Sanjib Baruah

Ambiguities of Sovereignty: Politics of Peace in Northeast India

ABSTRACT: In August 2015 leaders of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M) and representatives of the Government of India signed a preliminary peace agreement. Very few details of this ‘framework agreement’ are known. But there are indications that some version of the phrase ‘shared sovereignty’ would appear in the final agreement. This paper while necessarily speculative seeks to draw out the possible meaning of the phrase and its implications, based on public statements by key players. It is expected that the Indian public would either not pay it much attention or find the phrase acceptable, so long as no Naga international identity is invoked. However, the development has substantial implications for domestic sovereignty, i.e., the organization of political authority in the region.

Ajay Verghese

Was Colonialism Beneficial? Some Answers from a Historical 'Accident' in South India

Abstract: Many social scientists have examined the long-term impact of European colonialism on contemporary politics. At the broadest level, was colonialism beneficial for colonized peoples? This article uses a historical ‘accident’ to isolate the effects of British colonialism on modern Indian development. In the late 18th century, the British annexed the northern region of the state of Kerala (Malabar), but did not annex the south (Travancore). A comparative historical analysis of Malabar and Travancore shows that British rule led to fewer schools, roads, and hospitals. Since independence, leftist parties in Malabar have closed this ‘development gap’ with Travancore. This article details both the negative effects of colonialism, but also the power of human agency to overcome the legacies of the past.

Carla Bellamy

Alternative Kingdoms: Articulations of Autonomy and Authority at Husain Tekri Sharif

This paper draws on ethnographic and archival research performed in the former Muslim princely state of Jaora, in Madhya Pradesh.  It focuses on several different moments and events, all of which feature a collection of shrines known as Husain Tekri (Husain Hill). It examines the role that the shrines have played in the authority of the nawabs of Jaora from the late 19th century through the first decade of the 21st and it also explores the role the shrines play in the identity and community formations of contemporary residents of Jaora and pilgrims to Husain Tekri. For the nawabs of Jaora state, the nawabs of post-independence Jaora, the citizens of Jaora in pre- and post-independence India, and contemporary pilgrims to Husain Tekri, the shrines facilitate expressions of autonomy and authority that feature unexpected combinations of the concepts of citizenship, sovereignty, the religious, and the secular.

Sunil Purushotham

The Long Second Partition, 1946-56

Although it is commonplace to refer to a single partition, independence in 1947 required two distinct yet co-constitutive territorial settlements. These settlements were attempted to resolve the contradictions of the fragmented landscape of colonial sovereignty. The contingent system of layered sovereignty, administrative fragmentation, and legal plurality that cohered after1857 into a stable institutional structure was accompanied, as Bernard Cohn observed decades ago, by British perceptions of India as being comprised of communities on the one hand, and a traditional feudal order on the other. This duality was preserved in all the attempts at “constitutional reform” leading up to 1947, with each principle (community and kingship) serving simultaneously as the basis for claims to sovereignty. I have argued elsewhere that the acceptance, at least on behalf of the Congress, of a territorial settlement based on religious demography was premised, in no small measure, on making a break with a constitutional history that recognized kingship as a legitimate basis for sovereignty. I suggested, moreover, that a series of violent events unfolding from 1947 worked to transform a landscape of fragmented and layered sovereignty into a coherent and singular regime of national sovereignty. This was an event-based understanding of decolonization that understood sovereignty as a historically contingent and “precarious effect” of state formation that was based not on a state-monopoly of violence but rather on a cooption of cumulative violence dispersed across the body politic. In contrast, this paper explores the ambivalent processes by which the spatial, legal, and administrative inheritances of the princely states conditioned, and at times furthered, the development of a postcolonial regime of sovereignty in the decade after 1947. My primary example will be Hyderabad.

Shivaji Mukherjee

Historical Legacies of Colonial Indirect Rule: Princely States and Maoist insurgency in Central India

Do colonial institutions matter in explaining civil wars? The literature on civil wars has not explored the historical legacies of colonial institutions for insurgency. I address this gap in the literature, by exploiting sub-national variation in the Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh in central India, which epitomizes the causal mechanism of colonial indirect rule through *princely* states creating conditions of weak state capacity and tribal grievances. I test the theory on a new dataset at the sub district Assembly Constituency level within Chhattisgarh, and use IV-2SLS regression to address endogeneity due to selection bias, combined with historical analysis and interview data to demonstrate path dependence. The IV-2SLS analysis shows that constituencies which were formerly part of indirect rule through *princely states* have a higher probability of Maoist insurgency, than constituencies which were under British direct rule. This study demonstrates historical origins of ethnic inequality and weak state capacity which are important explanations for civil war onset. It also sets the agenda for further research on other cases where colonial institutions create conditions for insurgency, like the Taliban in FATA in Pakistan, the ethnic insurgencies in Burma’s peripheries, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, and possibly leftist insurgencies in Peru and Colombia.

Cabeiri Robinson

Disputed Territory: State Subjects and Post-Colonial Sovereignty in Kashmir

This presentation examines the continuing salience of the ‘state subject’ as a category of political belonging and sovereign limitation in the former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. The presentation traces the origins of the politico-legal category of Hereditary State Subject to 19th century struggles by peoples within the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to establish limits on monarchical sovereignty by establishing land settlement, usufruct, and patronage rights for the people of the state. It then examines how the Hereditary State Subject provisions grounded the foundational political categories of the post-colonial provincial successor states on both sides of the Ceasefire Line/ Line of Control, even as the states of India and Pakistan sought to consolidate national citizenship articulations of political belonging. The paper concludes by examining three recent political conflicts which are more comprehensible by understanding the way in which the Kashmiri political imagination is shaped by the concept of the state subject based rights rather than by post-colonial articulations of cultural belonging.

Grad Students

Mircea Raianu

“A Mass of Anomalies”: Land, Law, and Sovereignty in an Indian Company Town

Large-scale industrial production in India was made possible during the first half of the twentieth century by the unprecedented extraction of mineral resources, particularly coal and iron ore, and the corresponding entry of capitalists such as the Tatas of Bombay into the remote interior of the subcontinent. I argue that this process was part of a broader transition from a patchwork of multiple, fragmented, and layered sovereignties during the colonial period to a unified national economic state-space by 1947. This paper examines the emergence of Jamshedpur, site of India’s first integrated steel plant and privately governed company town. I begin by tracing the protracted acquisition of land and dispossession of mainly adivasi cultivators by the Tata Iron and Steel Company from 1900 to 1920, as it sought control over territory, migrant labor, and natural resources across a wide swath of eastern India. The company pursued a distinct strategy of obtaining short-term leases from princely states and local zamindars, while simultaneously using the legal apparatus of the colonial state to secure absolute tenurial rights. However, the presence of multiple sets of intermediaries and the uneven application of laws such as the Land Acquisition Act (1894) and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) would, in time, undermine both the creation of an urban enclave in Jamshedpur and the complex arrangements for mining rights at the company’s collieries. Minor rulers (such as the Rajas of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar) were adept at playing the Tatas, the colonial state, and rival steel companies against each other, while succession disputes and pervasive corruption threatened security of tenure and profits as independence approached. Princely states were thus decisive in shaping forms of spatial “unevenness” specific to the modernity of India’s political economy. The paper engages with comparative cases, from the Soviet Union to Latin America and Africa. For example, anthropologist James Ferguson has shown how extractive oil and mineral industries in Africa have tended to “selectively territorialize” capital into “enclaves” separate from the nation-state. By contrast, the Indian case presents a more layered political geography in which the assumption of private sovereign control over land and resources was always contested and incomplete, and the state closely followed capital into the interior.

Madihah Akhter

Insurgent Sovereignty? Succession in Princely Bhopal, 1924-1926

In 1924, Bhopal experienced a mysterious and dramatic period characterized by competing claims to power and a complex legal issue that was only resolved behind closed doors between Bhopal’s ruler, Sultan Jahan Begum, and King George V. This presentation will examine Bhopali sovereignty through the succession case, during which Sultan Jahan Begum used Muslim law and precedent to challenge British legal definitions and understandings of princely primogeniture to ensure that her youngest son succeeded. Concurrently, personalities played a constituent role as Sultan Jahan Begum came up against her grandson during the legal battle. I argue Bhopali sovereignty was unique and Sultan Jahan Begum was given preferential treatment by the imperial state. I situate the case against the backdrop of princely rulers as the representatives of India in the League of Nations. The public and contestational nature of this case exacerbated the fissures between British and princely India, exemplified by what Stephen Legg has called the “international anomaly,” or India’s presence as the only non self-governing member of the League. Ultimately, Sultan Jahan Begum’s relentless, and ultimately successful, insistence on overturning primogeniture in Bhopal is one example of how sovereignty in princely Bhopal and the imperial state was in a constant state of negotiation and was informed by a mixture of legal exactitude and personalities within the international context of the League of Nations.

Shayan Rajani

Obstructing Geography: Resisting British Interventionism in Early Nineteenth Century Sindh

Abstract: This paper considers four diplomatic encounters between the Talpur sovereigns of Sindh and the East India Company from 1800 to 1829. These encounters hinge around British demands for access to Sindh and Talpur concern for denying British mobility in their domain. At stake in this contest is the British effort to expand their geographic knowledge of Sindh, which is a necessary precondition for escalating interventionism. The Talpurs drew on political and cultural resources available within Sindh and transregionally in their attempts to thwart the British. Yet, even as they sought to close off social and political exchange with the British, successive encounters found them appropriating British terms of engagement to shore up their resistance. The paper examines the range of possibilities open to sovereigns in the early nineteenth century who found themselves under the shadow of an ascendant British Empire. The dialectic between resistance and appropriation characterized the diplomatic exchanges of two states that were becoming rapidly familiar and increasingly suspicious of each other.