¹

In Vepery, all caste Hindu members of the congregation immediately got up and walked out of the church (Handmann 1903:40). Congregational life in Vepery had never been peaceful and conflicts between some of its missionaries only added to the problems caused by the shudras' insistence on caste distinction (Handmann 1903:198 & Gross 2006c:332). In 1827, the young Danish missionary Haubroe was transferred from Vepery on the order of Bishop Heber,²² due to the conflicts caused by the young man's insistent attempts to deprive the shudras of their caste privileges. The reception here of Bishop Wilson's circular thus is not hard to imagine. The congregation of Vepery had over the years become one of the more 'anglicized' stations, not least due to missionary Rottler, who translated the Common Book of Prayer into Tamil and had no qualms following the Anglican liturgy (Gross 2006c:334f) instead of the Lutheran. But growing dissatisfaction with the increasing demands for the abolition of caste distinction among the Protestant missionaries during this period backed by strict measures of church discipline in 1846 led the shudra members of the congregation to split from the English mission and to establish an independent congregation in the neighbouring part of Madras called Purasawalkam (Gross 2006c:336).²³

For two years this new congregation at Purasawalkam managed on their own without an ordained missionary and with only a catechist to handle all services except communion. In 1847, news of the reestablishment of the Tranquebar mission by the LMS reached the Purasawalkam congregation, many of whose members or their relatives had originally come from Tranquebar, and in 1848 they decided to apply for admission to the Lutheran mission. After six months of negotiations including a visit to the Tranquebar conference by four of their representatives, they were accepted as a Lutheran congregation.²⁴ This transfer created uproar among the Protestant missionaries and the fact that the Purasawalkam congregation had been taken over by a mission with a more lenient attitude towards caste distinction only served to exacerbate the conflict.²⁵ During the following years the Madras press carried much criticism of the Lutheran missionaries and in 1850 the Madras Missionary Conference published its minutes including a condemnation of caste distinction and the Tranquebar missionaries (Handmann 1903:288). This led the Leipzig mission director, Karl Graul, who happened to be in South India at the time, to publish a pamphlet in which he tried to explain and defend the Lutheran attitude to the institution of caste: 'Explanation concerning the Principles of the Leipzig Missionary Society, with regard to the Caste Question' (1851).²⁶ For decades the Lutherans were continuously accused of using the subject of caste to proselyte and of breaking the traditional ideal of comity between the different mission societies. This influenced a number of English historiographies of the mission in India, e.g. the historiographer of the Church Mission Society, Eugene Stock, who wrote, 'In after years the difficulties

rather increased, owing to the action of the new Mission of the Leipzig [sic] Lutheran Society, which allowed caste (and does so still), and drew away many members of the S.P.G. congregations.’ (Stock 1899:301f)²⁷

Internally also, the LMS suffered heavily from the caste conflict since a number of individuals among its missionaries and supporters in the home country took a very critical stand against the official line of the society in the matter. In fact, at one point the young society appeared almost on the verge of a dire schism (Handmann 1903:310–347). The missionaries in Tranquebar split into two groups, one wishing to follow the strict procedure of the Anglican bishop and missionaries, and the other wishing to continue a more lenient and accepting attitude supposedly going back to the original Tranquebar missionaries. Representatives of both groups returned to Leipzig to explain their positions to the home board. Instructions from the home board, however, failed to settle the schism, and in 1858 the conference in Tranquebar, an institution created by Ziegenbalg in which the missionaries regularly came together to discuss and decide organisational as well as theological matters, split into two, a conference and a counter conference, ‘Gegen-konferenz’ (Handmann 1903:333). New instructions from the home board finally settled the matter in favour of a compromise accepting the traditions of a more lenient attitude towards caste distinction in the older congregations, which made a number of dissenting missionaries leave the service of the Leipzig society.

A central figure during this process of heated discussions and clarification within the society was its director, Karl Graul. In 1861, at the bidding of the general assembly in Leipzig, he presented the stand of the LMS towards the caste question in East India in a publication (Graul 1861). The focus of the following section will be the content of this publication with regard to its use of the figure of Ziegenbalg.

‘Die Stellung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Mission zu Leipzig zur Ostindischen Kastenfrage’

In this rather compact text, Graul, in addition to presenting a chronological account of the caste conflict within the Leipzig Society, sought to argue against the claim of the Reformed missionaries that the Lutheran missionaries were at odds with the traditions established by Ziegenbalg and his successors; to show that the Reformed missionaries differed considerably amongst themselves in dealing with the caste problem; to refute the accusation that the Leipzig Society missionaries were using the caste question as a means to proselyte; to give a full and thorough presentation of the Lutheran stand; to argue, theologically and historically, in favour of the more lenient approach of the Lutherans; to show that the disagreement between the Lutheran missionaries and the Protestant missionaries basically contested the means and not the end which in both cases was to rid Indian society of the system of caste.

Whether his conclusions were right is beside the point in the present context.

The focus of the following is on the way Graul in his publication used the name of Ziegenbalg to legitimize the approach and methods of the Leipzig missionaries of the nineteenth century. In the view of the Leipzig Missions-Collegium, the governing body of the LMS, the Indian caste system was not to be regarded in its original form as the work of the devil, but rather as a national, civil institution with its roots in the varied tribal background of Indian civilization. Over time and as a result of a natural historical development of the Indian national spirit, the caste system—like all natural things in heathen civilisations²⁸—had taken on various wrong and sinful aspects and had been taken over by ungodly powers. Thus, an originally national, civil institution very similar to the German system of class and rank of the Middle Ages had become mixed up with religious ideas and duties. This was the situation of the heathen Hindus. For the Christian Hindus, however, the situation was different, and it was with the situation of the latter that the Lutheran missionaries had to deal as far as the caste system was concerned.

In the view of the Leipzig Missionary college, what was left of the caste system among the Indian Christians was purely a civil, i.e. non-religious, element. When some the members of the Lutheran congregations still adhered to elements of the caste system, argued Graul, and in particular with regard to commensality and marriage—even though they were now regarded as 'without caste' following their conversion to Christianity—it was simply due to the force of habit and to facilitate their interaction with their heathen surroundings. But as far as their views and feelings towards caste were concerned, they were completely different from those of the 'heathens'. This, however, did not preclude certain unfortunate forms of abuse. Thus, generally, the majority of the shudra Christians would not accept—in the church or outside—to mix indiscriminately with the pariah Christians. Nor were they willing to eat together with the pariahs or partake of anything prepared by them. These forms of abuse were certainly not condoned by the Lutheran missionaries, who just as much as their Protestant counterparts wished to see the end of the caste system; they differed only from the legalism of the latter. Such a rigorist approach would, according to Graul, only serve to embitter the congregation, to intensify the shudras' clinging to their caste privileges, to bloat the pariahs, and to invite hypocrisy and sycophancy. Instead the Lutherans preferred to attack the caste spirit itself by what they considered the evangelical way of pastoral care (Graul 1861:4–11).

To what degree was this approach of the Leipzig missionaries in agreement with that of their Lutheran predecessors? Graul's attempt to answer this question took up the following forty eight pages (Graul 1861:11–49), and on nineteen of these (Graul 1861:14–33) Ziegenbalg's name is mentioned no less than thirty seven times!

No one would or could deny that the Lutheran missionaries from the time of C.F. Schwartz onwards maintained a tolerant attitude towards caste distinction in the Lutheran congregations: The various castes lived in different streets; in church, the high caste Christians would sit on the right side and the low castes on the left; at communion the high caste Christians would approach the altar first and the low castes would follow; and finally, at ceremonies outside the church, e.g. burials and marriages, the castes would be served by a catechist belonging to their own caste (Graul 1862:12). However, when it came to Ziegenbalg, he at least—so the Protestants claimed—had followed the same practice as the English, Scottish, and American missionaries of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, they maintained, his successors had not been up to his standard, so that when Schwartz—probably the Lutheran missionary most admired by the English missionaries—started his work, the Lutheran Christians had been so spoiled by his predecessors that he was unable to revert to the original practice of Ziegenbalg. Or so the story went (Graul 1861:14). And this was the story he attempted to disprove. The way Graul argued his case consisted in juxtaposing various passages from the letters and mission reports sent in by the missionaries or culled from these and published in the *Hallesche Berichte*, the first Lutheran mission journal.²⁹

1. In a letter from 1712, Ziegenbalg in connection with the heathens' ban on marriages and commensality across castes wrote that '...we do not allow such distinction but teach that all are one in Christ and that no one is to be preferred to another. Therefore we allow them to marry each other not according to caste but at their pleasure where they otherwise may be wed in a Christian manner.'³⁰ Graul admitted that Ziegenbalg's phrase 'we do not allow such distinction' might be interpreted as similar to the legalistic approach of the Protestants of the nineteenth century, but— he argued—did not the word 'teach', on the other hand, clearly indicate that this was indeed a case of moral persuasion in the true evangelical sense? And did not the phrase 'at their pleasure' preclude any kind of moral enforcement? On the basis of Ziegenbalg's statement, Graul concluded that Ziegenbalg had certainly taken the way of moral persuasion and what was rather astounding was how successful he had been from the very beginning in overriding caste distinction; a rate of success which surpassed that of the most radical hardliners of the nineteenth century, who were generally content to have their converts share a single meal (Graul 1861:14–15).³¹ But how was one to account for Ziegenbalg's amazing success in spite of his going against caste distinction, though in a truly evangelical way? Graul described this as a 'riddle' and offered a number of solutions or 'keys' as he called them.

2. According to a letter written by the Tranquebar missionaries Walther, Pressier, Dal, and Bosse in 1728, the members of the Tranquebar congregation were not of high caste, they were generally employed by either the Danish Asia Company or the Mission, they did not bother much about the local traditions,

and generally married each other. They were, concluded Graul, needy pariahs or of similar caste, or simply of mixed blood. Even if, quite exceptionally, some poor shudras, who had changed their traditional attire and found it advantageous to mix with the Europeans, were also members, this would not change the overall picture (Graul 1861: 1617). In other words, marriage across caste lines was simply not an issue, since the vast majority belonged to the same or similar castes.

3. In a letter (not dated) Ziegenbalg wrote that since the heathens of the district were under the jurisdiction of the Danish king they were not in a position to vent their resentment against the converts. For the same reason they only spoke well of them in the presence of the missionaries. Had they lived in the kingdom of Thanjavur they would surely not have tolerated them and would have severely persecuted them (Graul 1861:18).

4. In 1714, Ziegenbalg mentioned that a heathen had complained how very hard and troublesome it was to earn one's living after one became a Christian. In fact, already in 1709 Ziegenbalg and Plütschau had taken various initiatives for the catechumens to earn their livelihood while being taught the catechism. These initiatives eventually turned into a veritable charity system under which children in the mission schools received food and clothing, adults received weekly alms, the sick were cared for and cured, and the deceased were buried free of charge. The converts were employed by the church and the schools and in time also by the Danish Asia Company. No wonder Ziegenbalg was successful in the way he handled the caste problem, Graul observed (Graul 1861:16–18)!

5. But what about caste distinction in the church itself—the practice which was at the centre of the criticism levelled at the Lutherans—did that also go back to the time of Ziegenbalg? Since there appears to be no plain and univocal evidence on this, Graul referred to a letter written in 1727 by the four missionaries Walther, Bosse, Pressier, and Dal, in which it was mentioned that in the beginning their predecessors had been compelled to have the pariahs sit in a special area, something they had fully accepted. Of course the critical question here was and remains how to interpret the words 'beginning' and 'predecessors', that is when and who? Since one of the signatures of the letter belonged to the missionary Dal, who arrived in Tranquebar in September 1719, that is a good six months after the death of Ziegenbalg and a little less than six months before the third missionary Gründler's death, the only reasonable interpretation according to Graul would be to include Ziegenbalg and Gründler among the 'predecessors'! The letter further mentioned that at some point this arrangement had been discontinued, but after some time the missionaries had felt compelled by the complaints of the catechists to follow the example of St. Paul and the apostles in giving in to the weakness of the people and reintroduced the arrangement according to which the pariahs and the shudras were sitting segregated. Only as far as the sacrament was concerned there was no distinction (Graul 1861:19–20). Graul surmised that this concession to the civil order of the country was made in

order to appeal to the higher castes, since a concomitant growth of congregations consisting of pariahs and of the alms system in the long run would not be financially feasible.

6. Protestants had argued against the claim that toleration of caste distinction had taken place already under Ziegenbalg with reference to a statement he had made in 1718 that neither catechist nor catechumen was allowed to make a sinful distinction concerning food and beverages. In this case it was easy for Graul to demonstrate that Ziegenbalg's statement had been made in response to a brahmin who blamed the Christians for not distinguishing between pure and impure with regard to food and drink as they were seen to partake of both meat and all kinds of beverages. Ziegenbalg had answered the brahmin that contrary to the brahmins who in their superstition and foolishness had led people to believe that eating and drinking against their directions would cause people to lose their caste as well as salvation, the missionaries did not attach any importance to what people ate or drank, and certainly not in terms of pollution or salvation, which was what Ziegenbalg had in mind when he used the word 'sinful' (Graul 1861:24–25). In other words, as long as the Christians did not associate distinctions regarding food and drink with superstitions or justify them with reference to superstitious foolishness, the Lutheran missionaries did not interfere. In other words, the statement to which Protestants had referred in their criticism of the Lutherans had not been interpreted in its proper context.

7. Graul made a similar argument in connection with another of Ziegenbalg's statements which had been used by the Protestants against the Lutherans: 'Among us Christians such foolishness is not tolerated.' Ziegenbalg made the statement during a conversation with a brahmin lady who had explained that contrary to Christians who believed that there were only two kinds of people,³² males and females, among Hindus it was believed that in the beginning God had created many castes and this distinction between the different castes was still observed. What did he have to say to this caste distinction? Ziegenbalg had answered that anyone could observe that there were only two kinds of people, namely males and females. All people were divided into many nations and in each there were many families, occupations, and professions, but that did not create any essential difference between people. It was very foolish of the Hindus to divide people into as many castes as there were professions and to believe that people must stick to their caste, must marry within their caste and must not share food with people from other castes, something which created conflicts since one caste hated the other. Furthermore, each caste had its own traditions with regard to food, ceremonies, and festivals. A member of one caste would rather lose his property and wealth or starve to death than take up an occupation despised by his caste. This foolish distinction destroyed the mutual love that was the natural way among people and prevented people from being friendly and helpful towards one another. And Ziegenbalg concluded, 'Among us Christians such foolishness

is not tolerated.' However, Graul argued, one should bear in mind that this statement was pronounced in a conversation with a heathen and as part of an attempt to describe the fundamental views and rules of the Christians *in general* and not the practice of the Tranquebar missionaries *per se* with regard to the caste question in particular. Furthermore it would have been only natural for Ziegenbalg to emphasize as much as possible the differences between the Christian and heathen views and maxims. But did that completely exclude some degree of tolerance in the daily life of the Tranquebar congregation? Surely, continued Graul, if one of the strict Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century had been present, he would have asked Ziegenbalg to specify how they put this non-tolerance of caste distinction into practice in their daily life? Did they have strict rules? Did they go as far as excommunication or dismissal in case a member or an employee broke the rules? Or did their non-tolerance simply mean that they bore witness against it through the word of God and through their own examples? (Graul 1861:26ff).

In Graul's view, these various statements of Ziegenbalg up until a year before his death did not constitute evidence that some degree of tolerance of caste distinction did not take place already in his time, at least if it was not sinful, i.e. superstitious and involving ideas of pollution and salvation. True, he had described already in 1712 how astonished the heathens had been to see the converts sit together in church eating and drinking together, but for Graul this did not necessarily mean that they were sitting indiscriminately mixed. In the eyes of the heathens, the fact that the Indian Christians of various castes were all sitting 'together', men and women, in one and the same house of God and that the children were eating and drinking 'together' in the school, must have been by itself astonishing. That the heathens blamed Ziegenbalg for abolishing caste distinction also did not prove anything, since the same accusation was levelled at Pressier, Walther, Bosse and Dal in 1728 and also at the missionaries in 1744 at a time when even the Protestants acknowledged that the tolerant caste view was firmly in place among the Lutherans (Graul 1861:28–29).

When one reads that the heathens in 1712 were surprised to find that as soon as their countrymen became Christians, 'all earlier distinction was abolished' (Graul 1861:30), one should be careful not to press the word 'all' too far. Ziegenbalg himself had pointed out to a heathen that only the ceremonies and customs which were connected to the heathens' superstition were done away with whereas they were free to choose in matters concerning food, clothing etc. In fact, concluded Graul, none of the quotations made any difference as long as it could not be proven that—on the one hand that the congregation already in 1712 had among its members shudras of recognized families who were financially independent of both the mission and the Danish Asia Company; and on the other hand that these more general statements in the quotations above included also such shudras (Graul 1861:30)! After all, did not the missionaries themselves

in 1726 confess that the caste distinction was still so deeply ingrained that one could not even think of marrying a pariah girl, who had passed through the mission school and thus was relatively educated, to the poorest shudra? Thus when the missionaries in 1728 mentioned marriage across caste lines they could not have been referring to the mixing of genuine shudras with pariahs but rather to the mixing of various pariah castes, of bastards of European-Indian background, and at the most of some poor shudras who had separated from their people (Graul 1861:17). As far as the school children dining together was concerned (see above), Ziegenbalg had himself written in 1712 that the food of the Malabars (i.e. the Tamils) and the Portuguese (i.e. of mixed blood) were prepared by two different cooks, although the food was the same (Graul 1861:31). Graul ended this part of his publication by concluding that unfortunately the old Hallesche Berichte were insufficient as far as getting the full picture of all aspects of the practice of the first Lutheran missionaries was concerned, although to him it was obvious that firstly Ziegenbalg was not too bothered about caste in his work among the destitute pariahs; second Ziegenbalg attempted to make a distinction between what he perceived as heathen superstition on the one hand and plainly natural ceremonies and customs on the other; and finally Ziegenbalg in his dealings with the problem of caste distinction had opted for persuasion by means of teaching, exhortation and the good example over external discipline (Graul 1861:32).

As mentioned above, in the present context it is irrelevant whether Graul was successful or not in his almost casuistic attempt to demonstrate the concord between the approach of Ziegenbalg and the Leipzig missionaries with regard to handling the caste problem, and in his defence against the criticism raised by the Protestants for deviating from the approach of Ziegenbalg. But why, one may ask, was it so important for him to prove this concord? First of all, the fact that Graul at several places took as his point of departure some of Ziegenbalg's statements used by the Protestants in their criticism, demonstrates the high esteem in which Ziegenbalg was held by the Protestants as well as the Lutherans. To demonstrate a link to the work of Ziegenbalg, no matter how tenuous, was a way to strengthen the Lutherans' claim to legitimacy. Secondly, to ignore this alleged concord would render invalid the explanation made by the many former members of the English congregations who, especially during the time of the caste conflict, had sought readmission to the Lutherans explaining that they wanted to return to the church to which they had originally belonged (cf. the case of the original Vepery congregation mentioned above). Thirdly, when the Dresden mission society and not any of the English mission societies was granted the right to take over the mission in Tranquebar in 1847 (two years after the English had taken over Tranquebar), it was undoubtedly because its missionaries were deemed the most likely to be able to continue the work originally begun by the Lutheran Ziegenbalg and his contemporaries. To openly admit to a departure from their work would certainly not look very good, not least because the Leipzig

society in 1861 still received the interest of the private Danish funds set apart for the Lutheran mission.

Conclusion

This article has tried to illustrate aspects of cultural encounters in connection with the Lutheran mission in South India, and to show how a narrative is performed and reformulated time and again in order to achieve or confirm legitimacy. In this particular case, the story of how Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg laid the foundations of the Lutheran Tranquebar Mission, later to become the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, has been chosen to present examples of how the encounter with the people and the traditions of South India forced the European missionaries, Lutherans and Protestants alike, to rethink their strategies. During this process, which included elements of cooperation as well as competition, Ziegenbalg became a bone of contention, and for the Lutheran missionaries and their home board it was especially important to demonstrate that they—who had recently taken over what was left of the original Tranquebar mission—were indeed his true heirs and successors. There can be little doubt that this continuous reference to the 'founding father' of the Tranquebar Mission has contributed significantly to the status which Tranquebar and Ziegenbalg, whose portrait has even appeared twice on postal stamps, still enjoy in South India.

Notes

- 1 I wish to thank the staff of the library of United Theological College, Bangalore and of the archive of Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, Chennai, for their kind assistance, and the Bikubenfondene for funding part of the research.
- 2 The German missionary Berger, who in 1836 visited Tranquebar on his way to Borneo, made a similar mistake in describing Tranquebar as the mother of all missions to India (Handmann 1903: 88).
- 3 'When speaking of the Tranquebar Mission, his [Ziegenbalg's] name is usually mentioned first. He was not only *the* founder of Indian Protestant missions, he was *the* Tranquebar Mission.' (Lehmann 2006 (1956b):4)
- 4 In fact, the Church of Sweden did missionary work in the seventeenth century in the Baltic provinces and in North America (Estborn 1952:1).
- 5 'Vater d. ev. Mission' (Handmann 1903:33).
- 6 Whereas the Church of Sweden while Lutheran nevertheless had maintained the pre-reformation office of bishop and the tradition of apostolic succession, this was done away with in Germany where the churches at the reformation replaced the bishops by so-called superintendents.
- 7 In 1698 according to Stock 1899:21; 22).
- 8 Lehmann says Ziegenbalg and Johann Gründler – the latter arrived at

- Tranquebar in 1709 – were the ones who became correspondent members (Lehmann 1956:172). Böhme was chaplain to Prince Georg of Denmark, consort of the future Queen Anne of England, and a correspondent of August Hermann Francke in Halle.
- 9 Handmann calls Copenhagen the head of the Danish-Halle Mission, Halle its heart and England its gift giving hand. ('Zu diesen zwei Hauptfaktoren, von denen man Kopenhagen den 'Kopf' und Halle das 'Herz' der dänischhalleschen Mission nennen kann, kam als dritter gewissermassen als ein gabenspendende Hand, noch England dazu.' (Handmann 1903:23f)).
 - 10 'As we have already seen, all the S.P.C.K men in India were Lutherans. In the Church Missionary Society's first fifteen years it sent out twenty four missionaries. Of these, seventeen were Germans;' (Stock 1899:91)
 - 11 Frykenberg calls him 'the greatest of the Tranquebar missionaries' (Frykenberg 2006:472).
 - 12 Schwartz' decision to become a SPCK missionary was taken with the full approval of the Mission College in Copenhagen as well as that of Francke in Halle (Fenger 1843:227f).
 - 13 'Under Schwartz the Mission was extended far beyond the little Danish settlement of Tranquebar. From Madras to Tinnevely, over the whole Tamil country—its influence spread, and numerous congregations were gathered. These Missions, unlike Tranquebar itself, were not under the Danish administration, but were more directly the work of the S.P.C.K, though the missionaries came from the same German sources.' (Stock 1899:25)
 - 14 It was the express wish of the Danish (Lutheran) King Christian VIII that the 'mission' should be allowed to remain Lutheran (Nørregaard 1988:241). In 1841, the Dresden mission society had—after several failed attempts beginning in 1834 to elicit a definitive answer from the Danish Mission College—on its own initiative sent missionary Cordes to Tranquebar, and he subsequently became an assistant to the last Danish pastor, Knudsen, who left Tranquebar in 1843. This left Cordes alone in charge of the congregation and he thus became something of a transitional figure in the history of the Tranquebar mission.
 - 15 The last missionaries ordained according to the Lutheran rites reached India in 1818 (Handmann 1903:37).
 - 16 Neill describes the situation as '...one of the most peculiar features of the Anglican situation in India—the support given over a long period of time by a strictly Episcopal church to a Lutheran and non-episcopal mission.' (Neill 1985:115)
 - 17 Daniel Wilson was consecrated in 1832 as the fifth bishop of Calcutta at a time when the renewed charter of the East India Company stipulated the addition of two new bishoprics, Madras and Bombay, with the bishop of

- Calcutta as their metropolitan (Neill 1985:270).
- 18 (Handmann 1903:289)
- 19 'It seems to me that the separation of castes may be tolerated in the Church provided that due measures are taken to teach our congregations that by nature all are equal.' Handmann 1903:435.
- 20 The caste distinction in the churches might take the form of different seating, fixed sequence of approaching the altar in connection with communion (shudras followed by pariahs), and allegedly in the Tranquebar church at one point even the use of two chalices, one for shudras and one for pariahs. Different cemeteries and demands not to be served by catechists of a lower caste than one's own were also not uncommon.
- 21 Early 1935 Bishop Wilson visited Thanjavur and in Tiruchirappalli had a number of meetings with the separated members of the congregation and managed to persuade a number of them to return. In his letters he triumphantly described a confirmation service held in the mission church in Tiruchirappalli and how the different classes of society freely mixed. Read in retrospect his words are not without a hypocritical ring: 'I told the congregation that I aimed at no distinction of civil ranks; that the Europeans would naturally approach the altar first; that the respectable and educated natives, Soodras and Pariahs, would naturally come next; that servants and persons of the humblest stations would follow; but that there was to be no inseparable barrier, no heathen dread of defilement, only the natural gradations of society which prevailed in Christian churches at home. However, the English gentry voluntarily mixed themselves, on purpose to show the natives that there were no inseparable divisions in Christianity, but all were one body. Positively, a Pariah kneeled between the Collector (the chief personage of the station) and his lady, at the lady's request. Out of five hundred, ten or twelve only left the church, and would not submit to my demands. Such is God's goodness!' (Wilson 1863:53 (29f). At Thanjavur as well as at Tiruchirappalli, however, only a very small number of shudras took part in the administering of the sacrament. With these as a small nucleus the bishop had to suffice. For a detailed account of the affair, see Bateman 1860:424-483.
- 22 Not Bishop Wilson as stated by Gross (2006c:334).
- 23 Apparently, the shudra members of the congregation had refused to accept a pariah catechist chosen by missionary Kohlhoff who responded by refusing to baptize and bury a child. The shudras bought a cemetery of their own in Purasawalkam and buried the child there. In 1848, SPG missionary Brotherton, one of Kohlhoff's successors at Vepery, remarked to Cordes: 'The best part and the most hopeful [i.e. the shudras] was driven out from us by continual annoyances, merely to have the satisfaction of having a congregation of Parias.' (Handmann 1903:198f).
- 24 The agreement signed by the representatives of the Purasawalkam

congregation included a withdrawal of their former constitution which specified that no pariah catechist was to service the shudra members. Another item in the new agreement specified that in the church and especially at communion there were to be no caste distinction. (Handmann 1903:200)

- 25 In 1848, eighty two English missionaries in Madras had signed a statement that no one was to be baptized unless they had agreed to give up all caste distinction and had given proof of this by partaking of food prepared by a pariah, something which of course was totally unacceptable for the caste Hindus (Handmann 1903:288 n.1).
- 26 A short extract published in Kuriakose 1982:149f.
- 27 See also Sherring 1875:57: 'The Danish and German missionaries soon perceived the formidable influence of caste as an opponent of the gospel, unless they were ready, like the Roman Catholics, to enlist it on their side, by permitting it to be retained in the Christian churches established by them. They chose to make caste a friend rather than an enemy. In doing this, they sacrificed their principles. They admitted an element into their midst which acted on the Christian community like poison. They embraced an adversary, which could never become a friend. They sowed the seeds of pride, distrust, and alienation in their native congregations, which brought forth abundant crops of rank and vexatious weeds. (...) Doubtless, this repression of Christian principle, and this compromise with the worst foes of Christianity facilitated conversions, if they are worthy of the name. To this circumstance, I apprehend, may be mainly attributed the large number of baptisms in so few missions in the course of the last century.' Stock 1899:26: 'But while Schwartz and his comrades are to be admired and their memory cherished, their missionary policy was not one that can be altogether approved. They baptized inquirers far too readily; they tolerated many heathen customs; they chose, as Mr. Sherring expresses it, to make caste a friend rather than an enemy, and thereby admitted a traitor within the citadel and prepared the way for the ruin of the work.' Neill 1985: 406f: 'All the Protestant missionary societies, with one single exception, approved of the actions of Bishop Wilson. (...) The one exception to the rule was the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission. (...) Missionaries of all the other Protestant groups felt deeply grieved and at times outraged by Lutheran policies, especially in the matter of proselytism from among the adherents of other Christian groups.'
- 28 My use of the term 'heathen' whether as a substantive or adjective reflects the terminology of the time and is a translation of the German words 'der Heide' or 'heidnisch'.
- 29 'Der Königlichen Dänischen Missionarien aus Ost-Indien eingesandte Ausführliche Berichte', generally referred to as 'Hallesche Berichte'. According to Fenger, however, passages in the missionaries' letters which might prove offensive to the Christian readers and thus jeopardize the cause of the mission were often omitted (Fenger 1843:207–212).

30 (Graul 1861:14)

31 Graul here referred to the practice of the Protestant missionaries of having their catechumens as well as their employees pass a 'test' which consisted in partaking of a meal prepared by a pariah. This so-called 'love-feast' was first introduced by American missionaries in Madurai in 1847 and later taken up by the Madras Missionary Conference and the SPG (Handmann 1903:309).

32 The German word 'Geschlecht' may be translated variously as gender, family, generation, lineage, and genus. Here the translation has been varied according to context and includes also the word 'caste'.

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**‘Written on leaves in the Malabarian manner’
print and the cultural encounter in eighteenth
century Tranquebar**

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Abstract

This paper attempts to put together the dispersed information in the missionary archives to reconstruct the pioneering work of the Danish missionaries in bringing print to the Tamil country. The specific locus of the interaction was the small town of Tranquebar on the Coromandel coast. In the process of reconstructing the interaction, this paper seeks to know how a new technology of communication—the medium of print—encountered a culture with a long history of textual production. This cultural interaction entailed a dialogue between missionaries from the west who had deeply imbued a negative understanding of indigenous culture and were impelled by a desire to proselytise, and a native elite steeped in indigenous forms of cultural production and reproduction. The missionary access to knowledge was mediated by native intellectuals who held their ground. The quest for knowledge to understand indigenous culture also led them to seek out manuscripts. Not only the content but also the material artefact of the indigenous book written as it was on palm leaves posed a challenge to the missionaries. It is to the credit of the Tranquebar press that they could adapt the technology of the Gutenberg movable type to Tamil language. Evidence indicates that the printed material from Tranquebar was received by some native converts and made a profound impact on their world view.

Introduction

And in this Year we expect to receive, if it so please God, a set of Malabarick Types, by the Ships that shall come from Europe, that we may likewise publish the Word of Salvation among the Malabars, in their own Damulick Language, and introduce the desirable Use of Books for their temporal and spiritual

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advantage. We may remember how much the Art of Printing contributed to the manifestation of divine Truths, and the Spreading of Books for that End, at the time of the happy Reformation, which we read of in History, with thanksgiving to the Almighty God. O Living God, grant that the Christians here in India, and the Multitude of Gentiles, may, with Hearts full of Gratitude, become sensible of this great Benefit, and receive with Joy that Word of Life which is, and shall be laid before them, printed in their own Languages...

Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and John Ernest Grundler, dt. Tranquebar, 7 April 1713 in *A Letter to the Reverend Mr Geo. Lewis ...*, (London, 1715, p. 26.)

Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and John Ernest Grundler leave one in no doubt about the power they attributed to the printed word. It also shows their acute consciousness of print as a factor in the reformation. Especially interesting is the reference to both the 'temporal and spiritual advantage' of print. Lest this be thought an isolated instance, the writings of the Danish missionaries in early eighteenth century are replete with references to the power of print.

As soon as the Effect of the Portugueze and Malabarick Printing Press shall appear, by furnishing the Heathen with a sufficient Number of printed copies of the Word of GOD, and other Treatises concerning the Christian Faith, and the Duties of our holy Religion, we shall have a fresh and signal occasion to Praise the Lord's Most holy name, for this new and singular Instance of his mercy, and to return our hearty thanks to all those, who have spared neither Pains nor cost to further and promote the fame.¹

The Single Instance of your having presented a printing Press, with a Font of Portugueze types, to the Malabarians, will make the Remembrance of your concern for them *as lasting as the Books themselves* published from thence.²

This paper is an exercise in putting together disparate information on the pioneering work of the Danish missionaries in bringing print to the Tamil country and analysing the early print culture. The specific locus of the interaction was the small town of Tranquebar on the Coromandel coast. In the process of reconstructing the cultural interaction this paper seeks to grasp how a new technology of communication—the medium of print—encountered a culture with a long history of production of texts in a variety of disciplines and genres. This cultural interaction entailed a dialogue between missionaries from the west who had deeply imbued a negative understanding of indigenous culture and were impelled by a desire to proselytise, and a native elite steeped in indigenous forms of cultural production and reproduction. It is redundant to reiterate the asymmetrical nature of this encounter as it was mediated by power.

This essay is largely based on the periodical letters that Ziegenbalg and Grundler sent to their benefactors, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in London. These letters were contemporaneously—often within a few years of their composition—translated from Latin and High Dutch into English,

and published as books by SPCK in order to spread the word about the state of heathens in the east and the need to proselytise them.³

Historical research on this period undoubtedly demands polyglot skills which paradoxically is extremely difficult in this post-colonial world, especially for an Indian. There is however still scope to construct elaborate histories and chart unknown territory even with limited linguistic skills. It is salutary to remember that even Daniel Jeyaraj, whom Brijraj Singh describes as ‘one of the greatest living authorities on Ziegenbalg’,⁴ has based his research on Ziegenbalg’s writings in German, Tamil, and English, and adds the caveat that Ziegenbalg’s ‘works in Portuguese and Danish, his letters in Latin are not included in this analysis. ... Ziegenbalg’s works in these languages, invites other scholars, competent in these languages, to study them’.⁵

We now know that Tamil was not only the first Indian language but also the first non-European language to see print in the Gutenbergian tradition. Print’s route to India was from the west, and not from China or Korea. And from its genesis in about a century after Gutenberg printed the forty two-line Bible in 1455 until the turn of the nineteenth century, the history of print was tied to Christianity. The earliest printed book in Tamil (but in Portuguese character) was printed by the Jesuits in Lisbon in 1554 and the first in Tamil character was printed at Goa in 1577. This Jesuit tradition of printing was continued in the sixteenth century by Henri Henriques in Ambalakkad on the western coast of India and in Punnaikkayal⁶ on the south-eastern coast, and by Robert de Nobili in the seventeenth century. In a sense these printing ventures could be called the ‘incunabula’ in the terminology of bibliophilia. They were the *cul de sacs* of print in India. The fact that few, if any, of these imprints have survived in India has a tale to tell. No information has survived on how they were distributed, who consumed them and how—in other words the standard questions in book history. Thus the printing efforts in the Danish colony of Tranquebar constitute an important moment in the history of print in India. The available documentation makes possible the exploration of the early history of print culture in colonial India.

Towards an understanding of grammar and culture

When Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau arrived on the shores of Tranquebar on 9 July 1706 after a long sea voyage from Copenhagen on 29 November 1705, they encountered a civilization which had a long and rich heritage and history. The burden or privilege of learning Tamil had fallen on Ziegenbalg by sheer happenstance: on board *Princess Sophia Hedwich* the casting of lots had given Tamil to Ziegenbalg and Portuguese to Grundler.

Language, that crucible of culture or the confusion of Babel confounded the missionaries on the coast. At the outset they could discern three languages: Kerendum, Damul and Wardagu. Kerendum is obviously *grantam*, the script

used in the Tamil country to write Sanskrit. Despite the confusion in identifying language with script, they were right on target when they described it as ‘the Language of Bramins, and maybe called the Malabarick Latin; it being almost of the same Dignity there, as the Latin is in Europe’. Interestingly the Danish missionaries showed little interest in Sanskrit; it had to wait for its moment almost a century, for William Jones and Orientalists under him. Their focus and understanding on Tamil was apt:

But the most vulgar Language is the Damul, or the Malabarick, which extends it self above Four Hundred Miles Distance, and is even understood in many Foreign Dominions. However, the Coast of Malabar is noted for the purest and most refined Language; all the Malabarick Books and Writings being commonly penned in this Dialect.⁷

However, this assessment was not without its ethnocentrism, anticipating much of Orientalist essentialism of Indian languages: ‘The [Tamil] Language itself is exceedingly pathetical, enrich’d with Abundance of Rhetorical Flowers and Graces, which wonderfully affect the Ear, especially if they be accompanied with some Gravity on the Speaker.’⁸ (What the third—Wardagu—is, is not clear. It probably refers to ‘Vadugu’, or the northern language, as Telugu is sometimes referred to in the Tamil language.)

Classificatory systems and modes of reckoning time also posed problems: ‘they don’t reckon their Years from the Creation of the World or from any other certain Epoch: but they have a period of sixty years, which they call Antu; and every year in every Antu has its particular Name, so that when Antu is at an End, they begin again in the same manner.’⁹

Understanding that ‘[a]n exact knowledge of the Malabar Divinity, in all its Branches and articles, may prove useful for laying open the better, the very foundation on which the idolatrous Worship of the Pagans is raised’¹⁰ the missionaries sought to discover the canon and came up with a list: *Dewarum* (*Tevaram*), *Dirumwaschagum* (*Tiruvacakam*), *Tschiwapadagum* (?*Silappadikaram*), *Willakkoli* (?), *Diruwalluwet* (*Tiruvalluvar*), *Ganapadagum* (*Gnanapodagam*), *Tschiwakawischum* (?), *Abiramiandadi*, *Kaschikandaum*, *Periapuranam*, *Weruttaschelpuranam* (*Viruttachala Puranam*), *Dirutawenkapuriannum* (*Tiruvengkattu Puranam*), *Markanda Puranam*, *Ramaianum* (*Ramayanam*), *Paradum* (*Bharatam*).¹¹ They found that children read *Konneiwehntan* (*Konraivendan*), *Mudurei* (*Mudurai*), *Nalwari* (*Nalvali*) before ‘proceeding to Poetry and History contain’d in the Book of *Tolkabiam* (*Tolkappiyam*) and *Ramaianum*’.¹² The texts thus consisted mostly of religious and didactic literature.

In encountering these myriad texts the missionaries were at a loss when it came to understanding the underlying structure or grammar.

What render'd this language most difficult to the Missionaries, was the great want of Grammar Rules ... necessary for learning the fundamentals of a Language. It hath hardly been digested into a Method, and is besides, very variable and luxuriant in its Expressions.¹³

In order to arrive at an understanding of the rudimentary structure of the language they first compiled a vocabulary with the help of a native schoolmaster. Ziegenbalg 'began also to collect a Dictionary with the help of my Tamil colleague. The Method we used was this: First, I had every Word of their Language rightly spelled and written in the Presence of some Malabarians; and then the genuine Pronunciation added with Latin letters, and at last the signification put to it.'¹⁴ 'But after all the Pains... they were still in the dark as to the Grammatical Construction of the Words.'¹⁵ In recording the pronunciation of the words acute difficulty was encountered with the guttural sounds while the labial sounds greatly puzzled the natives.¹⁶ Finally they landed up with 'some Rudiments of a Malabarian Grammar, drawn up by a Popish Missionary' and some 'Book composed in Malabarick, by Roman-Catholic Priests'.¹⁷ Here probably the reference is to the work of Jesuits especially Beschi's grammars of High and Low Tamil. Thomas Trautmann talks of the great 'grammar mania' that overtook Europe in the late eighteenth century leading to the explosive growth of grammars and dictionaries in the west.¹⁸ But it seems that its wellsprings could be traced back to at least half a century earlier, a fact that Trautmann is not oblivious of.

The task of translating the texts, especially the Bible into Tamil, brought forth the differing structures of Tamil, Greek and the other European language translations that were used.

The Division of the chapters hath been preserved entire; but it was impossible to keep close to the Distinction of the Verses, us'd in the European Translations. The Reason is the particular Genius and Idiom, whereby this Language is distinguished from all the rest. The construction requireth often, that some Verses be transpos'd, and that some Words come in at the End, which, in other Languages, stand in the Front. Besides this, there is neither comma, colon, nor semicolon, to be met with; and therefore no Verse can be fully concluded, but where there is a full-point, in an European Language. If these Properties of Speech be neglected and things transfus'd at random no Malabarian will be able to apprehend the Sense or Meaning of what he readeth.¹⁹

This passage not only shows the differing grammatical structures of Tamil and the western languages but also points to the mediation of print conventions in structuring language.

In this task of grappling with Tamil and fitting it into a grammatical frame comprehensible to the European mind, Ziegenbalg enlisted the help of local schoolmasters as well as *kanakkupillais* or village accountants who played a

crucial role in the village administration with their control over land records. The harnessing of the *kanakkupillais* is interesting as new research—cf. the work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam²⁰ *et al* and Bhavani Raman²¹—has drawn attention to the importance of secular literati as distinct from religious scholars not only in the production and diffusion of pre-colonial knowledge but also in providing the crucial interface between European and indigenous systems of knowledge. These native literati seem to have performed two very important functions. Firstly they imparted native knowledge to the European missionaries and secondly, they acted as intermediaries in the assimilation of knowledge. And their relationship was not as yet fully caught up in networks of power. Of one of his schoolmasters, aged ‘three score and ten years’, Ziegenbalg writes within two months of reaching Tranquebar,

...puts such philosophical questions to me. Truly, the Malabarians being a witty and sagacious people, must needs be managed with a great deal of Wisdom and circumspection. Our School Master argueth daily with us, and requireth good Reasons and Arguments for everything. We hope to bring him over to Christian knowledge; but he is confident as yet, that one time or other, we shall all turn Malabarian, and in this Hope he takes all the pains imaginable, to render things as plain and easie to us as possible.²²

Despite Ziegenbalg’s patronising tone it is evident that a serious critique of facile understandings of Orientalism is needed. Interestingly, even before the dawn of Enlightenment we find the discourse of reason being invoked.

The study of language was of course oriented towards propagating the Word of God and Ziegenbalg soon got down to the business of producing books. By 1713 the list of ‘Malabar Manuscripts, which either have been composed by the Missionaries themselves, or by them translated from other languages, chiefly for the Use of the Malabarick Church and school’²³ was truly impressive.

1. The whole New Testament
2. A collection of the gospels and Epistles used throughout the year. Done in a volume by itself
3. Luther’s short catechism, with an Exposition, and without it
4. A short history of the Old Testament, with the Arguments of each chapter
5. A collection of some short Rules or Directions for a Christian Life
6. Twenty-six sermons upon the Article of the Christian faith
7. Eleven Sermons upon Some other subjects of Divinity
8. Fourteen Sermons upon Mr Freylinghausen’s Short System of Divinity
9. The History of the life of Christ

10. The Order or method of Salvation
11. An Abridgement of the Old and the New Testament
12. A succinct Narrative of the Christian, Jewish, Mahometan, and Pagan Religions
13. A compendium of Divinity
14. A Church History of the Old Testament, by way of Questions and Answers
15. A Monitory Letter, directed to the Malabar Paganism, by one of the Missionaries
16. A collection of letters sent to some Particular Persons of the Malabar Heathens
17. A Malabarick Translation of Some exhortatory letters, sent from Europe, to a new-planed congregation of Heathens converted to Christianity
18. A Monitory letter writ to the Malabar congregation by one of the Missionaries, who was then in Madras
19. The Danish Liturgy
20. A Book of Hymns, set to European Tunes
21. A Book of Hymns, set to notes after the manner of the Indians
22. A Book of Devotions, or Prayers
23. The Articles of the Christian Religion broke into short questions
24. A little Reading Book, containing Some Moral Rules of life.
25. A body of Divinity (not yet finished)
26. Dr Spener's Exposition upon the Catechism (not yet finished)
27. A Malabar Dictionary, compil'd out of various authors, and provided with a German Index
28. A Dictionary digested after the order of the Malabarick Alphabet, and done in such a manner, the Reader, at one view, may find the primitive Word, together with all the Derivatives depending thereon. It contains above 40,000 Words, all writ on leaves and is designed to be transcribed on Paper, and to be Printed in Time, for the Benefit of the Mission.
29. A Poetical Dictionary, digested into Twelve parts, and taken out of Poetical Writers only
30. A Book upon Arithmetick, composed after the Manner of the Malabarians
31. A Malabarick Primmer
32. A Malabarick Spelling-Book²⁴

As is evident items 1–26 pertain to Christianity while the rest are language aids. Apart from these texts the Danish missionaries sought out ‘some few Theological Manuscripts, written by Roman Catholic Priests’ and ‘after being carefully revised . . . and purged of whatever might favour Popery’ were included in their collection. These included:²⁵

1. Some Questions relating to the Christian doctrine
2. A Catechism
3. Some Orations upon Theological Subjects
4. A collection of Prayers, according to the Order of the Passion of Christ
5. A String of Pearls: Or an old mystical Treatise upon the Christian virtues.

Founding the press

It was in this context that the need for a printing press was acutely felt. In the schools that the Danish Missionaries had established, the most expensive part of the exercise was the transcribing of books for pedagogical purposes.

As for the outside of these books, they are quite different Dress from those in Europe. There is neither Paper nor Leather, neither Ink nor Pen made any use of; the Character being by the help of Iron tools impressed on a sort of leaves of a certain tree, which is much like a Palm-Tree. At the end of every Leaf a Hole is made, and thro’ the Hole a string is drawn, whereby they are kept together, but must be untied or loosened, whenever the prints of these characters are to be read.²⁶

Transcription from palm-leaf manuscripts was no easy task. Given the nature of the palm leaf the orthography it used did not employ dots, as they would damage the leaves. Consequently a single character could be read in more ways than one. Given the lack of punctuation, an innovation that comes in only with the advent of print, letters, words, lines, verses, commentaries, glosses and quotations followed one another without any space. There was also enormous scope for scribal errors. This necessitated a high level of literary and literacy skills, a knowledge of prosody and possession of a vast vocabulary.²⁷ Not surprisingly Ziegenbalg sometimes employed as many as six *kanukkupillais* for this task.²⁸ Ziegenbalg and Plutschau were categorical when they wrote that

And whereas the Art of Printing is not known in these parts, transcribing must supply the Place of the Press. Upon the whole, you see, that as our charity school cannot well go forward without taking in some Men to assist us; so the whole Design can’t advance without employing more hands, first to translate, and then with some Iron tools to Print upon leaves of Palm-trees, such things as are thought useful for their Edification.²⁹

Ziegenbalg went to great lengths to acquire texts that would throw light on

the religious and cultural life of the natives. And print—or rather the non-availability of it—was a major impediment to his work.

I have often sent some Malabarick Writers a great way into the Country, in order to buy up Malabarian Books from the widows of the deceased Bramans. But there are a great many more of these Books, which being grown very scarce, are not so easily found out. However, I do what I can to get 'em into my Hands, and to purchase 'em at any rate, that so I may be able to unravel the better, the Mysteries and fundamental Principles of their idolatrous Religions.³⁰

Within even two years of landing on Tranquebar coast Ziegenbalg was contemplating the setting up of a press and actively campaigning to get the mission's benefactors to donate a press.

We heartily wished to be supplied with a Malabarick and Portuguese Printing Press, to save the expensive charges of getting such Books transcribed as are necessary... I have hitherto employed six Malabarick Writers in my house, which, however, considering our Present Circumstances, will prove too chargeable in time. 'Tis true, those Books which we get from the Malabar Heathens must be entirely transcribed, or else bought up for ready money, if People will part with them; but such as lay down the Grounds of our Holy Religion, and are to be dispersed among the Heathen, must be carefully printed off for this Design.³¹

Finally, after great difficulty the printing press gifted by the SPCK arrived at Tranquebar (16 September 1712). The consignment consisting of a printing press, 'font of Types, commonly called Pica', utensils, paper, books, etc., was captured off the coast of Brazil with a ransom of 300 Sterling—which gives an indication of the value of the printing establishment.³²

About the Delivery of the Press and Paper, several Difficulties have been started at Madras, which, however, have at length been so far removed, that now we are in Possession of it. We are now busie about fixing the Press in our House, and are in Hopes, that we shall be able to print a few sheets within three months by way of a specimen, in order to send some copies for a satisfaction to our Benefactor ... and truly as our Benefactors in England are the first that have found Ways to convey to us a Press, and thereby to disperse the Word of God on this heathenish Coast.³³

The Press being set up, proves so helpful to our Design, that we have Reason to praise the Lord for *so signal a benefaction*.³⁴

Their printer was a German in the Danish Company's service at Tranquebar. He was not only a printer but also a compositor. Ziegenbalg expected that if someone else came in the next ship then he could be taken from the company's service entirely 'in order to have him constantly employed in Printing Books'.³⁵

However their first problem was the types. Even though Ziegenbalg reported in late 1713 that ‘The Malabar Press and Foundry is now in pretty good Forwardness, and we are entering with all possible Expedition upon the Impression of the New Testament in this Pagan language’³⁶ adequate types posed a problem. The first types were of course cut in Halle, which could not meet the demands of the missionaries in Tranquebar. Soon new types were being cast in Tranquebar itself. By early 1714 Ziegenbalg proudly reported that

By Reason we were not provided with a sufficient Number of Letters in the Malabarian Tongue, we could cast of but very few copies. This Defect however has, for these three months past, been wholly supplied by our Founder.³⁷

Another difficulty with the Halle types was that they were so big that they took up a lot of paper, a rather scarce commodity. The new types cast in Tranquebar were much smaller and were, if not more elegant, at least less awkward. The very first Bible printed in any Indian language, if not a non-European language, provides a striking illustration of this: the 1714 first edition’s first 495 pages are printed in big type occupying a lot of space but beginning from the chapter on Paul’s epistles, it is printed with smaller type and paginated separately from 1 to 176.

Initially the press depended on imports for its supply of paper. The first consignment of 100 reams came in 1712. A year later, in 1713, another 75 reams came once again from the SPCK.³⁸ Again in 1715 SPCK sent 55 reams from London.³⁹

The scarcity of paper has hindered us from pursuing the Impression to the End of the Epistles. For the seventy five Ream of the largest paper you were pleased to send us last year, only six remain; but of the lesser size, which made up your first present of paper, we have thirty reams left in our store. For the setting up of a Paper-Manufacture here, though we do not think it altogether impracticable, yet our perpetual want of Money has not permitted us hitherto to attempt such things. The Malabar-Types which were sent from Germany, proved so very large that they consumed Abundance of Paper; to remove this inconvenience, our Letter-Founder has, about two months since, cast another Type of a smaller size, wherewith we design to print the remaining part of the New Testament.⁴⁰

In this circumstance ‘We are also resolved to set up in Time, a Paper-Mill, which will employ some more hands.’ This was indeed ambitious. However the logic was that although the initial cost of manufacture would be high it would ultimately recover the costs considering the big plans they had for publishing.⁴¹ By the end of 1715, they were happily reporting that

We are now very busie in building a Paper Mill... Our Honourable Governour

defrays half the expense, and I, on the Mission's account, the other half. The Timber-Work belonging to this Fabrick is finished, and a few Days after we begun the Edifice it self. If this Design under God meets with success, it will be very advantageous both to this Mission and to all India.⁴²

However costs were not the only difficulties that were encountered. There were technical difficulties as well.

[The Paper Mill] is a great Forwardness and will be finished ... in a few Months. Governour Hassius, who is half concern'd in the Project, is afraid it may miscarry for want of those linen rags they use in Europe. But if this Country linen can be serviceable they will get a considerable profit by their Manufacture, besides their furnishing Paper for the use of their own Press.⁴³

The reason for the success of the missionary effort was not only their zeal but their resourcefulness in looking forward and identifying wants and attempting to fulfil them with available resources and training local people. 'As the Work increases, we shall likewise want Physicians, Stewards, Printers, Composers, Founders, Bookbinders & c. and we have begun already to train up some to several of these Professions; and we shall continue to do so.'⁴⁴

The printing establishment had been put on such an effective footing that even after Ziegenbalg's premature death in 1719 the Tranquebar press was the leading establishment anywhere in the East, and in India itself it was about a century before Serampore near Calcutta took the lead in printing in India and in the south the printing centre moved to Madras. After Ziegenbalg, the work of printing was continued intermittently during the century. Missionary stalwarts such as J.P. Fabricius (1739–1742), C. F. Schwartz (1750–1762) and J.P. Rottler (1776–1803) laboured in Tranquebar.⁴⁵ Graham Shaw has counted as many as 338 imprints that were issued from Tranquebar during the century.⁴⁶

The cultural impact of print

The story of the Tranquebar press has been told many times even if not exhaustively. But one aspect of the success of the Tranquebar press deserves special attention, given its importance in understanding its social impact. The book is only a material artefact and does not become a social product until it is circulated and consumed. As indicated earlier the early Tamil imprints—be they from Goa or Amabalakkad—had little circulation. It has even been suggested that these imprints were never intended for public—whatever that may have meant in that time—consumption but were meant to be circulated among the missionaries. We have no evidence at all of how these texts were received.

However, with regard to the Tranquebar imprints, we have the very first available responses to the printed word in south India if not in the whole of India. Apart from the vicious tract war that took place between the Jesuits and the Lutheran missionaries regarding 'theological disputes, arising from their differing

interpretations of the Christian scriptures and approaches to missionary work⁴⁷ we have detailed documentation of how print impinged on one native convert. This brings us to the astonishing story of Rajanaiken, a poor outcast ‘pariah’ who lived in Thanjavur. The story is from J. Fred. Fenger, a missionary who had spent many years in Tranquebar and who ultimately wrote the history of the mission in rich detail.⁴⁸

Rajanaiken’s grandfather became a Catholic at the age of thirty. Rajanaiken was baptised at birth. By the age of twenty two he had learned to read and write. Along with his younger brother Sinnapen, he took a great fancy for reading books—mostly on palm-leaf which contained ‘papal histories of saints, the miracles of the Virgin Mary and a few of those of Christ’. His hunger for reading was not satiated and he tried to get more books, especially the books of Moses, from Catholic catechists through ‘flattery and presents’. It was at this time, in 1725, that he met a Catholic mendicant monk, Sittananden who possessed a printed book containing the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles bound together (Ziegenbalg’s translation of the first part of the New Testament, 1714)—a copy probably acquired from Schultz. Apparently he could not read it himself and had even torn off the title page. After much effort he granted Rajanaiken’s request to read it but warned him ‘You can keep it for your own reading, but take care that the Priest does not see it’. Rajanaiken ‘used to read it all day and then from evening till midnight by a light’. When he had read it through, ‘the Lord had given me great light in understanding it’. But then he was struck by a real fear: once Sittananden came he would have to return the book.

I therefore determined to copy it all out on Palm-leaves and make a book of them, and so began to write. I copied the Gospels of St Mathew and Mark and part of Luke, but being but little accustomed to writing, my hand was so tired that I could do no more.⁴⁹

Fortuitously Sittananden never turned up and Rajanaiken could retain the book. A few years later, in 1727, he went to Tirukaidaiyur, a village near Tranquebar where he met a Catholic Schawrimuthu (Savarimuthu) who had a small printed book—Ziegenbalg’s letter addressed to all Malabarians, published in 1717. Rajanaiken claims, interestingly, that Savarimuthu could not actually read the book but pretended to do so and collected alms from his ‘ignorant (Romish) hearers’! Rajanaiken promptly bought the book from him for one fano. On enquiry he found that he had got the book from German priests. He struck a deal and got further imprints from the Tranquebar press. Beginning to suspect that that he was being cheated he began corresponding with the German priests and finally went directly to Tranquebar with his brother. The first book he bought was the entire New Testament. ‘After I had had about six months’ intercourse with them, partly by writing, partly by word of mouth, and had studied the Bible’ Rajanaiken converted to the Evangelical congregation in 1728.⁵⁰ Rajanaiken personifies the impact that print could have on people.

Conclusion

When the Danish missionaries brought the new technology of print, along with an unshakeable faith in the power of print in propagating the Word of God in Tranquebar, they encountered a cultural situation that was novel to them. Unlike the vernaculars of the Europe which were of relatively recent origin and which used the Latin alphabet, they faced languages which were evidently of much older vintage with longer traditions of textual culture though it was not clear how old. Initially they confused script for language. The confusion was further compounded by the registers of 'high' and 'low' languages. Their access to knowledge was mediated by native intellectuals who, though they appear as little more than silhouettes in the missionary writings, held their own. The quest for knowledge to understand indigenous culture led them to seek out manuscripts. The list of books that Ziegenbalg could trace and acquire copies of is impressive in that it includes important works of grammar, literature, religion, philosophy and pedagogy. Not only the content but also the material artefact of the indigenous book written as it was on palm leaves posed a challenge to missionary understanding. It is to the credit of the Tranquebar press that, through a long and difficult process of trial and error, they could adapt the technology of the Gutenberg movable type to Tamil language. The pre-print Tamil book with its different orthography and the lack of print paraphernalia such as punctuation was skilfully tackled by the Tranquebar missionaries. Even though the pages look inelegant at this point in time, the domestication of Tamil orthography to the printed page effected by the Tranquebar mission press lasted for well over a century. The printed Tamil book looked much the same until even the early part of the nineteenth century.

The evidence, though tantalising, indicates that the printed material issuing more or less steadily from Tranquebar was received by some native converts and made a profound impact on their world view. Even though the books were often treated only as artefacts enjoining authority on those who invoked them in the course of preaching, the books did change the reader—as evident from the case of Rajanaiken.

In the present discussion we have restricted ourselves to the Indo-Danish cultural encounter in the context of technology in the medium of print. Further exploration based on the fashioning of prose in the Tamil language, the creation of a new vocabulary to express Christian theology, the changing notions of translation, etc. is also possible. That however is beyond the scope of this essay.

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Halle, and the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. The comments of the other guest editors and the anonymous peer reviewer helped greatly in revising the paper.

Notes

- 1 *A Brief Account of the Measures taken in Denmark for the Conversion of the Heathen in the East Indies*, London, 1715, pp. 11–12.
- 2 *A Brief Account of the Measures taken in Denmark for the Conversion of the Heathen in the East Indies*, London, 1715, p. 26. Emphasis added.
- 3 It is interesting to bear in mind that these volumes, going by the name of *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East* were published near contemporaneously and frequently reprinted, going into as many as three editions over the period of a decade (in the first quarter of the eighteenth century). Curiously there are significant variations—usually expansions—in these editions. A comparison provides a rich fare to the historian. Most subsequent writings on this period draw on these volumes—with or without express acknowledgment.
- 4 Brijraj Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary to India: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1683–1719)*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. iv.
- 5 Daniel Jeyaraj, *Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, the Father of Modern Protestant Mission: An Indian Assessment*, The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, New Delhi and Chennai, 2006, p. 3.
- 6 Graham Shaw however categorically states that ‘The claim that Punicale (Punnaikayal) ... was also a centre of printing at this period [sixteenth century] is without substantiation.’ Graham Shaw, *The South Asia and Burma Retrospective Bibliography, Stage 1: 1556–1800*, The British Library, London, 1987, p.5.
- 7 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries... in The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1714, p. 5.
- 8 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries... in The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1714, p. 6.
- 9 *An Account of the Religion, Manners, and Learning of the People of Malabar...*, London, 1727, p. 1.
- 10 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries... in The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1714, p.16.
- 11 *An Account of the Religion, Manners, and Learning of the People of Malabar...*, London, 1727, pp. 37–39.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 67-69.
- 13 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries... in The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1714, p. 6.
- 14 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part I*, Second edition, London,

- 1711, pp. 28–29. (Letter of Ziegenbalg dated 16 September 1706.)
- 15 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, p. 7.
- 16 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part I, Second edition, London, 1711, p. 29. (Letter of Ziegenbalg dated 16 September 1706.)
- 17 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, p. 7.
- 18 Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2006, Chap. 1, esp. pp. 35–41.
- 19 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, p. 31.
- 20 Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001.
- 21 Bhavani Raman, paper presented at the conference on the Madras School of Orientalism, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 11–12 May 2007.
- 22 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part I, Second edition, London, 1711, pp. 30–31. (Letter of Ziegenbalg dated 16 September 1706.)
- 23 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, p. 47.
- 24 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, pp. 47–49.
- 25 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, p. 49.
- 26 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part II, London, 1710, p. 5.
- 27 See A.R. Venkatachalapathy, 'Reading Practices and Modes of Reading in Colonial Tamilnadu', *Studies in History*, 10 (2), July-December 1994.
- 28 *An Account of the Success of Two Danish Missionaries...* in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1714, p. 13.
- 29 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part I, Second edition, London, 1711, p. 61. (Letter dated 16 October 1706.)
- 30 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part II, Third edition, London, 1718, p. 7. (Letter of Ziegenbalg dated 22 August 1708.)
- 31 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part II, Third edition, London, 1718, p. 7. (Letter of Ziegenbalg dated 22 August 1708.)
- 32 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1718, pp. 13–14.
- 33 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1718, p. 19. (Letter from Ziegenbalg to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 23 September 1712.)
- 34 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ...* Part III, London, 1718, p. 46. (Letter

- from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 11 January 1713.). Emphasis added.
- 35 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 46. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 11 January 1713.)
- 36 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 76. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 11 December 1713.)
- 37 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 111. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to SPCK, dated 3 January 1714.)
- 38 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 63. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 12 September 1713.)
- 39 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 166. (Letter from J. E. Grundler to SPCK, dated 28 August 1715.)
- 40 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 117. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to SPCK, dated 27 September 1713.)
- 41 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 75. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 11 December 1713.)
- 42 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 184. (Letter from J. E. Grundler to SPCK, dated 16 January 1716.)
- 43 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 199. (Letter from William Stevenson to SPCK, dated 3 February 1716.)
- 44 *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East ... Part III*, London, 1718, p. 75. (Letter from Ziegenbalg and J. E. Grundler to Henry Newman, SPCK, dated 11 December 1713.)
- 45 J. Fred. Fenger's *History of the Tranquebar Mission...*, Tranquebar, 1863, pp. 315–17.
- 46 Graham Shaw, *The South Asia and Burma Retrospective Bibliography, Stage I: 1556–1800*, p. 14.
- 47 See Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, p. 44.
- 48 J. Fred. Fenger's *History of the Tranquebar Mission...*, Tranquebar, 1863, pp. 175–79. Fenger mentions that his account is based on Rajanaiken's own letter written in 1732. It is not clear where this letter is now.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

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‘Where once Dannebrog¹ waved for more than 200 years’: Banal nationalism, narrative templates and post-colonial melancholia

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Abstract

This article focuses on Sophie Petersen’s Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier (Denmark’s Former Tropical Colonies) from 1946: an outstanding example of the Danish narrative about Denmark as a tiny benevolent and thoroughly humanistic nation, which ironically sacrificed its imperial potentials for the sake of justice, but thereby gained greater honour on a moral and ethical level. This narrative seems to have found its final form after the sale of the Danish West Indies, the last Danish tropical colony; perhaps as a sort of compensation and explanation for the ‘loss’ of colonial empire. However, at the same time the narrative played an important role legitimizing Denmark’s claim on all of Greenland in the name of its people. It again gained relevance in connection with the German occupation of Denmark and the decolonization following World War II. Petersen’s book was invoked again and again over the following decades. Even in the present day, the narrative of the benevolent Danish empire is still reproduced—also when the explicit goal has been to create a counter-narrative. A possible explanation is found in theories of nation, remembering and narration. Finally, the article discusses whether the continuing interest in the former colonies and the history of the past Danish empire should be seen (only) as a sign of post-colonial melancholia: a reaction against globalization, migration and altered geopolitical and racial balances of power, or whether it might (also) be seen in a more positive light as an effort to appreciate history and create new and more equal meetings across borders.

Introduction

‘In gold and gleaming purple, the sun sank deep in the west, far into the endless

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sea, where the eye met no coast, and the ear no other sound than the long, steady swells, which lazily rolled onto Tranquebar's sandy shores.'²

With these lines the Danish writer Vilhelm Bergsøe (1835–1911) opens his short story 'Da flaget faldt' (When the Flag Fell, Bergsøe 1893). That Bergsøe never personally visited the place is evident in the counterfactual geographical construction—the real Tranquebar faces east, and thus the sun rises on the water and sets on land. However, it is not the actual Tranquebar that holds Bergsøe's interest. The true topic of the short story is Denmark and Danish identity; Tranquebar is employed as an allegory on failed Danish super power aspirations.

The short story begins on the night before the English take over Tranquebar.³ On the beach we encounter two young men: Gjedde, a descendant of Ove Gjedde, the original founder of this Danish trading colony, and Samanta Tschandra, a son of one of the respected elders and a loyal servant to the Danes. The power relations between the two men are unambiguous: 'The brown Hindu' rocks the bamboo hammock where 'the white European' is resting, and the story does not attempt to challenge this fundamental power relation. On the contrary, throughout the text, the Indians are restricted to their role as *children*. Even the esteemed village elders are included under this general term for the Indians: 'this flock of children'. However, according to the short story, the Danes do underestimate the Indians' profound sense of loyalty and gratitude toward the Danish nation, whose governance they far prefer to the English, who are portrayed as leading a very different sort of reign, cf. the words attributed to the spokesman for the elders: 'We do not want to become English Tranquebar-men, beaten with canes.' While the Danish fort echoes with the Danes' self-forgetting drinking songs,⁴ the Indians arrive at the sound of the wailing that accompanies the dead on their way to the funeral pyre. The Indians are busy plotting a revolt against the English, but Gjedde prevents it because he knows that they will not be spared: 'This flock of children! ... This cannot be allowed to happen! Let them mourn; but let them live!'⁵

Many years later, the two men meet again in Singapore. Tschandra is a wealthy man now, but his love of Denmark is unchanged. As his most precious treasure he still preserves the flag, which he saved, at peril to his own life, from falling into disgrace at the hands of the English—an act that in fact ought to have been the responsibility of the Danes. Until this day, he has kept the flag in the hope that it may one day wave over Tranquebar again. When the Dane tells him that this will never happen, because Denmark has shrunk 'since the flag fell from Dansborg on Tranquebar's Shore,' the Indian proclaims that he will use it as his funeral shroud when his body is carried to the funeral pyre: 'What I loved most dearly in life shall follow me in death to Brahma and his eternal stars.'

Thus, the short story is a reprimand to Denmark and the Danes, not because they dared to dream super power dreams and wanted to reclaim in India 'what we had lost at home in bloody, futile battles' but because they simply gave up and struck

the flag that once waved so ‘free and proud (...) for more than two hundred years’. Characteristic of the Danes is thus on the one hand their gentle, noble manners and big dreams, and on the other a strange indifference and lack of resolve when it really counts. Hence the empire was lost. The additional reduction of the empire that the story alludes to is the defeat by Germany in 1864, which led to the loss of Schleswig-Holstein. When the short story was written, the colonies in the West Indies were also in a poor financial state. The sale of yet another territory that had been under Danish possession for ‘more than two hundred years’ was under serious consideration.

The short story is of course paternalistic, colonialist and full of overwrought pathos, but it does serve to outline the contours of a basic narrative about Danish colonialism as a particularly gentle and humane form of colonialism, different in kind from the regimen of other, far more brutal empires, and this narrative has continued to influence the Danish understanding of the colonial age in our own time (Olwig 2003, Thisted 2004, Gaustad 2005). This article will demonstrate how this understanding is cemented in the years during and after World War II, where the former colonies came to play a much larger role both in Danish literature and historical works than had previously been the case.

The colonial age cannot be said to play any prominent role in Danish literature as such. Rather, there is a more or less unseen and untold narrative underneath the official representation of the creation of modern society, as is also the case, for example, in English literature (Said 1993, Newman 1995). Most important in a Danish context are the West Indies, in Denmark’s possession right up until 1917, when they were sold to the USA. The background was the so-called triangular trade, where weapons were carried to the Danish forts in western Africa (Denmark had several forts in what is now Ghana). The weapons were traded for slaves, who were shipped out to the West Indies, where they worked in the sugar plantations, the output of which was shipped to Europe. Few literary works deal with Tranquebar,⁶ and current Danish knowledge about the area and its history is limited. Nevertheless, Tranquebar does play a role in Danish consciousness, probably because this was the first area to come into Danish possession. Tranquebar is the gateway to the narrative about Danish colonial history.

The interest in colonial history became pronounced in Denmark in the early 1900s. At this time, a number of historical source texts and treatises were published, and this provided a basis for broader descriptions such as Kay Larsen’s two-volume work, *De Dansk-Ostindiske Koloniers Historie* (The History of the Danish East Indian Colonies), published 1907–08. The work intends to provide a description of ‘Denmark’s history beyond the domestic borders: The Danes’ travels in the wide, wide world’, presented ‘in a relatively accessible form’ (Larsen 1908:7). In the following decades, Larsen published several books on the history of the Danish colonies, and his idea of— firstly the national perspective; second the broadly accessible portrayal; and thirdly the comprehensive description of the former

tropical colonies, set the standard for various subsequent initiatives, including Sophie Petersen's *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* (Denmark's Former Tropical Colonies). Petersen's book is intended as a popular scientific introduction, spiced with impressions from her own visits to the locations in question. Sophie Petersen had tremendous clout in her own time, and her book is widely quoted in posterity, both in direct and indirect references. For that reason alone it may be worthwhile to take a closer look at this publication.

'Denmark's own Sophie'

Sophie Petersen (1885–1965) grew up in Copenhagen, where her father managed a coffee store. She describes her home as conservative and royalist (Petersen 1954, Nielsen 2003). The household income was modest, and Sophie, an only child, was enrolled in one of the less distinguished girls' schools. However, since she was clearly academically gifted, she enrolled in Nathalie Zahle's School shortly after her confirmation, one of the best schools in Copenhagen, where several of the teachers experimented with modern educational approaches; the school also engaged in practices that could be called *interdisciplinary* (Possing 1992). Much of this is reflected in Petersen, who saw no inherent conflict in reconciling profound Christian beliefs with a scientific world view, and who integrated history, literature and geography both in her writings and teaching. Petersen obtained a master's degree in natural history and geography, majoring in geology, from the University of Copenhagen in 1911. She really wanted to study geography and history, but that combination did not exist at the time. Until her retirement in 1955, she worked at the upper secondary school Nørre Gymnasium in Copenhagen, and she published a number of textbooks on geology, geography and natural history. It was her travels, however, and the related books, articles and lectures, not least the very popular radio lectures, that made her famous among a wider audience.

And Sophie Petersen *was* famous; to this day, older generations remember her as 'Denmark's own Sophie', a nickname bestowed upon her by magazines and newspapers, which also named her Denmark's, Scandinavia's, why, perhaps the world's 'most widely travelled woman'. Every single year, Petersen went travelling, by ship to Greenland, by train through Russia, Siberia and across Asia, by zeppelin to Brazil, around the world by aeroplane, and criss-crossing the North Pole. She visited the most remote, exotic sounding places: New Guinea, Fiji, Borneo; she set foot in the world's northernmost city—and in the southernmost; she made it all the way to Australia and New Zealand—at a time when the trip took nine days by plane from England.⁷ A life like Petersen's generated lots of stories and anecdotes. Sophie Petersen was unmarried and had no children. In many ways, she incarnates the Victorian image of the woman traveller as an eccentric old maid. At the same time, many also clearly saw her as a role model: the woman who broke all boundaries, geographic as well as gender-related, and who repeated, in interview after interview, that she had never once been afraid.

Frugality, by the way, was a necessity; apart from one major travel grant and a few scattered, smaller grants, Petersen largely paid her own way. She travelled during her vacation time, and the lectures and articles from one trip helped pay for the next. In addition, Petersen drew skilfully on her extensive network, primarily within the Danish Missionary Society and its partners, and stayed with Danish consuls, former students and female geographers around the world. She also contacted Danish companies that had subsidiaries abroad, and in return for small services, such as delivering parcels and letters, she was provided with food, lodging and transportation. This naturally made the travels more manageable and pleasant. With due respect for Petersen's vast travel experience, it is only fair to note that most of her trips had the character of brief, tourist visits where she mainly saw the alien lands through a European lens, as reflected in this somewhat flippant remark: 'What language does one use to get by in Madagascar? people ask, when they hear that one has been there. Danish, I reply, for I was there either in the company of Missionary Henriksen's (...) or I was among the many Norwegians, who do such a large and highly important work out there in the service of the mission.' (*Kristeligt Dagblad* 22/1 1950). She rarely established any close contact with 'the natives', and the thought of carrying out any actual 'fieldwork' among these people was inconceivable.

In addition to a vast output of articles, Petersen published books and educational booklets about the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, Burma, Australia, Ethiopia, Mexico and Guatemala, the Andes states and Nigeria. *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* (1946) is considered her main work. Another publication in her oeuvre that has gained special status is the 'popular book' *Grønland i Hverdag og Fest* (Greenland in Everyday Life and Celebrations, 1928), which kicked off her travel book production, and where Sophie Petersen found her particular style in the combination of travelogue, general enlightenment and textbook.

In the preface to *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* she describes how the work with the book kept her occupied throughout the war. She uses the term 'the war winters', partly in reflection of the fact that the bulk of the work took place in the winter, partly as a metaphor for the German occupation of Denmark. 'It was a great help,' she writes, 'during these dark times with their bitter severity to be able to concentrate on and lose oneself in a topic from Denmark's past, indeed a topic that called forth memories about experiences in tropical parts that were once Danish' (Petersen 1946:5). Thus, the work takes place within a very particular national context, and as the description reflects, it is characterised by a certain degree of nostalgia and melancholy over Denmark's lost grandeur. Indeed, the work was published as a sort of 'anniversary publication' for a national *loss*: the loss of Tranquebar. In the discourse that Sophie Petersen uses, there is rarely any mention of the 'sale' of the colonies but rather the 'cession' and better yet the 'loss' from a national point of view.

Sophie Petersen had dealt with Scandinavia's common history and with

Denmark's possessions in the northern Atlantic Ocean for many years, and of course she had travelled extensively throughout Scandinavia and the North Atlantic. She visited Iceland and the Faroe Islands in 1919, western Greenland in 1920 and 1921 and eastern Greenland in 1929. In 1932 she visited Tranquebar and Serampore, and she made it to the main sites in the Danish voyages to China. This was one of the times when Petersen had been granted a furlough, and her journey lasted five months. In 1937 she was in Guinea (Ghana), and in 1939 she visited the West Indies. Thus, much of Petersen's book relies on recycled material from previously published articles,⁸ and the journalistic style lends the presentation a light and intimate tone that makes the book accessible to a wide audience. *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* was very well received by the critics and sold out in one month! In 1948, she followed up on this book with an educational picture book: *Vore gamle Tropekolonier* (Our Former Tropical Colonies, published with Arne Ludvigsen). A second edition of *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* was scheduled. Petersen had revised the book with corrections and additions, and on her journey around the world in 1950 she stopped by Tranquebar and Serampore once more to take more and better photos. Then, however, came the mammoth work *Vore gamle Tropekolonier* (Our Former Tropical Colonies, 1952–53) edited by Johannes Brøndsted, which Sophie Petersen reviewed in glowing terms. She emphasises the fact that professional historians have addressed the topic— but she cannot resist mentioning, in her first review, that it might have been beneficial had the writers been granted a trip to the colonies, to acquire 'a fresh, first-hand impression!' In this way, Sophie Petersen also manages to mark her own territory.

Empire, nation state and banal nationalism

'Four times in Danish history, expansionist ages have occurred, where the urge to create a larger Denmark has led to major changes' writes Sophie Petersen (1946: 7). These ages are listed as the Viking Age, the Age of the Valdemars, the Age of the Kalmar Union and the Colonial Age. From a contemporary point of view it is remarkable that from the outset, Petersen views this expansionist urge with a sense of national pride. Later works about slavery have introduced a very different, shame-filled view of this period in Danish history.⁹ If there was any notion of shame in relation to the colonial age at the time Sophie Petersen was writing, it had a very different source: Denmark's inadequate efforts and insufficient success as a colonial power, resulting in the cession of the colonies, as reflected in Wilhelm Bergsøe's short story. It is precisely this national sense of inadequacy that Petersen is seeking to challenge and recast, to make the colonial age a source of positive national pride once again.

Thus, the empire is not only added, through memory and narrative, to the nation state as a part of the collective memory; the empire also defines fundamental values that characterise the nation: Denmark represents order and enlightenment, and as a colonial power it represents the kind, enlightened governance that looks after the (lesser developed) people who have come under the nation's custody,

much like a loving parent.

Overall, the book unfolds as one long argument in favour of this perspective. This even applies to the slave trade, where Sophie Petersen (in addition to the usual arguments stating that the blacks were involved themselves, and that it was a point of honour for the Europeans to put an end to their monstrous atrocities, including human sacrifice and infanticide) is clearly of the opinion that there is unambiguous evidence that Denmark treated the slaves better than all other nations. In fact, the slave trade was something that others implemented, and which the Danes only reluctantly were dragged into, although it really was not in their nature: 'The slave trade was not something that fell natural to us Danes at first...' (1946:222)! Sophie Petersen does make it clear that the Danes were not, as most Danes believed at the time—and continue to believe, despite much published evidence to the opposite—the ones who put an end to the slave trade. The Danes were the first to end the slave transports from Africa to the West Indies, but slavery itself continued in the Danish colonies longer than it did in the English colonies (1946:245). On the other hand, the Danes were concerned about the slaves' well-being, so much in fact that after the emancipation they almost went too far in their efforts to achieve equality, because the former slaves were far from ready to be treated as Danes but should have undergone a process to gradually transform them 'from innocent children into skilful and diligent workers' (1946:364).¹⁰ Thus, in an economic sense, despite all their humanism, the Danes manage to saw off the branch they are sitting on—but in return they seize the moral high ground.¹¹

Thus, at the end of the book, Petersen is able to emphasise that 'the Danish tropical colony nation' is definitely not a tragedy that deserves to sink into 'the Sea of Oblivion' but rather in many ways a success story that holds 'many bright and good memories of the Danes' conduct among the coloured people...' (1946: 403–05). She summarises 'the many humanitarian measures that we introduced',¹² and refers once more to the English governor's praise of 'the good sanitary conditions, the calm and order, the excellent legal protection and care for the poor' that prevailed in the Danish colonies at the handover in 1845 (1946:405).¹³

'In our colonies, we have always governed leniently and humanely in accordance with the contemporary perception of these concepts, and throughout the entire Danish colonial history runs, like a red thread, the urge of the Danish mentality to pursue equal rights for all, regardless of nation and race.' (1946:405).

This argument is of course related to the common strategy that Mary Louise Pratt calls *anti-conquest*: a representational strategy where the Europeans refute that the expansion had the character of conquest. Thus, they maintain their innocence while still claiming European hegemony (Pratt 1992:7). In the Danish discourse, however, this strategy has a special twist, where Denmark is represented as the nation that pursued humanist ideals in word and deed. This notion is embedded

in another Danish discourse claiming that ‘small is good’—resulting from the previously described reduction of the nation (Østergaard 1992).

Although in the 1950s there are signs of growing critical awareness in Sophie Petersen’s view of the relations between blacks and whites—she was definitely not in favour of the growing apartheid in South Africa—this perception of the Danish colonial system and ‘the Danish mentality’ with its built-in humanism and anti-racism was a perspective that she maintained without the slightest reservation.¹⁴

Thus, the Danish colonial age incorporates the humane and anti-colonial ideals that prevailed at the end of World War II: to Sophie Petersen, the colonial age also represented initiative and entrepreneurship, qualities that were crucial to achieve renewed expansion, on the terms of a new age. In her introduction to the book, Sophie Petersen therefore takes her readers on a walk through Copenhagen, introducing them to the visible legacy of the colonial age: all the warehouses, palaces, Frederiksberg Park with the Chinese pavilion and Frederik V’s equestrian statue in front of Amalienborg Palace, erected by Asiatic Kompagni (Asiatic Company) in 1774:

‘... it too, a worthy symbol of the colonial age and together with all the others a reminder for the present of a time in our nation’s history when travellers to East India and China made Denmark’s name renowned on distant seas.’ (1946:8).

Entrepreneurship and an international perspective, those were the factors that created Denmark’s golden age:

‘In the shipyard, the builders and craftsmen were busy all day long, while the ships were loading and unloading in the canal by the warehouses. The workers struggled with barrels and bales to the sound of the sailors’ cheerful shanties. In the offices sat the clerks, the ‘functionaries’, calculating and writing, sending letters around the world, to India and China, to princes and merchants ...’ (1946:9–10)

And these very same factors are securing Denmark’s status at the time when Sophie Petersen is writing:

‘... We Danes have never forgotten that in yonder days, through bold voyages to the East Indies and China, to the West Indies and Guinea (...) we in fact incorporated the entire globe into our sphere of experience and endeavour (...) To Denmark, the line from the East Indian colonies and the days of the China voyages continues through to this day, albeit under different forms than then.’ (1946:198)¹⁵

The text elegantly zips from one part of the planet to another with international contacts and alliances in the forefront, while top marks are given to those of the main characters who command multiple languages and possess what we would now call multi-cultural skills; however, at the same time the text is virtually obsessed

with Denmark and all things *Danish*. *Danes* were the first to reach America (1472). It was with the goal of securing the perception of the northern seas as *Danish* that the expedition was launched that led to the rediscovery of Greenland (1605). It was with the goal of finding a *Danish* sea passage to India that Jens Munk set sails (1619) etc. By contrast, the large 'foreign element' of Dutch, English, French, Irish, Flemish and German settlers who made up the group of plantation owners in the Danish West Indies, and who 'caused a stark difference in nationality between the colony and the motherland,' helped seal the islands' fate (1946:307–08; 406; cf. the phrase on p.335: 'there were not enough of us out there'). Key individuals whom Petersen wants to categorise as Danish are, however, granted extensive dispensation possibilities. For example the doctor Poul Erdmann Isert, who was born in Angermünde, Brandenburg, Germany: 'He always wrote in German, which was not unusual in Denmark at the time, but his mindset and expression were Danish through and through' (1946: 240). Thus, consistently, the perspective is defined by the nation, which is not just any nation but *our* nation.

Thus, reading the text becomes a performance act in itself, where the reader confirms and is confirmed in his or her national status. In this sense, the huge popularity of the book may also be explained by the fact that it had a sort of 'cleansing' ritual function after the shock of the occupation years (and the expansionist urges of another nation).

The inclusive pronouns 'we', 'our' and 'ours' are high-frequency words in Sophie Petersen's text. Thus, she does not say that the colonial age lasts until 1917, at which time *the* last tropical colony is sold, but rather that it lasted 'until *our* last tropical colony was sold' (p. 8, my italics). Similarly, the Portuguese King Alfons V had 'us' launch an expedition (p. 13), and 'we' also had connections in the Moluccas, Timor and the Philippines (p. 29). 'We' may gain land, and 'we' may lose land (see, e.g., p. 40), and when land is said to be 'lost' (for example the Bengal settlement Danmarks nagore, p. 46), there is of course no doubt that the area was lost *for Denmark*. The text rests on the premise that the reader is prepared to accept this 'we' without further discussion or consideration, identifying with this very abstract concept of 'the Danish people' that the text invokes so frequently—interspersed with more ceremonious expressions such as 'the nation's own children' (p. 68). The term 'we' is assumed to cover this Danish people straight from the 1600s until the 1940s—as it is assumed to cover any imaginary future readers. 'We lived (...) under the influence of a wise and gentle government,' she writes without reservation about the age of booming trade and the later reform age that led to the emancipation of the peasants (p. 54).

Thus, the text evokes exactly the sort of imaginary community that Benedict Anderson calls *imagined* (Anderson 1983). It is not only in a horizontal sense that the nation state ideology encourages individuals to identify as sharing a community with people they will never meet face to face; in a vertical sense too, there is a sense of community with strangers in an age gone by, all united in this organic and almost

religious *ethnic corpus*. While the individual citizen may possess entrepreneurship and an urge to travel, the nation itself appears as a subject for the ‘urge’ to expand Denmark, which is often mentioned in the text, apparently a biological property of the nation’s ‘genes’—as a part of its identity as a *seafaring nation* (e.g. p. 13).

‘Banal nationalism’ is Michael Billig’s term for this sort of invisible or transparent nationalism, which dips the flag on a daily basis as a discreet reminder to the nation’s citizens. Billig adds to Renan’s famous statement that the nation is not only based on collective *memory* but also on *collective amnesia*, as not all events are remembered with the same degree of enthusiasm. Billig notes, however, that it is not just a matter of something being remembered while some other thing is actively repressed, but rather of a complex dialectic between remembering and forgetting, which is expressed on a daily basis in the ‘forgotten reminding’. ‘The homeland deixis’ is his term for the extensive use of ‘we’, ‘our’ and similar forms of rhetorical pointing, which invoke the imaginary and imagined national collective. Sophie Petersen draws heavily on these conscious/unconscious mechanisms in her efforts to maintain and preserve the story of the former Danish tropical colonies as a part of the Danish narrative and thus of the collective Danish memory. Although so much time has passed since the areas in question belonged to Denmark, it is still a profound experience for ‘a Dane to travel in our former tropical colonies, through areas where several families of Danes have worked, and where once Dannebrog waved for more than 200 years,’ as she states in the book’s pithy closing line (p. 407).

While Tranquebar was still Danish

On her visits to the individual colonies, Sophie Petersen notices in particular the features that might be identified as Danish. Thus, she says about Tranquebar:

‘A visit to modern-day Tranquebar might be something of a disappointment to a Dane. While Tranquebar and environs in 1845 had 23,425 and Tranquebar City and suburbs had 5,000 residents, there are now at most 2,000, and the town is merely a modest fishing town where everything is quite dilapidated. There is, nevertheless, something pleasant and appealing about this small town on the wide, white beach and the fresh, blue-green sea, and with its city walls, the old citadel and the old houses, the town forms a wonderful, finite whole. (...) Entering through the gateway in the low city wall, one immediately finds oneself in narrow, sandy Kongensgade – the streets still carry the old Danish names – which one can take all the way through the town, from west to east. It is immediately apparent that the town’s layout is not Indian. This is a Danish town, where the streets cross each other at right angles; this is a fortress town, a tiny Fredericia, surrounded by bastions and mounds. (...) The houses are Danish in the way in which they face the street directly in rows, not like the European neighbourhoods in other Indian towns, which are tucked away in gardens (...). True, there are no street mirrors, yet the view of street is treasured, and the unavoidable iron bars in front of the windows have

been bent outward at the base, thus allowing a peak along the wall. (...) the flat roofs and the open porches, where one can take in the sea breeze in the evening, reveal that this is a Danish town moved to the sun-drenched climate of India. The last residents' names still live on in the resident's memory, and the houses are called the Vodskov House, the Petersen House, the Hansen House, the Halkjær House, etc'. (p. 77–79).

Although the inscriptions on the headstones in the Danish cemetery are testimony to a different, harsher time when people died young, and Danish girls were given away in marriage at the age of thirteen, these fates nevertheless have some of the same 'distinguished' and 'monumental' touch that Sophie Petersen finds in the abandoned buildings:

'But although Tranquebar is now an impoverished town, and a town in decay, one senses behind it all that it was once a distinguished and monumental town. The marvellous governor's palace, the impressive churches and the stylish and richly built patrician houses along the ruler-straight streets bear testimony to this.' (p. 88)

'The Natives' Quarter' offers an exotic contribution to this European grandeur and order—as is evident, the subsequent description is intended to describe both what things were like then and what they are like now, in an image where time stands still:

'Then, as now, there was a native quarter, 'Blacktown', where darkskinned Indian children frolicked in the streets amid the bustling traffic, while men dressed in white and women in colourful saris thronged alongside Sanijasis (holy men) wearing yellow clothes covered in sandalwood dust, ashes and burnt cow manure. Here, the craftsmen sat with their labour; sons were taught by fathers and followed his lead in craft and trade. In the evening, the light of oil lamps will have spilled out from the straw huts, while music will have sounded from drums, pipes and strings, accompanied by the natives' singing.' (p. 89)

'Denmark became a poorer place when we lost this piece of India, which with its colourful populace and its mosques and pagodas, reflected in lotus ponds, shed glory on the familiar Denmark of the homeland,' Sophie Petersen concludes (p. 89–90). The evacuation of Tranquebar caused mixing and disorder: 'In the ruins of former patrician houses black Tamil children now play...' (p. 88), and between the lines, one senses that Denmark was not the only party that became poorer due to the lost association. Although today's Tranquebar is portrayed in an objective, non-judgmental tone, one understands that conditions here are far from optimal. The peasant villages in the surrounding area are 'messy', and the text evokes an almost visceral sensation of the filth and the dirt, lying in droves everywhere and 'emitting a foul smell in the heat' (p. 94). The pariahs' village in particular is impoverished and neglected. The pariahs have no access to education, and here, 'like everywhere in

India there is (...) stark opposition between Mohammedans and Hindus' (p. 95). The implication is that many things would have been better had Denmark stuck around and assumed the mantle of leadership.

After the handing-over of Tranquebar to the English, arrangements were made with the Leipzig Mission to take over the mission completely. 'D.M.S. (the Danish Missionary Society) was not even asked if it could or would be willing to assume this task' (p. 74).¹⁶ The reader senses that the mission has ground to a halt completely, and even though the text is very discreet, one has no doubt as to Sophie Petersen's opinion in this regard. Danish governance stood out in many and essential respects, something which she (almost) has the population's own words for:

'The relationship with the population was good, and far better than in the English settlements. Many spoke some Danish, and they felt a certain devotion and assurance toward the faraway Denmark, which treated its children humanely and provided enlightenment and education and maintained law and order through just courts. In a very particular way, Tranquebar in its state as a Danish settlement can get under one's skin, when in the East one encounters native families from Tranquebar who say that their parents or grandparents were Danish subjects. Thus, in Bangkok in 1932 I met an old Indian who traded in gem stones; he told me with pride that he himself had been born in Tranquebar while the town was still Danish.' (p. 90)

Particular symbolic importance is assigned to the university in Serampore established by Frederik VI through a royal diploma in 1827 and secured in the sale agreement, as the continuation of the university's activity was made part of the sale treaty. The Danish context continues to be remembered and respected says Sophie Petersen, and in the assembly hall, behind the rostrum is 'a grand Dannebrog, and beside it paintings portraying King Frederik VI and his Queen Marie, Sophie Frederikke' (p. 121). She talks about the students' ready willingness to show a Dane around the university: "'It is, after all, thanks to the Danes that we are able to study here!'" they say.' (p. 120)

'Thus, one senses throughout the Indian literature about Serampore University a deep sense of gratitude toward the Danish royal family and the tiny Denmark, and to this day, Denmark and the Danes are mentioned in speech and writing with the greatest reverence and affection.' (p. 121)

It is largely Wilhelm Bergsøe's short story that Sophie Petersen reflects here, both in her book and during her later visit in 1950, when initially she mourns the fact that the flag is no longer on display in the assembly hall. However, sorrow turns to joy when she learns that the flag is indeed still preserved, but that it is so aged that they no longer dare to keep it on display. Petersen is allowed to see the carefully preserved flag: 'But most interestingly, here was also a large, new Dannebrog, which the University flies at all festive occasions, where it waves next to India's flag.' (Kristeligt Pressebureau 14/10, 1950)

Surely, Denmark needed national mobilisation after the war—and yet, one may wonder at the resonance that this sentimental retrospective treatise evokes among her contemporaries. Her work is particularly celebrated in the conservative press; however, the complete lack of criticism is still remarkable.¹⁷ Even the very left-wing newspaper *Information* is positive, and despite a critical caption about the slave ships, the paper finds reason to emphasise that Denmark ‘nevertheless’ can pride itself on being the first nation to ban the slave transports. Thus, even in the reviews, the story of the Danish slave trade becomes ‘The Danish effort to end slavery’—*Berlingske Aftenavis* even finds that ‘Denmark might have deserved to continue to own ‘Danish Guinea’ today as a monument to this humane initiative’ (26 Nov 1946) (sic)

Indeed, the issue concerning Denmark’s status as a colonial power and the grateful natives was much more topical than might be apparent at first glance. It is no coincidence that Sophie Petersen insists on closing Denmark’s colonial age with the sale of the West Indies in 1917. In 1946 Denmark still had two settlements in the North Atlantic.¹⁸ After the war, Greenland in particular looked like it might become a hot potato internationally (Sørensen 1983, Lidegaard 1996, DUPI 1997). According to the Danish view, however, Greenland was not a colony in the common sense of the word but rather a people and an area of land that Denmark had taken into custody with a view to securing the protection and development of the people and the land. Sophie Petersen had been deeply engaged in the debate about Greenland’s future during the crisis with Norway, when Norway laid claim to most of Eastern Greenland, and the case was heard at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague.¹⁹ The court decided in Denmark’s favour on 5 April 1933, with the consent of the people of Greenland and their testimony to the benevolent reign of the Danes as Denmark’s main argument in the case. That changes were necessary in the Danish policy concerning Greenland was obvious, however, at the end of World War II. The population of Greenland had long been calling for reforms, despite the kind words about Denmark’s reign, and now the war had opened the hitherto hermetically sealed area to the mighty American neighbour to the west. That the USA had strategic interests in Greenland was evident, and some form of sale or takeover was considered by many to be a real threat/possibility. The solution was to tighten the bonds between Denmark and Greenland—which led to Greenland being included in the Danish kingdom as Denmark’s northernmost county in 1953.

Thus, even though *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* does not explicitly deal with Greenland, it is also a topic. Denmark should not now give up the last remnants of that which makes the nation greater, in every respect, and the Danish ‘we’ has a responsibility toward those that have been let in, and who have been granted the right—if only partially—to call themselves Danish. This is the book’s implicit main message, which was quite clear to its contemporary readers. As the *Information* laconically states, ‘The interest in Denmark’s old colonial empire seems to be on the rise at the same time as there is some ferment in the few “possessions” that remain.’

(30 November 1946). And as the *Berlingske Aften* concludes its review: ‘Sadly, in 1916 we saw that the popularly elected politicians were as petty in their prosaic calculations as the kings ... now we had only Greenland left. Will we be able to safeguard that?’

Narrative templates and collective memory

The newspaper reviews are not the only ones to engage without dissent in the national discourse in Sophie Petersen’s book. The previously mentioned major publication by professional historians, which preempted the republication of Sophie Petersen’s work, joins exactly the same discourse.

‘Following and describing the life and fate of our old tropical colonies (...) was a task that had to be shouldered at some point...’

These are the opening words of Brøndsted’s preface, which turns the treatise into a sort of national inevitability. Brøndsted too highlights Danish efficiency despite the nation’s limited size: ‘We joined in, and we had our share, albeit a modest one by Western European standards.’ And the painful sense of loss:

‘To us, a world has ended with the loss of our tropical colonies. As this treatise progresses, we wave goodbye to one after the other. The final surrender of the tropical settlements occurs mercilessly. Demise and closure. Like lights going out, one by one, the tropical colonies exit our history.’

The idea is exactly the same as in Sophie Petersen’s book. The work is even structured in a similar fashion: The individual areas are addressed chronologically in the order that they first ‘came under Danish flag’, and the metaphorical treatment of the flag is maintained unchanged:

‘With the cession of the Nicobars, the final chapter was written in the history of the Danish East Indian colonies. The Danish flag no longer waved over settlements in the East.’ (Rasch in Brøndsted 1952:426)

While Sophie Petersen’s was a neat and solid publication, 435 pages, illustrated with high-quality black and white photos, the historians’ book is a real extravaganza: 1,250 pages in two volumes in foolscap folio, thick gilt-edged paper equipped with colour illustrations throughout, including a large series of hand drawings by the two Danish artists Ib Andersen and Mads Stage, commissioned for the occasion. In addition the project involved a team of seven scholars. All these factors help lend this work gravity and secure its status as a national ‘monument’.²⁰

In the actual text, the use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ is far less frequent and has a different twist, as it is mostly used to refer to what ‘we’ know now about the past, based on what can be deduced from the sources. Thus, at first glance, this ‘we’ does not appear to be nationally anchored. Seen in context, however, not least in relation to the title, which clearly sets a certain frame for the text, it becomes nationally anchored after all: A group of Danish historians set out to trace what can be discerned about the

Danish tropical colonies—perhaps in the light of sources from other nations, but nevertheless seen through a clearly Danish lens. In this sense, authors and readers are embedded in a particular intimate group, where ‘we’ (Danes) share what ‘we’ know about *our* common history.

Thus, the historians present the history of the Danish tropical colonies as explicitly *Danish*—although many of the key players obviously are of other nationalities. As in Sophie Petersen’s book, here too this latter factor is stated as one of the causes of Denmark’s lack of success as a colonial power, although the attribution is more discreet. Thus, a separate chapter focuses on ‘Danish everyday life in India’ although the population, including the European segment, consisted to a great extent of many other nationalities, even in Tranquebar which had more Danes than any of the other places. The description of Tranquebar is strongly reminiscent of Sophie Petersen’s, and it is in fact essentially a paraphrase of her presentation with a single section as a direct quote, attributed to ‘a Danish traveller who has made a current visit.’ (Aage Rasch in Brøndsted 1952:418)

In many respects, *Vore gamle Tropekolonier* applies a point of view that seems much more consistent with current perceptions with regard to the colonised people and the slaves. There are frequent attempts at seeing the situation from the point of view of the colonised people, and the reasons for their actions are sought in their status as oppressed rather than a result of their inferior race or culture.²¹ Indeed, the editor sort of crosses himself with this statement in the preface, where he seeks to erase all doubt about the intentions of the treatise:

‘...one thing seems certain, namely that the motherland’s main and preferred point of view toward the colonies throughout the years was that they should offer a return. The primary interest was in fact efficient exploitation. Surely, this was accompanied by anything but negligible missionary and educational efforts as well as other socially based care for the local population – we may point to an example such as the abolition of the slave trade – but all such endeavours were indeed secondary. The first and foremost issue was always that of yield. And as sure as this entirely one-sided principle of exploitation belongs unmistakably to a bygone era in world history, the saga of our former tropical colonies will forever remain a matter of irrevocable past.’

If it is so completely beyond doubt that Denmark’s main interest was economic gain—why is it then, that one cannot escape the impression that this treatise generally confirms a perception of Denmark as the tiny, heroically struggling, humane nation? This is in fact evident in the quote above, as Brøndsted while rejecting any intent of idealisation nevertheless more than suggests such idealisation himself. For one thing, he manages to reiterate once more the faulty conclusion concerning the abolition of the *slave trade*, which Sophie Petersen had in fact sought to refute, and which is also refuted in Brøndsted’s own work, in Jens Vibæk’s section, which is anything but idealising: ‘Ophævelsen af negerhandelen’

(The abolition of the negro trade) (vol. II, p. 248 ff.). And furthermore, the entire sentence contradicts itself, as instead of refuting the notion of idealism it in fact supports it by listing all the good deeds associated with Danish colonialism. Was it really such a bad thing if the objective was economic gain, since it also led to so much good? That is at least what a liberal minded reader would have to wonder. Finally, there is the word *saga*, which has such rich connotations in a Danish context—not least national connotations, given the status of the Icelandic sagas in the Danish canon. For what is a saga if not a dramatic tale of grand events and people larger than life—not always paragons of virtue, to be sure, but always governed by history's striving for a higher goal. In Brøndsted's words:

'What a gallery of governor's physiognomies, of civil servant types, of adventurers' profiles! And what a valuable cultural-historical insight into other cultures and in the missionaries' admirably tough endurance!'

This clearly sets the scene for a 'grand narrative', both in the sense of a rich and dramatic narrative and in the sense of an effort to achieve a clear goal. If this goal is the end of the colonial era and of slavery, then Denmark must be said to have been cast in quite a lead role in the introduction—regardless of its claim to a critical perspective.

The portrayals of Danish colonial history are characterised by precisely the sort of chain of *intertextuality* that Edward Said described in relation to European representations of 'the Orient' (Said 1978). One text leads to another, and the presentation is like a snowball rolling down the mountain side, growing ever larger as it goes. Thus, it is evident how the same stories and anecdotes, particular points of view and standard remarks re-emerge in text after text, jumping back and forth among genres (source text, fiction, nonfiction) and becoming part of an established narrative. Writers draw on the same sources, naturally, but they also draw on each other's interpretations of them—and not least, on each other's interpretations of the cultural encounter and the characteristics attributed to the parties in this encounter.²²

Thus, it is not only in the years immediately after the war but also right into the late 1900s that we encounter the reproduction of Sophie Petersen and the discourse that she draws on. For example, we see it in the exhibition text that Karen Fog Olwig quotes in her analysis of a very problematic art exhibition that was held in 1992 to mark the seventy fifth anniversary of the handover of the Danish West Indies in Galleri Nikolaj in Copenhagen (Bidstrup et. al. 1992; Olwig 2003). The text appears to be mostly quoted from Sophie Petersen—or from some of the later sources that have drawn on her and the presentations that she draws on.²³ Olwig describes how the Danes have preserved the former Danish West Indies as an 'imagined world' where they can live out their idyllist fantasies of the humane Danish colonial reign, and she attributes much of the explanation to the fact that the islands were ceded so early that the Danish narratives were never really confronted with the views of the

former slaves (Olwig 2003:214). This undoubtedly has some bearing, but it cannot be the full explanation, as the same myths persist in the case of Greenland, where Denmark has not been able to avoid the colonial confrontation, and where the Danish view clearly revolves around an 'imagined world' (Thisted 2002, 2003). The second part of the explanation probably carries more validity: The Danes are reluctant to give up the dominant Danish narrative about the colonial era and Danish humanism, because this narrative has become such an integrated aspect of the Danish self-image, fitting so nicely with the story of the egalitarian, peace-loving Danish peasant culture as the basis for our modern-day democracy (Olwig 2003:215, Østergaard 1992). One might add other mythical basic narratives, for example the rescue of the Danish Jews during World War II. The Danish narrative about Denmark's humane colonialism has become what James V. Wertsch calls a *schematic narrative template*.

Wertsch deals with the term *collective remembering*, which is so widespread, even in scientific approaches, although it is in fact misleading. The western mindset includes a tendency to view the collective in an individual perspective, so that social groups are presented almost as a sort of 'enlarged' individuals who have the same properties that one normally attributes to individuals: individuality, uniqueness, delimitation, continuity, homogeneity, etc. (Handler 1994:33, quoted in Wertsch 2002:21).

Thus, the term 'collective remembering' implies an underlying notion of a sort of super-individual, who may act as the subject for the process of remembering. Even though modern science offers no basis for this sort of collective subject, it offers a metaphor that is hard to get rid of, because it covers the fact that collectives in fact remember certain events in a similar fashion and construct narratives about them based on common patterns. In research, this phenomenon is explained by the concept of *mediated* memory and *mediated* identity. Collective remembering is passed on in the form of *text* (oral tales, written tales of any kind, images, film). In this sense, Sophie Petersen's *Danmarks gamle Tropekolonier* and the professional historians' *Vore gamle Tropekolonier* constitute two important contributions in a mediated Danish presentation of history and identity. Based on Jerome Bruner, among others, Wertsch introduces the term *schematic narrative templates* to explain why certain narrative constructions of history are maintained even in the face of changing times and paradigms (Wertsch 2002). Wertsch's main examples are World War II in its English and Russian representations, respectively. How is it that World War II is still *The War* in English collective remembering, when there have been so many other wars since then? And how is it that the Soviet era's representation of World War II has survived the collapse of the Soviet Union? According to Wertsch, these narratives have crystallised as templates, which people draw on more or less automatically, partly because they are transparent and banal, and partly because the narratives in question still offer support for the narrator's identity construction (World War II as the 'pure', noble war in contrast to murkier later British missions; the Soviet narrative of World War II matching a modern need

for a separate, heroic Russian identity construction). The narrative about the Danish people and its love for equality and justice can be viewed as an example of this sort of narrative template, which was created in a time when it served as compensation for a severely reduced nation, and which still matches the prevailing Danish self-image and the image that is projected abroad (as a leader on issues of minority rights and autonomy, as the birth nation of the folk high school, etc.). The narrative template is associated with profound emotions and pleasure, and thus it tends to take over, even today and even in cases where the intent was to challenge the idealised representation of Danish colonialism.²⁴

Post-colonial melancholia

On 14 July 2002, the dream that Wilhelm Bergsøe rejected as completely unrealistic finally came true: Dannebrog was raised once more over Fort Dansborg. ‘For the first time since 1845, Dannebrog waved from the tower of the citadel next to the Indian flag, and with tears in our eyes we watched the flags go up.’ (Poul Petersen 2008:9)

This story was written by one of the four founders of The Tranquebar Association, which began as a local association connected to Vestfyns Efterskole²⁵ on the island of Funen in Denmark. In many articles and interviews, the four have described how they visited Tranquebar after picking the destination more or less at random, and like so many other Danish visitors they were struck with sadness at seeing the decay of the former Danish buildings. The group applied for permission to lime-wash the fort—and received a permit for an actual renovation of the main building of the fort. Initially, they financed the project out of their own private funds, until a number of foundations and the Indian government became involved. The grandiose inauguration in July 2002 marked the completion of phase one of the renovation of the fort and the land gate. Since then, additional initiatives have been launched, including The Tranquebar Initiative of the Danish National Museum, and a wide-ranging network of contacts has been established, involving Indian authorities and companies as well as key individuals on the site and the local population. The Tranquebar Association has also established a permanent presence on site with the acquisition of several houses, and it continues to be a key partner both in initiatives to restore old Danish buildings and in improving living conditions for the local population—for example, the association has been in charge of a coast protection project, not aimed at securing the old Danish buildings but at protecting the current fishing village. Another important object of the society is to promote awareness of the area within Denmark. Several tour operators have begun to bring Danish tourists to Tranquebar, and an internet search is almost bound to lead to the association’s web site (www.trankebar.net). Through a link to the website of the Chairman of the Board Karin Knudsen (www.karin-trankebar.dk), visitors can take a guided tour of modern Tranquebar, written in the same style as Sophie Petersen’s text from 1946, with an emphasis on rediscovering Danish elements. Similarly, the presentation of Danish colonial history that the association offers is

largely identical with Sophie Petersen's:

'In size, Denmark is one of the tiniest nations on this planet, but it belongs among the greatest in terms of exploration, innovation and inquisitiveness. Our culture is known far and wide. Denmark's reputation is largely of a positive character, and from time immemorial, the Danes have had an urge to "know" the rest of the world.' (Christensen 2003)

Thus, Tranquebar has once again become a Danish concern:

'In the Tranquebar Association, we hope that development will take a course that we Danes can take pride in, and that many Danes will have the pleasure of visiting the tiny piece of India, our former trading station Tranquebar, which was for 225 years the fourth-largest city in the Danish kingdom.' (Poul Petersen 2008:13)

This sudden Danish interest in Tranquebar may appear to be a form of 'neo-traditional pathology' that Paul Gilroy has labelled *post-colonial melancholia* (Gilroy 2005). The term refers to the 'hunger for reorientation', a powerful need in people for absolutes and landmarks in an otherwise contour-less and increasingly confusing time that has enveloped England due to a failure in addressing the country's colonial past. Not least the collective English denial of the brutality of the colonial reign has left 'destructive blank spaces' both in individual biographies and in national history (op cit:98f). In fact the same accusation may be levied against Danish historical representations, as expressed by writer Thorkild Hansen:

'The slaves walked on their naked feet through two hundred years of Danish history without leaving any other trace than the bit of information we find in the school textbook about Denmark being the first country to abolish the slave trade. Thousands of men, women and children. And one sentence to tell it all. And the claim is also wrong' (Hansen 2002:33)

According to Gilroy, post-colonial melancholia should be seen in the context of but must not be confused with *imperial melancholy*, which refers to the 'white man's burden', defined as the 'tendency to become sad and pensive in the face of the empire's demanding geopolitical responsibilities' (op cit:91). The distinction is one between melancholy as a sort of 'mood' and melancholia as a more specific diagnosis—similar to the distinction between feeling depressed and suffering from depression. Thus, the term post-imperial melancholy signifies the guilt-laden depression that occurs the moment the 'natives' and 'savages' begin to appear and make demands for recognition in the empire's metropolitan core. From this moment, ethnicity and nationality begin to challenge the class hierarchy that previously held the position as the most significant identity marker, and post-imperial melancholy becomes post-colonial depression. Thus, an excessive focus on former grandeur and a morbid interest in cultural heritage, 'the morbidity of heritage', support an increasingly insecure national identity and offer people a certain degree of pleasure,

as the notion of the lost empire and the consequent racial disorder can maintain a feeling of order and stability, although it belongs to a long bygone era.²⁶

In Denmark too in recent years, immigration has become the target of debate, for example during the Mohammed cartoon crisis, which caused serious damage to Denmark's international reputation as a tolerant and minority-including nation. Similarly, a veritable canon-fever has struck the nation, with a whole range of government committees charged with selecting the best works in the fields of Danish literature, music, film, architecture, etc., etc. (visit www.kulturkanon.kum.dk), even including a so-called 'democracy canon' (www.demokratikanon.dk or <http://pub.uvm.dk/2008/demokratikanon>). Not least in the statements by the government minister who initiated and spearheaded this effort, the whole canon endeavour has had a strongly ethnocentric, exclusive character in relation to the 'new' citizens whom the canons confront with all the cultural treasures that ethnic Danes have in common (e.g. Thisted 2006). Thus, it makes sense to talk about post-colonial melancholia in Denmark. Karen Fog Olwig's article, mentioned above, was published before both Gilroy's book and the Danish Mohammed cartoon crisis, but her explanation of the exhibition in question is quite consistent with Gilroy's theory: Among other things, Gilroy and Olwig both see the racial exotic, primitive Other as a sign of national closure and rejection of multicultural, trans-national communities (Olwig points out that the Danish West Indian exhibition coincided with the Danish voters' rejection of the so-called Maastricht Treaty, which proposed increasing the economic and political integration of the countries in the European Union).

However, an exclusive focus on the initiatives' retrospective and image or myth-preserving aspects fails to do justice to the Tranquebar Association or to similar trans-national/trans-local friendship societies. As mentioned above, the projects lead to a wide range of highly contemporary partnership, based on respect and mutual relations and, hopefully, more or less symmetric power, in stark contrast to the common perception of colonial power relations (albeit not necessarily to the actual conditions in colonial India, cf. Brimnes 1999). It is quite possible to view the genuine interest in current Indian society, which is expressed, for example on the website of the Tranquebar Association, as an expression of a much more open attitude marked by key words such as hospitality, conviviality, tolerance, justice and mutual care, which Gilroy poses as the opposite of post-colonial melancholia—at least if one imagines this openness toward the Indians in India transferred to the domestic situation as well, as an acceptance of a modern multicultural Danish nationality.

The fact that the Danes draw so heavily on the story of tiny Denmark with the broad, tolerant perspective, is probably not only due to post-colonial melancholia gripping the nation but also because that is the discursive or narrative repertoire available when one approaches the topic of Danish colonial history—at least if one wishes to stick to the material available in a more popular form.²⁷ The national aspect certainly continues to be a key orientation factor in a complex modern reality. Hence,

it is not surprising that certain locations attract interest because they are or were once Danish. Thus, in some contexts, the national perspective can pave the way and be used as a basis for intercultural narratives, and it should not be disqualified a priori as nostalgic or melancholic.

If narrative templates in fact work because they tell a story that is *good* in many respects—and if it is true that there is only one thing that can outcompete a really good story: an even better story—it is not enough for researchers to criticise the existing stories. They have to get involved in creating new narratives and presenting them in a form that projects them outside the narrow circle of their fellow researchers. A measure such as the current research initiative concerning Tranquebar represents a unique opportunity to do just that.

Notes

- 1 Dannebrog means ‘the Danish cloth’; it is the poetic Danish name for the Danish flag.
- 2 The original text is in Danish. This and all subsequent translations from Danish works, newspapers etc. are the author’s.
- 3 Denmark sold Tranquebar to England in 1845. The area was acquired as a Danish trading colony in 1620.
- 4 Jens Baggesen (1764–1826): ‘Dansk Tranquebarvisen’ (Danish Tranquebar Song), 1791 is embedded in the short story.
- 5 Behind the obvious grudge against the English lie the so-called ‘England Wars’: During these wars, in 1801 the English defeated the Danish navy outside Copenhagen’s Harbour, and in 1807 they launched an extensive bombardment of the city itself. The England Wars were the precursor of Denmark’s involvement in the Napoleonic wars, where Denmark wound up on the losing side and had to cede Norway to Sweden following the Kiel Peace Treaty in 1814.
- 6 One of the early source texts for the description of the colony of Tranquebar, written by the Icelander Jon Olafsson (Olafsson 1907, 1931) has provided raw material for both historical and literary texts, and by virtue of its dramatic passages about the war against the Nayak of Tanjore, it has also found its way into various books for boys, e.g. Krei Horn: *Peter Krage i Kompagniets tjeneste* (Peter Krage in the Service of the Company), 1955. In combination with the sources on the colonisation of the Nicobars, Doctor Poul Erdmann Isert’s letters from Danish Guinea 1783–87 form the basis for the plot in Kelvin Lindemann’s novel *Huset med det grønne Træ* (The House with the Green Tree), 1942, which was quite popular at its time. The sources for the history of the Tranquebar mission and the stories about Governor Peter Anker form the basis for Jette Kjærboe’s novel *Rejsen til Kærlighedens Ø* (Journey to the Island of Love), 1989. Tranquebar is also the topic for Peter Høeg’s short story ‘Fortælling om et ægteskab’ (Story of a Marriage) in *Fortællinger om natten*, 1990 (*Tales of the Night*, 1997). Høeg describes how a Danish family has based its wealth upon

colonialism—but later erased the memory from the family history; in the same manner as the nation erased the memory of colonialism from the collective memory.

- 7 See the list of Sophie Petersen's travels in Thisted 2008:7.
- 8 Thus, the visit to Serampore had already been described in various newspaper and magazine articles, and the section 'Et Besøg i Nutidens Tranquebar' (A Visit To Modern-Day Tranquebar) appears almost verbatim in the Berlingske Aftenavis 31 Oct 1945. An article about the visit to Tranquebar in July 1950 was printed in the Kristeligt Dagblad (essay) 27 Dec 1950.
- 9 A key work in Danish anti-imperialist literature is Thorkild Hansen's trilogy *Slavernes Kyst*, 1967 (trans. *Coast of Slaves*, 2002), *Slavernes Skibe* 1968 (*Ships of Slaves*, 2002), *Slavernes Øer*, 1970 (*Islands of Slaves*, 2005), for which Hansen received the Nordic Council's Literature Prize in 1971.
- 10 Exactly the process that in the Danish perspective was considered well underway in relation to the Greenland population—albeit far from complete, which is why Greenland needed to remain under Denmark's 'protection'; cf. the passage below about the link between the representation of the former Danish tropical colonies and the situation in the remaining colonies in the North Atlantic.
- 11 The same explanation of the Danish lack of success with the colonial project is found in many contemporary texts, for example in Kelvin Lindemann's then critically acclaimed and widely read novel *Huset med det grønne Træ*, 1942. Here, too, the Danish idealism, benevolence and sense of justice undermine the colonial project: In the following, the Danish protagonist considers the potential bombing of a village: 'To breach the Dutch monopoly would mean millions in annual earnings for the Danish colonies and the monarchy. What, by comparison, was a tiny village of brown people who collected severed heads? And yet, he could not help reflect on his own provincial contempt at hearing about the atrocities committed by the Dutch in their colonies. (...) He admitted the typically Danish in this Hamlet-like situation (...) here, so close to the goal, he was gripped by scruples. This was the way in which Denmark had missed its opportunity to become a great colonial power, like Holland. The hard preparations were in place, but when it was time to pick the fruit, the will was stifled.' (p. 140).
- 12 For example, it was of course a *Danish* area that was the first in India to abolish *sati*, the burning of widows: Serampore in 1821 (1946:116).
- 13 Quoted in full from Commander Steen Bille's report to the Danish government, p. 119.
- 14 Sophie Petersen's more critical point of view is evident, for example, in the two articles 'Problemer i Østafrika mødt paa en safari' (Problems in Eastern Africa, Encountered on a Safari, essay in Kristeligt Dagblad 5 May 1950) and 'Træk fra Øjeblikkets Afrika. Der maa en Sindelags-Ændring til hos de Hvide' (Aspects of

Current Africa. A Change of Heart is Required From Whites, the newspaper *Flensborg Avis* 16/12 1952). The articles draw on exactly the same events, but while the problem in 1950 rests solely on the ‘fanatical’ Mau Mau movement, in 1952, as the headline clearly states, it is attributed much more to the whites. On the other hand, she does not appear to have ever fully grasped what went on in Belgian Congo.

- 15 Sophie Petersen had previously written an entire monograph on this topic: *Danmark i det Fjerne. Danske Virksomheder i Udlandet* (Denmark in Distant Parts. Danish Companies Abroad), 1936.
- 16 The phrasing (and the indignation) stems from Kay Larsen, whose work, by the way, does not make nearly as much use of rhetorical means to establish a national narrative but instead sticks mainly to listing historical data.
- 17 There were reviews in practically all Danish newspapers. See list in Thisted 2008:11.
- 18 The Faroe Islands and Greenland. Iceland declared its independence in 1944.
- 19 See Petersen 1928, especially Chapter 9, the section ‘Grønland-Norge-Danmark’ (Greenland-Norway-Denmark), p. 155f. Sophie Petersen also wrote newspaper articles about the issue.
- 20 The book was republished in 1966–67 in eight volumes with new illustrations.
- 21 But not always, cf. Green-Petersen and Willemoes Jørgensen 1983, who find that Georg Nørregaard in his assessments of African culture is not far from the assessments found in travelogues from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- 22 Examples of depictions of the colonised people as children even in the treatises by the professional historians can be found in Thisted 2008:27.
- 23 This point of view is expanded with examples in Thisted 2008:32.
- 24 Thisted 2008 analyses examples from the past decades of Danish movies and TV-documentaries.
- 25 Efterskole is an independent boarding school for lower secondary students. Visits to India are part of the school’s activities.
- 26 Gilroy bases his work on theories that take the assumption of a collective psyche seriously, and hence he also operates with this sort of collective super-individual, which is rejected by Wertsch. Whether he would accept that his theory is simply translated to mediated identity may be questionable, although this solution seems less restrictive and hence more consistent with his own desire to write a *positive* book, where the notion of multiculturalism is seen as a concrete possibility, not just romantic utopia.
- 27 Thus, the Danish narrative is challenged by the world that the Danes encounter in India. As in this example, which describes a memorial service after the 2004 tsunami, held in February 2005: ‘Here, Hindus, Muslims and Christians gathered,

first on the shore and then at a common memorial event for the affected families. We could learn something from this. In Tranquebar, there is a tradition for dialogue between the religions. Something that is quite unique, even to India. Is it perhaps something that we Danes have taught them in the course of 225 years?' (Poul Petersen 2005:27). There is confusion as to who actually has something to learn from whom, and the attempt to preserve the standardised Danish narrative is not convincing.

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Tranquebar: A forgotten Danish colony?

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Abstract

The following paper focuses on the present day encounters in Tharangambadi between various Danish actors and members of the fishermen community. Through three significant notes of convergence between the different versions of the past the question of cultural encounters are studied as encounters between different historicopolitical horizons and mnemonic modes of remembrance that are described in phenomenological terms. The main argument of the article claims that these preliminary differences result in difficulties of understanding the motives and acts of the other, and also result in new narratives influenced by the new encounters in Tharangambadi between local inhabitants and Danish visitors.

Introduction

‘Do you remember any stories about the Danes?’

‘I’m only 80. The Danes ruled here more than 300 years ago!’
(eighty-year-old widow of a fisherman, Tharangambadi)

‘I don’t know much about the whereabouts of the Danes while they were here.’

‘How would you know what your forefathers did?’

‘450 years ago!’
(twenty four-year-old fisherman and his mother, Tharangambadi)¹

Tharangambadi, ‘where the waves sing’, alludes to the situation of the small village on the Coromandel coast, where strong waves swallow a part of the town every year. The lion’s share of the eastern town walls, several streets and a

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700-year-old Hindu temple have already surrendered to the sea. The old Fort Dansborg, which once securely stood more than 100 meters away, now lies less than fifteen meters from the waves. In 2004, a tsunami hit the town, killed more than 700 people and set a new turning point in the changing history of Tharangambadi,² which during the period 1620-1845 served as an important trading post in the Danish realm. This history is still affirmed by a number of buildings from the colonial period that are slowly caving in due to sea erosion, salty winds and the hot climate and pushing the question ever harder: should the buildings commemorating the past be preserved or left to disintegrate and fade into oblivion?

As the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt (1998) has pointed out, buildings as the product of *work* transcend the time of the production, render our world stable and provide the sort of recognition that make us feel at home. But at the same time, a building – as with any other physical artefact – may also serve as a reminder of that past that created it, even if this effect was never intended. There are no monuments in Denmark commemorating the Danish colonial past. In Tharangambadi, however, a chapter of history which has been almost forgotten by most Danes, is still encapsulated in a few buildings, which makes the town a suitable place for heritage tourism. In recent years the colonial past has again been the subject of renewed interest by different groups within Danish society that either regret the loss of the memory of an exotic past or are ashamed that these darker parts of the national history are not playing a more conspicuous part in the common knowledge of the national history.

Yet, a history forgotten, alienated and searched for by Danes in a foreign country also raises the question of its use. When Tranquebar was sold to the British in 1845 Tharangambadi shared the fate of the rest of India, which was gradually conquered by the ever growing British empire and firmly held as a colony until full independence was gained in 1947. A period which has marked the Indian subcontinent in innumerable ways and left an ambiguous heritage, which is still being intensively negotiated by historians, politicians, religious groups and common people alike. With the imperial history of India in mind, the new interest in Tranquebar by different Danish actors³ not only raises the question of the need to commemorate this part of the past and how this is being done now, but also how the same past is viewed from a local perspective, and what happens when a potentially problematic past is being put in focus by foreign players, usually with a politically-motivated agenda.

The background of the present study is an observation I made during my fieldwork. In light of repeated claims for an official Danish excuse raised by descendants of Danish slaves in the former Danish-West Indies (present day U.S. Virgin Islands) and a smouldering critique of Danish colonialism in Greenland, Iceland and the Faroese Islands,⁴ my initial interest in Tharangambadi originated in the limited attention Danish colonial history has generally received, combined

with a curiosity for knowing how people in Tharangambadi relate to the Danish colonial period. During my fieldwork, however, I gradually became aware of the fact that I, exactly because of this initial interest, reacted more on the answers given during interviews than expected. This typically happened when I was confronted with very positive accounts of the Danes or the German missionary, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg—a figure I had been ignorant of before engaging in studies of Danish colonial history and still knew only a little of before coming to Tharangambadi. With post-colonial studies of critical relations between colonizers and missionaries in mind, I was for long disturbed by the fact that Ziegenbalg was often mentioned, when I presented myself as Danish, until I realized the deeper reasons behind the local appreciation of Ziegenbalg. What was at stake in the encounters occurring in the interviews was a clash between different expectations and ideas of the other that have an intimate relation to the interpretation of the past and the motivation behind its use.

This paper seeks to explain the encounters in Tharangambadi today as an encounter between sets of historical knowledge made up both by politically-motivated attitudes and agendas informing the use and interest in history, and by phenomenological modes of approaching the past that play a key role in the manner in which the past is being remembered and dealt with. As the example of Ziegenbalg illustrates, there are clear discrepancies in the different versions of the same past. This article articulates the driving logics behind the different ideas and interpretations of the past that causes these discrepancies: Discrepancies that might on the surface be interpreted as cultural differences, but could also be explained as stemming from different political motives and phenomenological starting points.

The point of bringing a phenomenological approach into the context of an encounter of historical horizons is to highlight the fact that the new public Danish occupation with colonial history⁵ not only exists as an internal politically-motivated attitude to the national history in Denmark, but also is expressed in concrete activities in Tharangambadi – from short excursions to long term projects of different kinds – that are fuelled by the attention paid to concrete physical reminders of a certain epoch, and also leave marks in the local perception of the past. In that sense the concrete encounters in themselves make up contact zones, involving both social and physical elements affecting the way in which the past is turned into history.

This ever moving process of the encounter is illustrated by three significant points in which historical knowledge of both Danish and local actors converge: 1) the colonial buildings that form a great part of the sphere of interest of many of the Danish actors but which are also reflected upon by the local inhabitants; 2) the German missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, the mission and the local schools; 3) a point I have called ‘the kind Danes and the new narratives’, which refers to the new situations that arise from the very fact that Danish tourists as

well as researchers, State Donors, NGOs etc. have been present in the last thirty years-whereby contact zones between diverse Danish and local actors have arisen and new local ways of understanding the history of Tharangambadi and its affiliations with Denmark have been generated.

History and memory

This section briefly outlines some of the key concepts informing the study of historical encounters focusing on the use of history in identity politics as well as the relation between memory and history.

As a narrative-that is a structure of particularly momentous events often with a high explanatory force and interpreted in a specific way-history has the ability to convey to individuals as well as communities a sense of identity, and gives a possibility of identifying with others, who would otherwise be unknown, because of physical or temporal distance. As a powerful tool in the formation of group identities, history has always played a key role in the politics of identity, whether in the form of a so called 'collective memory' or as modern historiography, which although committed to the scientific study of the past, is still highly vital in modern politics, where it is used to render legitimacy to different policies. The French historian Pierre Nora (1987) coins the constellation of historiography and individual/group memories as *histoire-mémoire*, when speaking of a concordant relation between the more academic historiography and history as it is memorized by members of the community – a use of history that seeks to deepen and support the individual/group memories by historiography. This concordance makes it possible to identify even distant events that are no longer retained as proper individual or social memories but only described by historians as *our* history. According to Nora this alliance between history and memory no longer exists, as the field of historiography has been taken over by a critical and scientific historiography that seeks the truth about the past, beyond creating a sense of identity. Still, it is possible to argue that *histoire-mémoire* has never really vanished. Given the identity-building effects and the political implications of historiography, the interpretation and representation of the past matters to a broader public than historians, and it is a well-established fact that neither the historian's nor the common man's use of history is politically neutral, which points to the fact that *histoire-mémoire* still plays a societal role. (Nielsen 2005)

The encounters between different sets of historical narratives, interpretations and motives in Tharangambadi are not merely encounters between Danes as opposed to the local inhabitants, as each of the two parts are internally split along lines of religion, agendas, castes, professions, etc. What makes the encounters in Tharangambadi special is the fact that it is not only encounters between political motivations, but also between different phenomenological modes of approaches to the past. Tranquebar was sold in 1845 and apart from Danish actors, who within the last thirty years have been visiting Tharangambadi, the

Danish visitors in general have no memory of the former colony. Danish colonial history has since the second half of the nineteenth century been relegated to the margin of what was regarded 'the history of the nation' and thus not transformed into a *histoire-mémoire*. Although it did not disappear entirely, the level of knowledge of this part of the past has been very low and the buildings in question are not giving rise to any individual or group memories connected to the colonial period. This marginal role is opposed to the high knowledge of colonial history in general in Tharangambadi, which is due to the impact British imperialism has had on India, and also to the fact that some inhabitants have memories of the period of their own, or know of it from close relatives, and in addition live in a physical environment, where the traits of the colonial period are still visible. The colonial history is thus easily conceived of as part of *our* history to the inhabitants of Tharangambadi, which leads us to notably two mnemonic phenomena in the perception of the past that can with advantage be described in phenomenological terms.

The American philosopher Edward S. Casey enumerates a list of different mnemonic modes ranging from the primary short term memory, through social reminiscing to the commemoration by entire communities where the events commemorated by far transcend the life time of the individual. Of special interest in this context is the notion of commemoration as well as place memory-the latter is a sense of familiarity with the place varying from a vague feeling of 'having been here before' to a regular dwelling in or inhabitation of the place (Casey 1987: 190ff). Place as well as physical artefacts function, according to Casey, as strong reminders of a certain past. (Casey 1987: 93-99) This observation is in line with the notion of regions, introduced by the British anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000)-that is a grid of junctions made up by semantically important places that are known through former experiences, memories and movements, and that is vital to the human sense of orientation. Memory might thus be triggered when moving or staying in a place or a region, which is why physical artefacts such as memorial stones and also ordinary buildings or even landscapes often play an important role in the memory of a certain past-whether it is a fully private or a social historical past that is being remembered. Place memory and artefacts as reminders play a crucial role in the encounter.

There is, however, also a social aspect also to memory as introduced by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950), who asserted that memories are always influenced by the social framework surrounding the individual. In line with this argument the British anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989) argues that societies retain memories in the form of ritual or celebrations and these certainly play a role in the transmission of this part of the past. The social element of memory is, however, also relevant to the recall of the past that took place in the interview situations of my fieldwork. According to Casey, the mode of commemoration consists of social situations in which more individuals jointly

revive memories, whereby the individual memories are supplemented by additional perspectives and the past thereby renegotiated (Casey 1987: 217ff). This social situation has indeed been influencing my interviews where more family members often took part and in which my own perspective on the past was also at work and contributing to the outcome of the dialogue.

Danish and Indian attitudes towards colonial history

In the following section an outline of the political debates on the use of history in the two countries is attempted in order to illuminate some of the driving logics actively influencing the encounter. However the political level implied in the use of history is not always manifest to the users themselves and though determinant, the actual outcome is often considerably more blurred than the distinct logics that are sketched out here.

Tranquebar and Danish interpretations of the colonial history

The minor role colonial history has long played in most of the dominant versions of Danish history owes much to the fact that this perception of history is directed towards the Danish components of the past, meaning the national community, which consists of a culturally and ethnically defined unity. This perception of history has its equivalent all over Europe and became the dominant political form of communal identification in the new nation states emerging in the nineteenth century. By focusing on a unitary history of the people through time, the politics of identity in the early nation states were from the outset genealogically oriented towards a national cohesiveness.

The mental-historical predecessor of this national awareness was a patriotic sense of loyalty towards the prince and the state, not necessarily understood through linguistic, cultural or ethnic categories. This form of patriotism was ousted by nationalism at the time of political changes, but was retained in the form of the clipped monarchy, which came to form a separate national rallying point in the new national consciousness. Carrying the structure of an older perception of state and territory, patriotism is important to understand when dealing with the perception of colonial history, since territories that are tied to the nation state only by virtue of the king are, strictly speaking, unimportant to nationalism in its pure form. In what could be called a national-patriotic frame of perception, colonial history constitutes an exotic annex to the national history, often mixed with undertones of nostalgia playing on the loss of something 'once Danish'. (See Flott & Laursen 2007, Brøndsted 1952-53, Petersen 1946, Larsen 1907)

During the last few decades, however, this national-patriotic frame has been accompanied by a new critical alternative turning against what is conceived of as an excluding nationalism, and a national history that no longer conforms to the political realities. The showdown between old forms of narrating national history and its critics takes numerous forms that will only briefly be dealt with

here. Among these forms a tendency which might be understood as a new ethics of memory, stands out and is particularly interesting in our context. The principal idea in this paradigm, which has evolved in the aftermath of World War II, comprehends the common national conception of history psychologically, as a kind of collective consciousness in line with individual consciousness, which needs to remember and deal with the problematic parts of its own past, in order to understand itself on a deeper and more sound level, and to avoid repeating old mistakes. The new paradigm was at first an internal European phenomenon closely linked to the experiences of the Holocaust and violent nationalism getting out of control, but was later supplemented by the voices from the former European colonies, demanding an equal remembrance of past atrocities committed outside Europe and long before World War II. Although turned against nationalism, the new paradigm of memory ethos considers national history as being momentous for national-self perception and does in that sense, never really detach itself from a comprehension of history as a prolonged collective memory, but rests willy-nilly on the premises of the very perception of history that it is criticizing (Nonbo Andersen 2009).

In a Danish context the new paradigm of remembrance is expressed in a pronounced guilty conscience about Denmark's share in the transatlantic slave trade, and the colonial project as such. (See amongst others Jensen 2005, Larsen 2008, Hansen: 2004-2005 [1967-1970]) Comparatively, Tranquebar appears to be one of the least problematic of the former Danish colonies: slavery was not its *raison d'être* as in the Danish West Indies, and the Gold Coast of Guinea; the trading post was established following a legal agreement with the local prince and sold in 1845-some time before the British conquest of India had reached its climax. But following the sketched paradigm of remembrance, the historical accounts (both academic and popular), as well as the slide into oblivion of this chapter of the national history, have come under suspicion for being a sign of an (intended) national repression. This leaves the approaches to the Danish period in Tharangambadi in an ambiguous position, in which indignation over Danish colonialism is almost as hard to carry through as it is difficult to ignore the problematic sides of colonialism: often resulting in peculiar blurred mixtures of the two outlined logics.

The Indian dispute concerning history

Whereas the Danish debate on Danish colonial history is still minor compared to other historical debates, the Indian equivalent is considerably more tense, and linked to direct political implications (Lal 2003; Harris 2003). The attempt of Indian nationalism to define a common national history has proved to be quite complicated in a country divided by languages, religions, castes, classes and regions. The dispute of history stems from the later period of the British raj, was settled for a while in the immediate aftermath of the Independence, but reached new heights from the 1970's onwards (Lal 2003). The present dispute could

largely be described as a dispute between Hindunationalists, attempting to let *hindutva* play the role of the essentially uniting factor defining the Indian people. In the formulation of *hindutva* Hinduism has often been criticized for conforming to a Brahmin version, favouring the higher castes and Sanskrit, and championing its modern heir Hindi as the natural national language. The attempt to rally India under *hindutva* is thus problematic for large sections of the population.

In southern India, and especially in Tamil Nadu, the *hindutva* version of the common Indian history has long been challenged by the Dravidian movement, objecting to what is regarded as Brahmin supremacy; it opposed the socially stigmatizing caste system, which in its interpretation stemmed from a Brahmin version of Hinduism: a domination which the former attempts to counter by insisting on a distinct Dravidian culture, language and identity that in some versions even predates the Sanskrit based culture (Arooran 1980; Geetha & Rajadurai 1993; Pandian 1996: 3325 ff). The ideological basis of the movement was passed on to the two dominating political parties in Tamil Nadu, DMK and AIADMK, which initially also opposed Brahmin domination. The modernistic, progressive ideas, characterizing the Dravidian movement have some similarities to Nehru's progressive visions for India that were oriented towards a future freed of the impeding traditions that had partly been defined and realized by the British raj. By claiming a different origin and a distinct culture, however, the Dravidian movement was and still is regarded as a threat to national Indian unity by its opponents (Pandian 1993).

The Indian dispute over history thus directly affects major discussions of identity politics, and the power to define a national collective memory as retained by history: discussions that are to an extent echoed, even when dealing with the Danish colonial period in Tharangambadi and are therefore of interest in this context. Although less accentuated, a similar debate is found in Denmark in which an element of identity politics is certainly present. As mentioned, the conceptions of history sketched above are logics which are often blurred when it comes to concrete actors. Regardless of which of the two categories they mainly fall under, it counts however for a great number of the Danish actors in Tharangambadi (sightseeing tourists, NGOs as well as academic researchers) that they consider the colonial history as an important part of the Danish history and thereby agree that dissemination of its knowledge and preservation of its remains are important (See also Jørgensen 2008: 6).

Converging Histories

When asking to the history of the town, I was most often given answers turning on three main nodes mentioned in the introduction, which reveal some of the central approaches to the Danish as well as the colonial period as such. As they are at the same time weaved into the different Danish approaches as outlined above, they could accordingly be termed points of convergence in the encounter

between different approaches to the same past. For that reason these examples are applied as a prism for the study in the following pages.⁶

Fort Dansborg

‘The British came to trade (...). People in India bought the foreign products because they were fairly decent and colorful. As time went by they captured the whole country. They became popular because of their trading skills and used the king and queen as marionettes. And in this way Tharangambadi was enslaved by the fort.’

(24-year-old fisherman, Tharangambadi)

During the Danish period Fort Dansborg greeted the foreign newcomers arriving by sea. Today only fishermen arrive from this side, but the fort, which is now one of the best-preserved remnants of the Danish period, figures on numerous historical drawings of the town, and is still used as a logo by different Danish players.⁷ The fort, together with other buildings of the colonial period, is the manifest evidence of former Danish presence in town, although particular Danish elements are hard to spot in a construction style that is best characterized as ‘western’, with a distinct admixture of Indian elements. Only a few buildings such as the New Jerusalem Church directly reveal their Danish affiliation.⁸ Despite these traits, however, these buildings make up the pivotal point of much of the recent interest in Tranquebar – especially the interest taken by Danish tourists on short term visits, and also by the NGO the Trankebar Association and the National Museum that are both involved in different ways in the restoration of the buildings (Jørgensen 2008).

Whereas memories of Danish presence at the Danish West Indies were long being kept alive by former civil servants and their families, and made known to a wider public through popular biographies etc., no such active efforts to commemorate Tranquebar seem to have taken place, which might be explained by the negligible number of ‘ethnic’ Danes present at the time of the sale. This might also explain why historian Kay Larsen already in 1907 wondered why so little was known of the former Danish colony, Trankebar (Larsen 1907). As Danish colonialism and colonial history was somewhat marginalized for long, and Danish individuals who experienced the colonial period in Tranquebar have long been dead, seemingly without transmitting their experiences in a popular form, the colony seems gradually to have slipped out of a popular historical tradition, and has thereby lost the continuous recognition characterizing the *histoire-mémoire*. In that sense the past of Tranquebar has to most Danes become a past which might be exciting, but which is also marked by a high degree of ignorance and appears as deeply foreign and unfamiliar to present visitors. This might explain why much of the new interest in Tranquebar is centred on the tangible remnants of former Danish activities: a landscape of ruins in which the historically informed fantasy-not impeded by any memory or tradition of remembrance-might wander

freely, but which also constitutes a frozen structure, where later changes and other uses fade away. It is thus very likely that Tharangambadi, without the conspicuous remnants of the Danish period, would have attracted much less attention than is the case today.

The Jail Bungalow

Whereas the fort, for most Danish visitors, stands out as one of the most visible expressions of former Danish presence, in a local context it is the emblem of the British period. Colloquially the fort is referred to as 'the jail bungalow' and is mainly tied to connotations of violence (Grønseth 2007: 34) in the form of soldiers/police; the well in which criminals were presumably hanged and slid out into the sea; in other versions to molestations of local women by the British, which is even found in versions stemming from the period after the independence. One of my informants claimed these molestations-and not the conversion into a museum-to be the reason why the former government of Tamil Nadu chose to restrict public access to the fort. Nevertheless, there are also more positive versions that are connected with the fort, which reflect a later use of the compound: the particularly sweet water from the well in the other fort is often mentioned and especially elders of the fishermen's community seem slightly annoyed by the fact that the compound today is restricted outside the opening hours of the fort museum. Thus, the historical narratives connected to the fort-consisting of individual memories and stories told by older relatives-are quite clearly associated with the British period. Some of the stories might stem from history classes in the local school; most of them, however, do not appear in the locally produced historical guide book, *Reminiscences of Tranquebar*, which many mention as their source of knowledge of the town history. A special set of stories, dealing with a subterranean passage to Thanjavur, might refer back to the time before the British. It is told that the kings of Thanjavur used the passage when they wished to speak to the Danish king/the Danes, who lived at the fort. These stories are not mentioned in *Reminiscences of Tranquebar* either, but several of my informants said that they had played around the passage as children. The stories possibly reflect an awareness of the fact that colonial power was limited to begin with, and was in concord with the local Indian rulers. Only in connection to these particular stories it is sometimes mentioned that the Danes built the fort.

In general though, the distinction between the Danish and the British period is fuzzy. The centre of the local conception of the colonial period is the independence in 1947 with which the division between a repressive British imperial power and a national Indian freedom movement is so clear cut that any earlier distinctions between colonial powers fade away. None of my informants ever mentioned 1845. One mentioned the Danish sale, but explained it as a decision taken by Gandhi to send out all the whites from India! It could thus be argued that the distinction between the Danish and the British period arises only in the very moment when Tranquebar is being staged and conceptualized as a former

Danish colony-a phenomenon I will deal with more thoroughly in later sections.

Both Danish and local approaches indicate that the Danish period has in some sense been forgotten, although there are certain discrepancies. The only historical junctions left in Tharangambadi today are a handful of buildings, graves and the military layout of the old city, which speak their own silent language. It holds for the critical as well as the affirmative Danish current that the past in Tharangambadi lends itself to contemplation, but is essentially forgotten. To decipher the remnant historical sense one has to rely on historical accounts and depictions. Likewise the Danish period has fallen into passive oblivion among members of the fishermen's community. In that sense their approach too is marked by the fact that it needs historical accounts to certify those parts of the past. Many of my informants told me that they were not able to recount the 'real history', and that I should turn to the books at the local library.

The clearest difference between the locals and some of the Danish approaches to the buildings are related to the phenomenological level. The buildings testify to a specific past to the Danish spectator that, although quite unknown, is still regarded as important. In addition, a certain ideal of authenticity characterizes much of the restoration work carried out by the Danish actors. Briefly summarized, this ideal is due to a sense of growing discrepancy between past and present that has been felt in Europe since early modern times due to the departure from stable traditional life forms. The result is, among other things, a need to preserve relics from the past in their original form, in order to save them from what is felt as the relentless advance of time (Nora 1984 xxiii ff., Lowenthal 1985: 391-406). This ideal of authenticity has however gained global propagation during the twentieth century and is as such not specific to the Danish alone, but could just as well be observed in Indian partners of the National Museum engaged in restoration work in Tharangambadi such as INTACH (Jørgensen 2008).

In contrast to those types of Danish approaches that have specific interest in the buildings, the approach of the fishermen is not shaped by the obsession for preserving authentic buildings, but is characterized by the dwelling perspective in which specific artefacts and places might remind of the past but which is less dependent on an 'authentic' appearance as the buildings do not merely serve as reminders of a specific period, but are embedded in a larger net of knowledge (Ingold 2000). The opposition between a heritage-oriented approach to the old buildings and an approach marked by a dwelling perspective is thus in no way unique to Tharangambadi and could just as well be found anywhere in Denmark or India.

Ziegenbalg, the Schools and the Forgotten Mission

- I'm here to study the history of Tharangambadi.
- Ziegenbalg!

- Ziegenbalg?
- German!
- German?
- He was the first protestant. The first Tamil book was printed in the New Jerusalem Church.
- (...)
- How was Tharangambadi before Ziegenbalg arrived?
- I wasn't born at that time.
- But maybe your older relatives have told you about it ...?
- The only thing they told was this: Only after Ziegenbalg arrived our country was developed. Ziegenbalg is not only famous in India but all over the world.

(70-year-old retired teacher, Tharangambadi)

Probably unintended, the sending out of the two German missionaries, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, by the Danish King Frederik IV in 1705, became the starting point of the Protestant Church in India and the Lutheran World Mission. With wide global consequences and receiving some international fame, the event seems a date of remembrance in Denmark, and the names of the two missionaries could be expected to be known to a wider public. This, however, is not the case. Although Ziegenbalg and Plütschau are often mentioned in Danish historical accounts of Tharangambadi, they often take up an unobtrusive place, and are only rarely mentioned as pioneers in a protestant missionary context. For that reason, visiting Danes without a connection to missionary circles probably react rather uncomprehendingly to the iconic status Ziegenbalg enjoys locally. Whereas from a local perspective most of the other European players of the colonial period make up quite a faceless group, the life and work of Ziegenbalg, complemented by a couple of other missionaries, notably Plütschau and Gründler, constitute a true turning point in the history of the town.

The local Ziegenbalg

According to the Norwegian anthropologist Christian Grønseth the local Christian narrative concerning the history of the mission is centred on Ziegenbalg's struggle with the unjust colonial master on behalf of the local population (Grønseth 2007: 32). A similar version of the events is also known in some of the Danish historical accounts of Tharangambadi, which agree that the missionaries at the outset were met with hostility by the colonial administration, which feared that the interaction between the mission and the local population could harm trade (Feldbæk 1980: 91, Brøndsted 1966-68: 225ff). The predominant role of Ziegenbalg in local versions of the Danish period owes much to the fact

that almost all inhabitants of Tharangambadi have attended the Christian schools (Andersen & Schönbeck 2009). Additionally, the annual celebrations of Ziegenbalg conducted by TELC,⁹ including processions through parts of the town, contribute to the remembrance of Ziegenbalg-even for those who might have forgotten their school lessons.

Ceremonies and celebrations are among some of the most effective mnemonic modes of celebrating a collective past, since the past is represented through reaction. The ceremony usually has a repetitive character whereby it creates a sense of continuity through time (Connerton 1989: 43-45), which resembles the remembrance, functioning as a re-actualization of the remembered past. Due to this phenomenon, the memory of Ziegenbalg is vivid in a very different way than the rest of the Danish period. Ceremonies are often characterized by a high degree of rigidity and formality, which doesn't leave room for multiple interpretations-'one kneels or one does not kneel' as Connerton (1989: 48ff) puts it. In this sense the historical Ziegenbalg has been replaced by an almost mythological Ziegenbalg staged as a remarkable exemplar to be learned from-even if one is not Christian. The statue of Ziegenbalg on the corner of Kings Street and Queens Street, mounted to mark the tercentenary of his advent, is flanked by two commemorative tablets, in Tamil and English, that list Ziegenbalg's many 'firsts', concluding with an invitation to follow in his footsteps.

As a key figure in the Christian mission, in control of a large part of the educational institutions, Ziegenbalg might potentially be problematic to the Hindu fishermen. There seems to be a certain jurisdiction prohibiting conversions in the fisherman community (Grønseth 2007: 56), and when I asked directly, members of the community often denied having taken part in the Ziegenbalg celebrations, or replied hesitantly. Still, Ziegenbalg is often mentioned in the context of the history of the town, and is always referred to in a respectful manner, which might be explained by the fact that the majority of the community has attended Christian schools without having converted, and accordingly do not think of the mission as posing a direct threat to their own religion (Andersen & Schönbeck 2009). Additionally, Ziegenbalg is generally respected as a learned person (Price 1996), and the fishermen most often emphasize his scholarly activities-his Tamil scholarship, the establishment of the printing press, and the publishing of the first ever Tamil Bible-which apparently resonates with a deeper Tamil sounding board that transcends his Christianity.

Language is one of the most important markers of a distinct Tamil identity in the early Dravidian movement. Although divided by different religious lines, Ziegenbalg's general popularity might reflect an unspoken, but deeper comprehension of being Tamil that unifies the local inhabitants. This secular comprehension of sharing the same cultural and linguistic origin is repeated in the introductions, written by local civil servants, in *Reminiscences of Tranquebar*, where the relationship between the religious groups are described as an example

of ‘ancient secularism and communal harmony’; ‘LONG LIVE TAMIL’ concludes one of the forewords (Sultan 2008: 7-9). Having done significant work for the early promotion of Tamil, even Ziegenbalg-the missionary sent out by a colonial power-plays an important part in local history and is probably even regarded as ‘one of our own’-that is Tamil-even by not Christian inhabitants. (Grønseth 2007: 70)

Despite the fact that Ziegenbalg was a German sent by colonial power and a potential threat to the local religion, he is nevertheless fitted into a conceptual framework turned against both imperialism and the repression of the Dravidians, which explains the concordant local agreement in letting Ziegenbalg exemplify Tharangambadi’s place in world history.

The unknown Danish missionary history

The exposure of Ziegenbalg as the most tangible and living local memory of the Danish period stands in sharp contrast to the oblivion Ziegenbalg and the Danish-Halle mission have been subjected to in the Danish context. The mission plays possibly an even more recessed role in Danish history than colonial history (Jensen 2005).

The key roles in a number of Danish accounts of Tranquebar-academic as well as popular-are performed by entirely different persons such as the colourful characters of Captain Ove Giedde and company deputy Marcelis Michielszoon de Boshouwer, who both were driving forces in the first East Indian expedition; the soldier Jón Ólafsson, and the later Governor Peter Anker (Larsen 1907, Brøndsted 1952-53, Lorentzen 1977, Gregersen 1986, Wagner 2006, Bredsdorff 1999, Feldbæk 1980, Flott & Laursen 2007). Although none of the above mentioned would have qualified as Danish had present day borders been fixed at that time-Ove Giedde originated in Scania in presentday Sweden, Boshouwer was Dutch, Jón Ólafsson Icelandic, and Peter Anker Norwegian¹⁰ -they are nevertheless regarded as Danish in the sense that they represented the secular Danish state in different ways. The missionaries on the other hand were sent out by the king, but never represented the state directly, which might add to the fact that they are generally seen as less important in the Danish context.

The germ of oblivion of the Tranquebar mission is found in the historical conditions, characterizing the envoy of the first missionaries. In the Ceylon contract from 1618, King Christian IV had already claimed the right to conduct missionary work among the local population (Feldbæk 1980:89). But as with other North European princes of the fifteenth century, the mission didn’t appear at the head of the agenda and the claim wasn’t realized until King Frederik IV decided to send out missionaries to Tranquebar. Because no other protestant king at that time had sent out missionaries to his overseas realm, Copenhagen happened to become the cradle of the Evangelical world mission. The deeper explanation of the princely initiative being somewhat hidden (Iversen 2005: 15),

it is however clear that the mission didn't refer back to the biblical missionary command (Matt 28, 16-20), but rather reflected a royal care for the subjects in the distant parts of the Danish realm (Nørgaard 2005: 41-42)-a continuation of the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (Korsgaard 2004: 67; Nørgaard 2005: 42; Iversen 2005: 15). But as the principle was in conflict with the Danish church, represented by Bishop H. Bornemann, who doubted the legitimacy of sending out missionaries without a preceding vocation from a congregation, the command was forwarded to the Pietistic mission in Halle (Nørgaard 2005: 43-44). In practice the mission became a Danish, German and British cooperation with a clear international touch, and few Danes ever became involved in the work done (Iversen 2005: 15), which was the reason why, at the time of the sale in 1845, it was handed over to the German mission. Accordingly, the Tranquebar mission was already regarded as a separate royal project, and the later historical accounts had a tendency to ignore it (Nørgaard 2005: 44).

The explanation for the little interest in Ziegenbalg in the Danish accounts has to do with the fact that he was German. The idea of a national Danish history, which was formulated during the early nineteenth century, was heavily influenced by several border region wars against Germany. As a result the Danish national history was formulated in direct opposition to German influences. The Tranquebar mission stems from a time when the question of nationality played an inferior role in relation to the state, but the later preoccupation with nationality results in severe difficulties, when dealing with these transnational aspects of history: Ziegenbalg is usually mentioned in Danish accounts of the history of Tranquebar, but his nationality is always latent, which results in different ambiguous attempts to place him as either German or Danish (Jørgensen 2008: 10), which adds to his marginalization in a Danish context.

The difficulties in placing Ziegenbalg as a participant in Danish history mirror the local appropriation of Ziegenbalg, in which the question of his nationality is secondary. What matter locally are his deeds. To a certain extent Ziegenbalg-in line with other important events such as the independence and the tsunami-figures in a local history transcending the religious borderlines, despite the fact that Ziegenbalg in actuality represented the Christian mission. His central position in local accounts of the Danish period displaces Danish elements and the period as such in favour of a stylized icon, which naturally is important to the Christians, and also resonates with the rest of the local community.

While the local knowledge of the Danish period is largely painted by the church, the history of the mission has almost been sorted out in the Danish accounts. In that sense, the Ziegenbalg example illustrates that mnemonic modes other than written historical accounts seem to play a crucial role in what is actually being remembered, and highlights the fact that in order to maintain a vivid memory, the remembered past has to reflect the self perception of the present,

or at least contain the potential to be brought into resonance with it.

The Kind Danes-New Narratives Unfold

‘In those days the British treated us like slaves, but now we are fishing, earning money and taking care of our families. When they ruled they treated us like slaves, but now we don’t know how they did it.’

‘Were there any differences between the Danish and the British?’

‘The Danish people treated us without showing any discrimination. They gave us nets and boats, small boats. But we haven’t got them any longer. They are broken.’

(70-year-old fisherman, Tharangambadi)

‘You said earlier that people were afraid of the Danes in those days?’

‘No, I didn’t say that. I said that when the Danes were here, we didn’t have to be afraid. That was what I said. We would live a happy and luxurious life, if they were here. But now we are living in Tamil Nadu, and we are poor.’

‘What did the Danes do when they were here?’

‘When they came they did a lot of good things for the country. They constructed a port. But when they left they didn’t give anything to the fishermen.’

(Retired fisherman and elderly female rice vendor, Tharangambadi)

‘How was Tharangambadi before Ziegenbalg arrived?’

‘There were no modern facilities. My forefathers were very poor. We all lived in palm huts. 20-30 years ago it was very hard to earn just 20 or 30 rupees, and we had to support a whole family with that in a palm hut. Before Ziegenbalg arrived we lived below the poverty line. When the Danes ruled, it became somewhat better.’

(40-year-old fisherman, Tharangambadi)

Knowledge of the Danish period among members of the fishermen community is only found in fragments, while the colonial period as such is largely coeval with the British period. It seems that this fragmented picture is gradually being completed with new information on the Danes- which probably even includes most westerners who have visited the town in the last thirty years- whenever the question of a possible difference between the Danish and British period is being raised. By filling out the crevices in the old knowledge of the Danish period with new historical knowledge and individual memories, new narratives are emerging. I raised the question of this distinction during my fieldwork studies, and the answers elicited reflected the commemoration aspect in which different perspectives of the same past influenced the stories told. Thus, exactly because my informants’ knowledge of my nationality, the Danish

element of the past becomes more accentuated as it would not otherwise have been. The commemoration situation of the interview generally resembles many of the encounters in Tharangambadi, where Danish actors in direct contact with local inhabitants draw the attention to their own nationality, and thereby define a new conceptual frame for the understanding of the past, in which Danish elements are particularly emphasized. When Grønseth (2007: 34) concludes that there is no mention of a Danish period in the narratives of the fishermen, the reason might simply be that his being a Norwegian hasn't triggered the slumbering fragments.

In the new narratives, the unselfish and wealthy Danes play a leading part as the benefactors and protectors of the town. They sometimes abandon the town and forget their role as protectors, but the connection has ancient roots and is somehow connected to Ziegenbalg. When asked directly about the whereabouts of the Danes, and the purpose of their activities, the answer is often that the Danes came with the single purpose of helping the locals. They came with boats and nets for the fishermen, with money and funding and even planted a hedgerow at the coastline, gathered coins, and long ago they had constructed a port and other larger buildings. Hidden behind these accounts are: knowledge of development aid given by among others DANIDA in the 1980s, a state visit by former Danish Prime Minister Poul Schlüter in 1987, the archaeological excavations and restoration projects by notably the Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum, the restorations carried out by the NGO The Trankebar Association, and the coast protection project by the Bestseller foundation. It counts for all that, with their local perspective, they categorize as 'Danish' without further divisions. The approach to the Danish period of the fishermen has long been retained as fragments of knowledge lying dormant. The awakening of these fragments is first and foremost a result of the above mentioned renewed Danish interests in Tranquebar, a phenomenon that Esther Fihl (1989: 137) already noted in the 1980s, where the local awareness of the Danish period grew considerably in connection with the development project of DANIDA, and the initial preparations for the restoration of some of the buildings.

Due to the fact that the Danish period is very often identified with the British, the local approach to the Danish period is ambivalent, as Tharangambadi forms part of a larger pan-Indian conceptual framework, in which the independence is of major importance. Yet at the same time the picture is blurred, as the new accentuation of the colonial past as Danish leaves the door open to a new advantageous connection to Denmark. In this context the example of the nearby Karaikal and Puducherry which until 1963 belonged to France and still maintain certain favourable connections, plays a part. In Tharangambadi this is expressed as nostalgia of the Danish period covering a kind of wishful thinking.¹¹ By allowing the Danes to play the role of benefactors in the town, it is possible to appeal to a former colonial power for financial support without being disloyal towards the

identification with Indian nationalism, as all one has to do is to confirm a clear difference between the Danish and the British. This resembles a general pattern the Danish anthropologist Helle Jørgensen has traced in the wider local area, where all Europeans other than the British are generally spoken well of.¹² To stress the Danish element of the local history thus makes it special from other nearby towns, and as the Danish elements could be linked to Ziegenbalg, it might even resonate with a wider Tamil feeling of identity.

However, because the Danish period has largely been forgotten by the members of the fishermen community, it is possible to create a narrative that fits with present day's demands and requirements. My informants were all well aware that people were hanged at the fort by what is generally thought of as an unjust colonial power, but because of the lack of remembrance, tradition and historical knowledge of the Danish period, the problematic sides of colonial history can quite easily be ascribed to the British and the positive parts to the Danish.

A non-encounter?

At a certain level, the discrepancies between the different versions of the Danish period indicate a communication gap between Danish actors and the fishermen community. Neither the different political efforts that motivate a number of the Danish efforts to make Tranquebar known to a wider Danish public, nor the *realpolitik* characterizing some of the more business oriented Danish actors desiring good relations with the economically growing India, seem to be known to members of the fishermen community. In this sense the encounters between different Danish actors and members of the fishermen community could be labelled a non-encounter, as the deeper motivations behind the visible activities of the other have apparently remained hidden to all parts. Consequently, none of my informants seemed to be aware that the reason why so many Danes were visiting Tharangambadi, is to a considerable extent due to a secular historical interest, and that much of the restoration work carried out very often reflect the view that Danish colonial history receives very little public attention in Denmark. One told me that he had noticed that the Danes often wished to see the old gravestones,¹³ and another that the Danish tourists often watch Ziegenbalg's statue, but when I asked them why, they replied that they didn't know the reason. A fisherman, who collected old coins in his spare time in order to sell them to tourists, told me in detail about different coins he had found that proved that the town had once been an important trade post, but when asked why the tourists were interested in buying the coins, he suggested that it was due to the high profit that they could gain by selling them in Denmark. In the same manner several of my informants pointed out that they had once received financial assistance, which for inexplicable reasons had ceased.

Although there are considerable differences in the ideas, interests and motives lying behind Danish actors in Tharangambadi, they are generally regarded

as a homogeneous group by the members of the fishermen community, who observe that restoration work is carried out, funds and tools are given, and people are visiting etc., but who do not seem to have been informed of why Tranquebar matters that much to the Danish. Except for Danish researchers and other Danish actors staying in Tharangambadi for a longer period, the importance of Tamil identity and history as opposed to Indian history in general, is presumably hidden to many Danish visitors in Tharangambadi, for which reason phenomena such as the local popularity of Ziegenbalg will probably seem somewhat intriguing. I found myself being quite sceptical to the praises of Ziegenbalg due to my previous knowledge of the role of missionaries in other parts of the former Danish colonial realm: a knowledge that for a while prevented me from realizing that there might be good reasons for his popularity, and from accepting the answers given as more than just an attempt to please me. Although the narratives of different Danish and local actors converge, and the Danes and locals move within the same place, the deeper motivations behind the visible acts stay hidden. A non-encounter it is however, only on a political level, precisely because the activities in themselves set up new frames of interpretation of the past. Regardless of the major differences between the Danish actors involved in Tharangambadi during the last thirty years, their very presence in town has left marks that might under certain circumstances be reinterpreted as part of the history of the town.

Concluding Remarks

Although there might indeed be good reasons to enhance the general knowledge of Danish colonialism by engaging in the preservation of the cultural heritage in Tharangambadi, or visiting the town in order to learn more about it, the discrepancies between the different versions of the past raise the question whether evoking the memory of the Danish period in Tharangambadi, and thereby involving a whole town in a memory project initiated by Danish actors, is desirable to the local inhabitants at all. Bearing in mind that the colonial past is problematic and still hasn't been settled in India, one might ask if a constant reminder of this period is effectively blocking any attempt to reach a settlement and think ahead. As briefly mentioned, several attempts to throw off the yoke of the colonial past, by a complete rejection of using history as a legitimating factor, have already seen light in modern India (Kaur 2007).

On the other hand, the encounters of history in Tharangambadi could also be interpreted as examples of a past forgotten almost entirely by all parts, whereby it creates new openings and possibilities that might be of benefit to all. It is not my intention to decide, whether oblivion might be preferable to remembrance in this case. Instead I wish to draw attention to the fact that although the political motives behind any use of history are important to concrete actions being realized, the intentions are easily disorganized by mnemonic phenomena that are not always in concord with the initial intentions, but might create other memories- and even more important, often do so without it even being noticed.

The example of the fort thus indicates how the preoccupation with buildings is often a sign that the past has already been effectively forgotten. Due to their continued affiliation with the past, the maintenance of physical structures might seem the most effective way in which to hold on to that past. The buildings as well as other artefacts do guarantee remembrance of a specific past, but might as well remind of a lot of other pasts-conditioned by the use and framework of perception. Despite their tangible and enduring character, the mode of communication of artefacts is thus fragile.

The example of Ziegenbalg, the mission and the schools, on the other hand demonstrate that - although they require active efforts and engagement - other mnemonic modes might be considerably more effective than physical structures, when it comes to remembering a specific past. But it also shows that the past remembered has to fulfil a certain function, or at least resonate with the present needs and interests. Additionally, politically defined frameworks of history do have some influence on what is being remembered or forgotten.

Finally the emerging narratives illustrate the creative potential of oblivion, the intimate link between individual memories and comprehensions and larger conceptions of the past, which cause a sense of gradual transition between events transcending the lifetime of the person and individual memories. Consequently the new narratives cannot simply be viewed as veiled appeals of financial support, as they reveal new layers of meaning during certain circumstances.

The narratives linked to the three points of convergence are consequently fine examples of the fact that activities such as development aid, missionary work, relief work etc-which in the donor countries is often conceived as a distant and somewhat abstract aid to anonymous people in need-and even simple tourism, historical interest and restoration of buildings leave their footprints in a local context, enter into history and thereby later interpretations and conceptions of the past; a fact which might seem obvious but is nevertheless often ignored.

Notes

- 1 The ethnographical field data in this paper stems from my interviews and participant-observations in Tharangambadi in January 2008, where I worked as a field assistant to Professor Esther Fihl researching modes of memories and oblivion among the fishermen. As my fieldwork was focused on the fishermen community, I have only spoken to a limited number of Christian inhabitants and none of the Muslims. There might be considerable differences in the local narratives according to religious divisions. For a fuller account of the local approaches to the past see Jørgensen 2008 and Grønseth 2007.
- 2 In the following the name Tranquebar will be used when referring to the period 1620–1845 or Danish history, while Tharangambadi denotes the present town.

- 3 There are a number of very different Danish actors present in or visiting Tharangambadi representing different approaches to the Danish colonial history, ranging from individual tourists passing by the region, visitors with relations to Danmission, which has historical ties with Tranquebar; representatives of the NGO The Trankebar Association—an association of amateur historians engaged in renovation of some of the colonial buildings; The Bestseller Foundation involved in development aid; and the National Museum working on a number of different research projects and renovation work. When speaking of Danish interest, visitors etc. in the following pages, I refer to a Danish visitor without any specialized, preliminary knowledge or specific tasks (such as researchers or representatives of missionary organizations) of colonial history who would most often approach Tranquebar. But it is of course a generalized picture. I will however assert that even researchers or Danish representatives of the church are largely understood as just ‘Danish’ by the local inhabitants who do not necessarily differentiate between the visitors, as the differences are not always obvious to a third party.
- 4 E.g. the art project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* 2006; Pia Arke: *Scoresbysundhistorier* 2003.
- 5 The colonial history has received limited though continuous attention notably from historians and anthropologists throughout the twentieth century and varying attention in the public sphere; however during the last ten years a more steady and frequent attention can be observed in public media such as news papers, magazines etc. (Nonbo Andersen 2009)
- 6 I am grateful to Helle Jørgensen, who has contributed vital information and useful comments during the research and writing of this paper and to Jegan P. who acted as interpreter during the interviews and who has provided this study with invaluable information.
- 7 E.g. the logo of the Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum, or the front picture often used on the webpage of the Danish NGO The Trankebar Association
- 8 The front gable of the Church is embellished with the monogram of the Danish King Frederik IV
- 9 Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, the heir to the Danish-Halle Tranquebar mission
- 10 Entries in Wikipedia sometimes present an illustrative picture of how the nation state is today being projected on to earlier times. In the Danish version of the headword ‘Tranquebar’ different representatives of the colonial administration are dominating. The Swedish version concentrates on the fact that Ove Giedde was from Scania. The German version pays specific attention to Ziegenbalg, etc.

- 11 Jørgensen, personal communication.
- 12 Jørgensen, personal communication.
- 13 Some of Jørgensen's informants explain the Danish visits at the churchyards as signs of forefather worshipping (Jørgensen, personal communication).

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The fishing community and heritage tourism in Tarangambadi

Raja H Swamy*

Abstract

The growth of tourism in Tarangambadi has benefited in several ways from the post-tsunami reconstruction efforts of the state government. While fisher people are being relocated to a new inland housing complex about 590 meters from the coast, the area of historic Tranquebar comprising the southern section of Tarangambadi is being claimed by a variety of tourism interests seeking to develop the area's 'heritage' sites. This paper argues that the cultural encounter embodied in the relationship between the growth of tourism and the displacement of the fishing community is centred on a process of silencing that is central to the hegemonic production of place in Tarangambadi. The state and central government's neo-liberal orientation provides a central basis for silencing the spatial claims of the fishing community by devaluing artisanal fishing as an activity, and promoting tourism as a means to expand the GDP. Simultaneously, the production of heritage involves a selective reading of the colonial past where the fishing community is conspicuously absent. A critical re-encounter with the historical geography of Tarangambadi's fishing community and the fishing complex it belongs to can provide a tentative direction towards unravelling this process of silencing.¹

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between post-tsunami reconstruction of housing for the fishing community and the development of tourism in Tarangambadi. Driven by two distinct sets of priorities, tsunami housing and tourism are radically altering the geography of the village in ways that raise serious questions about post-disaster planning. It is increasingly evident that an economic development agenda predicated on encouraging tourism is laying

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claim to spaces once inhabited by fisher people, especially in areas identified with historic Tranquebar.

The process is leading towards sharpening the physical boundaries between the fishing community and the areas being targeted for tourism development. This spatial consolidation driven by the political economy of tourism is aided by the state government's relocation agenda which initially sought to pressure the fishing community into accepting relocation by using the lure of free housing and the threat of not assisting with repairs of damaged houses within 200 meters of the High Tide Line (HTL) (Government of Tamil Nadu 2005a). This paper argues that a critical understanding of Tarangambadi's post-tsunami spatial dynamics requires an investigation of three interrelated facets: first, the state government's post-tsunami relocation agenda, and the partial subversion of its intended outcome by the fishing community aided by an important NGO ally. Second, the policy-level biases which marginalize the fishing community's economic interests by relegating them to the category of 'humanitarian' aid while promoting tourism as a 'national priority' (Government of India 2007:247). Third, how the pursuit of 'heritage' tourism embodies the silencing of a village's historical geography, and marginalizes the fishing community by denying its historical agency. This silencing is strategic because it is intimately tied to exclusionary spatial claims driven by the political economy of tourism and the presumed needs of its intended consumers.

In investigating post-tsunami spatial dynamics in Tarangambadi several bodies of literature stimulated the core questions explored in this paper relating to the political economy of neo-liberalism and the relationship between the contemporary production of heritage and the contested terrain of history. Post-disaster contexts remain woefully under theorized outside concerns of effective delivery of relief and succour by humanitarian and state institutions. This remains so even as increasing evidence points to the coalescing of neo-liberal economic agendas and post-disaster interventions (Klein 2007). Not only are disasters events that reveal the stark underpinnings of social orders with all their contradictions (Blaikie 1994; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002; Oliver-Smith 1996; Lewis 1999; Middleton 1998; Bankoff, Frerks, and Hilhorst 2004), but they also are fundamentally spatial events revealing the contradictions within these social orders. Yet even as anthropological studies of disasters focus productively on the relationship between location and vulnerability, they fall short of considering the spatial contradictions of the post-disaster political economy in the context of neo-liberalism. An important body of research that can contribute to addressing this lacuna is the impressive work on space and spatiality by geographers (Harvey 2005; Massey 2005; Lefebvre 1991) and political ecologists (Arabindoo 2005; Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Agrawal 2005), as well as anthropologists investigating the spatial dimensions of neo-liberal governance (Ong 2006; Ferguson 2006, 1990; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Tsing 2005).

Methodology

Field research for this paper included interviews with fishermen and fisherwomen residing in the northern and southern sections of the village and in the newly constructed houses in the northwest. Additionally interviews were conducted with architects of SIFFS, INTACH and independent property developers, construction workers on sites, and managerial and working staff of hotels. GPS mapping of housing relocation, significant tourism and related development works, the sea wall and beach space use was undertaken using a Garmin GPS unit and mapped and analyzed with Quantum GIS-Postgres/PostGIS and Google Earth software. Relevant off-site research included interviews of district officials, officials in charge of the World Bank/ADB funded post-tsunami reconstruction program, representatives of district level, regional and national fishing community organizations, NGO staff in Nagapattinam and fishing community historians in Chennai and coastal ecologists in Bangalore. In referring to Tarangambadi, I use the term 'village' in order to avoid inadvertently legitimating the problematic dichotomy between the northern section of the village and its southern historic part. This dichotomy is at the heart of the current efforts to bifurcate the village and dislocate its fishing residents from areas sought for tourism development.

Tsunami and relocation

The tsunami of 26 December 2004 devastated the fishing communities of Nagapattinam district. With its higher concentration in the low-lying northern part of the village, Tarangambadi's fishing community suffered 304 deaths, 904 completely damaged and 266 partially damaged houses, the loss of 128 fibre boats, 200 Kattumarams, and fifteen trawlers (PRAXIS 2005).² In addition engines, nets, ice boxes and other fishing related gear, household property, valuables and more were also lost. The state government's response to the disaster bears detailed analysis as it effectively set in motion the processes that characterize today's reorganization of Tarangambadi's socio-economic geography. The primary objective pursued by the government was to relocate fishing communities throughout the state from their present habitations to new locations inland. The government announced: 'Many non-government organisations, voluntary agencies, corporate houses, charities, public and private sector enterprises etc have been in contact with the state government to participate for the permanent relocation and rehabilitation of people affected by this calamity (Government of Tamil Nadu 2005b).' Setting a framework that required interested organizations to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with District Collectors and stipulating norms and standards with regard to the quantitative and qualitative issues pertaining to housing construction, the government order noted in its first annexure that land for construction 'will be provided by government.'

Thus the stage was set two weeks after the tsunami, for a housing agenda

that was to be dominated by NGOs that signed MoUs with District Collectors committing them to build houses on lands provided by the government, which in effect absolved them of any responsibilities with regard to the contentious issue of relocation. If G.O. (Government Order) 25 sets the basic framework for the NGO–state relationship in executing a housing construction agenda that implicitly advances the dislocation of the fishing communities, G.O.172 spelled out the government’s displacement strategy in clear terms (Government of Tamil Nadu 2005a). Invoking the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification (CRZ), the state government laid out its criteria for relocation based on relative distance of existing habitations from the HTL, and the willingness of coastal residents to move to the new location (NCRC 2005; Sridhar 2005). Crucially, the G.O. makes acceptance of new housing conditional on the recipient formally relinquishing all claims to legal or de facto coastal habitations and uses. The offer of ‘a newly constructed house worth Rs.1.50 lakh free of cost’ with insurance and title (patta), was a very attractive incentive for Tarangambadi’s fisher households, most of whom live on untitled (non-patta) land and engage in fishing. However the incentive was also accompanied by the government refusal to help repair damaged houses in the area less than 200 meters from the HTL. The issue of relocation is no simple matter for the fishing community given that proximity to the sea is central to the viability of their livelihoods. The present location of fishing villages along the coast may be deemed unsafe in the aftermath of the tsunami, but it also offers a number of important advantages that can be irrevocably lost as a result of relocation. Fishing on the Coromandel coast predominantly carried out by beach landing craft that are typically launched from, landed and parked on beaches. Beaches also serve as storage spaces for other fishing related gear such as nets, ice boxes, out-board motors and so on, as work-spaces for net, boat and engine repairs, unloading, distribution (auctioning and sale), drying and packing of fish. These post-landing processes are time-bound and are predominantly the economic domain of women.³

Additionally, proximity to the sea is crucial for fish sighting, ideal for embarking on trips at dawn, and for making unplanned trips especially in the event of catches by others (Sridhar 2009). Moreover, the beach also serves the recreational, social and cultural needs of the fishing community, and is a thoroughfare linking villages with one another. These locational advantages are disregarded in the housing reconstruction agenda which focuses on a limited conception of lived space centring on habitation while disregarding livelihood, and as such have remained the basis for the fishing community’s ambiguous views on new housing. In general, Tarangambadi’s fisher people distinguish between the advantages associated with titled, ‘free’ housing, and those inherent in original coastal habitations. Having made their own determination not only with regard to the relative advantages and disadvantages of relocation, but also estimating the government’s ability to put into practice its stated objectives, one

common objective of fisher households throughout Nagapattinam has been to accept new housing while continuing to retain old habitations or spaces with the anticipation that they will be able to keep both.⁴ The new houses provide safety during the rough season and in emergencies, or as secondary locations for extended families, the elderly or children to reside.⁵ Unanimously, fishermen and fisherwomen insist that their very existence depends on being a coastal people, and efforts to use risks associated with the sea to alienate them from the coast will be vigorously resisted.

The government's relocation agenda was unquestioned by most NGOs engaged in reconstruction throughout Nagapattinam. However in Tarangambadi the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) managed to thwart an all-out relocation of the fishing community. As the largest apex body of fisher cooperative societies in South India, SIFFS is a uniquely membership-driven NGO with origins in the 1970s.⁶ While its main area of operations is Kerala, SIFFS has been expanding efforts to organize Tamil Nadu's fishing community into cooperative societies and providing services related to the economic needs and interests of fisher people. These include marketing, credit, insurance, boat building and repair,⁷ acquisition and distribution of outboard motors, repair services, ice plants, running timber plantations for Kattumaram construction, research and documentation, and advocacy and lobbying for fishing interests with the government. SIFFS took a principled stand on the question of relocation by first conducting a detailed study of the village, assessing damage, and determining the areas that were the most vulnerable to inundation. Using its findings, SIFFS approached the community and offered its assessment on the existing location of houses, especially for those within 200 meters of the HTL. In addition, the community was provided information on the vulnerabilities and drawbacks of the low-lying new inland location, since it was found that some areas of the original village were safer. As a result the fishing community averted en masse relocation and many houses beyond 200 meters of the HTL were repaired or rebuilt in situ by SIFFS (Kuriakose 2005b).

Yet despite SIFFS' efforts to only encourage relocation for those clearly living in high-risk parts of the village, the attraction of a new house offered practically free, coupled with the confidence of being able to retain old houses and sites resulted in a large number of people opting for new housing.⁸ These two characteristics have had much more of an impact on the decision to accept new houses than the fear of remaining exposed to the hazards of the sea. The perception of risk from living in close proximity to the sea, sharpened as it was by the traumatic experience of the tsunami, has to be ultimately weighed against the risks to livelihood from giving up that proximity. Especially among recipients who retained their relatively undamaged old habitations, those who intended to repair and reoccupy damaged or destroyed houses, or those whose shift to the new houses was part of an arrangement within or between households, the risk

most acceptable is that of seeking to keep two houses; one at the new location, and one in the original location. Tacit defiance of the state is after all the reality of the de facto built spaces of fishing communities, and a facet of life for the vast majority of marginalized populations in India.

SIFFS also commenced building houses in the area where 'colony' houses once stood.⁹ While not exactly in situ construction since many of the recipients were those who had lost their homes in areas closer to the coast, this effort by SIFFS ensured that a huge section of the village remained in the control of the fishing community. SIFFS negotiated between individual households in ensuring areas vacated in the northern part of Tarangambadi stayed within the control of the village either as built space beyond 200 meters, particularly in the colony housing area, or as part of expanded plots equal to the size of plots in the new location, on which people could expand their houses if they chose to do so. In this, SIFFS' efforts stand out in sharp contrast to that of the majority NGOs engaged in post-tsunami reconstruction in Nagapattinam, for ensuring that at least in the northern part of the village some of the spatial interests and hence advantages of location enjoyed by the fishing community were defended. That this was not possible in the southern part of the village has to do with SIFFS' inability to pursue its initial recommendations predicated on fishing households remaining in the area and being partners in a regulated and limited tourism agenda coexisting with the fishing economy of the village (Kuriakose 2009).¹⁰ SIFFS was approached by unspecified tourism interests but declined to collaborate with them, and was aware of efforts by institutionally supported as well as independent tourism interests to approach fisher households with offers for their properties in both the northern and southern sections of the village.¹¹ Early post-tsunami habitat mapping exercises conducted by PRAXIS meticulously recorded the presence of a fishing majority in the areas of 'historic' Tranquebar. SIFFS' original habitat mapping of the village, while recording housing type, nevertheless indicated that the areas targeted today for tourism included a mix of habitations with kutcha, semi-pucca, and pucca structures interspersed in the Tranquebar area as well as the southern seafront.¹² It is pertinent to note that while most of the fishing households in this area lived in kutcha or semi-pucca houses, several owned and continue to own large pucca houses with adjoining land. Yet despite having expressed initial intentions to do so, SIFFS did not undertake any repairs or retrofitting activities of fisher houses in the area and perhaps aware of its own limitations as an NGO, tacitly acquiesced in the de facto bifurcation of the village.

Setting the agenda in government policy

The post-tsunami reconstruction agenda intensified the neo-liberal devaluation of artisanal fishing by disregarding economic development needs of the fishing community, and promoting instead a lop-sided humanitarian agenda centred on relocation to free housing. In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami,

the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the United Nations carried out a Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) which sought to summarize damages and losses resulting from the tsunami, and outline a short and medium term plan of recovery (ADB, UN, and World Bank 2005). This report created the framework for the Emergency Tsunami Reconstruction Project (ETRP) of the World Bank and the Tsunami Emergency Assistance Program (TEAP) of the Asian Development Bank,¹³ that together advanced a large-scale plan of reconstruction that policy makers insisted was designed to ‘build back better’ and not merely to restore the region to its former condition.¹⁴

The definitional schema deployed by the JAM’s report is instructive. The economy is delimited at four levels. Firstly, regional specificity: the coastal economy is not ‘well integrated’ into the ‘overall economy’ and thus neither a ‘key driver of growth’ since there is no ‘major industry located in the coastal districts.’ Secondly, sectoral specificity: the fisheries sector contributes ‘a mere 0.6 per cent’ to the state’s GSDP, and as such, the tsunami’s impact on this sector did not affect Tamil Nadu’s ‘economy’. Third, sectoral generality: ‘fishermen, vendors, small entrepreneurs and agriculturalists’ do not contribute to the state’s revenues since they belong to the informal sector. A fourth delimiting assumption informing the World Bank’s vision of the ‘economy’ is in the claim that ‘natural-resource’ based activities are on a long-term declining path.

The JAM Report also pointed out that ‘marginal impact in the short run on the balance of payments can be expected to the extent that shrimp exports and coastal tourism are hit (ADB et al. 2005:44).’ Thus the crux of the distinction between those activities privileged to belong to the economy and those that are not important to it lies in their relative importance for the Gross Domestic Product and the Balance of Payments. This definitional strategy set the stage for how the institutional apparatus of reconstruction took shape—supporting activities that advance the cause of the GDP and BOP while relegating those that do not to the temporary mercies of the World Bank’s ‘humanitarianism’ which involves support for fishing on a temporary, short- to medium-term basis. The long-term goal however remains limited to the promotion of vocational transformation, alternative livelihoods, and diversification of activities towards ‘sustainable’ alternatives (ADB *et al.* 2005:70–72; World Bank 2005:19, 102–108, 214). The bulk of ETRP’s financing, about 87.5 per cent was marked towards housing construction for the affected coastal communities, primarily fishers. However, a decision was taken in early 2005 by the state government that housing construction would be farmed off to the huge numbers of NGOs that expressed an interest in ‘rebuilding communities’ on lands acquired and provided by the government.¹⁵

Meanwhile tourism was touted as a ‘national priority’ in the central government’s eleventh five-year plan of 2007, and ‘heritage tourism’ under the heading ‘Improving India’s existing tourism products further and expanding these to meet new market requirements’ supported appropriately in state-level financing

initiatives, most notably G.O. 155, which introduced generous one-time subsidies for the construction of various grades of hotels in 'less known tourist places' such as Tranquebar (Government of Tamil Nadu 2007). The package also offered soft loans at a 0.1% interest. More recently the state government announced a Rs. 378 lakh tourism development package for Tranquebar, with the first instalment sanctioned for 'landscaping, lighting, signage, planting of saplings, including ornamental plants (Government of Tamil Nadu 2007; Shankar 2008).'¹⁶

Tarangambadi as part of Nagapattinam's fishing village complex

Tarangambadi's village (oor) pachayat is considered the 'head panchayat' for twenty four fishing villages of Tarangambadi and Sirkazhi Taluks in Nagapattinam district. As in most of Nagapattinam's coastal villages, the predominant social group engaged in fishing is the Pattanavar caste, which maintains strong kinship and socio-political ties with other fishing villages along the coast. In general, fishing communities in the Tamil Nadu coast have powerful traditional institutions centring on lineage groups (pangaali) and village (oor) panchayats that organize and regulate social and economic life within and between villages along the coast (Bavinck 2001:48 esp note 5). Communities throughout the Nagapattinam and Karaikal coast believe themselves to be part of a sixty four (or sixty eight) village chain that stretches from Arkattuthurai in Vedaranyam to the northernmost village of Kodyampalayam in Sirkazhi (Bharathi 1999:244; Gomathy 2006). While the exact number of villages in the chain may vary depending on whom one asked, there is a direct correlation between the imagined geographic contiguity along a north-south axis and the social and economic life of the fishing villages. Bharathi's pioneering ethnography of Pattanavar fisher communities in the Coromandel coast provides compelling details of the close integration between spatial categories and socio-cultural life (Bharathi 1999:Ch.2). The fundamental orientation towards the sea enjoins Pattanavar fisher people to view the east as a category associated with livelihood, whereas the west represents the area occupied by people engaged in non-fishing activities. The coastline represents a containing category within which particular features of landscape derive meaning. It also serves as a delineating category, to the west of which lies the generic west domain, the 'outer' zone where non-fishing categories and relationships predominate. Importantly, the area between the habitation space of fishing villages and the shoreline, the sandy beach or kallâram is considered far more important than the areas adjacent to the northern and southern edges of the village, since in this space a wide range of activities relating to livelihood, and also of social, cultural, and religious significance take place. Nevertheless the surf-beaten shoreline adjoining villages in a north-south direction, continuous with the village's kallâram, is considered immensely important particularly for its centrality to communications and transportation in Pattanavar geography. This is most visibly reflected in the continued use of the beach as a transportation route for livelihood as well as social and cultural

purposes.¹⁷ Tarangambadi's history is therefore deeply embedded in the historical geography of the region's fishing villages, tied northwards to Kuttiandiyur, Vellakoil, Perumalpettai and onwards, and southwards to Chandrapadi, Chinoorpettai, Mandapathoor, and so on. This embeddedness in the region's north-south fishing village complex is also borne out in kinship networks that connect the village's fishing households to villages as far south as Aryanattutheru and Akkarapettai in Nagapattinam Taluk.¹⁸

With regard to the economic life of the village, Tarangambadi has at least 1670 active fishermen, and 500 women fish vendors and utilizes about thirty mechanized trawlers anchored off the coast, 200 motorized boats, and a hundred Kattumarams. The daily value of fish traded in the village varies between five to seven lakhs and three to four lakhs, with the peak season falling between June and July (PRAXIS 2005). About 80 per cent of the fish catch is sold to private companies who process and export fish, outside traders and the SIFFS cooperative society while the remaining 20 per cent is controlled by the women fish vendors of the village who sell locally or in regionally important markets such as Sirkazhi, Mayavaram, Nagapattinam and Karaikal. A fishing cooperative society begun in 1956 is headquartered in Tarangambadi, and serves eight other fishing villages, providing loans and subsidies for fishing related expenses, a small allowance to compensate for the lean months of the year, and subsidized diesel. Other institutions that make Tarangambadi an important centre for fishing villages in the region include the office of the Assistant Director of Fisheries and a government hospital.

Tarangambadi as a site for tourism

The southern part of the village was once a fortified enclave of the Danish East India Company. Danish interests in Tranquebar were primarily centred on seeking a foothold in the Coromandel–South East Asia trade, and secondarily in the Danish import of Coromandel goods such as textiles, diamonds, indigo, saltpetre and cotton yarn (Subrahmanyam 1990:169). With mixed luck over thirty years, the Danish company imported cloves, nutmeg, and sandal from Makassar, and carried freight for the Portuguese in Nagapattinam to Tenasserim. In addition to trade, the company was allowed to fortify Tranquebar and collect revenues in and around the village. Despite brief periods of success in the seventeenth century, the Danish presence in Tarangambadi became less important to intra-Asian and Asia–Europe trade which was increasingly dominated by the English and in 1845 the colony, now a Crown property, was ceded to the English East India Company, an event that signified the general decline of Danish power. Nevertheless, two centuries of Danish presence in Tarangambadi left behind an impressive legacy of built structures and cultural intercourse between Europeans and the local Tamil population. It is this legacy that tourism development interests seek to market as 'heritage' products for consumption in contemporary Tarangambadi.

Tourism and relocation

There are three types of interests at work in the development of tourism. On the one hand central and state level governmental initiatives seek to promote 'economic development' through heritage tourism. The belief underlying this approach is that Danes interested in exploring their historical past would bring in foreign exchange and spur development activities in the village generating employment and opportunities through tourism. Similarly motivated are tourism experts such as Nils Finn Munch-Petersen, whose study in 1995 for the Danish government's development arm, DANIDA, called for regulated tourism as a way to promote the 'integrated development' of Tranquebar, which is 'eminently suited as an up-market historical cum beach-resort destination' (National Museum of Denmark 2004:36), and whose present work is described under the headline 'Protection of Tranquebar Heritage and the Creation of Employment Opportunities through Planned Sustainable Tourism Development'¹⁹ Munch-Petersen now heads the 'Heritage/Tourism Group' of the Danish National Museum's (NMD) Tranquebar Initiative, a broad academic enterprise bringing together a wide range of disciplinary expertise to produce research predominantly on various aspects of the Danish colonial encounter in Tranquebar. Then there are capitalist interests such as the Neemrana Group of hotels, a venture of the Indophile French businessman Francis Warciarg, which identifies 'heritage' sites and develops them into hotels for high-end customers throughout India. 'Heritage' from this point of view translates into a high priced commodity that can be offered along with a range of other more common luxuries sought after by tourists. Allied to this effort, but driven by a different motivation is the 'heritage conservation' agenda of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). 'Heritage' for INTACH is about retrieving and restoring specific elements of structural design and retaining an overall sense of aesthetic continuity with an assumed architectural past.

Not only do these interests broadly coalesce on the issue of developing tourism, but a significant level of collaboration also shapes their work. The state government owned Hotel Tamil Nadu, aimed at midrange customers, is leased under Neemrana's management, which also manages the Nayak House as a 'cottage' for the Bestseller Foundation.²⁰ The latter is among five 'vernacular Tamil' houses purchased by Bestseller through its Indian branch, and restored by INTACH, whose architects also restored the Bungalow on the Beach and Gate House for Neemrana.²¹ The first, once the residence of the British Collector, is now a high-end luxury hotel, while the latter is increasingly of interest to tourist groups and families.²² Nayak House, located at the seafront opposite INTACH's office (itself a restored house), is described by Neemrana's website as 'a honeymooners idyllic cottage parked at the edge of civilization with a private sea attached'.²³ INTACH (Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry chapters) is now working with the NMD to commence restoration work on the dilapidated ruins of the

eighteenth century residence of the Danish Governor, the Governor's Bungalow. The funding for this project is channelled through the NMD to INTACH New Delhi, from an anonymous source according to the NMD (Tranquebar Initiative 2005:6). The NMD originally indicated that it intended for the restored building to be used as a hotel or for 'some commercial use (National Museum of Denmark 2004:20-21).' Interestingly, Neerana had also expressed interest in the Bungalow, intending to convert it into another heritage hotel.²⁴ Loosely associated with the above interests is the Trankebar Association, a private Danish initiative that began lobbying for the renovation of the Dansborg Fort.. The Association owns Flora Cottage on Queen Street, a guest house for Danish and international visitors.²⁵

While all the above players engaged in the development of tourism have institutional backing and support, there are others who in anticipation of opportunities for quick profits have entered the scene, and are engaged in prospecting and purchasing properties for their own tourism-related purposes. These players either work loosely with organizations that have institutional backing, or are themselves formally employed by the latter. These include affluent non-resident Indians (NRIs) who have purchased houses for restoration by offering large sums of money to fishing households in the 'historic' Tranquebar area encouraging them to move to 'free' tsunami housing. Given that the government required recipients of new housing to hand over their old houses to the government, it is unclear as to how such purchases were made, or how sellers qualified for new housing. One such NRI who resides in Germany, employed the services of German architects to convert a fisherman's house into an extended bungalow, and the land on which another's stood, into a space where 'friends can relax and enjoy the sea,' or where he 'can meditate on the rising sun'.²⁶ While work on the former reveals the complete shedding of heritage pretences, the latter is more idiosyncratically designed, turning a small sliver of land facing the beach, once the location of a fisher household, into a structure that leaves local fishermen and women puzzled as to its utility or even aesthetic aims. The above individual and his architects worked loosely with INTACH's architects who appear to have been annoyed by the blatant disregard for aesthetic conformity displayed by these freelance private developers, but who nevertheless provided advice on the design of the structure's Mandapam, or stylized roof.

Sharp views of each other reveal much about the ways in which both these groups of architects view their relationship to the place, but also shed light on contemporary dynamics shaping elite concerns with identity.²⁷ INTACH's architects consider adherence to standards of aesthetic fidelity to be an important part of conserving heritage. At the same time, the freelance developers accuse INTACH of being disingenuous in criticizing them for not conforming to an aesthetic order, the contours of which are no more faithful to the cultural history of the village than their own unpretentiously tourism-oriented aesthetic

'divergences'. INTACH's restoration involves careful modifications that retain many of the original features of the structure's internal and external design even if the resulting internal structure lends itself to modern uses, including study rooms, toilets, and so on. However INTACH's strict adherence to 'Tamil vernacular' design principles and a stated commitment to ensuring that the common people are not adversely affected does not preclude outcomes such as those pursued by the freelance developers interested in cashing in on tourism. Moreover, INTACH designed heritage structures are being actively promoted by Neerana as destinations for the more conventional pleasures of beach tourism as much as for the heritage they embody and provide access to.

In addition to the above independent developers, employees of Neerana-run hotels have their own private networks of middle men and agents who approach fishing households with lucrative offers from customers that include film personalities based in Chennai.²⁸ According to a Neerana manager interested buyers prefer to restore existing properties rather than buy land. Fishing households both in the old Tranquebar area as well as those located closer to the presumed border of the fishing village report increasing pressure from agents representing interested buyers. Some question the very idea of heritage since they themselves have formal ownership of houses for generations, and see the village as first and foremost a fishing village.

One such household of seven members has formal ownership of their large house and property for at least seventy years, and its residents maintain that the whole area was once occupied by many Pattinavar families, a claim borne out by the census data compiled by PRAXIS (2005:108–112). The head of this household, a fish trader, pointed out that the primary problem faced by fishermen was distance, and that ongoing efforts to push fishing families out of historic Tranquebar to the new tsunami housing colony was detrimental to their livelihood. Similarly several other fisher households residing in the area report being approached repeatedly by aggressive agents intent on convincing them to part with their houses. Even residents now living in the new housing complex report having been approached in the aftermath of the tsunami by 'outsiders' wanting to buy their houses despite the fact that they were expected to give these over to the government having accepted new housing (as per G.O. 172).²⁹ Meanwhile, in the area adjacent to the Dansborg Fort's southern and western walls a cluster of about thirty five fisher households lived in mostly thatched houses. Most residents of the southern section of this cluster have moved into new housing, and the area is deserted except for a few remaining households.

The western section has a cluster of houses that suffered relatively little damage, and residents here are less than enthusiastic about moving to allotted houses in the new colony.³⁰ They report being coerced frequently by officials and only one house with a legal patta (title) has electricity. After the tsunami, these residents lived in temporary shelters, but severe water logging forced them

back to their original location. Having received no assistance from the government, residents conducted repairs with their own meagre resources within a year of the tsunami. They now believe that the government's plans to restore the 'parade grounds' outside the Fort's entrance include the destruction of their houses, and conversion of the area into gardens and walking paths for tourists. The ostensible reason for relocation provided by officials is 'safety' but residents question how the hotel and its 'rich people' are safe 'close as they are to the sea,' while the government 'and its friends' are so concerned about them.³¹ They also point out that their current location is both close to the beach where they park their boats and store their nets, and enjoys adequate protection from the Fort's walls. Despite evidence of some pucca or semi-pucca houses in the area before the Tsunami (see PRAXIS 2005; Kuriakose 2005a) there is a tacit consensus among NGOs including INTACH and SIFFS that the area around the fort is to be completely cleared of its fisher residents, for tourism.

Thus on the one hand, a combination of institutionally supported and informal efforts are underway, attempting to persuade relatively affluent fisher households to move out of historic Tranquebar, while those with smaller means are being coerced out of the area with less disguised methods. The overall effect of both institutionally supported and informally pursued tourism agendas is to push Tarangambadi's fishing community out of the southern part of the village, which is increasingly viewed as an exclusive zone devoid of fisher households. A Bestseller Foundation video about its work in Tranquebar goes so far as to refer to the 'surrounding fishing villages', conveying the impression that the spatial exclusion its activities help promote are in actuality existential facts on the ground.

History and place

The tourism agenda brings together several distinct perspectives on heritage. While these have different motivations, they coalesce on the goal of producing a sense of place that draws on selective readings of the history of Tarangambadi. This place carries a name, Tranquebar, which once was a vestige of the European mispronunciation of Tarangambadi, adopted by colonial governance, but today stands as a label for the distinct place being produced in the southern part of the village. The importance of this act of naming lies not only in its cultural contradistinction with Tarangambadi, but also in the implicit historical and geographical claims conveyed in its contemporary reproduction. Tranquebar is produced with reference to a reading of the past in exclusive historical geographic terms, where remains of built structures left behind by European rulers, associated religious institutions and homes of members of Indian mercantile classes together constitute markers of a temporal spatiality that does not admit the existence, presence, or agency of the village's fishing community. This despite the fact that aside from its own historical geographic ties to, and construction of the place, the fishing community's pre-tsunami presence in the

historic part of the village was significant: 328 Pattanavar fishing households out of a total of 613 households, or 53 per cent. In the southern seafront area Pattanavars constituted an absolute majority with 61.5 per cent of all households, while in the old Tranquebar town area to the west of the seafront, they remained the largest single social group with 41 per cent (PRAXIS 2005:108). Among the other social groups in the area were Dalits, Muslims and Christians, as well as a small number of Vanniyars. While the religious heterogeneity of the area appears remarkable to outsiders, and government officials are quick to point to the close proximity of Hindus, Muslims and Christians as a symbol of coexistence, no such significance is attached to the presence of such a large number of fisher households in the area.

The NMD's Tranquebar Initiative represents the most complex and wide-ranging effort to achieve a justifiable balance between the desire to produce place as a reservoir of historical knowledge and the presumed socio-economic needs of the village's inhabitants. Yet, of the eight focus areas of the Initiative,³² the only one that deals with the fishing community, the 'Farming/Fishing group' includes two projects building on the twenty five years of ethnographic work of Esther Fihl. A focus area titled the 'Historic Group' includes projects investigating the construction of 'cultural otherness' in colonial Tranquebar, the representations of Tranquebar in Danish literature, and historical interactions between Nordic and Indian medical practitioners, Nordic missionaries and Indian religions, and on intercultural intimacy between Danes and Indians between the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paper seeks to show how the quest to mediate 'heritage' centred on the Danish colonial encounter with the contemporary neo-liberal demands of tourism precludes the acknowledgement of Tarangambadi's fishing community as a subject of history. This is neither conspiratorial nor inevitable, but more likely the result of an uncritical acceptance of dominant assumptions about historicity or lack thereof, of marginalized populations. It is therefore not inconceivable that an academic effort to address this discrepancy remains within the realm of possibility. What is missing is an organic history that views the Indo-Danish encounter as an important moment within a broader and deeper historical current embedded in local and regional cultural understandings of space and time, the contours of which I will attempt to outline below.

Towards a historical geography of Tarangambadi

Fishing in the east coast has a long history stretching back to the Mesolithic era, with archaeological evidence of 'fishing camps' engaged in 'marine food exploitation' on coastal dunes called *teris*, near the tip of the peninsula (Kennedy 2000:196–197; Misra 1989:25). In the early centuries of the Common Era, Greek accounts described the south eastern coast as a busy zone of trade dominated by several market-towns, harbours and ships, as well as diverse communities consisting of traders and local people including fisher people (Ray 2003:49–51).

However it is in Tamil literary sources of that era that we find detailed references to fishing communities in the areas where the great emporia flourished. In sharp contrast to Sanskrit literary accounts of the north that generally referred to fishing communities with varying degrees of contempt (2003:48), Tamil bards provided rich accounts of fishing communities, describing them frequently as constituents of the coast in emporia, towns and villages, with descriptions of their habitations, details of work, and social and economic relations with the wider communities of the region. At least one Sangam poet, Ulocannar (150–200 C.E.) is thought to have been a Parathavar, a member of the fishing community described in the Sangam literature (Zvelebil 1975:275). The *Pattupaatu*, from the same era describes a fishing community living on the coast of the great Chola port of Puhar, or Kaveripattinam, believed to be submerged in the vicinity of modern Poompuhar, north of Tarangambadi. This corpus of literature contains vivid details of the work of fishing including references to the practice of fish-sighting, the use of large nets, various fishing techniques, fish drying, the sale of fish in urban markets, and the prolific presence of fishing villages (Ramanujan 1985 and Takahashi 1995). Tamil poetry from the early first millennium provides substantial evidence of thriving fishing communities on the east coast that were an integral part of the coastal political economy.

Furthermore, research into the hitherto understudied historical relationship between fishing and the development of maritime technologies in the Indian Ocean shows that these communities played a far more central role in the economic history of the region than previously acknowledged. Fishing communities played an important role in the growth of maritime trade contributing to its development by linking the resources of the sea with markets inland or within reach by sea. By providing cargo carrying services, fishing and sailing communities became part of a seafaring complex providing sailors, navigators, and boat builders and developing a storehouse of knowledge and skills vital for sailing and navigation (Ray 2003:30–81, 275–277). From early Greek records of the first millennium to sixteenth and seventeenth century accounts of Portuguese travellers and a host of other Europeans, we learn that local fishermen provided vital navigational assistance once their ships approached the ports of call, as well as local transport using a variety of watercraft including masulas (padagu), dhonis, vallams and kattumarams. Of these craft, the first three have long histories of uses in both fishing and cargo transport (Kentley 2003:127; McGrail et al. 2003:189–194; Roche 1984), while the kattumaram is used even to this day for fishing on the Coromandel coast. Until the advent of the steamship in the late nineteenth century, which resulted in limiting them into ‘marginal fishing activities’ the primary source of skilled labour for seafaring remained maritime coastal communities (Ray 2003:2).

The Portuguese traveller Tomas Pires noted Tarangambadi (Teregamparj) as a Coromandel port along with Kayal, Pulicat, Adiramapattinam, Nagore, Tirumalairayapattinam, Karikal, Tirumullaivasal and Kunimedu in an account

written in the early sixteenth century (Pires, Cortesão, and Rodrigues 1944:271). The village was already a part of the regional maritime trade complex and considered important enough by the powerful states of the era with the arrival of seafaring Marakkayar Muslim traders in the fourteenth century, and the construction of the Masilamaninathar temple by Maravarman Kulusekhara Pandyan early in the same century. What is yet to be established is the relationship between the fishing community and the Marakkayar maritime traders. Tentatively we may assume that this relationship, though certainly reshaped by the introduction of the Marakkayars' own seafaring knowledge and technology, was founded on similar principles as those that governed the coexistence of the fishing economy with the needs and dynamics of maritime trade. An early seventeenth century temple inscription makes reference to the levying of taxes from the village's 'Arya Nattar' community, presumably fishermen (Nagaswamy 1987). By the time the Danes arrived in Tranquebar, the predominantly fishing village had a settlement of Marakkayar merchants and some Hindu Chettiar traders. Both these latter groups owned ships and managed vast overland, coastal and maritime trade networks (Mukund 1999:139, see also 64). Joining them in Tarangambadi, and often in open conflict, were the Danes who over the course of the century transformed a part of the village into Tranquebar, the centre of Danish maritime trade operations in the east. Within this context of a new colonial settlement, Jon Olafsson, an Icelandic gunner employed by the Danish East India Company, arrived in 1622 aboard the *Christianshavn*, lived and worked for about a year in the Dansborg Fort. Written years later, his memoirs provide a fascinating glimpse into life in the new colony, and offer a few detailed descriptions that attest to the presence of a thriving and industrious fishing community (Olafsson 1932).

At the marketplace 'fresh fish of many varieties' was available, as well as bargained over and bought at the gates of the Fort Dansborg, and consumed regularly for breakfast (Ibid.:110, 139, 146, 148). Olafsson provides details of different watercraft constructed in the area, including *cadmeda* (*kattumaram*), primarily used for fishing, and with which one or two fishermen row out 'far into the sea' and use 'three-cornered' sails made of coconut bark and fibre, the material used to make a range of items such as nets, rigging, anchor-cables, sailors' caps, baskets, fishing tackle and thread (Ibid.:111, 144). In addition to *kattumarams*, he also notes the construction of 'boats, smacks and large vessels' including *zelings* (*salangu*, or *padagus*, as known to locals on the Coromandel coast but generally referred to by outsiders as *masulas* (Hornell 1920:50) which are rowed by ten or twelve persons; smacks, which Olafsson tells us were called *sampans* (*vallams*), and *navis*, or large ships that are used primarily for coastal trade. In addition, Muslim merchants (Marakkayars) operated sewn vessels of more than 300 tons which sailed to Arabia, Egypt and China. The technique used for construction of watercraft is markedly different from what Olafsson is accustomed to, with components stitched together with coconut bark threading regardless of the size

or intended use of the craft. This technique, distinct to the Indian Ocean region, presents further evidence of the interrelationship between watercraft used for fishing and maritime trade (McGrail 2003).

Olafsson's observations in Tarangambadi echo contemporary accounts of large sewn ships by Portuguese travellers like Gaspar Correa (Corrêa and Stanley 1869:240–243). The seasonal nature of fishing in the Coromandel coast was also observed by Olafsson when he notes that fishermen avoid going out to sea in the winter, and just before Easter, with ceremonies involving the pouring back into the sea, of seawater washed off three deities brought to the shore for the purpose marking the event, fishermen return to the sea (Ibid.:145). Even today, the return to the sea following the 'rough season; between October and December is marked with ceremonies to ensure 'better luck with fishing and greater safety for fishermen,' as Olafsson noted in Tarangambadi in the early seventeenth century. References to ritual performances involving fish symbolism, the availability and use of dry fish as currency, three hundred boys from the fishing community being taught swimming (although it is not clear whether this is in reference to Tarangambadi or Karikal), a port with 600 fishermen, provide further clues on the socio-economic makeup of the place, which was not entirely but significantly peopled by a thriving fishing community.

Space, time and profits

Urry (2001) describes the "tourist gaze" as the regulated consumption of commodified natural and cultural objects located at particular sites. The ability to engage in tourist consumption is predicated on the cultural sanction of leisure time, time not spent expending labour within a wage-labour economy, and as such tourism serves an important function within the capitalist political economy, specifically in enabling the regeneration of labour power (Britton 2004:139-140).

Tourism involves the production of place where the regulated consumption of leisure time can occur, and this place requires forms of uniqueness that are attractive and accessible. With heritage tourism this consumption of leisure time involves a 'tourist gaze' that integrates spatial with temporal movement—to borrow from the jargon of advertising, the consumer is transported in space and time. Thus heritage tourism merges the production of place along with that of memory, and offers a spatial-temporal product that is unique, attractive and accessible to consumers of leisure time. In Tarangambadi this merger involves the production of an exclusive zone for tourist consumption, and a selective reading of history centred on significances attached to 'restored' buildings. In doing so it nevertheless relies upon and promotes the devaluation of the economic life of the fishing community and the silencing of its history. Trouillot reminds us that in the ultimate analysis, the past can only achieve significance in the present with all its contradictions and inequalities (Trouillot 1995). The process of endowing spatial particularities with significance for the codification of

institutionalized memory simultaneously silences aspects of those considered inconvenient. In the present it may be partially recognizable in terms of its centrality to nationalisms and cultural narratives. Tarangambadi may on the one hand represent to INTACH the possibility of producing a 'responsible' citizen consumer (and conserver) of heritage, while to Danish tourism promoters a possibility to reconcile neo-liberal mobility with the challenges of confronting a colonial past. It may on the other hand also call attention to the ugly undercurrents of neo-liberal citizenry, as certain Indians consume leisure time while other Indians are required to relinquish their livelihoods in order to facilitate an increase in the GDP. Or for that matter, the nagging doubt that Danes interested in retrieving colonial memory in this small Tamil village are perhaps afflicted with post-colonial melancholia, as familiar boundaries lie vanquished by neo-liberal mobility of another kind—those of third world immigrants now becoming part of Scandinavian social orders.³³ These are no doubt important framings of the context that offers insights into the discursive and practical dimensions of elite identity formation. However it is equally important to identify and analyze the processes by which the capitalist political economy informs tourism's concerns with the past, bringing to the production of place the concerns, motivations and understandings driven by the demands of accumulation.

While the NMD seeks to promote a non-destructive, regulated form of heritage tourism, structural features of the capitalist political economy of tourism encourage the quest for accumulation and the consolidation of spaces of consumption. The means for regulating and limiting tourism are not easily apparent in the political economic present. Britton notes that the organization of tourism is simultaneously geared towards the accumulation of capital and the capture of rents from 'cultural and physical phenomena' (2004). Monopoly rent, or income streams that accrue to the owner of a service located at a site uniquely endowed with the advantage of being in proximity to objects intended for the 'tourist gaze', is the driving force behind the production of place for tourism (Harvey 2002). In other words, it is not only the particular restored heritage structures of Tranquebar that collectively constitute the spatial bounds of the produced place, but also the hotels, restaurants, banks, spas, and so on which aid in the consumption of the former. This dynamic suggests that the informal actors who operate in the shadow of institutional support are as much a constitutive feature of the heritage tourism agenda as INTACH or Neemrana.

It is in the quest to realize monopoly rent values that the current effort to capture space once occupied by fishing households achieves significance. Furthermore, inasmuch as tourists engage in the consumption of difference (Urry 2001),³⁴ the nature of that difference does not preclude the security and comfort of the familiar. Thus despite the fact that tourism involves movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the experience of the latter is a highly regulated affair that involves presenting a packaged commodity for the tourist gaze in

circumstances that also retain certain semblances of familiarity, especially in terms of basic needs such as food, personal care, comforts and living arrangements. Put in terms of the stark socio-economic differences between western tourists and Tarangambadi's locals, the regulated consumption of difference will require spaces of familiarity, constituting a 'comfort zone' the pursuit of which also influences the push towards achieving spatial contiguity within an expanded space of consumption—a hotel, next to which there can be a promenade, a nearby spa, gardens, and so on.³⁵ That this push towards consolidating an expanded space for 'heritage tourism' also inevitably conflicts with the socio-economic interests of the fishing community is borne out in Munch-Petersen's Tranquebar Tourism Plan report (Munch-Petersen 2007). Attracting Europeans to Tarangambadi will invariably involve hyping up its beach space, but this runs into a two-fold problem. Munch-Petersen notes that 'locals and excursionists' may ogle at the scantily clad Europeans on the beach. A second problem for him is that locals also use the beach front south of the Dansborg Fort for their toilet needs; presumably the surf may inevitably wash their excreta towards Europeans enjoying themselves on the beach. To avoid these two problems, he suggests using what he describes as an 'undisturbed...beach with no habitations' south of the Uppanar river, which can be accessed by employing fishermen as transporters. This belief in the existence of an 'open' beach in the area is reflective of the disregard for the uses of beach space by the fishing community.

As discussed earlier, the geographical reach of fishing villages extends in a north-south direction beyond the limits of the area of habitation (Bharathi 1999). One common feature observed seasonally is the extensive use of beach space for drying fish. The particular beach that Munch-Petersen considers 'empty' and with 'no habitations' is in fact extensively used by the fisherwomen of Chandrapadi to dry fish landed via the seasonally open Uppanar River.³⁶ This area is also a thoroughfare used mainly by the fishing communities of Tarangambadi and Chandrapadi when the river mouth is seasonally closed. Conversion of this space into an exclusive beach is an open invitation to conflict with the fishing communities of both villages as it is inconceivable that the hotels and tourism operators will tolerate the idea of co-existence with the beach space uses of fisher people. On the contrary as Munch-Petersen's concerns indicate, and as reflected in government policies relating to beach tourism in similar contexts, the quest for spatial exclusivity is expressed in terms of hygiene 'concerns' of the tourists (see Pondicherry Pollution Control committee 2003, Arabindoo 2005). Furthermore, beach space usage in other parts of Nagapattinam often involves tacit adjustments between 'traditional' notions of commons and juridical conceptions of property, with the former often weakened when particular state-supported public or private initiatives demand enforcement of exclusive rights to the use of coastal space.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to show how a historical geography of the fishing community helps put into critical perspective the strategic mediation of spatial claims and selective memory by the proponents and practitioners of heritage tourism. The political economy of tourism has its own dynamic driven by the quest for rent accumulation and the related requirement of expanded exclusive spaces for consumption, and as such will inevitably come into conflict with the fishing community. Nevertheless there are inherent limitations in the political economy of tourism in general that provide compelling reasons to question ongoing efforts.

Heritage tourism's 'economic' benefits are overplayed since studies show that tourism labour is segmented unfavourably for the local population (Williams 1998). Locals remain low-skilled and low-waged while outsiders dominate higher wage jobs; labour is seasonal, part time, and disproportionately feminized. In addition, tourism does not provide opportunities for the development of skills, and negatively impacts productive activities (like fishing) by drawing away labour. Moreover, tourism labour is universally unorganized and unregulated, and thus vulnerable to various forms of exploitation. This characteristic is closely related to the liminal promises of tourism, which include producing expectations of reduced social restrictions on behaviour (Urry 1995). In terms of contributions to economic development, tourism inflates land prices and raises prices of commodities, thereby annulling any marginal gains in income, and tends to discourage diffusion of investment in surrounding areas (Williams 1998:95).³⁷ Heritage tourism, attached as it is to a systemic commodity production ethos that requires the constant production of heritage commodities,³⁸ inevitably marginalizes possibilities for creative engagements with the Indo-Danish historical encounter. Ultimately it reduces history to 'artefactual' history, whereby tourists imagine pasts drawing on what restored or manufactured structures visually convey to them, having carefully excluded the unpleasant aspects of history (Urry 2001:102).

Massey(2005) illustrates three tendencies as failures of the spatial imagination. First, the view that space is a realm of crossing and conquest on the surface of which other people and cultures remain passive and unchanging until the agency and power of conquerors, explorers and pioneers act upon them and bring them into history.³⁹ Second, the view that some people are still living in 'another' time, and therefore require the agency of those endowed with the power to bring about development, free markets, employment, incomes, consumer lifestyles and so on. Here, the differences characterizing people living in particular places are transformed into a temporal 'otherness' whereby they are considered 'backward,' a condition that is ameliorated by bringing them 'forward' into the modern world through the infusion of new institutions and economic reorganization. Third, Massey points out that the tendency to seek and protect

presumed domains of essential purity— place derives significance as a geographical source of meaning and values, distinct from the global that brings in its wake integration and alienation. The inherent complexities of the world are glossed over by recourse to each or all of these three tendencies that more often than not inform and legitimate strategies of control and domination. Thus even if the present spatial practices of heritage tourism are not necessarily colonial or even imperialist, they unwittingly reproduce many of the assumptions that informed past and present strategies of power.⁴⁰ These cannot be ignored if power relationships in the present are to be genuinely addressed through critically engaged scholarship. Towards this, a critical awareness of the historicity of hitherto dehistoricized subjects is central, and their spatio-temporalities or historical geographical trajectories must be considered anew, with questions relating to the significance and goals of place-making extended beyond the narrow confines of the political economy of tourism. Tarangambadi is after all, following Massey's reminder, spatially characterized more by 'coeval multiplicities,' 'radical contemporaneity,' and 'constitutive complexity' than by the limited visions implied in each of the above failures of the spatial imagination (Ibid.:8).

Marginalized voices often provide valuable insights into the workings of social orders. Cultural encounters could just as well be sought in the unlikely shadows of the past: the Dansborg's walls, where prisoners, soldiers and the appropriated produce of nameless peasants and workers shared silence and darkness; the fort's entrance where Jon Olafsson haggled with fishermen and women over the day's catch; the fleeting moments when Danes and Indians tried to clandestinely engage in proscribed exchanges (as Olafsson recounts an episode in which Danes were caught and reprimanded by their superiors trying to sell cheese to Indians on board a Danish ship). In sum, the production of place engaged in by heritage tourism proponents can and should be destabilized by emphasizing the multiple trajectories, contemporary presences, and complex constitutive factors underlying the processes of place-making in Tarangambadi, especially as they pertain to the continued marginalization of the fishing community. The cultural encounter embodied in the current relationship between the growth of heritage tourism and the displacement of the village's fishing population is incompatible with the stated goals of the Tranquebar Initiative. In contrast, an alternative 'cultural encounter' drawing upon new understandings of the historical geography of Tarangambadi's fishing community, could open up possibilities for exploring alternative approaches to place-making, perhaps in terms that integrate the spatial interests of the fishing community with that of a limited and controlled effort to conserve the village's colonial heritage.

Notes

- 1 Funded by a grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation, research for this paper was conducted between September 2007 and July 2008. Sudarshan Rodriguez, Senior Research Associate with the Post Tsunami Environmental

Initiative (PTEI) at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore, provided invaluable advice and assistance, and accompanied me on several trips to Tarangambadi while conducting research for a separate project.

- 2 NCRC (NGO Coordination and Resource Center, Nagapattinam) figures vary slightly. See <http://vic.ncrc.in/villagedetails.php?village=Tharangambadi>
- 3 It is pertinent in this regard to note that the primary difficulty reported by women in relocated houses was the burden of distance to and from fish landing, auctioning, sales and market sites. With a significant proportion of time spent on transportation, women fish traders (particularly head-loaders) reported losses in income.
- 4 Needless to say, fishermen and women are circumspect about discussing details of their particular arrangements with regard to retaining their original houses or sites. After responding to questions on this issue, many of the interviewees requested anonymity.
- 5 Recipients of new housing described a variety of arrangements including renting of houses. Several retain old houses and/or properties in various states of disrepair on the coast. Some revealed that they had commenced periodic repairs as finances permitted, and were doing so with the knowledge of the Panchayat.
- 6 History of SIFFS: <http://www.siffs.org/Index.aspx?Page=History.aspx>, accessed on 5 March, 2009
- 7 SIFFS operates a boatyard on the southern bank of the Uppanar River.
- 8 Residents of the new location generally feel that the reason for their decision to accept new housing was the attraction of a titled house practically free of purchase costs. When asked about safety concerns, a few respondents—for instance a man who lost his wife and children and did not want to be close to his original place of residence, and a woman whose original house was located less than fifty meters from the sea, and was completely destroyed, indicated that their choices were motivated by the trauma of losses and enduring fear of the sea. Some respondents did note that their view of the situation changed over time and that despite previous concerns with safety, they now felt that the new house's main advantage was its being free and titled. Nevertheless none of the respondents in the new housing complex indicated any desire to relinquish claims on the coast, with some expressing the sentiment that they would rather give up their new houses than give up the coast if it came down to an ultimatum.
- 9 'Colony' houses were built in the 1980s and 90s as part of state government schemes to provide housing for marginalized populations. In Tarangambadi, the 'Vadakku Colony' (northern colony) area is located in the northwest part of the village.
- 10 Panchayatar Chandiran noted that tourism could, if carried out under the control of the community, bring some benefits to the village, but had grave doubts

whether this was possible under current conditions where the focus is heavily on relocation (Interviews: July 2008). Mr. X. Joseph, SIFFS Project Director in Tarangambadi concurs with this view but also suggested that the fishing community will only tolerate the growth of tourism until its needs for amenities are met (Interview: 11 June 2008).

- 11 Interview with X. Joseph, Project Manager, SIFFS, Tarangambadi. 11 June 2008.
- 12 The distinction is based on type of materials used for construction, ranging from locally available materials that require regular replacement and repair, to brick and mortar. 'Semi-pucca' refers to the use of tiled roofing with brick and mortar walls while 'pucca' refers to concrete buildings.
- 13 ETRP financing for Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry amounted to \$465 million. The TEAP's financing included a \$67.5 million loan and \$76.2 million grant to the Government of Tamil Nadu.
- 14 The phrase 'build back better' was used frequently in World Bank, ADB, and UNDP public statements and documents, and also in ILO, UNICEF and FAO documents as well as by NGOs and government officials. Its origin is variously attributed to the World Bank, U.S. President Bill Clinton, or U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. Importantly, this phrase provides a discursive justification for closely linking post-disaster activities with neo-liberal development agendas and priorities.
- 15 The Project Director of the ETRP/TEAP, Mr. C.V. Sankar noted in an interview on 3 June 2008, that the decision to hand over the responsibility of housing construction to NGOs was taken with considerable doubt as to their abilities to meet obligations. Thus the housing component of the ETRP remained intact and unused long after NGOs had commenced building houses throughout Tamil Nadu. However he also believes that despite some problems, NGOs did deliver on their promises remarkably well.
- 16 1 lakh = 100,000, so Rs. 378 lakhs = Rs. 37,800,000, or Rs. 3.78 Crore (1 Crore = 100 lakhs)
- 17 It is significant in this context that fisherpeople in Nagapattinam and Karaikal villages can accurately list several fishing villages to the north and south of their own, but often are uncertain about the specific Taluk or Gram Panchayat boundaries that tie their villages to the inland non-fishing communities. In a sense this also indicates the continued relevance of 'traditional' spatial categories despite the hegemonic presence of the state and its overarching, delineating and enclosing categories.
- 18 My fieldwork in these two villages included interviews of households with women originally from Tarangambadi. Similarly, in Tarangambadi and some of its northern neighbours, there are women hailing from Karaikal, Ariyanattutheru and Keechankuppam to the south, as well as some from Savadikuppam, Vanagiri and Poompuhar to the north.

- 19 Protection of Tranquebar Heritage and the Creation of Employment Opportunities through Planned Sustainable Tourism Development. <http://www.galatea3.dk/dk/Menu/Forskning/Nationalmuseets+Tranquebar+Initiativ/Forskningsprojekter/Turismeanalyse/Protection+of+Tranquebar+Heritage+and+the+Creation+of+Employment+Opportunities+through+Pla>
- 20 *Bestseller Foundation* is the foundation arm of the Danish textile giant Bestseller, owned by the Holch Povlsen family, second richest in Denmark. http://www.copcap.com/content/us/quick_links/news/latest_news/news_4th_quarter_2008/denmark%E2%80%99s_50_wealthiest
- 21 Four of the five houses purchased by Bestseller were semi-pucca houses with tiled roofing. Ref. SIFFS Habitat mapping of Tharangambadi.
- 22 *Romance by the seaside*, S. Basu, *The Hindu*, 16 August 2008. <http://www.hindu.com/mp/2008/08/16/stories/2008081650650400.htm>
- 23 Neemrana Hotels: The Bungalow on the Beach: <http://www.neemranahotels.com/bungalow/index.html.htm>
- 24 *Bungalow on Tharangambadi beach*, G. Balaram, *The Hindu*, 25 September 2005. <http://www.hindu.com/mag/2005/09/25/stories/2005092500120200.htm>
- 25 'Places to stay in Tranquebar and surrounding area.' <http://www.tranquebar.net/info/ophold/staying-uk.htm>
- 26 Interviews with Maurice Hohndorf, architect in charge of both projects, and architects from INTACH (who wish to remain unnamed). Additional informal interviews of neighbouring non-fishing residents of Goldsmith Street who have also been approached with offers for their properties. The upcoming bungalow's internal structure is designed specifically for multiple parties of tourists seeking seclusion, modern amenities and access to the beach.
- 27 According to INTACH's architects, this individual was annoyed by the prospect of Europeans laying claim to properties in Tarangambadi, reflecting in their view a form of misplaced 'NRI patriotism,' which perhaps refers to the tendency among expatriate Indians to increasingly seek solace in the identitarian promises of conservative and sometimes revanchist ideologies of cultural purity.
- 28 This information was obtained through interviews with managerial staff at the Hotel Tamil Nadu and Bungalow on the Beach, and associated working staff who wished to remain unnamed.
- 29 Interviews of residents in new housing complex, June 2008. Interviewees who indicated being approached by agents include J, V, M, K (fisherwomen) and S, M, K, V and R (fishermen).
- 30 These fisher households are poor, and own at the most kattumarams launched from the southern beach area. One resident claimed to have a Patta for her house. Significantly her's was the only house that still had electricity. With regard to relocation the chief concern expressed by residents in this cluster was about

the difficulties imposed by distance if they were forced to relocate, as well as the anticipated expenses involved in transportation as well as upkeep of the 'free' houses.

- 31 Words of a fisherwoman resident who pointed out that if the authorities were seriously concerned about her safety, they should not have cut the electricity connections to her home. Several women interviewed here were equally critical of NGOs including SIFFS for ignoring their requests for help in rebuilding or improving their damaged houses. They pointed out that for women life would be more difficult in the inland location because it would involve long walks to and from fish landing and trading points, as well as impose burdens with regard to sanitation needs. The latter concern has been completely absent from consideration in much of the post-tsunami housing construction throughout Nagapattinam.
- 32 Ref. Organizational Chart between pages 10 and 11, *The Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark: Aims of the Project, The Organisation, The Project Catalogue*. 2005.
- 33 Many thanks to Kirsten Thisted for kindly sharing a draft of her forthcoming paper 'Where once Dannebrog waved for more than 200 years.' *Banal Nationalism, Narrative Templates and Post-colonial Melancholia in the Description of the Danish Tropical Colonies*.
- 34 'Consumption of difference' refers to the regulated consumption of commodities that are markedly different from the tourist's own cultural world. Presumably these commodities will be consumed as part of the consumption of leisure time.
- 35 To borrow a term from Economics, the growth thus described is comparable to an 'agglomeration economy' whereby related economic activities benefit from proximity to each other.
- 36 Observed and documented in March and June 2008. Interviews conducted with fisherwomen and fishermen in Chandrapadi village.
- 37 Munch-Peterson's recommendation in this regard is salient: 'To preserve the Tranquebar market profile in competition with near-by destinations the establishment of down market and mid-downmarket accommodation should be discouraged.' Aside from its inherent elitism, the suggestion that development of hotels in the surrounding areas serving mid and down market segments should be *discouraged* throws new light on the question of regional economic development. Source: <http://www.nilsfinn.dk/Tranquebar-18.htm>
- 38 Since heritage is the main attraction for tourism in Tranquebar, heritage specific commodities will constantly have to be produced in order to maintain interest in the place. In other words, the logic of commodity production could well quickly overtake and dominate processes of identification, study and understanding of Danish or Indo-Danish heritage.
- 39 See also Eric Wolf's *Europe and the people without history* for a critique of

this perspective in the social sciences.

- 40 The strategic silencing of the fishing community's past reflects the persistence of the first tendency, while the belief that tourism will bring 'employment' to fishermen and women reflects recourse to the second. Another stark instance of this is illustrated in the following assertion made in a document summarising ongoing work on the marine archaeology of Tarangambadi by the Tranquebar Association: 'A fascinating aspect of India is that Old Danish traditions from throughout history are still present in everyday life i.e. grinding mills which were used in the Stone Age are still used in India today. Also boats built like in the Bronze Age, brickyards from the seventeenth century, and agriculture and fishing tackle from the nineteenth century. (Tranquebar Association 2007:9)' As for the third failure of spatial imagination, the Tranquebar Initiative claims that the village is uniquely suited to 'cultural and beach' tourism because its colonial built heritage is well preserved, but also because it is 'a serene and quiet town with a minimum of vehicular traffic' thereby implying even as it advances the agenda of tourism-led development, that the lack of development is itself a positive feature for tourists presumably seeking to find respite from the negative trappings of modernity. Needless to say such a view completely ignores the causes underlying the lack of development and the needs of the local population, the relationship between the lack of development in the village, and the region-wide economic marginalization of the fishing community. [http://www.galathea3.dk/dk/Menu/Forskning Nationalmuseets+Tranquebar+Initiativ/Forskningsprojekter/Turismeanalyse?Print=Article](http://www.galathea3.dk/dk/Menu/Forskning%20Nationalmuseets+Tranquebar+Initiativ/Forskningsprojekter/Turismeanalyse?Print=Article).

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Whose history? Transnational cultural heritage in Tranquebar

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Abstract

Tranquebar has been declared a heritage town by the government of Tamil Nadu due to the presence of a significant number of historical structures dating to 1620–1845, when the town was a Danish trading colony. The remains of past cultural encounters attract wide public and private interest, both from Indian and Danish agents, who have in recent years initiated an unprecedented number of restoration projects; but whose heritage is being preserved in this present cultural encounter? Establishing Tranquebar as a heritage town is not simply a question of preservation of built structures. The changes in the townscape of Tranquebar, in which the historic buildings are a part, are subject to many interests ranging from social development to widely differing aesthetic ideals. The current development in Tranquebar may therefore be seen as a cross-cultural process of interpretation and negotiation, in which the material traces from the past comprised of the built environment are just not historical, but become so, as they acquire special significance by being treated as heritage. To capture the coexistence of differing experiences of historicity and uses of the same townscape analytically this paper proposes the concept of the heritage palimpsest.

Introduction

In 1980 Tranquebar was declared a heritage town by the government of Tamil Nadu. This formal recognition was but one small element in a multifaceted process that involves many agents and has spanned decades. After many starts

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and stops in the process of promoting Tranquebar as a heritage town, in 2008 applications for proposed town development schemes planned by NGOs and local authorities led the Union Tourism Ministry of India to sanction 37308 lakh rupees in assistance to develop Tranquebar as a major tourist destination (Shankar 2008). NGOs and local political authorities are not alone in hoping that Tranquebar can develop with a point of departure in its significance as an expression of cultural heritage. The town is also the focus of intensive academic interest, currently exemplified by the Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark, a large cross-disciplinary research initiative involving twenty different projects in fields such as history, anthropology and archaeology.¹

Tranquebar has attracted attention due to the fact that the town—as opposed to a number of other former European trading stations on the Coromandel coast—to a large extent has preserved its distinct architectural traits from the colonial period (Hiort, De Fine Licht & Lund, eds. 1987). The Fort Dansborg, built by the Danes who had used Tranquebar as a trading colony in 1620–1845, remains the most imposing among local buildings, dominating the seaside of the town. Today it is a protected monument and serves as a museum that draws Indian as well as foreign tourists. Other physical traces of the Indo-European cultural encounters of the colonial period in Tranquebar include a monumental town gate, a number of functioning churches and schools constructed in the course of Christian mission work, as well as a number of administrative buildings and residential properties, and finally the very townscape with its straight streets that follow the old town plan and continue to carry European names like King Street, Queen Street and Admiral Street.

The practical background of this state of preservation is referred to in literature and development reports on Tranquebar as ‘an absence of development’, or economic stagnation (Fihl 1987: 21, my translation, see also Hiort, De Fine Licht & Lund, eds. 1987). Until the impact of the disastrous tsunami that hit the area in December 2004, Tranquebar has by contemporary Indian standards had the status of an economically marginal area where the local population is largely poor, living on fishery, agriculture and small trade. The town and its inhabitants have neither had opportunities for substantial economic growth or development of industries on a larger scale than that of fishing (Swamy, this volume), nor to the hectic construction activities that have taken place in more financially progressive areas of India (Pedersen 1987: 55–61). Many of the buildings that were constructed in the colonial period have thus remained till the present, some in increasing stages of decay, the others maintained and utilized for contemporary purposes. In the recent decades these buildings have given occasion for a number of reports that map their condition and outline plans for preservation and development, also for the purpose of increasing the tourism potential of Tranquebar.²

Hitherto the continued existence of the many buildings remaining from the

cultural encounters of the colonial period had largely been due to the fact that 'poverty has preserved the town—until now', as the representative of a Danish foundation involved in contemporary heritage preservation in Tranquebar has expressed it.³ However, Tranquebar is currently in the midst of a development process with a vast potential for change. After the area was hit by a devastating tsunami in December 2004, killing hundreds of local inhabitants and causing destruction of houses, huts, fishing boats and agricultural land, a large number of Indian and international NGOs have engaged in social reconstruction in Tranquebar (Praxis, n.d.). This process, which due to its scale has locally been referred to as 'a second tsunami',⁴ and which currently affects all aspects of social life in Tranquebar (Hastrup 2005), adds yet another dimension to the development of Tranquebar as a heritage town. Agents working with the preservation, development and use of the historic buildings of Tranquebar emphasize that the work towards preservation of cultural heritage in the town has been rendered even more urgent by the post-tsunami development. Preservation now necessitates an increased effort, as the rapid social change caused by the influx of money and development projects can cause the townscape of Tranquebar to be altered permanently through demolitions and new constructions.

However, establishing Tranquebar as a heritage town in actual practice is far from just being a question of preserving the physical structures of the townscape. Currently a number of Danish as well as Indian agents consciously aim to both preserve the townscape and create an increased local awareness of the importance and significance of preserving heritage, as it is expressed materially in the shape of architectural styles and historic buildings. The former British collector's residence—prominently located at the seafront with a view of Fort Dansborg—was bought for restoration by the Indian Neemrana heritage hotels and opened in 2005 as the first of three exclusive heritage hotels in Tranquebar, established to attract affluent visitors from outside. A local office of the NGO Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has also been established in Tranquebar after the tsunami, where it aims to create awareness and interest in the preservation of heritage buildings amongst the local population. These have been surveyed and listed by INTACH, which has also done restorations to inspire further preservation of local heritage buildings, the majority of which are owned by the local population and religious institutions of Tranquebar. With the National Museum of Denmark as a consultant, INTACH is also engaged in the restoration of the former Danish governor's residence, now owned by the Tourism Development Corporation of Tamil Nadu, which has an intention to turn it into a cultural centre.

Among the above and other agents, Tranquebar is situated in a diverse field of interests in developing the town as an instance of cross-cultural heritage. After the tsunami, a private Danish organisation, the Bestseller Foundation,

chose Tranquebar as the location for a large corporate responsibility project and is engaged both in the preservation of heritage buildings and distribution of development aid in Tranquebar with local partners such as INTACH. Similarly, the Danish Tranquebar Association, a society consisting of private volunteers, has since 2001 been working for the preservation of the Danish-built heritage of Tranquebar, most notably contributing to a restoration of Fort Dansborg. Plans for increased local dissemination are also underway by the Danish School Museum in Copenhagen, which is producing written and audiovisual school materials in both English and Tamil, describing the history of Tranquebar before, during and after the colonial period. These and other aspirations to create an increased awareness of cultural heritage in Tranquebar are currently unfolding among many agents, who form a network of cooperation concerning different projects. Thus, perceived from an anthropological perspective, the current development of Tranquebar as a heritage town constitutes a privileged field for research in cross-cultural construction of cultural heritage and social memory.

Whose history? And which?

Danish perspectives on working with colonial history

As a preliminary study of approaches amongst the Danish agents who are currently engaged in Tranquebar, I carried out a series of interviews in Denmark with researchers and representatives of NGOs involved in the preservation of heritage in Tranquebar, as well as those participating in academic workshops held under the Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark. This survey showed that all the involved agents, in their own way, accord significance to the relation between Danish and Indian partners in heritage, not only due to practical and academic concerns, but also for moral reasons, relating to the contemporary balancing of positions between nations that formerly stood in a colonial relationship. Awareness that a historic interest in Tranquebar from Denmark is not necessarily an innocent phenomenon is widespread amongst the Danish agents, both private organisations and researchers.

Amongst the participants in the Tranquebar Initiative post-colonial relations were much discussed regarding the practices of research and their context, such as the relationship with Indian authorities with respect to obtaining research permits, for instance for archaeological excavations, on which the archaeologist in charge explained that 'of course we cannot go down there as a bunch of imperialists to dig anywhere'. Similarly it is an issue concerning historical dissemination, on which a historian-cum-ethnologist argued that 'it is important that it is not a history written *by us*, but a mutual history—why, otherwise it is pure imperialism. Clearly it is important that there are some skilled colleagues [from India, with whom we can collaborate on researching the history and culture of Tranquebar].'⁵ Indeed, my own research project was born out of this field of tensions, as I took up a suggestion from the original project catalogue of the Tranquebar Initiative, which expressed the wish for a study of the cultural

encounters taking place in contemporary ‘negotiations of cultural heritage and collective memory’ in and about Tranquebar (National Museum of Denmark 2005: 16). In such a context it becomes an important methodological as well as theoretical point to explore the significance of heritage in a trans-national context, with a perspective that takes account of multifaceted approaches and uses of heritage both in research, daily life, and tourism. In this paper I will start with Denmark and then proceed to Tranquebar.

The current interests in preservation, research and dissemination on Tranquebar are inscribed in colonial and post-colonial relations, and how this fact ought to be handled in actual practice, is the topic of many deliberations in which the relationship between academic ambitions and a certain fear of ethnocentric colonial romanticism are consciously deliberated, but it can also be difficult to deal with. As a third researcher associated with the Tranquebar Initiative, a historian, said to me: ‘We cannot get past the fact that we are in Tranquebar because the Danes were there. But we do not fully wish to admit it.’ During seminars for researchers under the Tranquebar Initiative it has thus also been discussed how the projects—as some participants expressed it—can avoid to be ‘enlisted’ in a nationalist discourse, for instance in relation to the media, which might pose questions from a national perspective, which a researcher paraphrased as: ‘Say something about the Danes in Tranquebar’. With respect to this issue, the advice from the head of research under the initiative was that ‘we must emphasise that we have been visitors amongst the Indians’, thereby downplaying the national ‘Danish’ aspect of the colonial encounter, as well as the conception of colonial dominance, evading any notion of a self-evident right for the Danes to be in India.⁶

Amongst the Danish NGOs that take part in restoration projects in Tranquebar there was an admitted interest in engaging in this work precisely because a special significance was accorded to the fact that the Danes had been there. Yet these agents also deliberated on what it meant to come as outsiders and engage in projects of restoration in Tranquebar based on their own historic interests. An example is the work of the Danish Tranquebar Association, the webpage of which states as its purpose ‘to preserve the Danish remains of the colonial period in Tranquebar, [and] spread awareness of the Danish-Indian history in the area’.⁷ A founding member of the association explained, with implicit reference to the economic contribution they had made in 2001 to a restoration of Fort Dansborg:

If we ... were to reverse the situation, then it would correspond to ... four Indians coming to say: Hello, we would like to have permission to whitewash Kronborg [Castle]⁸. What would we [Danes] not say ...? Then we would say: Oh, shut up, you’ve got to be crazy, right! Or Germans, coming up to say: We have all these memorials, our ... bunkers [from World War II] on

the West Coast, they actually need ... they ought to be [painted] white, and then we would like for the German flag to be flown by each of them. What would the Danes not [say] – they would go completely crazy over it.

These quotes and the considerations behind them all point to the fact that when you speak of history, from an analytical point of view you need to ask what history and whose history (Herzfeld 1991: 53).

Danish doubt: Colonial history or overseas history?

The ways of relating to history are invariably a part of a larger social, political, ethical and academic context. Thus Danish historians and anthropologists have in recent decades engaged in a critical debate, arguing that Danish historiography relating to the former Danish colonies could be characterised as ‘a parochial tradition of ethnocentric national history’, in which colonial history has been relegated to the status of a form of ‘exotic local history’ (Green-Pedersen and Jørgensen 1983: 9, my translation).⁹ Initially this led a number of historians to replace the concept of ‘colonial history’ with a new one, namely that of ‘history of expansion’, which was perceived to be less value-laden. However, this concept retained the focus on European activities, and was therefore also replaced by the so-called overseas history, favoured by researchers concerned with being culturally sensitive and taking an interest in focusing on the cultural and social systems of the ‘non- European’ countries themselves (ibid.).

The politics of historiography regarding the ways in which history is conceptualised has a broader scope of relevance than that of academic debate alone, as this issue pertains to the dissemination of knowledge on past cultural encounters to the public, and consequently plays a role in the ways in which historical narratives are constituted and national identities imagined in the present (Thisted, this volume). This circumstance sparks the tension that we find expressed in the debate amongst the researchers of the Tranquebar Initiative regarding dissemination to the press, in which presentation of research on Indo-Danish relations from an exclusively national Danish perspective was made problematic. Considering also that the research projects of the initiative are located within the frame of a national cultural institution—the National Museum of Denmark (NMD)—there is a need for the involved researchers to address the issue of how their research and its dissemination to a wider public is implied in the imagining of past as well as present trans-national relations.

The debate on what sort of history one is engaging with when former colonies are implied is an issue that can also be encountered in contexts such as the Overseas Network at the NMD, which includes members of the Tranquebar Initiative. Illustrating the sensitive position of post-colonial relations in the context of Danish research and national institutions, I first heard of this network from an employee of the NMD, who in a casual conversation referred to it as a ‘network

on colonial history' used for debating the research and dissemination activities of the museum. When I contacted the museum administration for information, I was soon told that it was not called a network on colonial history, even though the network is in actual fact concerned with the former Danish colonies. Such a name was, as I was informed by one of the museum's project coordinators, not 'politically correct'. The term 'colonial' was evidently considered too fraught to be applied to the activities of the museum.

In a reorganisation of activities at the NMD in 2003, following a series of economic cutbacks, the museum defined a number of focus areas outside Denmark. It elected to focus on geographic locations where Denmark has had a more permanent presence and geopolitical interests (Jensen n.d.: 1). In this perspective, 'overseas areas that have been connected with Denmark ("colonies") are ... also part of the national collection [of the museum]' (National Museum of Denmark 2004: 11, my translation). While this strategy can be interpreted as a progressive attempt at engaging in post-colonial scrutiny and reconciliation—which in the context of other former Danish colonies such as Ghana includes overtly controversial issues such as the history of slavery—it simultaneously implies a peculiar nationally-situated understanding of what constitutes relevant knowledge about the world for the Danish public.¹⁰ Such an engagement in research and dissemination regarding former Danish colonies therefore constitutes a difficult balancing act in which nationalism, or even the danger of a Danish parochialism, must continually be critically engaged with.

When I came to my first meeting in the Overseas Network, a lot of the debate in this forum turned out to relate to the topic of how research and dissemination associated with the museum could—and ought to—relate to the colonial issue. This was discussed by the museum's curators and temporary project staff on a number of themes, including a perceived reluctance to deal with the topic at all: 'We keep circumventing the issue and dare not talk of colonies.' Another issue was the use of history in dissemination: 'In the outmost consequence [it could] become [a narrative of]: 'Thus the Danes once acted in the world—thus they act in the world today ... a colonialist project'. This debate included perceptions of the national self-image of Denmark, 'a picture of Denmark as the humanistic people, matching the current-day small state thinking—a self-image on the verge of self-complacency; that we were a less tough colonial nation than other nations'.¹¹ These examples illustrate the fact that the considerations that are played out in Denmark concerning the Tranquebar Initiative are part of a much larger context of debate on colonialism, post-colonialism, nationalism, research ethics, representation, and positioning.

The fact that the preferred designation for that which is being explored by the Tranquebar Initiative is 'cultural encounters',¹² a concept that does not by definition presume a hierarchical relation between the participants, is an indication of the point of reference from which the past is here wished to be represented,

and of the ways in which current relations with Tranquebar are intended to be practised. How the local population perceives Danish engagements in the history of Tranquebar, and what relevance, if any, these interests and activities hold for their life plays a role for the ways in which Danish researchers and NGOs conceptualise their projects. In one respect the different Danish agents want to avoid acting like a colonial power; in another the reverse speculation can also be found amongst them: Do the colonial relations really mean as much to the Indians as the internal reflections of the Danes assume?

History or historicity: Memoryscapes of Tranquebar

While much of the interest in Tranquebar as an expression of cultural heritage has its origin outside of the town, this does not mean that the interest is not matched by local experiences of historicity at various levels. As anthropologist and historian Bernard Cohn has pointed out in his Indian studies, '[t]here is not one past of the village but many' (Cohn 1990 [1961]: 89). The same landscape that has gained status as a heritage town can be a part of many histories, which may or may not overlap with histories about the colonial cultural contacts. Cohn describes the approaches to history which he encountered in his studies:

In a village or town, a casual question or observation on a building or ruin brings a flood of historical reminiscences. A query about who owns a piece of land leads to a genealogy and a story of warfare and conquest that establishes the person's right to the land. Direct historical stories justify, explain, and maintain the social structure and relationships. ... The past for an Indian ... is a living past that can be recalled for an individual or a group in a ritual or nonritual context, attaching him to large groups and to the civilization through a widespread mythic past or tying him to a limited group and to one place (Cohn 1971: 53–54).

The histories that seem relevant to the local population of Tranquebar vary, as they do to the Danish agents who take an interest in the town, for whom Tranquebar may alternately be, for example, a source of national pride, an economically underdeveloped community in need of aid, or a privileged setting in which to study cultural encounters. For instance, members of the Christian communities in the town accord a proportionally larger significance to the mission history (Petersen 1983).¹³ Protestant missionary activities were commenced in Tranquebar in 1706 at the behest of the Danish King Frederik IV, and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC), which is the result of these mission efforts, is engaged in intensive commemorations of its founding history in Tranquebar. Just as the tercentenary of the mission was celebrated grandly by TELC in 2006, a number of monuments of the mission history can be found in Tranquebar, along with several local institutions that are named after the founding missionaries, such as 'the Plütschau School', 'the Ziegenbalg Spiritual Centre' and 'the Ziegenbalg Home for Boys'. Thus the first two missionaries to Tranquebar, the

Germans Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau who arrived in 1706, have been characterised as ‘possibly the only Danes [sic] who are still remembered by the Indians in Tranquebar’ (Petersen 1983: 14, my translation).

Narratives concerning the colonial period are not otherwise a priority in the daily lives of the people in Tranquebar. For instance, when a middle-aged fisherwoman showed me around in Tranquebar during my fieldwork, she remarked that her father had told her how the gate of the then walled-in town used to be closed for the evening each day when the Danes were in Tranquebar. Anyone who came too late to enter had to wait till the following morning to gain entrance into the fortified town, she said. Intrigued at this snippet of memory I asked her how her father knew of that. After all, as I thought to myself, it was a long time since the Danes had left Tranquebar, which was ceded to the British in 1845. She explained with conviction that since her older sister had been born in 1947, naturally her father remembered the time before India gained independence. My face must have conveyed some puzzlement at this explanation of a historic memory which ostensibly related to a much earlier period than her father could possibly have had personal memories of. In response to my evident surprise, she stood musing for a while before her face cleared up, and she exclaimed that she only now recalled that the British came after the Danish. The rule of two European colonial powers was here conflated into one indistinct past, of which only anecdotal knowledge was retained.¹⁴

The town wall which the Danes had constructed to fortify Tranquebar is by now derelict and only a few remains of it still stand. In the post-colonial period the wall and its bastions had not mattered to the local population except in the most tangible sense, as building materials, and the wall had been unsentimentally mined for bricks by the people in Tranquebar. The same fisherwoman later related about the disappearance of the wall:

They took the stones [i.e., bricks] to build their houses, so the wall is gone. ... [From] that time Tranquebar houses were built of stone; in other villages they use clay. Because of the wall the houses were of stone in Tranquebar [i.e., the houses were of a better quality than in neighbouring villages]. All the fishermen used the stone.

Thus, the appropriated bricks and the houses that they had been used to construct now hinted at the history of the fishermen, rather than that of the Danes.

Progressing from the above example, as well as Cohn’s observation that local memories in Indian towns and villages may be prompted by elements of the landscape, such as ruins, buildings or plots of land, we might combine the concept of memory with that of landscape, to conceptualise Tranquebar as consisting of what could be termed *memoryscapes*. The state of local *memoryscapes* concerning memories of colonial encounters and their physical traces is indicated in the

British author Georgina Harding's account of a one-year stay in Tranquebar, in which she describes a meeting with the priest in a church in the nearby town of Nagapattinam:

He said [the church] was built by Danish missionaries. 'Did you not see the tablet on the wall where we entered?' We looked again. I told him that the inscription was Dutch, not Danish – after all it was the Dutch who had held Nagapattinam. 'So it is Dutch? Denmark is not Holland? What is Denmark, then?' That afternoon I met Nagapattinam's Roman Catholic priest at the old Portuguese church. 'Have you seen the CSI church?' he asked. 'It is very well built. It was built by the British.' Europeans were interchangeable in this town, on this coast. As he put it, 'There were the Portuguese and then the Dutch, then the French drove the Dutch out and then you British drove out the French' (Harding 1993: 46).

Importantly, with respect to grasping such a field, in terms of both theoretical and methodological approaches, the memoryscapes that are to be found in Tranquebar and the surrounding region do not necessarily revolve around a reflexive and detailed chronological consciousness of history that can be articulated in historical facts. A more apt concept with which to grasp this situation is therefore that of historicity:

'historicity' describes a human situation in flow, where versions of the past and future (of persons, collectives and things) assume present form in relation to events, political needs, available cultural forms and emotional dispositions ... The 'historicity' of objects ... is a moving target depending on the demands of the present ... a complex social and performative condition, rather than an objectively determinable aspect of historical conditions. Historicity in this sense is the manner in which persons operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating the future (Hirsch & Stewart 2005: 262).¹⁵

Historicity is thus something that goes beyond explicit historical narratives, and its significance can therefore be found in practice—that is, in daily interaction, in the use of the physical spaces of the town, and in bodily commemorative activities (Connerton 1989), the latter for instance when TELC each year celebrates the anniversary of the arrival of the missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plütschau with a procession on 9 July (Johnson 2005: 405). From this perspective on historicity and memoryscapes it is just as rewarding to explore the social processes concerning decay, demolitions and new constructions in Tranquebar as it is to investigate the ascription of meaning, or lack thereof, concerning the preservation of buildings and the interests expressed by this practice.

Tranquebar as a heritage palimpsest

New as well as old place names and names of buildings and institutions,

such as ‘the Ziegenbalg Spiritual Centre’, or a local shop named ‘the Danish Shop’, are ways in which explicit references are made to history as an element that is present in the physical and social landscape of Tranquebar, whether it calls forth certain narratives in the minds of passers-by or not. This landscape, with both its tangible and latent presence of traces of history, resembles a palimpsest—those historic documents of parchment, in which an original text has been partially erased and then written over again, resulting in a document that carries overlapping traces of history.¹⁶ Tranquebar takes on the character of what might be called a heritage palimpsest (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 157), in which the same locality for different reasons and purposes has repeatedly been—and becomes—marked and used as an expression of overlapping and changing memoryscapes.

If Tranquebar is seen as a palimpsest, the agents engaged in contemporary development will have different interests and competences in activating its layers, based on their varying experiences, positioning and historicity. This perspective thus calls for reflection on the encounters between the different agents that currently move in and have interests at stake in Tranquebar—the local population, authorities, NGOs, researchers, tourists and private entrepreneurs. In this context attention should be paid to questions such as how these agents perceive each other, their objectives and activities, and how they interact—that is, how Tranquebar comes to serve as a contact zone for different practices and narratives (Bruner 1996, Pratt 2006 [1992]). As explicated by the literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt in her conceptualisation of imperial encounters:

A ‘contact’ perspective emphasises how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travellers and ‘travelees’, not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power (Pratt 2006 [1992]: 8).

It is evident that rather than forming a constantly significant element of local identities in Tranquebar, historical consciousness of colonial and postcolonial encounters and relations can be found to arise on a situational basis, in contexts where they take on a tangible social relevance in cultural contacts of the present. Thus, during a development aid project which was launched in 1984 by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), aimed at the poor fisherman population within Tranquebar town, it turned out that those who lived outside the town, but within the former Danish territory,¹⁷ in the words of a visiting anthropologist began to ‘display a high degree of historical consciousness’, as they argued that they, as the descendants of Danish subjects, were just as entitled to Danish aid as those within Tranquebar town (Pedersen 1987: 53, my translation, see also Fihl 1987).

As the fate of the derelict town wall demonstrates, retaining the history of the Danish presence and preserving the built structures which it has left has clearly not been intrinsically important to the people in Tranquebar. In the course of the contemporary development of Tranquebar as a heritage town, the colonial history and its material remains is, however, gaining new attention, affecting the lives of the people and involving them in the negotiation of present and past relationships with Danes and other outside visitors such as representatives of Indian NGOs and governmental agencies. For instance a family of Muslim cooks who live in the western part of Tranquebar reported their experiences of finding their home subject to recurring interest of researchers and tourists because a rare remainder of one of the bastions along the town wall now serves as a part of the compound wall around their house. A member of the household explained:

This place was ruled by Danish people before, so the walls were built during that time. From we started to live here, we kept the wall safe. We never took bricks from it. After the tsunami, a number of people visited my house and wrote about it, but nobody helped [us]. We use the wall to protect our property from the river water [from an adjacent canal]. If we demolish the wall, then the river water will enter. ... Foreign researchers come and draw maps of the wall, because it was used by their ancestors ... and [these] people tell me: 'keep this wall safely, because it is ancient'.

It is clear from this narrative that the bastion primarily has a functional value to the family, that of protecting their house. Yet, the emphasis on 'keeping the wall safe' and 'never having taken bricks from it' directly addresses the sensibilities which the family has seen displayed by the visiting Danish researchers and tourists, to whom the wall is significant not as a structure of functional value, but as a monument.

The mentioning of the tsunami, which damaged many buildings in Tranquebar and also impacted on this family, points to a future-oriented context in which they hope that the bastion, as their little part of the palimpsest that is Tranquebar, can provide benefits for them by attracting development aid. In this case it is a disappointed though not abandoned hope. 'Nobody helped', as they said; but my interview with the family was completed with their plea that when I got back to Denmark, I should remember them, if there was any chance of an agency coming forth to help economically. This example recalls the role of historic consciousness in the encounter between the fishermen of Tranquebar and DANIDA in the 1980s, pointing to a process where elements of the past are taken up in a negotiation of interests, in which foreign visitors are locally understood as—if not actual then potential—donors of development aid.

Strange encounters

Development aid is, however, not the only local connotation of the new field of interest in the townscape and buildings of Tranquebar as a heritage

town. Many encounters with foreigners—by which category I refer to Danes as well as Indians from outside of the town—are taking place in Tranquebar. For instance a woman of seventy nine years, a goldsmith's widow living adjacent to a row of five houses which had been bought by the Danish Bestseller Foundation and restored by INTACH, had noted the growing presence of Danish tourists and restoration projects. The street in which she lived, Goldsmith Street, had become subject to increased attention as visitors were now passing by to observe the restored buildings, one of which has been turned into a hotel, 'the Nayak House', managed by the Neemrana heritage hotels. The old woman was curious about the foreign visitors whom she, as many other people in Tranquebar, referred to as *vellaikaranga*, 'white people', but she found barriers to her encounter with them:

In the hotel white people will stay. ... Many foreigners come and stay, but I cannot speak with them, language is a problem. They speak strangely. I would like to speak with them, but only I can see them; I just say 'vannakam' [a Tamil greeting].

She had, however, experienced some novel and more direct encounters in the course of this development: The vicinity of her home to those newly restored buildings had made it an interesting object to foreign entrepreneurs. Twice the family had been asked by strangers from out of town to sell their house.¹⁸ The old woman was not quite sure who these people represented, or for which specific purpose they were trying to buy her house. Asked what she thought, she did, however, have her own theory which she laughingly proclaimed: 'In those days the Danish ruled over Tranquebar—once again they want to acquire Tranquebar!'

The field of agency in which restoration projects occur in Tranquebar is diverse, as exemplified by the street in which this old woman lived. Restoration of a group of five houses had in this case been undertaken in collaboration between a Danish funding agency (Bestseller) and an Indian NGO (INTACH), with the interests of an Indian heritage hotel chain added on subsequently, as one of the buildings had become a hotel that was owned by Bestseller but managed by Neemrana. Thus, the interests of many agents merge in such projects, producing a context in which it can often be difficult for the inhabitants of Tranquebar to assess precisely who are the agents responsible for any given project.

'Why has the Danish government sent you?' one of my informants asked as I solicited an interview; and as an independent researcher I thus found myself having to do away with notions of governmental powers and development aid being at my disposal. Similarly employees of INTACH reported being assumed to come from the Indian government when they went about their frequent surveys. The confusion continues. The Danish government was for instance rumoured to have played a role in a recent restoration of the town gate which had actually

been carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India. Indeed, observing past and ongoing restoration work as well as the increasing interest of foreign tourists and the repeated architectural surveys by Danish and Indian agents alike, some inhabitants of Tranquebar speculated that the restoration of the town gate augured the rebuilding of the town wall. A woman living near the town gate told me that ‘very soon they are going to rebuild the town wall. Once the king [of Denmark] ruled here; his great grandson ... promised to rebuild the town wall’. In actuality there were no such royal Danish promises, nor any Danish or Indian plan for rebuilding the town wall amongst any of the governmental and NGO agents that I interviewed. However, in previous decades there have been Danish state visits to Tranquebar in the context of development aid; and local memories of these events seem to have been superimposed on the heritage development activities of the present. A wider field of encounters between people in Tranquebar and manifold agents from outside the town thus fuelled rumours as a means of local theorising on Tranquebar as a heritage town. Independent researchers, NGOs, Danish or Indian governmental agencies were inevitably implied in the same fluid field of local perceptions— as they were indeed involved in a fluid field of collaborative planning and practice of heritage projects, with interests criss-crossing among them.

Small wonder, then, that the old woman in Goldsmith Street was not entirely sure who the people were who had asked her to sell her house. All she could say was that they had been foreigners, not from Tranquebar. Nonetheless, with her candid comment on restoration and tourism as a sign that Danish people wished—and were in the process of—‘reacquiring Tranquebar’, she shrewdly perceived the quest for restoration as part of the marking out of a distinctly Danish layer in the heritage palimpsest of Tranquebar. She added that she had no interest in politics and professed that she did not care who ruled, as long as the town developed economically and the prices for household goods were reasonable. Her remark was thus not confrontational or intended as an expression of post-colonial resentment. Yet it does point prominently to local perceptions regarding the question of what history—and whose history—is being preserved in Tranquebar in the current process of heritage town development. Is the history of Tranquebar to be that of the colonial period, presented to be consumed by wealthy foreigners?

In the light of accounts such as the above, I recommend that the agents who engage in the contemporary development of Tranquebar as a heritage town should pay the closest possible attention to the local perceptions and social consequences of their work, in order to include as many different perspectives as possible. This applies equally to Danish and Indian NGOs and governmental agencies that carry out restorations and other physical modifications of the townscape, and to scholars who contribute to the ways in which the town is presented as an instance of past and present cultural encounters. In the current

situation where an array of agents work with and plan activities such as restoration, dissemination, and development of heritage tourism, it can be expected that a number of social aspirations, relations and historicity will increasingly become articulated in mutual negotiation of the content of the cultural heritage of Tranquebar, its use and meaning, both in a local and a trans-national context.

Heritage under negotiation

One source which articulates divergent attitudes to the historic buildings and the heritage of Tranquebar is the presentation in the many development reports and architectural surveys that have been carried out in the town. Circumstances and episodes described here point to key fields of negotiation and conflict, as they continue to occur in practice. For instance, a group of Danish architects got a shock during their survey of Indo-Danish historical buildings in 1998:

An astonishing happening to which we became witnesses during our stay was: Happy schoolgirls tearing down the upperpart [sic] of the *only remaining part of the Danish fortification* Danmark Bastion to create space for a playground. And this *in spite of that* [sic] *this edifice is listed as a historical monument*. ... The explanation given by the head mistress was that the school wanted to establish a playground here because there was no other land available. (Kunstakademiets Arkitektskole 1998: 4, 8, emphasis added.)

The architects were here reacting against what they perceived as desecration and an irreparable destruction of a property which within their perspective was constituted as heritage by formalised practices such as collection of descriptions, listing, photos, maps, and publication of books, a classic mode of producing and controlling heritage (Handler 1985, Hancock 2008: 36–40).¹⁹

With Tranquebar's increasing status as a heritage town, the ways in which the townscape and buildings of Tranquebar are used, maintained and changed have become potential sources of clashes that are simultaneously about ownership and property and constitute an underlying fight for definition and control over history, where the question again arises: Whose history is at stake—and what history? This calls into question the matter of who—not only in actual practice but also ideally—has the power and the right to decide who can control the contested physical structures, their use and the histories that they represent.

The fact that between 2004 and 2008 three heritage hotels have been established in Tranquebar, just as a large sum of money for development of the town has been sanctioned by the Union Tourism Ministry of India (Shankar 2008), is an indication that both private entrepreneurs and public Indian authorities believe in tourism development with the historical townscape of Tranquebar as the attraction. With the current situation, in which several Danish as well as

Indian agents continually engage in practical work for the preservation of heritage, rather than just producing an increasing amount of reports on the topic, the scope for clashes about the built structures of Tranquebar and their significance for the past, present and future of the town is intensifying.

An example is the work of the Tranquebar Association, on which one of the founding members related:

We have already made objections [about construction activities], for instance the [New] Jerusalem Church; the bishop ... all of a sudden wanted a new belfry in concrete built on top of the grave sites ... We prevented that by protesting vigorously to the district collector and to INTACH ... we sent letters of protest ... And ... you may say: Should ... you venture to do that as a foreigner? And you can call into question whether we are the ones who should do it ... But ... we think that is has been necessary. It thus prevented that they built this belfry, even though they were a bit displeased with us.

This points to a number of issues: above and beyond the aspect of property and control, which I have already touched upon, it indicates a debate on materiality and aesthetics (Herzfeld 1991, Thompson 1979). Not only are protests made concerning the desecration of the church as a relic of history, but it is also particularly emphasised that the planned belfry was intended to be made in concrete. A number of development reports reiterate the perspective that modern concrete structures, that in a number of cases have been added to historic buildings and their surroundings, are ugly and inappropriate. One example is the Indian Archigroup Architects' Pre Appraisal Report on Development and Conservation of Tranquebar, carried out in 1993 on behalf of the Danish Embassy in New Delhi. In this report the various built elements that shape the townscape of Tranquebar are described in short passages such as the following:

SCHOOL COMPLEX ON ADMIRAL STREET – year 1741. It is a complex of school, residences, hostels and a prayer hall. Some of the buildings are badly dilapidated needing immediate attention. *Additional buildings constructed in reinforced concrete are very ugly in character.* Original Ziegenbalg house and Prayer hall done in a classical Indo-European style still exist. It is owned presently by TELC (Archigroup 1993: 12, emphasis added).

Similarly other constructions are critically assessed:

GIRLS HOSTEL UNDER ROMAN CATHOLICS ... *Plenty of new construction also which spoil [sic] the street scape [sic] on King Street* (ibid, emphasis added).

The question of aesthetics is clearly both a matter of perceptions of historic authenticity and of how the significance of heritage properties should most

appropriately be marked. This is also indicated by another situation, related by a member of the Tranquebar Association:

We were talking with the then mayor of Tranquebar ... [some years ago], and she says: We should like to have a new pavement on King Street. And her new pavement, her terminology, it preferably had to ... be a sort of asphalt with a sort of *glittering* stones that shine, and then she wanted a sort of chains and shining lamps all along ... really, they have this somewhat Tivoli park perception of it ... something that must be presented needs to have a touch of Tivoli and blinking lamps in all sorts of colours ... If you enter an Indian temple, you will very often see that they have *scrapped* the crystal chandeliers and have hung up fluorescent tubes instead. But ... then I go back and I think of the fact that when I was apprenticed as an electrician ... back in the 1960s, why ... I went around to put up fluorescent tubes in everybody's kitchens, then we were pulling all these beautiful lamps down, so that was a transition period, such was the *time*, such was the *time* then, and it is simply that time that has moved to India now in many respects. Why, today there are many of these ... plastic utensils [in India]... I remember how my mother back in the 1950s *scrapped* her fine kitchen utensils and got some *horrible* plastic – today you would say some horrible plastic, but of course she thought that it was smart and it was lovely, [she] *scrapped* some of the *beautiful old* pots and got some '*fine*' – fine thin aluminium [pots], right – with plastic handles, she had some *beautiful* old pots and a lot of things ... And *this* is simply in many ways – this is the period which has now set in in India ... there they also scrap all of the old things, all the beautiful crafts, then all of a sudden it is something factory made.

These quotations associate the perception of historic authenticity with a particular linear representation of temporality and a corresponding representation of Tranquebar's place in history (Clifford 1988, Fabian 1983). Old works of craft and the traditional past for which they stand are valued, while the aspirations for modernity which are expressed in the reshaping of the material surroundings is defined as a phase that might later give cause for regrets because it threatens historically authentic surroundings that should have attained a status of something worth preserving. But what is being preserved?

Encountering the past or encounters with the present?

The concerns that are expressed in the debates on aesthetics, materiality, and historical authenticity can be seen as part of a dominating narrative. 'Time stands still in Tranquebar', proclaims a recent article in the widely circulated Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, referring to the ongoing work of '[c]apturing the lost magic' of the town (Chari 2009). In a similar vein, the contemporary townscape of Tranquebar is often quite literally represented as a place that stands still in

time—an image that implies an implicit comparison with what is presented as Tranquebar's historic heydays as a Danish trading colony (Pedersen 1987: 50). A report prepared by INTACH and Bestseller submitted to the Indian government for funding of town development states: 'The history of the town has three evident phases: The town before the Danish rule. The town during Danish rule. The town after Danish rule' (INTACH 2008: chapter 4.1, u.p.). In this perspective the 225 years of Danish occupancy are made pivotal to the conceptualisation of the history of Tranquebar to promote it as a heritage town.

If the past is a foreign country (Lowenthal 1985) then this country is certainly portrayed as accessible for visits in Tranquebar, to Indian as well as Danish and other foreign tourists. In a Norwegian tourist description of 'our forgotten colony' (Aagre 2001, u.p., my translation),²⁰ it is thus declared that:

The old town gate is like a time machine in time and space. On one side: India in year 2001, on the other: Denmark in the 16th century. A tiled town gate separates the two worlds. ... Today it looks more like a ghost town, a European town that has lost its way into Asia and cannot find the way back, a town like a sleeping beauty ... (ibid).

The same perspective is found expressed in development reports, such as the following, written by Indian architects on behalf of the Danish embassy:

... the winds of changes due to industrialisation and other associated development have blown past this town leaving the extensive Danish aura of the township unaltered ... [as an] architecturally historic, serene and unchanged environment ... [that] offers the visitor the tranquillity of the past in contrast to the present day's hectic life (Archigroup 1993: 2).

This narrative of a timeless present arrested in the colonial period does not provide much scope for understanding what the past means in Tranquebar. After all, the town does not stand still in time; rather, the development of Tranquebar as a heritage town can be seen as a process of interpretation and negotiation, in which the built traces of the colonial period are just not historic, but become so, in a process where they take on special significance as they are in varying extent talked about and used as heritage. A more promising perspective in which to represent and explore Tranquebar could be that of perceiving this place as an expression of cultural encounters not just in the past, but also in the present, taking account of different and changing memoryscapes and the ways in which Tranquebar is constituted not simply as heritage, but as a heritage palimpsest.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.galatea3.dk/dk/Menu/Forskning/Nationalmuseets+Tranquebar+Initiativ/Om+Initiativet> and <http://www.tranquebar.info/>
- 2 Indicating the wide field of interests in which Tranquebar is situated, reports of this type have variously been produced by Danish and Indian scholars and

consultants representing a range of agents including Danish architectural institutions, the National Museum of Denmark, the Royal Danish Embassy, Indian hotel chains, the Directorate of Town and Country Planning under the Government of Tamil Nadu, and increasingly also the Indian NGO INTACH, operating in cooperation with multiple agents including the Danish Bestseller Foundation, the Tranquebar Town *Panchayat* (town council), and the Department of Tourism under the Government of Tamil Nadu. (E.g. Hiort, De Fine Licht & Lund, eds. 1987, Petersen et al. 1993, Munch-Petersen 1995, Kunstakademiet's Arkitektskole 1998, Henk 2001, Kryger & Gasparski 2002, Ajit Koujalgi Architects 2004a and 2004b, Hansen 2005, the National Museum of Denmark 2005, Bestseller Foundation 2006, Tharangambadi Town Panchayat n.d., INTACH 2008.)

- 3 Here, as in all other quotes in the paper, the informant has been rendered anonymous to keep confidentiality. All quotes from Danish agents have been translated into English by the author. The notion that '*poverty preserves*' can be found expressed in a number of accounts of Tranquebar (e.g. Pedersen 1987: 63). The implied portrayal of stagnation, decay, underdevelopment, and the need to save the historic buildings is a recurrent narrative which implies a specific conception of linear temporality that posits an ensuing value of preservation as saving the traces of the past out of time (Clifford 1988).
- 4 Esther Fihl, personal communication.
- 5 Italics (here, as well as in following citations) indicates where the informant put particular stress on the words.
- 6 This admonition seems also to address contemporary cultural and political issues in Denmark. Considering that the topic of debate here was not research in general but dissemination to the Danish press, the remark could be interpreted as being directed at a wider debate on cross-cultural encounters of relevance to the Danish public, namely that of contemporary relations between Denmark and the world, at home and abroad. Just as the issues of other cross-cultural encounters, such as the contested integration of immigrants and refugees in Denmark, was a topic receiving much press at the time, Denmark was in the aftermath of the global 'Muhammed cartoon crisis', sparked by Muslim protests against the publication of twelve editorial cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in a national Danish newspaper in 2005. In emphasising a more humble perspective on the Danes as foreign visitors amongst the Tamils in the colonial period, the advice on how to present this cultural encounter of the past to the press seems implicitly directed towards promoting public reflection on the conditions of the cultural encounters in which Denmark is engaged today.
- 7 Quoted from the webpage of the association: [http:// www.testsite.runemester.dk/om/](http://www.testsite.runemester.dk/om/), accessed 30 March 2009, my translation.
- 8 The Danish Kronborg Castle, widely known as a main setting of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', is regarded as one of northern Europe's most important Renaissance

castles and receives about 200,000 visitors each year (<http://www.kronborg.dk/en.aspx>, accessed 30 March 2009). The fact that Fort Dansborg, situated in India, is held to be second in size only to the important national monument of Kronborg amongst Danish fortifications is one source of interest in Tranquebar amongst historically minded Danish visitors (Knudsen 2003: 8).

- 9 Cf. the debate in Fihl 1984, Hernæs 1985, Olwig 1985 & 2003, Brimnes 1992, Simonsen 2003.
- 10 For this observation I am indebted to work in progress by my colleagues Mads Daugbjerg and Thomas Brandt Fibiger.
- 11 For an analysis of constructions and challenges of this specific national narrative, which has held wide currency in historiography and popular accounts of Danish colonialism, see Thisted this volume.
- 12 In a formal presentation on an associated webpage, the initiative is presented as follows: 'The Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark constitutes a framework for a number of research projects, which all revolve around the study of cultural encounters in Tranquebar – then and now.' (<http://www.galathea3.dk/dk/Menu/Forskning/Nationalmuseets+Tranquebar+Initiativ/Om+Initiativet>, my translation.)
- 13 Tranquebar has a diverse population, the members of which belong to three main religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Additionally, caste (*jati*) remains a fundamental frame of local social life, and is reflected in a tendency to caste-based settlement. Colonial and mission history also affects the pattern of settlement in Tranquebar, as the members of the two dominant Christian communities in the town, Protestants and Catholics, are found concentrated respectively around the Protestant Ziegenbalg school in Admiral Street, and in the south-western corner of the town near the Catholic school and convent, as well as in the settlements of the scheduled castes who have historically been more prone to convert than members of the higher castes (Pedersen 1987: 54).
- 14 Since the woman's father was now dead, I did not find out the basis for the story about the town gate. For a detailed investigation of merging memories of the Danish and British colonial powers in Tranquebar, see Nonbo Andersen, this volume.
- 15 Thanks to my colleague, Thomas Fibiger, for referring me to the work of Hirsch and Stewart.
- 16 The term is derived from Latin: *palimpsestus*, from *palin*: again, and *psestos*: scraped. The phenomenon is known from parchment and vellum, costly materials, which for economic reasons were scraped and reused when the original text was no longer considered useful. The result is a document in which the original text may be partially erased and illegible in places, but still be present as a visible layer under the new text. Palimpsests with their layers are a source of great interest in historiography. In poststructuralist literary criticism, the

concept of the palimpsest has also become a metaphor of intertextual aspects (Brüel & Nielsen 1993: 451).

- 17 The Danish territory of Tranquebar from 1620 consisted of a fortified post in the town of Tharangambadi, which the Danes called Trankebar, and was expanded in 1670 with a surrounding area of approximately fifty square kilometres (Feldbæk 1980: 102 ff.).
- 18 Many agents have engaged in attempts to buy buildings owned by the local population in Tranquebar. These include Bestseller, the Tranquebar Association and Neemrana, who have all made successful as well as unsuccessful bids for buildings that they consider to be of special architectural or historic merit. The economic prospects looked up in the development of tourism and with an increasing amount of restorations, buildings in Tranquebar have become attractive for independent developers, for purposes such as summer residences or tourism related business. As Swamy (this volume) records in detail, attempts at buying or more aggressively pressurising local people out of their homes is a side effect of the contemporary development of Tranquebar as a heritage town and tourism destination.
- 19 There is, perhaps, some element of irony in the fate of the town wall and its bastions, the bricks of which are now largely scattered across the town as parts of more recent buildings which are little regarded in the current plans for developing Tranquebar as a heritage town. While this former fortification of the town is lamented by conservation architects as a shockingly derelict and unvalued monument of the Danes, the bricks which have been mined from it have gone on to signify other and more recent local histories, as my fisherwoman informant hinted at with her characterisation of Tranquebar as the town where the fishermen, through their resourceful appropriation of the bricks, lived in houses that were better built than those of neighbouring villages. As Swamy (this volume) points out, the fishermen's lengthy economic and residential history in Tranquebar is de facto being silenced in the contemporary representations and developmental emphasis on colonial history as the primary heritage of the town.
- 20 Denmark and Norway, now separate nation-states, were one when the trading colony in Tranquebar was established.

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**The last Vettiyan:
A musical tradition and
a degraded low caste profession**

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Abstract

As the feudal, caste-based organisation of labour in village India has given way to capitalist market forces and wage labour relations, traditional low caste professions are beginning to disappear. One of these professions is the inherited, highly stigmatized office of funeral drummer and graveyard attendant, called vettiyan. In Tranquebar, only one person from the Paraiyar caste is still serving as vettiyan, and even he dreams about a better future for his son. This article examines the gradual disappearance of the vettiyan profession in Tranquebar and the neighbouring villages in relation to the general changes in the economic, social, and symbolic status of the low castes. It looks into the ambiguous symbolic meanings of drums and drumming, and compares the vettiyan profession to that of other drummers and musicians from the Paraiyar caste. The article focuses on the subtle cultural encounters between people, who belong to the same caste and share almost similar cultural backgrounds, but still define each other as 'others'. It argues that the few remaining vettiyan are used by their Paraiyar caste fellows as symbolic repositories of the negative, degrading connotations of untouchability and impurity that are still associated with their existence and which they vehemently strive to escape.

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This article is based on empirical data from two-and-a-half months ethnographic fieldwork in 2006–2007. For the Tranquebar Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark, I studied the low caste communities in Tranquebar and collected daily life items for the Ethnographic Collections at the museum (Lillelund 2009). The Danish foundation Bikubenfonden generously provided the grant. I also owe my thanks to S. Balakrishnan, who worked for me as interpreter and field assistant. Without his help and advice, this study would not have been possible.

Introduction

'There is one house where we do not go.' The elderly man pointed his head towards the end of the street to indicate the direction of the house, where nobody from the street apparently were willing to go, let alone sit or eat. *'The man of that house does village work'* he explained. I was baffled. For the past twenty minutes, my newfound informant had told me about the exploitation and discrimination that the Paraiyars¹ until quite recently had suffered from the 'upper' caste Vanniyars. How Paraiyars were not allowed to walk through the Vanniyars' streets, enter their houses or eat together with them, though they worked hard every day on these people's land. Now he told me outright that he and his caste fellows themselves were practising discrimination, and that even against one of their own caste fellows. *'We are all the same, but that family is looking dirty. We don't like to eat in that house.'*

The 'village work' (*ur velai*) that the elderly, protestant man was referring to was the playing of the *tappu* funeral drums and the related tasks of gravedigging and cremation, which have been hereditary duties imposed on men from the Paraiyar caste. This work is associated with the utmost degree of ritual pollution because of the close association with death, human corpses and animal skins. The pollution assumed to derive from this work has been used to explain and legitimate the low status of the Paraiyars in the local hierarchy of castes (Moffatt 1979b: 256; Greene 2002; Arun 2007b: 90).² In Tranquebar as in many other villages of Tamil Nadu, the funeral drumming and grave-digging duties are only taken care of by specific individuals, exclusively men, called *vettiyan*s. The majority of the Paraiyar men work as casual labourers in the fields, at the construction sites or at the beach loading and unloading equipment and fish to and from the boats of the large fishermen community: occupations which are not associated with any degree of ritual pollution, though they are indeed indicators of a low social and economic status.

Today, only one man officiates as *vettiyan* in Tranquebar, and his and his family's social and economic status and general life circumstances are remarkably different from the rest of the Paraiyars in the village. While the discrimination and ill treatment of the Paraiyars generally has diminished significantly in the course of the past twenty to thirty years, the *vettiyan* and his family are still subject to discrimination, abuse, and even physical violence. They live socially isolated from the rest of their caste people, who keep away from them because of the stigma associated with drumming and grave-digging, and are thus discriminated against by 'upper' castes and Paraiyars alike.

Until twenty five years ago, there were four *vettiyan* families in Tranquebar. However, three of the families have quit the work, as the sons of the respective families have succeeded in finding other and better occupations free from the stigma of ritual pollution. In most of the surrounding villages, there are already

no *vettiyan*s left. Here villagers of all castes belonging to the Hindu faith³ now have to make do without *tappu* drum players for the funeral processions and instead engage other Paraiyar drum orchestras playing more 'decent' non-stigmatized types of drums, while engaging casual labourers of any caste for the grave-digging.⁴ This development reflects the marked decline of the 'upper' castes' authority in the village society and is one of the significant consequences of the breakdown of the old feudal caste structures, which have characterized the post-independence period. Today the 'upper' castes in Tranquebar generally no longer have the power to impose traditional work duties on the Paraiyars, and the Paraiyars are free to seek new and better opportunities on the labour market. However, it is still difficult to break social tradition in Tranquebar, as revealed by the case of the one man who still officiates as *vettiyan* in Tranquebar, despite discrimination and isolation.

The last remaining *vettiyan* in Tranquebar also dreams of a better future for his son free from the regular abuses at the funeral ceremonies of mainly the fishermen community and from the social isolation at home in the Paraiyar street. He is therefore determined to be the very last *vettiyan* in Tranquebar, despite the fact that his teenage son is a very talented *tappu* player, who often goes along with his father to play at local funerals. If the *vettiyan*'s son manages to find an alternative source of livelihood, the *vettiyan* profession will completely disappear in Tranquebar and with that a distinct musical tradition, which for centuries has been closely associated with the cultural and artistic traditions of the Paraiyar caste.

This article examines the gradual disappearance of the traditional *vettiyan* profession in Tranquebar and the neighbouring villages in relation to the general changes in the economic, social, and symbolic status of the low castes⁵ in the area. As part of the analysis, I will look into the ambiguous symbolic meanings of drums and drumming, and compare the *vettiyan* profession to that of other drummers and musicians from the Paraiyar caste. Contrary to the *vettiyan*s, other Paraiyar musicians are not avoided by their own caste people, but accepted as part of the community and even respected for their musical talent. However, most of the other Paraiyar musicians in the Tranquebar area are also mainly playing for Hindu funerals, so why precisely are the *vettiyan*s singled out and stigmatised even by people from their own caste?

The cultural encounters described in this article are related to the processes of social and economic change, which have not only significantly changed the power relations between the different castes in Tranquebar, but also added new dimensions and interpretations to the meaning of caste and cultural identity. This is particularly true of the Paraiyar caste. In the course of the past thirty years, the Paraiyars in Tranquebar have experienced a gradual emancipation from the feudal caste norms and the demands of the 'upper' castes⁶, which has encouraged them to redefine their caste identity in an attempt to shed the negative

connotations related to their caste. Like all other caste communities, the Paraiyars define themselves collectively in relation to the other castes in the village. However, the new identity that the Paraiyars attempt to carve out for themselves is also defined in opposition to the 'old' identity as low, dirty and depraved, which for centuries has been imposed on them by other castes.

This article addresses the cultural encounters involved in this process, where caste identity and cultural traditions are negotiated. The cultural encounters are not ground-breaking, historic encounters between people from different continents, religions, or ethnic groups, but subtle everyday encounters of those who share similar cultural backgrounds, but still define each other as 'others'. In conclusion, I will make the argument that the few remaining *vettiyan*s in the Tranquebar area are used by their Paraiyar caste fellows as symbolic repositories of the negative, degrading connotations of untouchability and impurity which are still associated with their existence, and which they vehemently strive to escape.

It is characteristic of the present situation in Tamil Nadu that people from the Paraiyar caste interpret their supposed common cultural identity differently, depending on the specific caste structures in their respective villages and towns. The examples from Tranquebar are therefore not representative of the Tamil Paraiyars in general, but add new aspects to the existing studies of the Paraiyars' musical traditions (e.g. Wolf and Sherinian 2000; Greene 2002; Clark-Decès 2005; Arun 2007b) and to the general body of literature on the gradual transformation of caste structures in India.

Contrary to the cases of the Paraiyars in the Tamil villages of Villupuram and Pappanallur⁷ studied by the anthropologists Isabelle Clark-Decès (2006) and C. Joe Arun (2007b) respectively, the Paraiyars in Tranquebar have not revolted collectively against the 'upper' castes' demand for *vettiyan*s to play the *tappu* drums at funerals and village festivals. Neither have the distinct musical tradition of *tappu*-playing got any kind of revival among the Paraiyars, as is the case in a large number of other villages and towns in Tamil Nadu, where the *tappu* drum is today used as a positive symbol of the Paraiyars' common cultural identity and tradition (cf. Clark-Decès 2006; Arun 2007b).

In Tranquebar, the Paraiyars generally believe that the sound of the *tappu* drums is unpleasant and inauspicious, and like the rest of the villagers, regard the *vettiyan* and his occupation as dirty and uncivilized. The Paraiyars thus share the 'upper' castes' view of one of the Paraiyar caste's most distinctive cultural traditions. Still, nobody urges the *vettiyan* to quit the job.

The Paraiyars of Tranquebar

As in most South Indian villages, the Paraiyars and other low castes⁸ in Tranquebar generally live outside the main village (*ur*) in separate settlements

referred to as 'streets' e.g. Samyan Street, Karan Street and Mission Street, the last mentioned because of the high proportion of protestant and catholic Paraiyars living there. The five Paraiyar settlements hold about twenty to thirty per cent of Tranquebar's about 7000 inhabitants. Thus, the Paraiyar caste is the second largest community in the village, only exceeded by the fishermen community of Pattinavars, which makes up more than fifty per cent of the total population (PRAXIS 2005?: 17). However, the Paraiyars generally consider their settlements to be separate villages, rather than parts of the Tranquebar village, even when some of these settlements lie immediately next to the streets of the Vanniyar or the Pattinavar caste.⁹

The livelihood situation of the Paraiyars in Tranquebar is generally miserable. It is difficult to find continuous work, and the wages for casual and agricultural labourers are low—approximately a hundred rupees a day for men and seventy rupees for women. A large proportion of the Paraiyar population lives in utter poverty and barely manages to get enough to eat, while others make a somewhat better living employed e.g. as drivers, carpenters or school teachers.

Until about thirty years ago, most of the Paraiyars worked as agricultural labourers for the local landowning castes (mainly Vanniyars), but as the water of the Uppanar River ran low and irrigation possibilities diminished, the agriculture around Tranquebar collapsed, and now only very few people get work as agricultural labourers.¹⁰ While the agricultural collapse caused economic hardship and insecurity for the Paraiyars, it has had the effect of contributing positively to their social emancipation from the 'upper' caste repression. The century old ties between the Paraiyars and the landowning castes were severed, as the Paraiyars were not economically dependent on the landowners anymore. As a result, the landowning castes lost their former power to dictate to the Paraiyars and over the years the abuses and discriminating behaviour of the 'upper' castes has significantly diminished.

Today, the Paraiyars in Tranquebar are usually not openly discriminated against. The Paraiyars drink tea in the same teashops and eat in the same eateries as others, and are free to walk in whichever street in the village they please and to sit in the buses wherever they like. Compared to Paraiyar communities living further inland, where agriculture is still profitable and they mainly work as agricultural labourers, the Paraiyars in Tranquebar are significantly less troubled by prejudice, marginalisation, and discrimination. However, they are still subject to subtle discrimination, particularly from the fishermen community, for whom some of them still work.

The fishermen community's continued discrimination and dislike of the Paraiyars became particularly evident immediately after the tsunami (December 2004), when many of the Paraiyars found that the fishermen actively tried to prevent the NGOs from helping the many Paraiyar families, who had been seriously

affected by the tsunami. These families, who had sought shelter from the tsunami in schools and community centres in the inland hinterland, were in the first chaotic days after the catastrophe driven out by fishermen families, who refused to stay under the same roof as the Paraiyars. Later on, they had to block the road to get the attention of the local and international NGOs that rushed in to offer aid to the survivors, as the focus was entirely on the fishermen community.

On the second anniversary of the tsunami, the fishermen village *panchayat* (caste council) erected a large monument commemorating the tsunami victims. The monument was financed by a foreign NGO and situated at a prominent place at the entrance of Tranquebar. However, only victims from the fishermen caste were listed in the monument, while the names of the about twenty victims from the Paraiyar caste did not appear on it.

The examples show that the relations between the Paraiyars and the fishermen caste presently are characterized by unequal competition, and certainly not by mutual interdependence, which characterized the patron–client relationships between ‘upper’ castes and low castes of the previous feudal caste structures. The ‘upper’ caste status of the fishermen caste in relation to the Paraiyar caste is in other words not a given, but a position that the former constantly sustain and defend. On the other hand, people from the Paraiyar caste attempt to protect themselves against discrimination and ill treatment by avoiding all unnecessary contact with the fishermen and other ‘upper’ caste people, e.g. the Vanniyars.

The Paraiyars in Tranquebar do not have strong traditions for raising collective protests against ‘upper’ caste repression, as is the case in some Tamil villages. Rather, it seems that the Paraiyars to a large extent have tried to appropriate ‘upper’ caste norms and behaviours as a measure to become accepted as respectable citizens by the other villagers. An example of these efforts of sanskritization (cf. Srinivas 2002: 42 pp.) is the Paraiyars’ general dissociation with the musical tradition of *tappu* playing, which according to many of the Paraiyars in Tranquebar earlier was a salient feature of their caste’s cultural tradition. It is uncertain when the Paraiyars in Tranquebar actually quit *tappu* playing, if it is at all true that their male forefathers all used to play the *tappu* drum, but my impression was that nobody except the *vettiyan* (and maybe the men from the families, who were previously working as *vettiyan*s) knew how to play the drum.¹¹ On the other hand, my impression could indeed very well be wrong.

Drums that chase away the evil spirits

The *tappu* drum is a flat, circular drum made out of a wooden or metal frame covered by a single tightly stretched drumhead of calfskin or goatskin, glued to the frame and tightened with a thin leather or cotton rope. The *tappu* drum typically measures about forty centimetres in diameter, but this is subject to

great variation.¹² When the drum is played, it is held upright between the arm and the chest and beaten with a thick wooden stick and a thin flat bamboo stick or in some cases, at least in Tranquebar, with ‘sticks’ made out of rubber stripped from discarded car tyres.¹³

The *tappu* drum, also known as *parai*, is closely identified with the Paraiyar caste, which is the only caste that plays it, and whose caste name assumedly derives from the name of the drum (cf. Moffatt 1979a; Viramma *et al.* 1997; Clarke 2002; Arun 2007b).¹⁴ In addition to funeral ceremonies, the *tappu* drum is traditionally played for the yearly village festivals and by the Paraiyar village messengers to announce local news about meetings, festivals—and deaths.

Today, the *tappu* drums are mainly associated with death and funerals, where they are played because of their strong power to chase away the evil spirits flocking around the dead body. The sound of *tappu* drums is therefore always interpreted as a sign of a recent death in the village and instantly associated with death pollution, misfortune, and distress—and generally, with the presence of the inauspicious *vettiyan*, who is supposed to be permanently polluted because of his close association with death.

For funerals and festivals the *tappu* drums are traditionally played by a *parai melam*: a drum orchestra consisting of usually five members: four *tappu* players, and one person beating the *satti*, a small drum made out of a clay pot (*satti*) with a drumhead of goatskin stretched over the mouth of the pot. However, this type of drum orchestra no longer exists in Tranquebar or any of the neighbouring villages, because of the very low number of *vettiyan*s remaining in the area. When more than one drummer is required for a funeral, the *vettiyan*s may now gather a small provisional orchestra for the occasion calling on a son or a *vettiyan* from another village, if they are available.

In the Tranquebar area, the *tappu* drums are today exclusively played by *vettiyan*s. This is also the case in the villages studied by Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine (Viramma *et al.* 1997) and Clark-Decès (2005, 2006), respectively. In Pappanallur, on the other hand, most of the Paraiyars know how to play the *tappu* drum, though it is only a small number of men who actually beat the drums for funerals and festivals. In this village, the duties of grave-digging and cremation are taken care of by men from the Thotti caste (Arun 2007b). In Alapuram, the village studied by David Mosse, the *vettiyan*s were not at all *tappu* players but woodcutters and gravediggers belonging to the Pallar caste, while drumbeating and sweeping was done by Thottis from the Paraiyar caste (Mosse 1999: 68).

The *vettiyan* is today regarded purely as a profession among the Paraiyars in Tranquebar. Both the *vettiyan* and other Paraiyars deny that the *vettiyan*s constitute a specific Paraiyar sub caste or clan (*vagaiyara*), as it is the case in other places, where the *vettiyan*s are regarded as the lowest subdivision (Moffatt 1979a,b; Viramma *et al.* 1997; Clarke 2002; Clark-Decès 2005; Münster 2007). In

Tranquebar, a person is only a *vettiyan* as long as he works as a gravedigger and *tappu* player. The families, who were previously working as *vettiyan*s, are today no longer marked by the stigma of the profession, but accepted and respected on par with all other Paraiyar families in the street.

The specific character of the *vettiyan* occupation and the caste structures in general thus varies significantly from one district to another in Tamil Nadu. It even seems that the content of the *vettiyan* profession has changed considerably during the past hundred years, and that they have not always been subjected to discrimination and stigmatization.

According to Edgar Thurston (1855–1935), ‘Vettiyan is the name applied to one of the officials of the Tamil Paraiyan settlement, who is also called Toti or Thotti. [...] The name Vettiyan is said to be equivalent to Bittiyan (bitti, for nothing), or one who does service, e.g., collecting grass, firewood etc., without remuneration’ (Thurston 1909 vol. vii: 392). Thurston’s description draws attention to the fact, that the *vettiyan* occupation is not an ordinary job, but principally an unpaid duty of certain Paraiyar men. Thurston states that the duties of the *vettiyan*s are multifarious. The duties may include jobs as diverse as carrying revenues from the village to the government treasury, taking care of the graveyard and digging graves, and going around the rice fields and diverting the course of water to irrigate the various fields according to the rights of the agriculturalists (Thurston 1909 vol. vii: 393). Thurston further describes the office of the *vettiyan* official as a hereditary duty, which entitles the holder to ‘some respect among his brethren, and to certain emoluments in kind e.g., grain at the harvest season’. Thus, the duties of the *vettiyan*s may previously have been much more varied than they are today, as the officiating *vettiyan*s apparently were not looked down on and discriminated against, but actually respected by their caste and guaranteed a small livelihood from the local ‘upper’ caste landowners.

The *vettiyan* profession: a vestige of the past

The *vettiyan* in Tranquebar, Subaraj, is a man of about forty years. He has been working as a *vettiyan* since he was only nine, when he took over after his father who had died suddenly. As many men of his age from the Paraiyar caste, he has never been to school and only knows how to write his name. From a very young age, Subaraj was taught to play the *tappu* drums by his father and uncle. However, the *vettiyan* occupation has not been passed down through generations in Subaraj’s family. Subaraj’s father himself was working as an agricultural labourer, when his younger brother, a very good singer who sang at funerals, died. The brother had been a very close friend of some of the *vettiyan* families in Tranquebar, and when he died, they asked Subaraj’s father to join them in playing the *tappu* drums at funerals and village festivals. Thus Subaraj’s father was drawn into the *vettiyan* profession.

The fact that Subaraj’s father did not himself inherit the *vettiyan* duty, but

apparently chose to take up the occupation freely, suggests that the *vettiyan* occupation was considerably less stigmatized among the Paraiyars fifty years ago. Further, it may suggest that the inherited *vettiyan* occupation was already beginning to disintegrate and disappear. For Subaraj, who inherited the *vettiyan* duty when he was still a young child, it has not been possible to quit the occupation, even though he feels very bad about the job.

Subaraj generally serves all the Hindu communities in Tranquebar and some of the neighbouring villages. Whenever a death occurs, the deceased's family sends for him. Subaraj is then in charge of digging the grave, if the deceased is to be buried, and of playing the *tappu* drum, first in front of the deceased's house and later in front of the funeral procession, which carries the body to the graveyard or cremation ground. Sometimes Subaraj goes to play alone, but most families prefer two or more *tappu* players for the rituals. Therefore, Subaraj often brings his son and his son-in-law to play at the funerals, and sometimes also the old man, Mariappan, who is the last remaining *vettiyan* in a village situated about six kilometres away from Tranquebar. If there are three or four persons playing at a funeral, one of them usually plays the *satti* drum, while the rest play *tappu*.

The funeral engagements of the *vettiyan*s vary in time. Sometimes Subaraj plays for only eight hours and at other times, the engagement lasts both night and day. The payment is also subject to negotiation. Sometimes, Subaraj gets a hundred rupees, sometimes 200, and the amount may even go up to 600 or 700, if he and his son are engaged by other drummers to play for a funeral outside Tranquebar. However, this rarely happens. Only when Subaraj plays for funerals of the fishermen community, the price is fixed at 150 rupees for grave-digging and *tappu* playing, and while Subaraj is free to refuse working for the rest of the village communities, he is obligated to perform the grave-digging and *tappu* playing services for the fishermen caste. In return, Subaraj is entitled to claim a small amount of cheap fish from the fishermen each day, if he goes to the auction hall at the beach, where the fish is landed. The *vettiyan* occupation is thus a vestige of the past feudal caste structures, characterised by hereditary patron-client relationships, which obliged the low caste clients to work for the 'upper' caste patrons and the latter to provide for the former.

While most low caste families were specifically serving one particular 'upper' caste family, certain individuals—among them the *vettiyan*s—were obliged to perform their service jobs for the whole village e.g. sweeping the streets, announcing deaths to neighbouring villages, disposing of the dead cattle, digging the graves for the dead and playing the *tappu* drums for funerals and village festivals. These traditional hereditary duties of the low castes, which by many contemporary anthropologists are referred to with the Tamil word *tholil* (literally 'job' or 'duty'), have generally disappeared as a result of the 'upper' castes' diminished power and the low castes' refusal to carry out, what they regarded as

highly degrading duties (cf. Clark-Dèces 2006; Arun 2007b).

Today, many of the previously hereditary duties of the low castes have been transformed into regular jobs, which are paid on market terms and carried out without force, while they are still performed by the same castes as before. In Tranquebar, it is, accordingly, the Thotti or Kattunaiyakar¹⁵ caste who now work for the municipal corporation as street sweepers and garbage collectors and for privates as septic tank cleaners and manual scavengers (cf. Lillelund 2009). Only, the *vettiyan* occupation is still a partly enforced hereditary duty. The fact that the fishermen community is still able to enforce the *vettiyan*'s duty to dig graves and play *tappu* for their funerals, reflects the strong position of power that this caste locally holds by virtue of its numerical and organizational strength.

During my fieldwork in Tranquebar, Subaraj actually once attempted to quit working for the fishermen community. After a big controversy over the payment for a particular funeral, where Subaraj refused to accept to be paid for only two men's work, when there had actually been three men playing, he was told by one of the fishermen that if he did not accept the payment, he could not work for the fishermen community in the future. Accordingly, Subaraj refused the money and declared that he would no longer render his services to the fishermen caste. On the next occasion of death in the fishermen community, Subaraj staunchly refused to play at the funeral, but was at last talked into at least digging the grave for a smaller amount than the usual funeral payment.

However, the fishermen village *panchayat* was not willing to accept Subaraj's resignation, and Subaraj and his wife were both scared that the fishermen would resort to violent reprisals against the family, if he maintained his refusal to play. The controversy ended with a compromise between the fishermen *panchayat* and Subaraj, who agreed to resume playing if the fishermen stopped beating and abusing him during the funerals and promised always to pay him the correct amount for his services.

During the controversy, Subaraj approached the leader of the Paraiyar village *panchayat* for help. The *panchayat* leader, however, strongly urged Subaraj to resume his duties to the fishermen community on the grounds that *tappu* playing had been both Subaraj's and his father's special skill, and that Subaraj himself did not know any other work. Perhaps the *panchayat* leader feared that the conflict would escalate and involve the whole Paraiyar community if Subaraj continued to refuse playing for the fishermen caste, or maybe he just realised that Subaraj did not have any real alternative to make a living for himself. Still, it was clear to me that the Paraiyar *panchayat* leader and assumedly many of the other Paraiyar villagers preferred Subaraj to continue his *vettiyan* profession, even though they all intensely disliked the sound of *tappu* drums and generally avoided association with him and his family.

The dispute between Subaraj and the fishermen caste and the subsequent reaction of the Paraiyar *panchayat* leader show the ambiguities related to the status of the *vettiyan*s. On the one hand, the *vettiyan*s are looked down on and discriminated against, and on the other they are forced or pressurized to continue practising their polluting musical skills. One reason for this is obviously religious: the Hindu funeral rites are not complete without the presence of a *vettiyan* and the sound of *tappu* drums. However, the *vettiyan* also plays an important role as the social and symbolic ‘other’ of the fishermen and the Paraiyar communities.

In relation to the fishermen caste, the *vettiyan* represents the low, polluting ‘untouchable’, who sets the relatively low social status of the fishermen community in perspective.¹⁶ In relation to the *vettiyan*, the fishermen are powerful ‘upper’ caste patrons and not the rough, poor, and uneducated villagers that people e.g. from the urban, educated middle castes/ classes see in them. Earlier, the entire Paraiyar caste played this role in relation to the fishermen caste, but today the Paraiyars increasingly refuse to take part in relations contributing to their own debasement and generally avoid unnecessary contact with the fishermen.

In relation to the Paraiyars, the *vettiyan* represents the ‘old’, imposed, dirty, and degraded Paraiyar identity as opposed to the ‘new’ and much more attractive identity as clean, educated, and respectable, which the Paraiyars today attempt to carve out for themselves. By making a distinction between an appalling old discarded Paraiyar identity and a new, respectable identity, the Paraiyars are better able to cope with the stigma still associated with their caste. However, the very acceptance of a former, ritually polluted identity— today represented by the *vettiyan*—means that the Paraiyars have to distance themselves from their own history and cultural traditions. For Subaraj and his family, the coping strategy of the Paraiyar majority means that they are only further discriminated and marginalized.

From time to time, Subaraj also works for the local authorities. When bodies are washed up on the beach or a suicide is discovered, Subaraj is called by the police to remove and dispose of the dead bodies. This is a job that he loathes more than anything. After the tsunami, the local authorities were again making use of Subaraj’s services, as he was ordered to remove the many dead bodies lying all over the village. He worked alone for five days continuously and filled six truckloads with dead bodies, without being paid anything apart from four packets of arrack (cheap local spirits) per day. Moreover, Subaraj was offered neither food nor any protective measures (shoes, gloves etc.), though he himself was highly affected by the tsunami and had lost both his house and his stores of rice.¹⁷

For Subaraj, the tsunami was not only a frightful experience and an economic disaster; it was yet another blow to his self-esteem, as the aftermath of the

tsunami manifestly underscored his social position as a (lesser human) person, destined to perform the most physically and ritually polluting tasks, without any compensation. That Subaraj to top it all was offered large quantities of cheap liquor to keep him going only further emphasized the prejudice against him, and the *vettiyan*s in general, as dirty and drunken.

The inherited occupation as *vettiyan* is not only making Subaraj extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, but also strips him of his fundamental right to self-determination and governmental protection, despite the fact that the so-called 'untouchability' and discrimination on grounds of caste is prohibited by the Indian Constitution. The democratic Indian state's laws for protecting the low castes from exploitation and social discrimination did not protect Subaraj from being treated according to the rules of the previous feudal caste structures even by the authorities. This happened, despite the fact, that *vettiyan* is explicitly listed as one of the caste groups entitled to special protection and programmes of affirmative action in the state of Tamil Nadu (Govt. of Tamil Nadu 1984). The rules of the past feudal caste structures, which still define the *vettiyan* profession, are in other words so powerful and compelling, that they rule out the norms and values of the modern, democratic Indian state in an unruly situation of chaos and distress as the tsunami catastrophe.

The exploitation of Subaraj by the local authorities after the tsunami further underlines the marginalized status of the *vettiyan*s. In this case, the *vettiyan* occupation appears to have been so closely associated with the former feudal, social order that it seemed incompatible with granting the individual rights guaranteed by contemporary democracy. Taken together, the examples above show how Subaraj, by virtue of his occupation as *vettiyan*, is customarily made to represent the rough, uncivilized 'other', in opposition to which the fishermen caste, the Paraiyars, and the local authorities all attempt to identify themselves.

Drums and status differences

While the *vettiyan* profession and the traditional *parai melams* of *tappu* and *satti* drummers are now generally disappearing in the Tranquebar area, other Paraiyar drum orchestras are not about to do so. On the contrary, these orchestras are developing and adjusting to the demands and possibilities of the contemporary society.

There are no drum orchestras based in Tranquebar, but in the village close to Tranquebar, where the old *vettiyan* Mariappan lives, altogether twelve men form an orchestra, which plays for funerals, temple functions, and marriages. The actual size of the orchestra depends on the occasion and the wish and financial capacity of the family engaging it. For funerals, it usually consists of five persons, four drummers and a clarinettist, while up to ten persons may be included in the orchestra in the case of a marriage.

No one from this orchestra plays the *tappu* drum, and the musicians generally distanced themselves from the *vettiyan tappu* players, during my interviews with them. For instance, they emphasized that they always were engaged separately by the deceased person's family in case of a funeral, even though they from time to time—quite often, actually—ended up playing together with the *vettiyan* in the funeral procession. They particularly emphasized that they always stopped playing at the entrance of the graveyard and never followed the dead body up to the grave, as the *vettiyan*s do. The leader of the orchestra, John, clearly preferred to talk about the orchestra's engagements for village festivals and marriages, rather than about the funeral ones. However, most families—even among the low castes—today prefer to engage classical 'upper' caste musicians for marriage functions rather than folk musicians like the members of this orchestra. Therefore, in all probability the marriage engagements of the village folk orchestra are very few and only for the very poorest of the Paraiyar families.¹⁸

The typical instruments of the Paraiyar folk orchestras are wooden drums like the *pampai* double drum, the braying *urumi*, the small *ravanai*, and the *tavil*, a large double-headed barrel drum. These drums do not have the powers to chase away malevolent spirits and are not associated with any of the negative properties that adhere to the *tappu* drum. The *tavil* drum is even one of the important instruments of the classical music tradition and regarded as very auspicious by all castes (Wolf 2000: 286). Moreover, one or two *nayanam* wind instruments of the oboe type also form part of the orchestra.

In the recent years, drum orchestras in the Tranquebar area have shifted out the traditional instruments with more popular and modern ones. The *urumis* and *pampais* are replaced by *tavils* and conventional side drums, while the *nayanams* typically are replaced by clarinets. Further, the *tavil* drums are now covered with a fibre sheet drumhead on the one side, as these are not affected by water like the traditional ones of goatskin. This alteration of the *tavil* drums thus makes it possible to play it outdoors even in the rainy season. The musicians are generally proud of these and other developments and innovations, and all of them seem to be content and comfortable with their identity as village musicians.

The main difference between the members of the village folk orchestra and the *vettiyan tappu* players is—apart from the types of the drums beaten—that the orchestra members are not playing because they have inherited a caste specific duty, but because they have a musical ear and like to supplement their income with earnings from playing their instrument. The musicians of the village folk orchestra are all free to refuse any engagement, and to quit the occupation whenever they want to.

A few years ago, the orchestra members all joined a newly started association for Paraiyar musicians, The Tamil Nadu Thirupananar Musical Association, which

among other things organises musical competitions and awards prizes for the best performances. The membership of the musical association clearly helped the musicians to identify themselves as artists and to express a sense of pride about their instrumental expertise. However, the musicians' persistent attempts to distance themselves and their musical performances from that of the *vettiyan*s' indicate that their close association with funerals and deaths make them vulnerable to prejudice and contempt despite the fact that they have voluntarily entered into the profession and are not beating the supposedly polluted *tappu* drum.

In the future, the families of deceased persons in Tranquebar and the nearby villages will probably have to engage only this kind of drum orchestra for the funerals, as it is already the case in many other villages in the district and in other parts of Tamil Nadu (cf. Münster 2007: 195). With the disappearance of the *vettiyan* profession, one of the salient features of the former feudal caste structures, the social institution of specific inherited low caste duties finally disappears. It also means that a distinct musical tradition is about to disappear and the rituals related to Hindu funeral ceremonies bound to change (cf. Clark-Decès 2006).

The traditional accompaniment of the *parai melam* to Hindu funerals has already been transformed, as there are no longer any proper *parai melams* in the Tranquebar area. The musical traditions associated with the *tappu* drums are thus subject to considerable change. The knowledge handed down through generations regarding the manufacturing of the drums and the many different intricate rhythms and their relation to specific rituals and occasions are no longer transmitted to the next generation and thus soon forgotten. Subaraj does not know where to buy new wooden frames for his drums, and he therefore still uses his father's old, lopsided frames for his drums, covering them with new skins from time to time.

In addition to the *vettiyan*s and the village folk orchestras, there are furthermore two Paraiyar drum orchestras of a completely different type in the town of Poraiyar about three kilometres from Tranquebar. These two orchestras differ from the village folk orchestras in the area, in that they only play for marriages, receptions, and other functions and never are engaged for either funerals or Hindu festivals. These orchestras use only modern style instruments like bass drums, side drums, saxophones, and percussion instruments, and the band members are never subjected to any degree of prejudice or disrespect because of their musical performances, but quite the contrary.

In one of these orchestras, one of the drum players is a former *vettiyan*, who has managed to quit his hereditary duty and change his *tappu* drum for a modern non-stigmatised type of drum. This way, he has been able to change his social status and shed the stigma of pollution of 'untouchability' that he suffered, when he was still working as a *vettiyan*. In this orchestra, the fear of ritual pollution is not even an issue, and none of the members is apparently trying to

distance himself from the former *vettiyan* drummer.

Drums are in other words closely associated with the social hierarchy of caste, and in Tranquebar, the *tappu* drums and the *vettiyan*s who play them, are to be found at the absolute bottom of the hierarchy. Modern style bass drums and side drums, on the other hand, are regarded as prestigious instruments, which add to the social status of the musicians who play them.

Concluding reflections

As a result of the general emancipation of the low castes in the Tranquebar area, the inherited low caste occupation of a *vettiyan* is now about to disappear. While the men from the other previous *vettiyan* families in Tranquebar have succeeded in freeing themselves from the inherited duty of the family and leaving the occupation, the last *vettiyan* in Tranquebar, Subaraj, is still bound by his duties towards the fishermen community. There may be a host of different social, economic, and psychological reasons as to why Subaraj as the last and only person in Tranquebar has not been able to free himself from his inherited duties. For instance, Subaraj was only a child, when he inherited the *vettiyan* occupation; he has no education and does not know how to do any other job, and most important probably he does not have the support of his caste to stand up against the powerful fishermen community. In this article, I have described how the gradual transformation of the rural caste structures is affecting the few remaining *vettiyan*s in the Tranquebar area as compared to the other Paraiyars, notably the musicians. Concentrating on the cultural encounters internally in the Paraiyar caste, the article argues that the *vettiyan*s are used by their caste fellows as symbolic repositories of the negative, degrading connotation of untouchability and impurity, which are still associated with the Paraiyar caste. Thus, I have suggested, that the reason why the Paraiyars in Tranquebar so clearly distance themselves from the *vettiyan* and his family is that they themselves try to escape from the humiliated and stigmatized identity as dirty, drunken, uneducated and uncivilized, that they previously were—and to some extent still are—endowed with by the other castes.

However, I do not find that the Paraiyars' avoidance of the *vettiyan* and his family indicates that the Paraiyars generally accept the internal hierarchy of caste, or that they practise caste discrimination in the same way as the self-professed 'upper' castes, as it has been suggested by the anthropologist Michael Moffatt (1979a). The Paraiyars in Tranquebar are generally very conscious about caste, and though most of them prefer to socialize with people from their own caste and most definitely marry within their own caste, they do certainly not approve of the existing hierarchy between the various castes in the village.

While the sound of the *tappu* drums is generally intensely disliked by the Paraiyar villagers in Tranquebar, *tappu* drum play is currently revived and reinterpreted by Paraiyars in a large number of cities and villages as a positive

symbol of their common cultural identity and tradition (cf. Clark- Decès 2006; Arun 2007b). Instead of attempting to distance themselves from the traditions and practises that the ‘upper’ castes have condemned as inferior, uncivilized, and polluting, these mostly young people take pride in the cultural customs of the Paraiyar community and for instance take up the musical tradition of *tappu* playing. The *tappu* drums are now played at organised concerts for an admiring (Paraiyar) audience and at functions and rallies of the political *Dalit* movement, that struggles for the social and political rights of the low caste *Dalits* (cf. Arun 2007b: 97).¹⁹ Even Subaraj’s son, Kumar, who in Tranquebar is being condemned by his Paraiyar caste fellows for playing the *tappu*, has won prizes for his excellent drum play in competitions in the state capital Chennai. The symbolic meaning of the traditional *tappu* drums is thus subject to radically different interpretations among the Paraiyars today.

In Tranquebar, there are still only a few active supporters of the Tamil *Dalit* movement, who have even heard of this alternative interpretation of the meaning of *tappu* drums. However, the *Dalit* movement is now gaining increasing support in some of the Paraiyar streets in Tranquebar, so it is possible that the alternative interpretations of the Paraiyars’ cultural traditions, including the playing of *tappu* drums, will catch on in the coming years.

Notes

- 1 Today, most of the Paraiyars in the Tranquebar area use the Gandhian term *Harijan* (often pronounced *Arjan*) to designate themselves. As one of the formerly so-called ‘untouchable’ castes, the Paraiyar caste is included in the official list of Scheduled Castes, while the many NGOs that have come to Tranquebar after the tsunami call them *Dalits*. For the purpose of describing change in specific local caste structures and cultural practices, however, I find that these three popular terms are all too vague and all-encompassing, as they are used to designate a myriad of different castes from all regions of India without distinction. My use of the caste name Paraiyar is not meant as an offense and I apologize to those who may feel hurt by my use of a caste name, which locally has been—and still is being—used as an offense and abuse.
- 2 David Mosse (1999: 67) and Isabelle Clark-Decès (2005: 13) both argue that the relation between ritual pollution and social status is inverse, and that it is because of their low social status that the Paraiyars have been forced to carry out polluting jobs as drumming, scavenging, etc.
- 3 Only Hindus make use of drummers for funeral ceremonies.
- 4 Daniel Münster describes a similar development in the village of Somanathapuram (pseudonym) in the district of Thanjavur (2007: 195pp).
- 5 I prefer to use the term ‘low castes’ to designate the vaguely defined group of people otherwise called as Untouchables, *Harijans*, Scheduled Castes, or

Dalits. I find that the term ‘low caste’ calls attention to the fact that the people encompassed by this term belong to communities, which are all characterized by their low social status, but may differ vastly from each other with regard to occupation, lifestyle, religion, political influence etc. In Tranquebar, nobody from the four different low caste communities generally identified themselves as belonging to a common group of *Harijans*/Scheduled Castes/*Dalits*, though people from the Paraiyar caste frequently used the term Harijan to designate specifically their community. Cf. note 1.

- 6 I use the term ‘upper’ castes to designate all castes that locally are attributed with a higher social status than the ‘low castes’ (i.e. Scheduled Castes). This means that some of the ‘upper’ castes of this article e.g. the Vanniyars and the Pattinavars (fishermen caste) are castes, which in other contexts are often referred to as ‘low castes’, because they generally rank low in the overall caste hierarchy.
- 7 These villages are located to the north of Tranquebar in the districts of Villupuram and Kanchipuram, respectively.
- 8 The Paraiyar caste is by far the most numerous of the four low castes in the Tranquebar area. The others are the Pallar or Devendra Kula Vellalar caste of small-scale peasants and casual labourers, the Chakkiliyar caste of traditional cobblers, now mostly shoe menders and casual labourers, and the Thotti caste—or Kattunaiyakars, as they prefer to call themselves today, who are mostly working as street sweepers and manual scavengers (cf. Lillelund 2009).
- 9 The idea that each caste constitutes a separate community—even a separate village—is shared by all the numerically large castes in Tranquebar.
- 10 The Uppanar River runs on the southern edge of Tranquebar and flows into the sea immediately south of the Danish fort. The river is part of the large Kaveri River basin, which for centuries has supported intensive irrigation of the highly fertile agricultural land in the area around Tranquebar. During the past decades, the water content of the Uppanar River has considerably reduced, due to the still unsolved dispute over the distribution of water from the Kaveri River between Tamil Nadu and the neighbouring state of Karnataka.
- 11 It is in this context relevant to mention that the British colonial ethnographer Edgar Thurston a hundred years ago cited H. A. Stuart, who was in charge of the Madras Census Report, 1891, for writing that ‘it is only one section of the Paraiyans that act as drummers. Nor is the occupation confined to Paraiyans’ (Thurston 1909 vol. vi: 78).
- 12 See Arun (2007b: 85 pp) for a thorough description of the traditional manufacturing process of *tappu* drums in the village of Pappanallur. In Tranquebar, the *vettiyan*, however, prefers to use goatskin rather than calfskin, because it makes the drum sound better and it does not stink.
- 13 There are apparently local variations in the ways that the *tappu* drum is

beaten. In Pappanallur, the *tappu* is played with only one stick and the open palm of the other hand (Arun 2007: 86).

- 14 See also the interesting commentary by Clark-Decès (2005:199), who argues that 'Parai', the etymological root of the word Paraiyar, should not be translated as 'drum', but instead as 'information by beating the drum'. This could indicate, that the Paraiyars traditionally were a caste of village messengers, rather than funeral drummers, and that the *tappu* drum once primarily was associated with informing services, rather than with deaths and funerals.
- 15 This community was previously known exclusively as Thottis in the Tranquebar area, but today they call themselves Kattunaiyakars, which they consider less degrading than the term Thotti. However, the state government of Tamil Nadu is not ready to accept this community as Kattunaiyakars, but insist that they are Thottis by caste. Contrary to the Thottis described by Mosse (1999: 68), Thottis/Kattunaiyakars are not regarded as a subgroup of the Paraiyar caste in Tranquebar. There is only one family from this community living in Tranquebar, while there is a large Thotti/Kattunaiyakar community in the neighbouring town of Poraiyar. Despite the Manual Scavenging Act of 1993, which prohibits the emptying of open toilets manually, a few of the Thotti/Kattunaiyakar women still work as manual scavengers in Tranquebar and Poraiyar. However, this work is not imposed upon them.
- 16 Cf. note 6.
- 17 Men from the Kattunaiyakar caste of the neighbouring town Poraiyar were paid fifty rupees per day for the same work, but were not offered food or protection, either.
- 18 For a short discussion on the difference between folk music (*natupura esai*) and classical music (*karnataka esai*) in Tamil Nadu, see Wolf and Sherinian (2000: 913).
- 19 Cf. note 5.

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Processions and chariot festivals in Tharangambadi and Velankanni: Cultural encounters and marking

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Abstract

This article addresses South Indian festivals on the basis of fieldwork in Tharangambadi and Velankanni during 2006 and 2007. In South India festivals and chariot festivals have been common since medieval times. Even if there is some agreement that ritual expressions in chariot festivals in India have developed with interaction between the different religions, they have recently been seen rather as expressions of the strength of the religious communities than instances of collaboration, due to the present conflicts among different religious communities. This article will argue for a more even approach as it will identify instances of cultural encounters among the different religious communities as they may be identified in the celebration of the various South Indian festivals. The article will also consider how far the festivals are manifestations of separate religious communities and the ways in which they are manifestations of collaboration among them. The article will at the outset consider observations of recent chariot festivals in Tharangambadi, where Hindus and Muslims celebrate related chariot festivals for Renuka

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This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in Tharangambadi by the author in January 2006 and August–September 2007. The registration of the Muslim car festival of the Pirs was carried out by Oluf Schönbeck in July 2006, and the author owes him great thanks for permission to draw freely on his notes. Parts of the presentation of the Muslim Car festival are taken directly from his notes. Besides Andersen and Schönbeck Malene Lykkebo and Daniel Henschen were part of the research group, and R. Meenaka and Barathi have acted as interpreters at different parts of the field collections. The fieldwork could, however, never have been carried out without the generous collaboration of numerous people in Tharangambadi, to all of whom our grateful thanks. The field trips have been generously supported by the Bikubenfonden, Denmark and are a part of the larger Tranquebar Initiative at the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

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Devi and the Pirs of the local darga respectively. Besides these celebrations, the chariot (palanquin) festival celebrated for the Holy Mother of Good Health of Vellankanni will be included.

Introduction

Far back in South Indian religious practice, gods have left their temples during certain festivals to allow their worshippers to draw or carry them around the temple to inspect their realm before they are reinstalled in their sacred seats once again after their visit terminated. That might be at the end of a visit to another holy site, but most frequently the gods circumscribed parts of their territory day after day during the festival so that their worshippers might meet them daily. Until recently it had been a problem to date the historical depth of these festivals as they are of little significance in the religious texts.¹ This problem has, however, been partly resolved by Paul Younger (2001) in his recent general study of South Indian festivals. Younger dates back the festivals to more than a millennium on the basis of epigraphic evidence which states information on donors to this kind of festivals. In his classification of the different types of festivals he forwards reasons that some of the festival forms may date further back, even to pre-agricultural society (Younger 2001:12).

This article addresses the extent to which the popular festivals integrate the society across the boundaries of present day religious groups. This is an issue which will have to be specified with regard to how far and in which forms the festivals may be considered to integrate some parts of the society or whether they may rather be seen as points of conflict between today's different religious communities. Both points of view are found in the general and the specific literature on the festivals.

A number of scholars have stressed various elements of conflicts which originate in the public religious festivals and the processions held during the festivals. Knut A. Jacobsen notes that research has given 'particular attention' to how 'religious processions' as part of larger festivals 'have been used for political gain or have caused riots' (Jacobsen 2008:6).

In Tamil Nadu Diane P. Mines has documented how conflicts between low and high castes are spread out in conflicts about access to temples, and fights over routes for processions (Mines 2005:189–99 and *passim*). In 2007 the processions which took the pictures of Vinayakar (Ganesh) to throw them into the ocean, led to clashes between Hindus and Muslims in some places, and in many places special precautions had to be taken to prevent trouble.²

Thus the festivals may also be seen as disintegrating from a societal point of view. On the other hand many scholars have stressed that there is evidence that the festival culture in South India has constituted a point of meeting in which different religious groups have often borrowed ritual elements from one

another (Raj 2008:84–87). It is also common that people of different creeds participate in one another's large public festivals. In some cases they participate as devotees. This is the case when they have made a vow to a healing god, goddess or saint for someone's recovery. There are numerous examples of Christians and Muslims participating in the cult of some South Indian Ammans (mothers, mother-goddesses), or Hindus and Muslims participating in the festivals of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni (Raj 2008), or Christians or Hindus collecting the healing dust from the grave of a Muslim Pir.³

One could count such transgressions of one's own religious community for active participation in the rituals of other religious communities as social integration of the society at large, but it would be a narrow viewpoint. In the words of political scientist Robert Putnam it would be classified as bridging or integrating social capital as opposed to bonding or excluding social capital, when the different groups in society isolate themselves from participation (Putnam 2000). Putnam's communitarian approach tends, however, to give too much importance to the interaction in civil society and too little to the signals issued from the state. In 2007 the importance of this balance became manifest when Hindu communalist groups tried to relocate the procession taking the puja figures of Vinayakar to the seashore at Tharangambadi through some Muslim hamlets. Some people were killed, but the police immediately ensured that the procession followed the traditional route and further atrocities were prevented.

A special issue in relation to the festivals in question is their relation to the leadership and theologians of their respective religious communities. Historians of religion as well as anthropologists have repeatedly stated that the reason for our lack of historical knowledge of the festivals is that they have been of little interest to the formal leadership of the religious communities (Clark-Decès 2005; Younger 2002:3), and in many cases the leaders either participated in the celebration in marginal positions or even worked directly against the festivals (e.g. Younger 2002:109). W.T. Elmore who wrote on the innate gods in South India in 1913 stated that South Indian 'Bramans' had 'a considerable interest in these gods [...] and no doubt [knew] much more about them than they [were] willing to tell.' An experience he explained as due to his impression that the Brahmins were 'ashamed of their connexion with this worship and their fears of the gods' (Elmore 1984:x). The religious leadership's reluctance to support or to admit their support of the festivals means that it is not a simple task to transfer Putnam's concepts from the western world in which they were developed to the interpretation of festivals in South Indian society.⁴ Here it will be important to sustain the interest in bridging and bonding behaviours in civil society, but it is also important to keep an open eye on the position of the state as defined by political action and the religious organisations.

Another important aspect is the longitudinal changes of South Indian society which may open our eyes to changes in the meaning and functions of the

festivals. Younger has drawn attention to how the festive tradition may work in a specific integrating way in a society with cross-cousin marriage as in South India.

The “Dravidian” marriage arrangements characteristic of South India permit marriages with first cousins on the mother’s side. This arrangement helped keep land within the larger family network and led to the creation of tight endogamous caste groups. To operate in the economic, political, and cultural arenas, these relatively small caste groups needed forms of common social interaction with others, and festivals provided one of the most effective forums for social interaction. Of course, other structures of social interaction define everyday economic and political relations among the castes, and psychological and religious dimensions of festival activity transcend the social, but South Indian “festivals” have a specific social function in both reflecting and redefining social structures. (Younger 2002:5)

It is evident that this cannot be considered as the only ‘function’ of a festival, and as Younger rightly admits ‘other structures of social interaction define everyday economic and political relations.’ His anthropological understanding of integration gives a deeper meaning to the collaboration between different social groups defined by closed family and caste groups in everyday life. And it may be used as part of an interpretation of the position of the formal leaders in various religious organisations and their positions with regard to the festivals. The archaic elements in a number of the oldest festivals indicate that the South Indian festival ‘grammar’⁵ dates back to a time before the formation of religious communities—in the modern sense of the term—a development which began in India in the first quarter of the nineteenth century as is evident from the introduction of the new term Hindu, which appeared for the first time in 1808 in the English writings of the Bengal reformer Rammohun Roy.⁶ So when theologians and priests argue for the cleaning of the festivals from elements of other religions or the exclusion of people of other creeds, their endeavour may be understood as a quest not only to introduce new and modern forms to religious life, but also of societal disintegration; the kind that matches the form of social capital which Putnam calls bonding.

From a methodological point of view this means that the festivals will be investigated in ways that identify how they may lead to social integration and disintegration of society. They will be seen from a societal perspective, and some elements may lead to the integration of society at large, some to smaller groups and thereby the exclusion of others—processes which will be related at the end of the article to the major changes in society.

The sites and the festivals

In this paper Tharangambadi refers to the old fortified town, and the surrounding settlements with about 7,000 inhabitants.⁷ To the east of the old

walls are the present bazaar streets and old housings mostly left untouched by the tsunami. Along the coast to the north is the old fishermen area which was devastated, but where new streets of concrete houses have been built at a safe distance from the sea and towards the east. The fishermen live here. Concrete houses for Dalits who lost their houses in the tsunami have been built as well.

The first Evangelical Lutheran Christian mission towards non-Christians began in Tharangambadi in 1706, but at that time there were already Indian Catholics as well as Muslims and Hindus in the town. At present there is one Evangelical Lutheran church, one of the Church of South India within the city walls, a Catholic church (The Holy Rosary Church) just outside and several Pentecostal churches to the south-west of Tharangambadi. Within the fortifications is a Muslim neighbourhood with a dargah at the so-called new Mosque and the old Mosque. There are also a number of Hindu temples in the old fortified town, some of which are run by formalised boards. It is relevant to note that even if two of the large Hindu temple compounds are in ruins, they are both still part of the religious environment of Tharangambadi and rituals are carried out at regular intervals. For the present article the Renuka Devi temple in the fishermen hamlet is the most important. It is a recent construction built on the spot of a former Renuka Devi temple at a central spot of the old fishermen settlement. The entrance to the temple is through a gate tower to the east in the tall wall which surrounds it. Then one enters an open meditation hall, and a dancing hall which is built in front of the central temple tower which houses Renuka Devi's head as she is depicted in the cult.

The festivals for this study were selected in order to illustrate how the different religious groups collaborate as well as try to maintain boundaries among themselves. As stated in the introduction, this kind of festival often offers such data. It is of special interest as the chariot festival of the Muslim pirs is extremely uncommon in Islam elsewhere and thereby offers an instance of the local culture which is relevant for the understanding of the traditional open-mindedness of Islam in South India. In this respect the festival of Our Lady of Good Health in Velankanni is different as Catholic festival life generally encompasses numerous processions where the saints are carried out of the churches and around the town by devout Catholics. The reason for including it in this article even if Velankanni is situated about forty kilometres to the south of Tharangambadi is that it offers rich data on the joint sacred spaces among the different religious communities in Tharangambadi. Another reason that makes it relevant is that we were able to identify Hindus as well as numerous Christians from Tharangambadi who participate in the festival of Our Lady of Good Health. The festival for Renuka Devi is then selected as the bottom line of a South Indian festival where some of the typical elements of the ritual grammar come forth.

One or several persons from our research group participated in all of the festivals during our various periods of data collection in Tharangambadi during

2006 and 2007. The descriptions of all the festivals are based on observation as well as in consultation with the relevant literature.⁸ As is evident from the references, we have been able to identify descriptions of the myth and history of Renuka Devi in South India and of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni. We have not yet been able to identify relevant descriptions of this kind of festivals for the Muslim pirs, but we hope to be able to put this festival in a larger frame in a later publication. For the present article the aim is to open up an understanding of the different forms of social capital sustained and created during the celebrations. To achieve this result it is best to begin with a description of the festival of Renuka Devi and proceed to those of the Pirs Sheik Ismail Sadaat Valiyullah and Seiyadina Saiyad Shaib Sadat Vailyullah, and end with the festival of Our Lady of Good Health as the distance to Velankanni necessitates some notes on the relevance of the festival to the inhabitants of Tharangambadi. Relevant instances of collaboration and mutual avoidance between the different religious communities during the festivals will be revealed in the descriptions to allow for the general analysis in the end of the article even if it is necessary to introduce new comments on levels of other forms of collaboration at last.

The festival of Renuka Devi

The myth of Renuka Devi is well established in the sacred literature of India where it is found in a number of different versions from the Mahabharata and through the Puranas to Shrimad Bhagavata (e.g. Elmore 1984; Mani 1979:339–341), but, as Elmore argues, the Renuka Devi cult in South India points to an old Dravidian goddess who has been connected with the Hindu pantheon (Elmore 1984:80), and in his study of Dravidian gods he offers solid evidence for her different Siva and Vishnu myths and appearances in South India. In her temple in Tharangambadi she is served by Brahmins arriving daily from Porayar three kilometres from Tharangambadi as all Brahmins have left Tharangambadi. Here it is the Vaishnava line of her myth which is described in a series of fifteen pictures painted on the inner walls of the dancing hall.⁹ We can follow how her father Renuka Asuran prayed to the Bala (baby) Durga for a child, and how the first of his twenty-one wives gave birth to a girl whom they named Renuka, and how they took care of the child who slept in her cradle which hung from the ceiling. After her marriage to the great Rishi Jamadagni and the birth of their sons she was still so chaste that she was able to fashion a pot from sand at the pond where she fetched water for the rituals her husband performed at home. But one day she saw the reflection of the Gandharvas in the pond as they were flying by, and she lost her chastity, and could no longer make the pot out of loose sand. Jamadagni ordered his son Parashurama¹⁰ to decapitate her, which he did. But when his thankful father granted him a boon Parashurama wished that Jamadagni should restore Renuka to life again. At a later point in the myth Jamadagni is killed by a king who wants his magic cow to feed his people, and Renuka dies of grief. But Parashurama takes both his dead parents to Rishi Guru Thatir who

advises him to bathe in the Ganga. When he does so his mother's head appears from the ground and later she reveals herself to him as the healing Mariamman. She is depicted in full person, seated and with a protecting many-headed cobra as a canopy and a snake in each hand with tongues of pure fire burning around her head— she is Renuka Devi.

A local friend who worked with an NGO told me that the pictures reflect the Brahmin version of the story; in the story told among the fishermen, Renuka Devi flees her husband's wrath and takes refuge in a fisherman's house. The fisherman and the fisherwoman try to protect her, but Parashurama kills them by beheading them all. He then asks his father to get his mother back, and the father gives him some holy water and tells him to put the heads and the bodies together and pour the holy water over it within a given time. So Parashurama hurriedly obeys his father but mistakenly connects his mother's head with the fisherwoman's body. Then he tells his father about the mistake—but nothing could be done to correct his mistake. That is why the Brahmins only worship Mariamman's head in the temples, as her body is a fisherwoman's. It was difficult to collect the myth, or ascertain how far these versions have spread or among whom. What can be said for sure is that both versions are in circulation, and the fishermen's version may be one reason for her popularity among them.

During the festival in August the fishermen are not allowed to go to sea for ten days, and the splendour of the festival dominates the entire town. At both ends of the fishermen's settlements gates of bamboo scaffoldings are raised and lit by chains of lights depicting changing gods: Vinayakar, Ammans and others.¹¹ The roads towards the fishermen settlements are lit by fluorescent tubes and Tamil pop and film music is heard from loudspeakers day and night. The electricity for this hubbub is produced by heavy and noisy diesel generators which can be heard day and night.

In front of Renuka Devi's temple between 800 and 1,000 people assemble every night for the show. Ladies and children on one side and males and young men on the other look at the changing shows performed at the bandstand in front of the temple. These shows have no religious content. Famous entertainers come here from Tamil television; folk dancers imitate Indian tribal as well as Hawaiian dances, generally with strong sexual implications that people enjoy. In the late evenings from 10 or 11 p.m. the young men start dancing with one another with wild forward thrust of their hips. When the elders determine it to have become too wild, one of the authoritative leaders of the fishermen panchayat who stands at the entrance of the temple crosses the square and orders them to behave.

It was said that Renuka Devi would be taken around the town on one of the nights in the middle of the festival, but eventually it happened only on the last night. In the early evening an impressive firework was sent up from the temple to

illuminate the air over Tarangambadi. In the temple the statues of Renuka Devi and Vinayakar were put on large palanquins and each was carried by heavy poles made of 12–17 centimetre thick logs. Later the orchestra and the temple dancers arrived. The dancers did not look like Tamils, but they were beautiful slender young women dressed in two pieces of clothing. Their hair was taken up, and over it they were given 25–30 centimetre high crowns to wear during their dance. The Brahmins came out of the temple and ‘fed’ the godheads with the smoke of burning camphor in front of them before they moved on and served camphor smoke to the people attending. The statues were then carried clockwise around the temple and carefully handled through the gate to a waiting tractor and truck which were to drive them into the town. Around midnight the procession started with Vinayakar’s small car in front, followed by Renuka Devi’s larger one, and moved slowly down the street towards the ocean and further around through the fishermen’s area in the northern and eastern part of Tarangambadi. All along the route women and children patiently waited with their offerings for the cars to come by. First they poured water under the cars, and then they handed the plate with their offerings to a Brahmin on the car. Each plate contained fruits such as bananas, rice, and a coconut, which was broken open in front of the godhead. When the sacrifice was performed the women immediately carried the plate into the house to the altar, where the broken coconut was placed.

All through the night and the following day the gods continued their rounds in the town. Late the second day when the dancers had been dancing for about fourteen hours their crowns were put aside and they stepped wearily along the streets to perform some tired dancing steps whenever the cars passed a house for the second time.

It is doubtful if Renuka Devi’s festival had integrative effect on society beyond the family and tightly bound caste group united by cross-cousin marriages. The route of the gods seems to have been restricted to the fishermen area and even if there were some Dalits living along the route it seemed to be a festival especially for the fishermen. The expensive festival had been financed by large donations from the fishermen and one may imagine that the festival bonded them together rather than open their society towards other groups in the village.

Nevertheless older Christian and Muslim men admit that persons from their communities participate in some parts of the Renuka Devi festival, and one might imagine that they at least would attend the fabulous shows in front of the temple every night. In our irregular participation during the nights of the festival we did not recognise any of the prominent members of the Christian or the Muslim community at the shows. When a Christian clergyman who was very open to the Muslims and Hindus in general was asked if he participated in the Renuka Devi festival, he admitted that he had been invited, but that he had not participated.

One may say that that the festival mostly binds the fishermen together and

that the religious part of it is almost solely for them, whereas there are some youngsters from the other communities who enjoy the shows and mingle with the fishermen during the shows.

As far as the grammar of South Indian festivals is concerned, the typical elements are the visit of the gods to their realm, where the devotees can see them. It is no problem for the devotees to go to the temple and see Renuka Devi and Vinayakar (*darshan*) or bring sacrifices to them, but in the case of some other gods it is difficult for the low caste devotees to enter the temple ground.

The chariot festivals of the Pirs

The importance of the Pirs is evident by the fact that their dargah is placed at the Old Mosque at the central spot of the eastern part of the Muslim hamlet in Tharangambadi. The Old Mosque is dated to the fourteenth century well before the arrival of the Danes, but I do not have any date of the Dargah which is now heavily plastered with modern concrete, and it is difficult to date it by looking at it. In the local religion the Pirs work mostly for good health, and it is repeatedly told that Hindu, Christian and Muslim women bring their children to the Pirs on Thursday nights when the shrine is open. Those nights are also common for Muslim women to go to the Dargah to pray, and one may well see ten or twenty properly veiled women turning towards Mecca to pray in front of the Dargah on such evenings. They are obviously addressing Allah and not the Pir as the grave is not oriented in the direction of Mecca. Other women, besides the praying ones, visit to collect the Baraka of the Pirs when the imam shakes the duster he has cleaned the grave with, over them and over their children's heads and shoulders.

There are three Muslim chariot festivals where the cars symbolising the two Pirs are drawn through the streets in the old fortified part of Tharangambadi. These are witnessed late in May and early in June. Here we will look only at the last of them as it documents a number of elements common to the Hindu car festivals.

The festival started with the appearance of a market in the street leading up to the mosque. A number of vendors were selling all kinds of articles from kitchen utensils to bangles, children's toys, caps for male Muslims, artificial as well as natural flowers, food, etc. Musicians and singers, some of them female, joined them on a stage put up in the square in front of the New Mosque in the early evening, and about 200 people assembled, mostly males but a tenth of them might well have been females. The females were also present as a number of them had assembled within the houses nearby, and one could see some of the veiled women in the porch of a house behind middle-aged men clearly belonging to the local elite of the Muslims. On the other side of the street a group of very young men and boys were enjoying the music, some of them dancing. After opening with three Muslim songs, the music consisted mainly of Tamil film songs

interspersed with a few 'village songs' and Carnatic music. Some very old songs and some rather new songs including very popular hits were played. One of them could be recognised as a present hit, from music videos played elsewhere. The popular film it came from was about a police hero, and had no religious content.

As the evening wore on and turned into night the music became gradually more frenzied and the dance of the young men and boys wilder. Clearly, the dancing was not completely legitimate, evident from their surreptitious glances towards the elderly men (and women) sitting on the porch across the street. The audience passed up money and notes with requests to the band. The music grew wilder and eventually the youngsters, including boys down to the age of six to eight, took to dancing on the street. More than once, the gentleman who was in charge of the whole arrangement interfered and tried—perhaps not wholeheartedly—to stop the dancing, apparently threatening to stop the music altogether, but he succumbed to the pleas of the young men. One could get the impression that their shouts of joy when the music was allowed to continue did not exactly annoy him.

The boys seemed to challenge one another in the dance, to dare one another—even the shy ones—to take part in what appeared to be a sexually very explicit dance. Their arms in the air, some with scarves in their hands, jumping back and forth they thrust their pelvis at one another without making full contact.

At about one o'clock the women retired, and all the men and young boys went to the dargah to start the procession. At last the procession car carrying an impressive flashing decoration (reaching some five or six metres high) was prepared, and it was ready for its round of the village. The procession was headed by musicians (three drummers dressed in blue and yellow jackets, an electrically amplified keyboard and a kind of clarinet) followed by the car with the flashing decoration being pulled by the youngest of the all male participants, i.e. boys some seven to ten years old, followed by an old jeep pulling a cart with the generator producing the power necessary for the decoration and the amplifier.

The procession moved to the east towards the seashore, and from there to the northernmost part of the village, and finally to the old city gate marking the southernmost as well the western borders of the village proper in order to finally return to the mosque and the dargah. Along the route sleepy people—mostly, if not only Muslims—came to their porches watching the procession pass by, and at least on two occasions, by the eastern and northern borders, the inhabitants of the houses marking the border came out offering sweetmeats which—after the prayers had been said—were distributed among the participants. Back at the dargah the imams recited from a prayer book. Finally, the doors of the inner sanctum holding the pir's tomb were opened, a heavy vapour welled out and a number of bowls holding mortar scraped from the walls of the dargah were passed around and the people present ate some of it.

With regard to the societal integration the Muslim car festivals seems to be more inclusive than the festival of Renuka Devi. Here Christian clergymen have said that they may participate, even if none was seen during our collections, and the cars move around through all parts of central Tharangambadi from the Muslim part of the town to the mixed Christian and Hindu parts of it. In all parts the people come out and look at the procession and pay their respect even if it may be difficult to know exactly what they think. As processions sometimes cause conflict the best indicator that it still integrates at the societal level may be that the processions do not meet with any opposition.

The reason for this may be the healing powers of Sheik Ismail Sadaat Valiyullah and Seiyadina Saiyad Shaib Sadat Vailyullah which people from all religious groups seem to trust even if some of them are reluctant to admit it. Christian clergymen would say that some people in their congregation visit the Pirs, but that it is wrong. The Pirs are nevertheless highly respected by members of all religious communities. The opposition may, however, come from the Muslim group itself, as some of the Muslims who have returned from the Gulf follow the criticism of Pirs put forward by Wahabi theologians.

In one interview (21 January 2006) a Muslim who had been to the Gulf himself indicated that there was this kind of resistance in Tharangambadi as well, but that he did not agree with it.

One may say that the Muslims in Tharangambadi have included the South Indian festival grammars in their religion, and that it may have been integrated at the societal level as it has created a space for members of the closed castes to meet, but that modern developments within Islam oppose this form of festivals.

The festival of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni

The festival of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni is one of the largest South Indian Festivals (Younger 2002:109, 115). In 2007 the crowd of pilgrims on a single day could have been more than a 100,000 persons, and official counts later estimated that 1,500,000 people had visited during the ten-day long festival (*Daily Thanti*). It is difficult to estimate when the cult was established which could have been at any time since the sixteenth century when 'many of the fishermen along the coast became Roman Catholic' (Younger 2002:109). The legend of a miracle in which Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni saved a Portuguese ship points to the existence of the cult even before the Portuguese lost Nagapattinam to the Dutch in 1658 (e.g. Frenz 2008:95).

The reason for including the festival of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni in a discussion of Tharangambadi is that Catholics as well as Hindus and Muslims and members of other Christian churches in Tharangambadi visit the church at Velankanni to thank her for benefits to their health. The ideal way to visit her is to go on a pilgrimage, and in Tharangambadi a shelter has been

built for the pilgrims who walk all the way on the coast road just in front of the Catholic Holy Rosary Church. One group which passed through came from Chennai, and their day started in the early morning when they prayed for three hours with fifty three rounds on the Christian rosary, and sang songs like 'Holy Mother Pray for us' (*Ave Maria*). Then they walked until breakfast and took some rest. Then they continued walking, as they listened to a tape recording of the Holy Mass. We met them during their rest after lunch in Tharangambadi, and they walked on until evening while they were praying the 'Way of the Cross' for forty sessions.

The clothing of the Christian pilgrims is white and saffron shirts, veshtis and saris and it was consistently told that it had been impossible to distinguish the pilgrims of the different communities from one another until recently. Now Hindu communalists have, however, started to attack the Hindu practice of joining the Christian pilgrimage, and the party from Chennai was evidently Christian as they walked along, because they drew a light procession car which carried a figure of Our Lady of Good Health and her banner on a sea blue background on the front, and a large picture of the blessing Christ on the back. This statement of faith also provoked booing from some children as they passed a Hindu village far to the south on the coast road.

It was said that there were some groups of Catholics who walked the proper pilgrimage from Tharangambadi to Velankanni, but many of the locals who went to Velankanni went by bus, and most of the visitors only attended the festival for one of the ten days. The pilgrim could carry his or her tasks out on the same day. On arrival the group of pilgrims hasten to the seashore where they go out and take a dip in the sea. Then they go to the small chapel of Our Lady of Dolours (Viagulamada Chapel). Here they bring their sacrifices of a sprouting coconut (many of the sprouts are one metre tall), a broken coconut with oil lit as a lamp, and a bunch of candles which they light after they have prayed and been blessed by the attending priests. At last they partake in the Holy Communion in the cathedral.

The official guidebook could be seen as a statement of inclusive social capital as it praised the number of people of different faiths who join Our Lady's flag hoisting ceremony on 29 August (*Shrine Publication* 2005:44), and there are indeed people of many faiths. Younger noted that a priest at the cathedral 'explains over and over that only Catholics should take the wafer' of the Holy Communion (Younger 2002:111). Hindu rites were included as well, and Younger suggests that the practice of sacrifice of hair to Velankanni by tonsure might be such a practice, so for him it is evidence of an inclusion of a Hindu practice when 'probably 20 per cent of the worshippers make their first offering [of their hair]' (Younger 2002:110). It is also possible to see how different groups of people carry their own practices with them to the pilgrimage. This is the case in the different ways of offering coconuts which distinguish Christians from Hindus.

In Tharangambadi a Hindu who said that he had sacrificed in Velankanni demonstrated that he had taken the coconut and flung it to the ground so that it had broken. The typical Hindu way of handling this sacrifice is different from the Christian way which does not expect the coconut to be flung on the ground.

As we know, the reason for a number of the visitors to go to Velankanni is that they have given a promise to go there in case Our Lady of Good Health would intervene for their health, and many of them bring gifts to the cathedral to demonstrate their gratefulness for her intervention. In the street from the seashore to the cathedral there are shops where one can buy the relevant *votive* gifts in silver—hands, cradles if they begot children, buses or cars if that is what they have prayed for. A large ‘museum of offerings’ at the back of the cathedral exhibits thousands of such gifts. Large and small pieces of silver varying from a few centimetres to full size torsos can be seen. It is evident that many of the prayers which have been fulfilled have been sent by married couples in order to get a child who had been born due to the grace of Our Lady of Good Health. In the official guide other kinds of miracles which are not easily recognised by the form of the *votive* gift are added. One of these is the story of how the police ‘by a miracle ... caught the robber and the gang’ who had robbed a family of their gold ornaments in 1992 (*Shrine Publication* 2005:93).

The central event of each day is when Our Lady of Good Health together with a number of other saints is brought out of the cathedral to be carried through the streets of Velankanni. After a large outdoor mass, three small and two large palanquins are brought out. The large palanquins are each carried by about a hundred persons. The palanquins are carried through the crowded streets of Velankanni and around the cathedral, and the official guide uses the technical Sanskrit term *darshan*, ‘to see (the god)’, which the Hindus designate as a meritorious act in its explanation of the large masses assembling.

All the pilgrims that have come to the Shrine from all parts of the world assemble outside the Shrine Basilica to have a ‘dharshan’ of their Blessed mother royally seated on the car with her divine Son and blessing all her children gathered around the Shrine. (*Shrine Publication* 2005:50).

In rite as well as terminology the festival of Our Lady of Good Health reflects deep-seated Catholic festival traditions successfully merged with the festival traditions of South India. And even the reasons for the visit of Hindus as well as Christians follow the lines of the other car festivals. We may remember the pictures of the myth of Renuka Devi in which her happy parents stay by her cradle hanging from above, or the healing Pirs. As noted, Our Lady of Good Health primarily intercedes for the health of people including the possibility of begetting a child.

The festival of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni is an issue between the various religious communities, evident from the Hindu communalists’

bothering of the pilgrims in many ways. The Catholic church at present stresses the way the festival includes the various religious communities. So the question of the festival is to be approached from other than the simple question of the generation of inclusive or exclusive social capital. One way is to look at it from the point of view of the Catholic authorities, and here Younger (2002) generally sees the festival as a problem for the authorities in spite of the fact that he lists evidence for support of it as well. Matthias Frenz's (2008) approach is to see the recent history of the festival as a deliberate attempt by the Catholic church to promote the cult of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni. According to me, Frenz is right in this regard. However that may be, the festival is evidence of the changes in South Indian festival culture as the society around has changed, and it may be time to return to Younger's anthropological approach to the festivals' integrating functions. That is how the festivals probably had an integrative effect across the close-knit family and caste groups in a society arranged along cross-cousin marriages.

Younger (2002:115) sees a problem: the successful promotion of the festival has resulted in a social change away from the original backing of local fishermen and low caste landless labourers to urban professionals— changes which for him is seen in the spread of the cult for the Holy Mother of Good Health e.g. Chennai in Tamil Nadu and Durban in South Africa. For him 'Only time will tell whether these other contexts for worshipping Velankanni will lead to a decline in the festival itself, or whether these more urban developments will take one direction, and the fishermen and landless labourers will return to a more traditional style of festival celebration at the revered seacoast shrine' (Younger 2002:116).

According to me Younger is right in his identification of some of the changes in the backing for the festival. The group of pilgrims from Chennai mentioned above is definitely part of the evidence. But in India this kind of success in disseminating a religious cult does not necessarily lead to its decay among the original cult group. Both groups may be included and it seems to be the case at present. What may be foreseen is that the Hindu communalists' critique of the festival may lead to less participation of the Hindus in the festival, and such a development will change the social capital generated through the festival from an integrative character to an exclusive character, bonding the religious communities within themselves instead of building bridges between them.

Conclusion

The three festivals analysed here—Renuka Devi, Sheik Ismail Sadaat Valiyullah and Seiyadina Saiyad Shaib Sadat Vailyullah, and Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni—show that they all follow a common festival grammar, stressed by the visit of the god, Pir or saint to his or her realm and offering darshan to the worshippers. When it comes to the integration of the local and larger society the three festivals are instances of different levels of inclusion

which has an immediate importance for the extension of their realms. Renuka Devi's festival may be seen as restricted to the fishermen community in Tharangambadi, and her celebration may be seen as a manifestation of their society and the integration in society, but her festival does not have any large integrative effect on the rest of Tharangambadi. In this regard the festival of the Pirs is more successful in integrating the town, but the route of their cars indicates that the fishermen in Tharangambadi are left aside. The festival of Our Lady of Good Health manages to include Christians, Hindus and Muslims and in this regard it is much more inclusive.

For the long term prospects of these festivals, one the largest threats to the possibility of integrating society is not when the festival comprises only one trade or caste like the festival of Renuka Devi. The threat comes rather from these groups within the different religious communities which want to isolate the community and distinguish it from others. That is the Wahabi critique of the cult of the Pirs within Islam or the Hindu communalists' attempts to obstruct the festivals of other communities. This may lead to a change away from socially inclusive forms of festivals to those which bond the religious groups within themselves and point towards a disintegration of society.

Throughout the article Putnam's terminology of integrating or bridging social capital versus excluding or bonding social capital has been used with some precaution. From an analytical point of view Putnam's terminology is useful in so far that it opens our eyes for the social implications of activities, and it is an important step forward. The problem with his terms is that they lead one to classify social activities as either bridging or bonding, and in many cases this is not the most wholesome analytical approach. In this article this critique has been documented in keeping with the change in the various communities. As a festival serves to integrate society, one must always consider the borders of the society being integrated, and even within the different religious groups there is debate on how a festival should be celebrated and whether it is relevant at all. Sometimes festivals of a single group manage to integrate the society at large, or they are demonstrations of one group's power over the others. One will always have to analyse the individual circumstances to determine whether a festival generates integration or exclusion of social capital. Finally as a *memento*, one may even assume that most festivals are integrating in some respect and excluding on some other.

Notes

- 1 The textual sources may, however, offer more information if the myths behind the processions are read as possible sources of the rituals as hinted by Isabelle Clark-Decès (2005:16), but this is a major rereading of the source material and will need careful consideration on how far this approach is historically valid in each case.

- 2 E.g. 'Over 250 Vinayaka idols immersed', *The Hindu*, Tamil Nadu, 18 September 2007.
- 3 As it is commonly told that the Christians and Hindus do at the grave of the Pirs Sheik Ismail Sadaat Valiyullah and Seiyadina Saiyad Shaib Sadat Vailyullah whose car festival in Tarangambadi in Tamil Nadu will be described in this article.
- 4 It is a matter of discussion whether religious organisations are to be considered as part of civil society or not. For the present paper which is not specially directed at an analysis of civil society, religious organisations will be considered as a part in so far as the term is used. The reason is that India never has had any king's church and that it is a secular state by the Constitution of India (1949) Smith (1967), and especially as stated in the preamble since the *Forty-Second-Amendment Act*, 1976.
- 5 The concept of a festival grammar is borrowed from Younger's (2002) seminal studies of South Indian festivals where he offers a rich variety of analytical approaches. It may be noted that Younger distinguishes sharply between North Indian pilgrimages and South Indian festivals, a distinction which is linked to his analysis of the importance of the festivals for social integration. As the analysis of social integration is central to this paper it would have been relevant to keep this distinction clear, but it has not been possible.
- 6 This dating of formation of religions as communities goes back to W.C. Smith (1978), but it is Jackson (2004:59) who has identified the first Indian use of the term 'Hindu'. Other scholars often relate it to the Census which began in 1871 (e.g. van der Veer 1994:19).
- 7 This area is mostly identical with wards two to six of the larger Tharangambadi Gram (*vide* Andersen and Schönbeck 2009, who discuss the population on the basis of the Census of India 2001 and the census conducted by the NGO Praxis in the spring 2005 after the tsunami on Christmas Day 2004 (*Village Level People Plan*). M. A. Sultan (2003) does not offer statistical information but is in other aspects an invaluable introduction to the monuments of Tharangambadi.
- 8 It has to be noted that the author does not speak or read Tamil, so the help and interpretation of different inhabitants of Tharangambadi as well as the interpreters of the research group have been invaluable.
- 9 The following summary of the myth follows the pictures and the explanations the author got, and tries to keep the literary sources at a distance to respect the local version of the myth which is specific in regard to a number of points.
- 10 Rama with an axe, one of the avatars of Vishnu.
- 11 As we shall see Vinayakar is celebrated together with Renuka Devi at the festival.

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**Between Jesus and Krishna:
Christian encounters
with South Indian temple dance**

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Abstract

One of the eight national dances of India, bharatanatyam, partly originates from the area around Tranquebar. During the time that Tranquebar was a Danish colony, devadasis, were patronised by the Thanjavur royal court. In 1623, a Danish–Icelandic soldier routinely observed the devadasis dancing outside the Masilamaninathar temple which he was guarding. His accounts of the dancers are interesting at two levels; first, they provide us with unique data on the role of the devadasis at the village level in seventeenth century Tamil Nadu. Secondly, they shed light on a certain imagination and perspective on Indian religion grounded in European Christian thought at the time. Since the seventeenth century, partly out of encounters with westerners, the dance of the devadasis has been taken from its original setting to a national middle class stage on which girls of very different backgrounds learn bharatanatyam. A second part of the article is based on fieldwork done in a bharatanatyam dance institution situated in New Delhi, and deals with a Christian student and her experiences enacting stories from Hindu mythology in the dance. The focus is on how she reflects on Hinduism as well as Christianity through her dance practice. Though set in very different contexts, the two accounts shed light on Christian perspectives on Hinduism through their encounter with a dominant South Indian dance form.

Introduction

When Jon Olafsson, an Icelandic soldier serving the Danish King Christian IV in Tranquebar, in the 1620s wrote about the ‘temple harlots’ that he saw dancing in front of the Masilamaninathar temple opposite Fort Dansborg—where

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he was on daily duty as guard—he was in fact describing the very prestigious *devadasis* (lit. ‘servants of the gods’) of that time, today known in the west as ‘temple dancers’ (Olafsson 1998). The devdasis were serving at village as well as court temples in which they had several tasks during the day, of which dancing during prayers and processions was the most important.

Tranquebar, a Danish colony between 1620 and 1846, is located in the area east of Thanjavur, in which most of the devadasis in Tamil Nadu lived. During this time they were generously supported by the Thanjavur court and their tasks were related to temple rituals and to manifest the power of the Nayak king and his dynasty (Kersenboom-Story 1987). Firsthand accounts from Tranquebar are interesting sources on the village level role of the devadasis at the time of the Thanjavur Nayak dynasty. In addition, the sources give insight into a European-Christian encounter with Indian religious and cultural practices. The fact that Jon Olafsson saw these dancers as harlots—and not as the more positive *nityasumangalis* or ‘ever-auspicious women’, as Saskia Kersenboom-Story (1987: xix) claims was the local perspective on the devadasis—is connected to a dominant European perspective on Indian religion at the time, in which Indians were basically seen as worshippers of evil. In this article I, in addition to discussing the roles of the devadasis at the time, explore religious/cultural encounters in the first years of Tranquebar’s existence as a Danish trading post, through a focus on devadasis.

Since the seventeenth century the dance of the devadasis has undergone a dramatic transformation, as it has been taken from its original setting, to a national middle class arena, in which girls of very different sociocultural backgrounds learn the dance now called *bharatanatyam*. To illustrate this transformation, I have included a paragraph on the reinvention or transformation of the devadasi dance into bharatanatyam, which today is considered one of India’s eight national dances. I have done so by focusing on a central person in this transformation, namely Rukmini Devi, who was the first Brahmin woman to perform the dance of the devadasis and give it a new name.

The third part of the article is based on a fieldwork done in 2005 in one of the bharatanatyam dance institutions situated in Delhi, in which the Thanjavur style of Bharatanatyam is practised. The focus is on a Christian dance student and her experiences enacting stories from Hindu mythology in the dance. We will see how the dance not only made her understand the Hindu religion more, but also gave her certain ‘tools’ to worship her own god. Here I will draw parallels between her practice and my methodology as an anthropologist as I also explore Hindu mythology through my position as an apprentice.

Set in very different contexts, the two incidences of cultural encounters, Jon Olafsson observing the devadasis in Tranquebar in 1623 and Deepakshi Williams practising bharatanatyam in 2005, shed light on encounters between

Christian and Hindu cosmologies at very different points in time. Despite their difference of contexts, a basic difference between Christian and Hindu ways of connecting with the divine becomes apparent in both the encounters.

‘Temple harlots’ in 1623

In 1623 Jon Olafsson describes a procession outside a temple of Tranquebar, presumably the Masilamaninathar temple, as situated opposite Fort Dansborg where he was on duty as a guard:

And when the evening drew on, this chariot with its idols and all the foresaid pomp was dragged to its usual place opposite the temple doors. And when they approached with it, all the harlots came out of the church, pagoda sirke, to dance before the gods, and with them their master, who is called baldor. He hires them out every day for money, both to the soldiers and the bachelors in the town, and this money is put into the treasure-house of the temple and is used for its upkeep; but the harlots get their keep out of the revenues of the temple, paid to them by the wardens.

The priests, who usually sits by the church door, and is called brahmeni, also goes out to greet the gods with great humility and obeisance, and then they are carried in, in great honour, by three picked men amongst them, the sons of the priest, with much beating of drums and loud blasts on the trumpets, and other music, and also the dancing of the *temple harlots* in their finery, which whiles, when they are not serving the gods, is hung up in the church (Jon Olafsson 1998:123, my emphasis)

Saskia Kersenboom-Story (1987) has done impressive work tracing the history as well as the significance of the devadasis in South India. She shows how, prior to the seventeenth century, female dancers had been present in both temples and courts, where they had multiple roles. First, they had an important role at village ceremonies, of protecting the people from the divine forces of village gods, which were considered dangerous. Second, within the Agamic—which later would go under the name Hindu—temples, the dancers served the gods themselves by taking care of their statues and performing for them as well as protecting them during processions outside the temples. And third, they were enhancing the prestige of the royalty – and their patrons – at processions. According to Kersenboom-Story the reason for the devadasis’ presence at all these different functions was because they were considered auspicious as *nityasumangali*, (lit., ‘ever-auspicious woman’) (Kersenboom-Story 1987:19).

Olafsson arrived in Tranquebar in 1623, and served as a soldier at Fort Dansborg for one year. Most historical data on Tranquebar at the time are official documents; therefore his diary¹ is a unique source to experience the daily life in Tranquebar, as it was encountered by an outsider (Fihl 1988). In addition, his account can be of interest for scholars trying to uncover the history of the

devadasis, since the coastal area east of Thanjavur is known to have had a well developed devadasi tradition. Tranquebar at this time was under the direct influence of the Thanjavur Nayak Dynasty, which with its significant patronage of the devadasis had a great role to play in terms of the integration of temple and court services of the dancers.

During the time of the Chola Empire (from the ninth to the thirteenth century) when the temples were well supported by the rulers, dance—along with other professions—had become hereditary, which meant that dancers as well as musicians were taught within the families (Kersenboom-Story 1987: 26). Dancers were ritually married to a temple deity while making an alliance with a patron. For their service to the temple, they received an education in dance and language at the temple. As Grindler-Hansen (2009) shows in his article in this volume, education through time had been run by the temples, and therefore devadasis were in a unique position as women to be able to receive an education. The devadasis did not renounce life outside the temples. Some became landowners through their patronage, and they could also have relationships with other men besides the deity and the patron.

But what were the actual functions of the devadasis? Because the devadasis were considered auspicious, they were ‘rented’ at ceremonies for pregnant females, name-giving and ear-piercing ceremonies and most importantly at weddings (Kersenboom-Story 1987:66). In the above citation, Olafsson translates these economic transactions as sexual transactions. Interestingly, a role closer to that of ‘harlots’, where one can talk of an actual exploitation of the dancers, did seemingly not become an issue till later, as the patronage of the dancers began declining following changes in the political and economic system when the British gradually came into power.

The routines of the devadasis at the temples that Kersenboom-Story has tried to unravel are based on Sanskrit temple manuals combined with Tamil informants from present-day devadasi communities. It points to a pretty busy daily schedule for those serving at the temples, involving morning rituals, processions, putting god and goddesses to bed etc. Yet, Olafsson’s accounts from inside the temple are quite limited, and it is unclear whether he had actually visited them.

Outside the temple, he observed the devadasis from the walls of Fort Dansborg. According to Kersenboom-Story, the ritual participation of the devadasis was concentrated on the *Cayaratcai puja* (or evening ritual) in front of the temple, which supposedly was held between 6 and 8 p.m. (Kersenboom-Story 1987: 112). At this time the devadasis would wave and offer torches (or *kumbhadipa*) to keep away evil eyes when they brought out the gods. They would perform a small dance choreography, i.e. the *pushpanjali*, which is a dance of offering flowers to the god or goddesses.² Olafsson writes on the evening

prayer:

These aforesaid temple maidens dance always before the gods every night from nine o'clock to midnight, and about the twelfth hour of the night, that is midnight, each of the twelve gods is carried up one street and down another, in a chariot, with torches, fireworks, trumpet-blowing and dancing, also the beating of the drums and other such marks of honour. We who were standing on guard on the walls of the fortress used to hear this every night (Olafsson 1998: 123).

Olafsson's timing for what seems to be the evening ritual, are later compared to what has been set out by Kersenboom-Story. According to Kersenboom-Story, the gods and goddesses were put to bed between 8 and 9 p.m., but in Olafsson's account they seemed to be up till midnight.³

In addition to the daily evening ritual, Olafsson also saw the dancers in action during a visit from an assumed patron of their temple. He thus describes the third of the above mentioned roles of the devadasis, namely the enhancement of the power of the patron:

(...) in the winter, the chief of their priests, or bishop came to the town Trangobarich (...) At once there were a great commotion in the town. All the temple harlots set to adorn themselves in their usual finery (...) And when the chief priest, with great company, crossed the river on an elephant, he reclining in a palanquin made of ivory, gilded and adorned with the most costly work in the which he was carried, all this host began to display their usual pomp with drums, trumpets, dancing of harlots and sleights of hand exhibited by the soldiers, and this noise and rejoicing lasted all the way back to the town until he reached the temple. Then all the drums were beaten, trumpets pealed and the women flung themselves about in strange dances, according to their manner, and as their baldor taught them (Olafsson 1998: 127–28).

Olafsson describes the visitor as the chief priest or a bishop; however one may also assume that his status had to do with his position in the Thanjavur Nayak dynasty, from where the village temples received support. The Thanjavur Nayak dynasty between 1612 and 1634 was ruled by Rangunatha Nayak, who by many is regarded the greatest ruler of the dynasty, because of his patronage of arts at the court and his passion for music. He put emphasis on the preservation of culture as compensation for political insecurity, as the dynasty was surrounded by militarily superior empires (Kersenboom-Story 1987: 39). The patronage of the devadasis was either directly through their service at the court (also called rajadasis), or indirectly through the support given to the temples in which the devadasis served. The royalty had a god-like status, thus at their procession devadasis had a somewhat similar role to play compared to that of the deities. They enhanced their power, provided them with entertainment and protected

them from the evil forces (Kersenboom-Story 1987: 36).

Kersenboom-Story (1987:42) suggests that the devadasi tradition of South India should be understood along a synchronic axis, in which an exchange took place between local village traditions, the Agamic/Hindu tradition and the court. At an artistic level, on the one hand the village dance imitated the stylization of the repertoire of the court, and on the other hand local elements were integrated into dances choreographed at the court for performance in temples. The level of exchange was also an actual transmission of dancers between village and court temples and the royal court. Already in the eleventh century, it was reported that the ruler of Thanjavur ordered four hundred temple dancers to be brought from nearby village temples, to be attached to the Brihadisvara temple in Thanjavur (Gaston 2005). The exchange was especially strong between the court and the temple of Tiruvarur, some forty kilometres southwest of Tranquebar.

Olafsson's diary cannot be taken as proof of a devadasi tradition, since to a great extent it is framed as an outside perspective on a practice foreign to Scandinavian traditions. His account of the devadasis says just as much about where he is coming from as it does of the life of the dancers. Esther Fihl (1988:122) notices that Olafsson tried to describe the unknown, which he observed with the help of an analogy to the already known, expressing both fascination and judgement. The fact that Olafsson sees the dancing women as harlots may very well be related to a dominant perspective on Indian women at the time as sexually loose. This imagination is more clearly reflected in Olafsson's description of life at the Thanjavur court, which he describes in great detail as a harem, even though he never gets a chance to visit. In other words, whereas Olafsson actually witnessed the devadasis outside the temple in Tranquebar, his descriptions from the royal court of Thanjavur were based on rumours:

But there are other things to tell about the King, firstly that besides his Queen he had, when we first came there, 900 concubines, but afterwards he gave up 300 of them to his son, but not those he kept himself, so that he himself had 600 on his register of sins. These concubines had a handsome and well-furnished hall with gilded pillars round it and windows of crystal glass: to this hall the King repaired daily to choose out for his fleshly lust whichever of them his heart desired (...) Now since I have already spoken of the King's residence, Travanzour, I will speak no more of it, but will briefly touch upon their manner of building temples and such other matters as concern their religion, their sacrifices and their worship of idols and such foolery, whereby I would rouse up each and all always to give God worthy thanks that he has led us here in Christendom out of such perilous darkness of error and the perdition of the damned. Blessed be the name of our merciful God to all eternity. Amen" (Olafsson 1998: 119)

In line with Edward Said's seminal work on the European construction of

Occidental and Oriental cultures during colonialism, S.N. Balagangadhara (2005:1) has examined European sources describing India and in particular Indian religion since the medieval ages. In doing so, he sees the sources not as data on India, but as an examination on western culture.

Hinduism is in fact a fairly new construct, which originally was a Persian term to denote the people living at the other side (east) of the Indus valley (Balagangadhara 1994). It was not used to denote a religion till the nineteenth century, and in that sense Hinduism did not exist in the seventeenth century, and also Olafsson does not give a name to their belief system. Here I am using Hinduism to denote the worship of gods and goddesses such as Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna and Shakti, based on the *Agamas*, Sanskrit scriptures. Since the 1990s there has been a general agreement among scholars of Hinduism that colonialism to a great extent has influenced the construction and study of Hinduism. Yet, little attention has been given to the 'pre-history' of nineteenth century orientalism (Sweetman 2004). Will Sweetman argues that one cannot just assume that the 'orientalist' perspective from this period can be extended backwards into the earliest encounters between Europeans and Indians (Sweetman 2004:16).

Balagangadhara argues that the perspective of Indian religion of early travellers and missionaries of the seventeenth century was shaped by dissertations on India written around the sixteenth century by academics as well as by religious scholars, none of whom had actually been to India. Balagangadhara (2005: 71) notices that 'running as a red thread throughout these reports are a description of the sexual mores of the Indians. Generally they present a picture of these peoples as sexually loose.' This looseness is partly seen in the description of the number of wives of the kings of the Vijayanagara empire in the sixteenth century (ibid.). In addition to this, there were records of ritual practices of Brahmins having intercourse with virgins as well as practices of wife swapping among friends (Balagangadhara 2005: 71–73). Balagangadhara does not go into a discussion on whether this is true or not, but solely sees it as a way through which Europeans questioned the morality of the Indians. (Interestingly that is a red thread running through the Indian perspective on western women today, which to a large degree is based on their encounters with western—as well as Indian—movies.)

What seems to incite Olafsson into categorising the devadasis as temple harlots, seems to be the dual role of the devadasis within the temple complex and outside in local society, or what many researchers have referred to as the 'sacred' and the 'secular' functions (Gaston 2005, Subramaniam 1985). It seems as if Olafsson degrades the role of the devadasis both in and outside the temples because of this duality, which was quite different from the life of the nuns in Europe, whose role was centred inside the walls of the monastery. Not that the nuns were an image of the good Christian where Olafsson was coming from, in

fact the institution of nuns had been closed as part of the Reformation and the break of Protestantism from Catholicism in northern Europe. Yet, the idea that women in service should not make money or have a life outside the temple seems to prevail. Also, what may cause his categorisation of the devadasis has to do with the fact that they use their sensual bodies in their connection to god. The link between eroticism and divinity has existed in different forms in India, as evident in the Kama Sutra, Tantric philosophy, the bhakti movement (to be described more fully) as well as erotic figures at temple walls around India.

Questioning of the Indian morality, Balagangadahara argues, was tied to disputes between Protestant and Catholic churches in Europe at the time. The challenging of the Catholic church by Protestantism brought about a number of perspectives, which became relevant in the definition of religions, and can be identified in Olafsson's description of local temple rituals and temple dance. As part of the breaking away from the Catholic church, Protestants emphasised the difference of religions. The question of the 'true' religion opposed to the religion based on false presuppositions was raised, and therefore people were to choose among a number of different churches (Balagangadhara 2005: 82). In doing so, he argues that Protestantism had to transform Catholicism—as well as other religions—into paganism. In this context, the religious practices of what we today would phrase as Hinduism, was perceived as pagan or underdeveloped religion. Consequently, the main reason for Olafsson's judgement of the devadasis might simply mean that he does not recognize the religion which they serve.

According to Olafsson a worship of god can only be a worship of something that by itself represents goodness (Fihl 1988: 177). However, the gods which were present at rituals in Tranquebar were not all good. There were not only rituals in which dancers and others demonstrate their devotion to the Agamic/Hindu gods and goddesses, but also rituals in which the dangerous village gods were 'worshipped' in order to keep them at a distance. The belief in evil gods at one point makes him come to the conclusion that they worship Satan:

For their faith is of such a nature that they actually worship Satan, and from him desire and make intercession for all that they regard as of importance for themselves. For they say that they do not need to worship God Almighty, the true and blessed Lord of glory and peace, because he is (they say) good and peace-loving, averse from strife and anger (Olafsson 1998: 129)

When devadasis were dancing in front of the temples when the statues of their beloved gods were brought out, as previously illustrated, their presence was essential for the protection from the evil village gods, whose attention was awoken (Kersenboom-Story 1987). This dual role in which the devadasis both enhance the grandness of the gods and protect them from danger sheds light on the fusion of village cults and the temple tradition of Hinduism, which was probably difficult to grasp for Olafsson. While perceived as pagans, Olafsson

describes how he and his friends tried to convince some locals of the rightness of their own god.

Some of us heaped reproaches on those who cared for them, through mediation of our servants, for their blindness in taking the glory from God and giving it to beasts, to which they replied that they could not see God (Olafsson 1998: 122)

The fact that the locals could not *see* the god they were *talking* about sheds light on the importance of the devadasis. Since the religious practice of the area was based on performance rather than text, the role of the devadasis was central (Kersenboom-Story 1995). The devadasis, I imagine—with an awareness that this observation is based on research in a modern dance setting—emphasised the presence of the divine at a visual level (Simonsen 2006).

In order to understand this, I wish to bring in a Sanskrit concept, *darshan*, translated as ‘seeing’, which according to Diana Eck (1988) is an important aspect of Hindu ritual practices today. When Hindus go to worship in a temple, they often use the phrase ‘I am going for darshan’ (Eck 1998:3). The images of the gods and goddesses in the temples that they are going to see are a focus of concentration and a manifestation of the divine itself (Eck 1998:45). It can be argued that the role of the devadasis within and outside the temples took part in the visualisation of the divine by bringing the images of gods to life, through such rituals as feeding the statues or carrying them to their bedchamber (Kersenboom-Story 1987). One way of enhancing the visualisation of the divine is through the humanisation of the statues of the gods. Olafsson observes during a procession what might be thought of as humanisation of the deities, when the statues were kept cool and comfortable with fans once outside the temples, similar to the privileges enjoyed by kings and the like.

In these three seats are placed the three aforementioned gods. On each seat are placed two females with gilded fans, to wave them over these idols, so that no dust, mote or fly should settle or fall on them (Olafsson 1998: 121)

To sum up, Olafsson’s account of the ‘temple harlots’ both sheds light on the role of the devadasis at temple rituals as well as what seems to be royal processions at the village level at a time when the integration between village traditions, Hindu temples and the court may have been at its highest. In addition, I have tried to come to grips with how preconceptions of India as well as the history of Christianity in northern Europe had an impact on the perspective Olafsson had on the devadasis. Since a great deal of sources on the devadasis are from the descriptions of outsiders, it is worth bringing into account what these sources have to say about other things that they experience besides the dancers, as one can get an idea of their perspective on non-dancers as well. On the basis of the above it might be interesting to ask, how and from where the

image of the devadasis as prostitutes comes from, an image which has some resonance in India today. Next we will look into a successful attempt to reinvent the dance of the devadasis, which meant that the dance was taken away from the devadasis themselves, at a moment when they had come to be considered immoral.

From the devadasi tradition to national dance

Despite the negative image of the devadasis which Olafsson and other outsiders painted, their prestige was not questioned throughout the time of the Danish colony. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the tradition was further developed into an art form at the Thanjavur court, designed for stage performance. The ‘Tanjore Quartet’, consisted of four brothers recruited by the Thanjavur court because of their skills in *carnatic* music (South Indian music), who composed specific music for dance, which today is among the basic compositions for the repertoire of bharatanatyam.

However, along with this development at the royal court, the devadasis of village temples received less support because of the shifting political system, which loosened the integration between temples and courts (Kersenboom-Story 1987). This meant a gradual disappearance of the patronage which came to an end with the British colonial power. The devadasis became dependent on money coming from outside the temple walls, and to a greater extent took up the position as entertainers. In this transformation, the devadasi dancers came to be known as *nautch* girls.

By the 1890s an anti-nautch movement—later known as the ‘abolitionists’—arose among the urban Indian elite, greatly influenced by Christian morality. The active members of the movement were mainly journalists, missionaries, doctors and Brahmins (Allen 1997). The movement worked for the abolition of the devadasi system which they saw as a flaw in the Hindu tradition. At that time dancers were still initiated as temple dancers, and performed at temple ceremonies in villages. Eventually the anti-nautch movement led to the Devadasi Bill passed in 1947 in the state of Madras, which banned devadasis’ ‘dedication’ to temples and dancing as part of temple rituals in the state of Madras (Gaston 2005).

Parallel to this there was another movement, known as the ‘revivalists’, among the elites of Madras, which advocated a revival of the dance of the devadasis. This was first of all part of a heightened national awareness which followed the national movement advocating India’s independence from the British. In addition, Mathew Harp Allen suggests that in the beginning of the twentieth century some interesting encounters of foreigners with Indian dance had an effect on this renewed interest for the ‘nautch’ dance of the devadasi. Unlike Jon Olafsson, the New York based modern dancer Ruth St. Denis, and the Russian ballet dancer, Anna Pavlova, were fascinated by the history of the devadasis and the nautch dancers. Ruth St. Denis was deeply intrigued by Indian religion, and after seeing nautch dancers at an attempt to recreate Indian village life at a fair in

Coney Island in 1903, she was determined to one day learn it. She did a number of choreographies, which became popular around the United States and eventually were performed in India in 1925–26 (Allen 1997: 88). Anna Pavlova became familiar with nautch dance through a fellow art student from India who choreographed two dance pieces for her inspired by Indian mythology. Rukmini Devi, who is today considered the most prominent figure in the revival of the devadasi dance style, first met Pavlova in London in 1924, and eventually they became friends.

Rukmini Devi (1904–1986) was born in Madurai in an upper-class Brahmin family. At the age of sixteen she married an English theosophist, George Arundale, with whom she moved to Madras (O’Shea 2006). She became very involved with the Theosophical Society in Madras, which though established in a western setting, was deeply grounded in Indian spiritual philosophy. Allen has argued that the search for an Indian dance *tradition* had strong roots in Orientalist writing and debates, which at the same time influenced the Theosophical Society in India, which again had a role to play within the Indian national movement (Allen 1997: 69).

Because of Devi’s fascination with dance, Pavlova had arranged for Devi to study with a ballet teacher. However, eventually Pavlova supposedly told her ‘You can learn ballet, but I think that everyone must revive the art of his own country’ (Allen 1997: 94). In 1933, Rukmini Devi approached Meennakshisundaram Pillai, a descendent of the Tanjore Quartet, to teach her the devadasi dance (Allen 1997: 73). Then in 1935 at a stage in the Theosophical Society in Madras, Rukmini Devi was the first Brahmin woman who performed the sadir/nautch dance. This marked an important stage in the reinvention of the devadasi tradition (Schechner 1985:69), which was to take the dance from the temples to the stage of auditoriums, from the devadasi community to the cultural elite from Tamil Nadu to the whole of India. In the years to come, Rukmini Devi established a dance institution, where she taught non-hereditary dancers as well as teachers; she designed a proper dance costume, she systematized the dance and she gave the dance a new name: bharatanatyam—which can be translated into ‘Indian dance’. Allen suggests that in doing so she was inspired by the high-classical, fine-art resonances of ballet, with which she had become familiar through Pavlova (Allen 1997).

In the years to come—the 1930s and 1940s—Rukmini Devi was challenged by T.S. Balasaraswati in defining the new dance. Tanjore S. Balasaraswati (1918–1984) was born in Chennai into a family with ancestors dancing at the Thanjavur court, and did her first sadir performance at a temple site in 1924. Along with the degrading of the devadasi system, neither Balasaraswati’s mother nor grandmother had been dancing, yet her mother was trained in music. In Chennai, however, Balasaraswati eventually entered the stage set up for bharatanatyam. The debate between Devi and Balasaraswati is often thought of as a debate over the space for sensuality in dance and whether something spiritual also can be

something erotic. Whereas Devi was developing a dance form, which was respectable, with controlled movements and downplayed emotions, Balasaraswati was emphasising the importance of sensuality in the dance. Devi emphasised the importance of the emotion *bhakti* or devotion, while Balasaraswati emphasised *sringarabhakti* or devotional love. The debate was simultaneously about the source, and thereby also ownership, of the dance. As a Brahmin, Devi emphasised the relevance of Sanskrit texts for the dance, and positioned the dance within Vedanta philosophy. Balasaraswati, on the other hand, originating from the devadasi community, emphasized its connection to the region of Tamil Nadu in particular the Thanjavur court (O'Shea 2006). From the debate grew different dance styles within bharatanatyam, thus Rukmini Devi has become an exponent of the Kalakshetra—also the name of her dance institute, which means 'temple of art'—style of bharatanatyam, and Balasaraswati represents the Thanjavur style.

Both abolitionists and revivalists were concerned with an Indian national identity, which was to lead the subcontinent to its independence from the British. In this search for a common cultural heritage, art was of great political significance. In this process, however, the art form was taken from the original practitioners to a national and elitist setting. Janet O'Shea points out that neither Devi nor Balasaraswati represented the local devadasi tradition as none of them dealt with the dance at the vernacular village level (O'Shea 2006) as it existed in Tranquebar. While bharatanatyam gradually became a respected national art form, the sadir dance of the devadasis serving at the village temples was banned. Interestingly in the year 1947, the Indian secular nation state was born and in the same year the devadasis were banned as an integrated part of the Indian religious institution. Still, the bharatanatyam dancers of today claim a continuation of the devadasi tradition, which is central to their role as bearers of an Indian cultural heritage. Along with that the devadasis—servants of the gods—are recorded still to serve at temples but enjoy far less respect in India than at the time Jon Olafsson observed them. Because the devadasi system is still illegal in Tamil Nadu, there are no official statistics on their number, yet in the state of Andhra Pradesh, north of Tamil Nadu, there are supposedly 22,941 and in Karnataka 16,624.⁴ Judging from the number of bharatanatyam dance institutions located in the larger cities around India, the number of bharatanatyam dancers far exceeds that of devadasis. While the dance has been taken away from the devadasis, it has become available for middle class women with various socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, and also for foreigners like me.

Exploring the love for Krishna and Jesus

In 2005 I spent six months doing fieldwork at a bharatanatyam dance institution in New Delhi, practicing in the Thanjavur style. Here students, mainly girls aged between seven and twenty five years, come for dance practice a couple of times a week after school. There are dancers with governmental scholarship

who come for daily dance and theory classes, in order to obtain a B.A. or an M.A. in bharatanatyam. In the field I took the position as an apprentice (cf. Bundgaard 2003) as a method for understanding aspects of Hindu mythology, since the dance to a great degree consists of enactment from the mythological stories.

Within dance research in India, since the 1930s, there has been a focus on the 'recovery' of dance techniques, often by going through postures sculpted on the walls of temples and classical Sanskrit texts on theatre and the expression of emotions such as the *Abinaya Darpana* and *Natyashastra*. This kind of research has been located in India, and has been supported and encouraged by the Sangeet Natak Academy, a statefunded national institution for research on Indian performing arts, established in Delhi in 1953. Along with the establishment of dance departments at universities, and the opportunity to pursue degrees in dance at institutions, the scope of research has developed. Of late there has been a fair amount of research focusing on the development of dance, from a post-colonial or feminist vantage point—research which the description of reinvention of dance rests upon (see also Meduri 1988, Hannah 1988, Chakravorty 2000). Yet very little research has focused on the dance training from a phenomenological level (Chatterjea 1996). The significance of the dance often seems to be assumed as that of professional dancers, many of them Tamil Brahmins, while the significance of the dance for non-professionals from less typical backgrounds has not been explored.

Considering the dance institution is situated in Delhi, there is quite a large number of Tamil (Brahmin) dance students. These are generally encouraged by their mothers to learn the dance as part of a cultural education (Mathur 2002). Non-Brahmin dancers generally have to struggle to get their parents to support their dance practice. Most of them explain how their interest in dance has primarily developed from watching dance in movies.

Interestingly, at the dance institution there were a number of Roman Catholic Indian students.⁵ In the following, I will focus on one of these dancers, Deepakshi Williams, in order to get an understanding of her aspirations and her involvement with bharatanatyam. At the time of my field research, Deepakshi was in her early twenties and was coming to the dance institute daily as she was pursuing an M.A. in bharatanatyam. Yet, it took some effort to persuade her to let herself be interviewed about her dance practice, since she kept asking me to interview the more senior dancers, who she thought would give me the correct explanation of the significance of the dance.

Deepakshi grew up in a town outside Delhi, with a father who was a teacher, a mother who stayed at home, and a brother who eventually became a teacher. She came to know of bharatanatyam at a Catholic summer school she attended some years ago. She told me:

My parents wanted me to join religious things, so they very much wanted me to become a nun. But I didn't want to go there, but still I wanted to fulfil my parents wish. So I went there to a Christian Institution for one month and joined a summer course. I attended a course in Bharatanatyam, and I saw that they are using hymns from the bible, and they are creating parallels in dance, Christian hymns in dance. So they brought the word of God into the dance. So I found that what the religious people are doing that is the same. They are doing work, religious work in a different way. What the nuns are doing I am doing in a different way. So I joined the B.A. programme in Bharatanatyam, and at that time I found that there is so much Indian heritage, the culture behind, that is bigger than Hindus and Hindu religion.

Deepakshi is comparing her bharatanatyam dance practice with the work of a Christian nun, despite the fact that the daily dance practice consists of praising Hindu gods and goddesses. The comparison seems to be related to her wish to fulfil her parents' desire to be involved in religious work. But what is interesting is that she can find space for her religious identity in an otherwise Hindu dance form.

Deepakshi—and the other Christian dancers at the institute—explained to me how the dance had made her understand and respect Hinduism better:

It has helped us to know their culture, their religion and their faith (...) there are so many things, stories. But that is not bad; it is a good thing in their religion. It has helped us to understand the people living around you (...) now we respect them. We know how to respect their religion. Before that we didn't know, when they had their *pujas*, what it was.

It not only created understanding and respect, but Deepakshi also felt inspired by the relationship between Hindu god/goddesses and devotee, which she found different from what she knew from her Christian tradition.

How they are representing their gods in any normal way, human, is really good. They have performed their god in a very human way. Like Krishna. So when we see we really feel something. It is good (...) we don't have these things in our religion, but we can make it. Because our god is also human. So why can't we think like that also.

Deepakshi told me that out of the Hindu gods, Krishna was the only one she really liked. Krishna is at the centre of many bharatanatyam dance items, especially the *varnams*—means colour in Sanskrit—which are considered the most important item of the bharatanatyam dance repertoire. Just to give the reader a sense of Krishna's presence in the dance, I will give a short introduction to him. Krishna is considered to be an incarnation (*avatar*) of Vishnu. As a child he was extremely naughty, but was still adored by everyone around him. As an adult he became a lady charmer, and all the milkmaids (*gopikas*) in his village

were in love with him. In a popular image of Krishna, he is in the woods dancing with each and every gopika, all simultaneously. This is said to illustrate that he has the power to make each person feel his presence at the same time.

At the time of my fieldwork the group of Christian girls were daily practising a varnam piece on Krishna. The compositions for varnams are most often based on *bhakti poetry* created at the time of the *bhakti movement*. The bhakti movement (*bhakti* means devotion in Sanskrit) was an alternative to the Vedic order of the Brahmin priests, as devotees could reach the divine directly by establishing an emotional relationship to gods and goddesses. In bhakti poetry the god is thus addressed in a devotional manner. The poetry is written by men. However, the narrator is a first-person female. The poems are about a *nayika* (heroine) longing for her beloved Lord, the *nayaka*⁶ (hero), who in many cases is *Krishna*. In the dance movements, the dancers perform both the part of the *nayika* and *nayaka*, but with a focus on the *nayika* or female devotee.

The focus of the bhakti poetry as well as the varnam dance items in which bhakti poetry is enacted, are the emotions rather than the plot. As a dance student one learns to express nine basic emotions or *bhavas*: love, happiness, compassion, anger, courage, fear, disgust, wonder and peace. All these emotions can be present in a varnam dance item, as a devotee goes through various states in her relationship with her hero/god.

Before any performance of a varnam item, a presenter explains to the audience that the dance item represents 'the longing of the individual soul for union with the divine'. This is in line with Rukmini Devi's interpretation. To understand the spiritual/philosophical framework which this phrase is based on I will make a reference to Vedanta, by which Devi and the Theosophical Society were very much inspired. Vedanta is associated with the *Upanishads* scriptures in which the divine is represented in a mystical as well as monistic way. In this philosophy the *atma* or supreme soul is one single entity residing in each being. Yet, in day-to-day life the *atma* is divided between an individual soul (*atma*) and a supreme soul (*paramatma*), as people do not realize the unity (Sahay 1998:70). The goal of human existence is its absorption into the supreme soul of the universe, and the method for this is by looking inward, in order to realise how one's own soul is connected with the divine soul.

Generally, all the Hindu dancers from around fifteen years of age or more thought of their bharatanatyam dance practice as spiritual, and used the above framework to explain how. The dance, they say, is a method of realising the divine within, as they embody the different gods and goddesses (Simonsen 2006). Anne Marie Gaston (2005) has argued that the desire for the spirituality of bharatanatyam is actually a desire for social acceptance. She claims that if the dance had not been acknowledged as spiritual practice, it would not have been accepted because of its erotic content (Gaston 1996). I am not claiming that the

dance is not spiritual practice for the dancers, but just that the verbalisation of spirituality also serves as a kind of veil for the dancers (Simonsen 2006). Interestingly, the Christian dancers were the only ones I came across who do not repeat the general phrases, related to the spirituality of the dance.

When we are performing and praising Shiva, it is all about telling a story about Shiva (...) if I am successful in presenting the story the people understand and get into the bhakti (devotion). But we just show, that is our target.

Here Deepakshi describes how the dance to her is a question of form, not meaning. In other words the content is not meaningful to her. Yet, she did convey how she could feel bhakti herself. She gave several examples of how certain movements were reinterpreted into a Christian cosmology.

We think of it as praising God. We use the dance for praising *our* God. For example we did a dance on Jesus that we performed at the Mass. When we do the aarti (makes a circle with a light for prayers), it is like when you give Jesus' flesh and blood at the altar.

In another example, Hindu ritual movements were given a non-Hindu significance by bringing in the more neutral and all-encompassing 'mother earth'. Before and after any dance practice, all dance students do a small ritual of respect (*namaskar*) in front of a statue of Nataraja, the dancing Siva, who has been considered a symbol of the power of classical Indian dance, since the time of the 'revival' of bharatanatyam (allen 1997). When asked about that daily ritual and what it meant to her, she answered:

We have this thing that we see the earth as our mother. So when we are doing the namaskar, we are apologizing for hitting her, when we are stamping the ground while dancing.

One aspect which in Deepakshi's mind seemed to differentiate her relationship with Hindu and Christian figures, was a question of faith:

I like the stories very much. But I don't believe in them, because they never happened. I only believe in Jesus.

This illustrates a basic difference between Christian and Hindu world perspective related to concepts of time. Whereas the Christian faith rests on a historical premise, based on the idea of Jesus as a historical 'real' person, within Hinduism, the realness of the gods and goddesses comes from a recognition or the presence of mythic time, which is experienced in a practice like bharatanatyam.

For me, the dance was an entry to the comprehension of mythic time. According to Kirsten Hastrup, in theatre (and dance theatre) there is a 'duality of time', where historical and mythical time fuse, as the actor becomes one with their part. From this transcendence of time an 'uchronia' emerges, described as 'another time or a history nowhere in time' (Hastrup 2004: 150). This

conceptualisation of the *uchronia* of theatre helped me grasp how I experienced the *uchronia* of Hindu cosmology. For me, along with the dance practice, the Hindu gods and goddesses became real, but neither as historical beings of the past nor as living beings in the present, but as meaningful characters present in an expanded 'uchronic' cosmology.

As a consequence, understanding Hinduism became less of a question of belief than one of cosmology, or the space inhabited by historical and mythic beings (Simonsen 2006). This was quite a different way of relating to divinity, than what I had been used to in Denmark, where the presence of god seemed more like a verbal construction, tied to the stories of Christ from the New Testament. I am aware that there are churches within Christianity, which like the *bhakti* movement emphasize the direct connection to god based on love. However, I, who was baptized into a Lutheran-Evangeline church, have been introduced to a Christian conceptualisation of god through visits to a number of churches around Denmark, as well as the general ongoing debate about Christianity. In the dance however, the connection to what had been conceptualised as divine, became closer to what I thought of as a relationship of love between man and woman, since it entailed emotions and eroticism.

On the basis of a discussion on religious experiences among Catholics in Malta, Mitchell argues that belief is based on three different but related modes of cognition: semiotic, practical and emotional (Mitchell 1997:79). According to Mitchell, the Maltese people develop a perception of god through the stories told in the Bible (semiotic), through ways of bowing in front of the images of Jesus in the church (practical) and through the memory of feelings of being close to god (emotional) (Mitchell 1997:86).

These three modes of cognition were also at stake for both the Hindu and Christian dancers. The difference in religious traditions seemed to be a question of the manner in which one could connect emotionally to god. Interestingly, Deepakshi thought that the mythic Krishna is represented in a more human way than the historical Jesus. The humanism I believe has to do with the way that one as a believer/devotee can approach him, not just as a disciple, but as a lover. Thus Deepakshi wanted through *bharatanatyam* to learn to approach her god with devotional love.

However, she hinted that this could not alone be done by transferring Christian stories into the dance since they are quite different compared to Hindu myths and *bhakti* poetry. This again has to do with the limitations of supposedly historical stories, as illustrated below:

I played one dance drama on Jesus, and in that I was the soldier who beat Jesus. And that part I didn't like, because I felt that I was beating Jesus. I don't know what it would have been like to play Jesus, because I never did that part. The girl who was doing that part, I did not like that girl, so I was

just thinking that I was beating the girl and not Jesus (laughing).

When all this is said about religion, dance for the Christian bharatanatyam dancer, like for other dancers as well as the devadasis, is tied to goals which do not have to do with only religion or spirituality. For Deepakshi, her bharatanatyam training would among other things give her an opportunity to become a teacher like her father and brother. When asked about her dreams for the future she told:

I want to finish the MA and then go to Mathura and teach for two years to earn for an MA in English. I want to teach in a college there. Mathura is the birthplace of Krishna, everyone there worship Krishna. Eventually I want to establish my own dance Institute. What we are doing here I want to learn more of. I want to experiment more, because the dance is so large. I want with this to perform something in my religion.

Deepakshi stressed her wish to have a job and generate her own income, as a means to sustain her independence after marriage. A bharatanatyam career is sought for, which integrates a means of income with religious endeavours. It was among other things this dual role of the devadasis, as both spiritual and economic beings, which Olafsson seemingly had a difficulty in accepting.

It is worth noticing here that Deepakshi's position in the field was not different from my own. As a Christian she was using the dance practice to get to know Hinduism better and simultaneously to pursue an academic degree. So was I. The methodology of dance ethnography (Buckland 2006), through which I engaged in the field as an apprentice, in my case was a unique method for a cross-cultural and cross-religious understanding situated in the body, as embodied knowledge (Simonsen 2006). This way of encountering the dance as well as Hinduism, for Deepakshi as well as me, was quite different from how Olofsson encountered the devadasi dance, and for quite obvious reasons.

Closing reflections

In dealing with cultural encounters in Tranquebar there was a glaring absence of the devadasis' account of their life and encounters with outsiders, the reason being that documents written by them do not exist, and in that sense the devadasis do not have a voice in this article. The second part of the article, in which a Christian bharatanatyam dancer describes her experience with the dance, is not meant to make up for this missing link. Rather it illustrates the extent to which the devadasi dance form has changed along its way into the national arena, as it has become open to so many different levels of interpretations, while being heavily framed by a certain Sanskrit-dominated discourse. The article illustrates how art/ cultural practices and religion in India are tied together, and therefore an encounter with dance is also an encounter with questions of religion. Studying encounters with Indian dance in the newly established Tranquebar as well as in a plural setting of urban India today, gives an insight into different

perceptions of Indian religion. These are perceptions which take part in the ongoing transformation of dance as well as the framing of religions.

Notes

- 1 The memories were written down a couple of years after returning home, thus the stories have probably been developed according to the interests of the listeners. The descriptions from Tranquebar are part of a larger account of his life and years of serving under Christian IV completed by his son on the basis of the stories told.
- 2 A dance item often performed at the beginning of a longer dance performance among present day bharatanatyam dancers (Simonsen 2006)
- 3 To get a sense of the significance of professions in a more easily accessible present, Andersen's article in this volume provides us with an exciting insight into processions in present day Tranquebar and the nearby area (Andersen 2009)
- 4 Numbers from census of India 2001. Kersenboom-Story (1987) as well as Anne Marie Gaston (2005) have done fieldwork with a few devadasis who remain in the area around Thanjavur, in order to get an idea of the devadasi tradition as it was in the past and how it has survived in the present.
- 5 The Christian population constitute 2.4 per cent of India's population (Census of India 2001)
- 6 Notice the connection to the word for king, Nayak, during the time of the Thanjavur Nayak Dynasty, which support the argument that the king enjoyed a god-like status

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Book Reviews

M.C. BEHERA (eds.), *Globalisation Rural Development: Competing paradigms and Emerging Realities*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 452.

The book presents a view on various stages of transformation in the development discourse pertaining to rural development. Primarily it is a shift from the traditional thought of rural development being an 'intellectual idealism' to the current trend of being a more participatory form of development. The book provides a bird's eye view of the change over a period of time and glance's through the macro or global level situation followed by specific case studies. The narrative begins with post world war period but fails to capture the setting up of support organisations like World Bank and the like. The inequalities in terms of provisions from these organisations come out starkly but the reason for the same is not clearly outlined. A rich blend of case studies from developing nations around the globe is well presented in the context of rural development.

Rural development, aftermath of Second World War was synonymous to development of third world countries. The world bodies like United Nations, International Monetary Fund, International Labour Organization and the World Bank were established to help the rural and poor economies in recuperating and moving towards development. On account of the formation of these organisations greater attention has been drawn to the state's role in development. The disparity in treatment meted out by international bodies as between the developed and developing nations is documented and the inequalities are sharply presented in various spheres of allocation, income and distribution among the developing countries. The preferential treatment also comes from the core - periphery dilemma. The decision making power lies in the hands of the core countries as they formulate policies for the international organisations. The author has not considered the role of the developed nations in terms of their contribution toward these organisations.

The developing nations were known as 'primitive' and 'uncivilized' which is an ethnocentric view of the western world. Sen gave the theory of public action (1998) and brought the ideas of liberalization. Social thinker's felt that liberalization was a process opposed to the direction of egalitarian reforms in an economy. The issue following is about the type of development whether it is people centred or economy oriented. The debate concluded on the lines that it must focus on the people and participation of the actual stake holders was the most important issue.

Here the non governmental organisations began to play an important role. The promotion of aid agencies and banks making the critical minimum credit available to rural population was started in India, Iran, Thailand, Togo, and Cyprus. In the 1980s the structural adjustment programme was started and it led to the analysis of commonalities and contrasts. The structural adjustment model became a big failure in African and the Asian countries. The primary reason being a common model cannot be adopted for all the countries, each economy's need is unique. India being a special case, within one country the model of development that brings improvement does develop other parts of the country due to variations in the natural resources, distribution of resources. The state had been reduced to a vigilance body that maintained law and order and democratic rule in the region.

The fourth and fifth chapters give insights into Africa's and Thailand's rural development and nature of globalisation in these countries. The author expresses fear over the current development trends in terms of its sustainability and bridging the gap of inequality. In the case of Thailand it was called the cementation; the region had its own development discourse called 'Sakai' and the word for development is '*kaan pattana*' coined in the 20th century. During this period agriculture was the fore runner of the development process juxtaposed to the current mechanised process of development. Various groups were joined together in the process opposed to the earlier view of decentralisation prevalent during the 19th century. Education was one of major areas of change for both development and sustenance in the new era.

The later chapters of the book focus their attention towards NGOs, sustainable livelihood and participation of women. The debate occurs among the non-governmental organizations on development with the main theme of development meant to attain a certain status in economic terms or overall growth along with sustainable capacities. The capacities refer to both the environmental capacity and development of skills for a higher growth. Another important aspect was the non-governmental organisations challenging the existing discourses on development. Many radical or socialist political thinkers and activists strongly felt that the existing mechanism was not suitable as it could not provide any room for revolutionary movements or to replace the prevalent regime. On other hand it was found that the neo liberal NGOs advocated the market –led policies and strategies for economic recovery.

The system of local self-governance and participatory approaches gained momentum and became popular in the 19th century. The approach was mainly for the people and by the people. The merits of this form of governance were, greater awareness among the people, developing the region so that the actual needs of the people get addressed. The major demerit of this method was lack of addressing the social genesis view and political realisation of participation. The authors have taken West Germany for their study into consideration with a comparison between East Germany and West Germany. That the development discourse has travelled through

various paths in different countries is visible in the different chapters presenting the respective case studies in the book.

Development and Democracy is another important aspect in rural development discourse. This includes the way of life, change in rural attitudes due to globalisation and the change in standards that individuals set for themselves. This is a part of sustainable livelihood, which gave a remarkable turn in development discourse by including social capital rather than natural capital. Eliud Wandabwa extensively studied the small-scale farmers in Kenya and the findings of the study have revealed that large-scale poverty and malnutrition that exists among the dwellers. Rural industrialisation has brought about low productivity and it has proved to be a bane and a major source of poverty in Nigeria. A vital element of globalisation is the local governance, which includes transparency, an economy free of corruption and equal access to political office. According to the author the poor are directly marginalized by globalisation process and high transaction costs are involved in accessing its services, including farming.

The rural development programmes in Swedish farming for long period of time were viewed by widespread prejudice, inefficient and considered environmentally harmful. This was mainly due to the practice followed in the region, farming was not looked upon merely as a practice but it was the way of life of the people. Individual economic self-sufficiency was the core of Swedish economy; and all groups of people began to participate in the development process. It is noteworthy to observe that women participated in large numbers which led to sustainability of the rural community.

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K N NAIR and G GOPIKUTTAN (ed). *Housing in Kerala: Impact of Investment, Technology and Institutions*, Centre for Development Studies, Daanish Books 2006, pp.195, Rs. 325.

The quantity and quality of housing definitely has an impact on the developmental status of any geography. Kerala's unique development experience which has attracted world wide attention however has not paid due importance to the issue of housing, which has in fact far reaching development implications. In *Housing in Kerala*, K Narayanan Nair and Gopikuttan try to capture the various dimensions, problems and issues involved in the Malayalees' tryst with housing. The book is a collection of papers based on a set of studies from the erstwhile *Kerala Research Programme on Local level Development* initiated by the Centre for development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. The book is the fourth in the series of studies in local development and looks into the problems and prospects of housing in Kerala. The issue stems from the huge growth of the housing sector in Kerala and includes studies in housing ranging from trends, sources, magnitude and patterns

to that of public interventions, technology and labour in the construction scenario.

The book starts with a prologue by the editors on the housing scenario in Kerala. It depicts Kerala's high social sector development necessitating huge housing requirements. It throws insights into the housing trends, investment, construction and dynamics of the labour engaged, public intervention and its impact on the economically weaker sections and places in context the role of market forces and standards of housing in general. In setting the tone, the issues of the housing problems of the marginalized sections, technology, labour and mode of production, gender and the security of labourers and slum dwellers are highlighted. While approaching this issue they also have provided the theoretical angle of the market and political economy. The introduction ends by looking at the issue of Kerala's housing after providing a national and global perspective.

Gopikuttan traces the history of housing in Kerala in the first chapter. He looks into the housing boom starting with the 1970s, analysing its causes and consequences, sources of finance, land price, dynamics of employment and wages, technology and materials used for construction. The author moves into the second chapter and looks into the magnitude of sources and dimensions of housing and investment while highlighting the issues in the first chapter in detail. The impact of the housing boom on the state economy is highlighted by analysing the employment factor, land and material market, technology, and economy in general. The author has also addressed the stagnation of the commodity production sectors while engaging with the huge housing boom.

Harilal and Mathew Andrews in the third chapter attempt to understand the changes in the construction sector, technology, labour process and the dynamics of the labour market in a historical perspective using the Marxian framework of analysis. They start by mapping the traditional housing scenario before moving into the mode of production that existed in the late nineteenth century. The authors then try to trace the factors that led to a catalytic change in the society before explaining them in the labour process of the construction industry. The study also explains the role of technology and organizational changes in bringing out the overall transformation in the labour process by the contract system in this sector.

The issue of housing has dimensions of gender starting from the policy level to the conception and construction scenario. Meenakshi and Ajith investigate the aspect of gender in a changed scenario of housing in Kerala in the fourth chapter. The study primarily looks at the intervention strategy and schemes at various levels before approaching the issue through the three angles of roles, needs and strategies. It studies three public schemes for eradicating poverty like the IAY (Indira Awas Yojana), MWS (Million wells scheme), CAPART (Council for Advancement, Peoples Action, Rural Technology) for understanding the role of women and their participation in rural housing schemes—its presence, possibilities and challenges in the two districts of Kannur and Thrissur. However the paper lacks clarity in

identifying the aspects of participation of women in different levels of house construction.

A critical appraisal of the impact of public housing schemes on the weaker sections of Kerala's society is attempted in the fifth chapter by Gopikuttan. He provides a historical dimension to the question before approaching the issues of housing, investment, finance, indebtedness and housing quality. A comparative analysis of the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in the regions of Kadapra, Kulanada and Ranni-Peerumed shows that public intervention has not succeeded in fully enhancing the welfare implications of the various public housing schemes. This raises serious questions. Gopikuttan again with Renuka Dineshnath in the sixth chapter explores the technology available for housing construction while discussing the level of appropriate technology that can be used, especially in public housing schemes. He surveys the use of appropriate technology and various initiatives taken in Kerala by studying two institutions that came up in the mid-1980s and propagated alternative and appropriative building technologies. He provides a detailed description about these institutions 'Nirmithi Kendra' and 'COSTFORD' which envisaged cost-effective, technology and environment-friendly buildings.

Continuing with the analysis of the housing needs of the weaker sections, V Madhusoodhanan portrays the rehabilitation measures for slum dwellers by taking a case study of Thiruvananthapuram City Corporation. He historically analyses the slum formation in this city, while incorporating the various elements of the society. The study has looked into the physical quality of life, income, expenditure, land and housing of the slum dwellers of this city before concentrating on the various rehabilitation measures taken by the government. Even though the policy of the government has changed progressively from slum clearance to slum improvement, this study clearly brings out the deprivation of the slum dwellers in Thiruvananthapuram city.

Gopikuttan looks at the failures of the public intervention and what he calls the contemporary crisis in the eighth chapter. He also offers some policy prescriptions of an alternative integrated approach, which can be considered for solving the housing problems of weaker sections. Here he talks of strategies like preventing wasteful use of scarce building resources with public intervention as possibilities by integrating the available facilities. The discussion varies from developing a database on housing at the state level, to a new strategy-based project, programs, alternative use of indigenous technology, and training, production and mobilisation of local resources. Changing the organisation of construction and micro-credit programmes is also considered for poverty alleviation. This section in offering alternatives to the housing problem states the need for revamping the institutional and structural landscapes mainly from a policy perspective.

C P John in the final section provides an insightful analysis of the genesis of *welfare fund* of the construction workers in Kerala. Here he realises that the

construction boom along with rising real wages had created many challenges to the workers, especially security. The major focus of this chapter is on labour welfare in the construction industry and the specificities deal with the functioning of the Kerala state welfare fund. The chapter concludes by providing some comments and suggestions for improving the welfare fund.

In the present context of Kerala, the question of housing assumes utmost significance. This collection of micro-studies on the housing issue in Kerala adequately fills the gap in the development studies in Kerala and calls for more in-depth analysis of the issues raised. It also equips the readers with an elaborate idea on the state of one of the developmental issues in Kerala.

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DAVID MOSSE, *Cultivating Development: Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 315, Rs. 380.

This study has a total of ten chapters. The first chapter is the introduction where foreign aid flows through the international project i.e. Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project. This project targets the Bhil tribal region in western India trying to realise the fruits of development. In addition, the hidden motto of the project is to establish or construct social relations in the margin and determine how the project can be successful by minimising the gap between policy and practice in the project-implemented areas.

The second chapter describes how foreign aid is employed in an ambitious project to provide the necessary agricultural inputs to the tribal poor. Cultivation is required to retain the social position of the tribals in agriculture. From an operational point of view, the success of the project requires private sector participation instead of state intervention. Local participation is also necessary for a level playing field in the project.

The third chapter is concerned with how a powerful intervention is in a position to encapsulate the basic understanding of social and historical context of development. It deals with tribal livelihoods where tribals are imagined as uncivilised. Their living identity has been changed from jungli living to settling in agriculture. This tribal transformation was carried out by the British rule. They also recognised that the primary sector (i.e. agriculture) is essential to retain their social position. Agricultural inputs such as land, cattle, bullock, credit and their participation are needed to supplement production. These bhil tribals are often indebted to sahukar for these possible reasons. They started migrating to other regions from the 1970's onwards to service the debt and get back the mortgaged asset.

The fourth chapter invites the Participation Rural Appraisal (PRA) project tool that seeks a 'bottom up' approach to learn local knowledge from the people and

make the project viable. By the end of 1995, a highly committed project team had sensitively built relationships with a handful of the poorest bhil adivasi villages of western India. Over the period they gained remarkable local knowledge and trust for implementation of the project. Through frequent discussions, the tribals were made aware of agricultural innovations. The success of the project was mainly generated by field workers.. Besides, for the effectiveness of the project, the best strategy was to choose young educated women or men who acted as knowledge translators between villagers and the project staff.

Despite the village level negotiations, the important demand of the tribal people was to mitigate capital investment for inducing fixed and natural capitals—river and dam— rather than community conservation, and to meet their urgent need for off season wage labour. Following this demand, there is a need to deconstruct the PRA project by looking at the fantasy of consumer choice. While assessing the intricacies of implementing the project, two issues come up—one is to address the methodological limitation in terms of its scope, and the second is to focus on a cultural tie up.

The fifth chapter investigates the operation of the project considering the two mechanisms—that of relationship among the project staff and between the patron and clients. It is argued that the project needs to have an effective system focusing on the relationships among the staff and maintaining the accounts and financial records. Despite the prime conditions, the IBRFP project failed to embody the wide choices of minority which in turn shows that there is no strong interaction in the latter. On the other hand, the self-help groups (SHGs) came into location for building the security of poor tribals. But, it could not symbolise the real transformation of the tribals in that region. They were following a supply driven approach—creation of savings—instead of a demand driven one. However, the latter strategy is compounded by local needs and their capability. The main reason for the failure of the supply driven approach is being profit-oriented rather than development-oriented. Above all, the author has critically argued that the project can well target near-development on the condition of personal struggle of the patron.

The sixth chapter brings forth different forms of consultancy knowledge. The forms are explained through three different sub-projects—crop supply, soil and water management, and gender analysis. Among all these, the crop supply strategy was successful through conceptualization, dissemination and interpretation of policies and outcome. Unlike the first one, the soil and water management strategy had mixed outcome. In a way it got its success to legitimise in the initial phase, but encountered a setback in operation because it needed an external lead. From the two case studies, it is understood that for success of a project, conceptualization, dissemination and interpretation are needed. In the case of gender analysis, two objectives were targeted—gender equity and exploring gender relationships. As a part of this project, self-help groups brought forth a new dimension to strengthen women's participation to marshal financial security arrangement. However, this intervention did not support

the earlier objective of the project, as gender concept was not taken into consideration.

The underlying consensus of the seventh chapter is to realise the project's success with the active involvement of knowledge consultants thereby creating a stable normative model. This framework of evaluation relies upon both quantitative and qualitative parameters to generate unified commodity value of the project.

In the eighth chapter, the DFID policy emerges as a holistic type of organization which merges with the IBRFP project to set up a wider scope and strong agenda for targeting development in the tribal region. It is realised that the project is making strong relationships with the state agencies for financial funding. The project has been criticised for its failure in the practical field, where no change was observed because of ignoring the ground reality of the process. Moreover, it has been argued that this project communicated poorly with the policy process, which in turn shows the complete absence of commitment towards development.

The ninth chapter has brought forth the hidden idea behind the project which was to enhance self-reliance among the tribals through institutional development. Although this project was demand-driven with a participation approach, it did not give real power to the villagers. This phenomenon does not provide a conducive environment for the project to acquire local knowledge. The author has argued that local knowledge is vital for the successful operation of the project in that region. Finally, absence of a favourable environment which is complementary to the project does not bring any transformation in the areas which remain a distant dream for the poor.

In general the book reveals how foreign aid policy works via development oriented projects and how the fruits of development are cultivated in the tribal areas of western India. Aid policy has welcomed a variety of projects. Transition of a project seems to be declining realising the different possibilities of outcome that do not justify the ground reality. Although these projects bring some transformation in the identity of tribal livelihood through the new developmental logo of a participation approach, it makes them victims at the hand of an exploitative jankar or sahuakar. However, certain projects follow the bottom up approach in order to provide some confidence to the tribals and ensure better performance of the project. It did not work due to the absence of a conducive environment where existence of dominant knowledge outweighed the local knowledge thereby making the project unsuccessful. On the other hand, the author has pointed out that endogenous relationships among the project staff prevail, but the question of hierarchy does not implement the consultant knowledge for project success.

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MICHAEL A. LEBOWITZ, *Build It Now: Socialism for the 21st Century*, Daanish Books, 2006. pp 127, Rs. 100.

The world is going through the worst economic crisis since 1929. As stock markets tumble, banks go bankrupt and economic growth grinds to a halt, the ghost of 1929 is back to haunt us. While economists struggle to estimate the depth and width of this recession, millions of people have lost their homes, jobs and pensions. The stark nature of capitalism is revealed, as the burden of recession and the labour of reconstructing failed economies falls squarely on the shoulders of the poor working class masses. As governments rush to the aid of the crippled banks and financial institutions, the people on the streets expect that their governments will do more to protect their medical insurance, housing and jobs rather than bail out the profit hungry billionaires.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of free market economies had raised the pitch of some hailing the end of socialism and others claiming the 'end of history'. For nearly two decades, the economic growth of emerging economies like China, India and Brazil had veiled the growing inequalities. But capitalism, in spite of the extended markets provided by globalisation, cannot escape the fundamental law of trade cycles. The long spring is over and it is the beginning of the cold winter. As a response to US imperialism, Latin America has opted for a new version of socialism. Leaders who belong to the indigenous population, with socialist programs have been democratically elected and have enjoyed massive popular support. While Hugo Chavez and his Bolivarian alternative have stood out, many other countries including Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia have embarked on less ambitious socialist programs. There is renewed interest in what socialism can offer.

This book by Michael Lebowitz, rooted in the context of Venezuela, makes a strong case for a socialist change and acts as a guide against the pitfalls of yesteryear socialist experiments. Introducing readers to the role of capital in the present world order and its exploitative character, the author builds the argument for socialism. Without deviating in any great degree from Marxist theory and praxis, he unequivocally states that what emerged in many countries in the last century was not socialism. The book dwells with two important themes—the first three chapters are an articulation of socialism as the only true alternative to capitalist exploitation. Debunking Keynesian economics and social democracy as a surrender to capital, he also criticises the TINA—there is no alternative—syndrome. Lebowitz laments that we as a society have lost sight of alternatives and are settling for 'barbarism with a human face'. The four chapters that follow are a call to building socialism. Borrowing from Marx, Lebowitz maintains that the new socialist world would be plagued by inheriting the defective values of the old system, but the answer lies in confronting rather than accommodating them within the new institutions. By allowing the highest degree of democracy in the development and execution of goals, he argues that a revolutionary state can achieve radical transformation. The author severely criticising the role of the vanguard, states 'we now know that socialism cannot be

achieved from above through the efforts and tutelage of a vanguard that seizes all initiatives and distrusts the self development of the masses'. Quoting heavily from the Bolivarian constitution drafted in 1999, he claims that the spirit of the constitution clearly aims to provide the democratic space needed for self development of the people.

Another strain of thought running through the essays is that the answer to capital strike is not to concede to its hegemony. Social democracy, the author claims, gives in to a 'capital strike'—it does not challenge the logic of capital. But capital strike could be an opportunity. Once again taking the case of Venezuela, the author narrates how the workers 'moved in' during the oil strike to take over the management of the oil industry and in doing so removed the threat of capital strike. This book also cautions us on the possible pitfalls during the transitional period. In a chapter entirely dedicated to the Yugoslav experiment with workers' self management, the author notes that the tendency towards self interest and competition between different enterprises may offset the benefits of self management and gravely endanger the model. He suggests that by building the values of social justice, equality and solidarity and by incorporating the needs of the communities into the decision making process of worker-managed enterprises, these difficulties could be overcome. In the succeeding chapter, he provides some insights into the Venezuelan model of co-management that places on the workers certain responsibilities and commitments to the local communities and the working class at large.

Build it Now: Socialism for the 21st century expresses the need for the 'New Human'. Che Guevara had taken this to be his primary task in revolutionary Cuba. He had realised earlier on that a new political-economic ideological system cannot be created by old minds corrupted by commodity relationships, at competition with each other. Che had constantly made appeals to the powerful socialist states for international solidarity and support to the underdeveloped world in their battle against imperialism. At home he had argued with his people to show a revolutionary zeal for voluntary labour and self sacrifice for the cause of proletarian revolution across continents. He made an example of himself, going out to fight battles in distant lands, for the cause of an international proletarian revolution. It is this spirit that is reflected in this book.

One element that glaringly strikes us is the lack of discussion about our responsibilities towards tackling climate change and developing a socialist world order that commits itself to preserving ecology and nature. Even while the author makes a reference to the protection of environment, he provides no clear picture of how a socialist economic order can tackle the grave danger that indiscriminate industrialisation has led us to. Would the people prioritise protection of nature over their immediate needs? Would a socialist process alter enough the values of humans to work towards more environment-friendly life styles? These questions gain greater relevance while discussing a nation like Venezuela which has greatly benefited from its oil wealth. Secondly, it is clear from our experience that socialism cannot be

sustained within individual nations. Lenin, Trotsky and Che Guevara recognised this. But, experience suggests that socialist revolutions tend to be isolated and the working class in neighbouring nations do not rise in defense of socialism. Even in Latin America, the Cuban revolution remained and remains the only guerilla based revolution. Even today major Latin American nations with left leaning leadership have failed to pose a serious challenge to neo-liberalism and regionalise the Bolivarian revolution. The author does not deal with this element that could seriously undermine the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. There is also a need to understand better the recent developments in Venezuela, where Chavez's attempt to further the socialist revolution through constitutional amendment was thwarted by popular mandate. Could this mean the maturity of a democratically aroused working class? Or is it the first successful challenge of capital?

Build it Now is a call to socialists across the world not to falter, not to give in, and to build a new socialist vision from the emerging realities on the ground. Without being too heavy on theory and jargon, the author takes readers through the basic ideas, premises and arguments of socialism. Coming a decade and a half after the collapse of Stalinism—vanguard mode of production as the author classifies—the essays clearly present the mistakes of the past and provide a revolutionary practice for the future. Written by a person closely connected with the developments in Venezuela, the book also provides us with interesting and insightful information on the unfolding of the Bolivarian revolution and about its single most visible protagonist 'Hugo Chavez'. More importantly, it presents the hurdles and pitfalls in the quest for building the 'New Man'. This book rekindles the vision of a socialist utopia that was lost along the way.

Venkat

Research Scholar, MIDS

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REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

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