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## ABSTRACTS

### **Secularist Discourse as an Ethnic Ideology: A Case of the Arab Orient**

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ON VIEWING THE PRESENT POLITICAL panorama of the Middle East one may perceive a noticeable representation of ethnic minorities in political movements and parties that sustain extreme secularist tendencies. This fact is not only related to the support that these minorities tend to give to social and political projects that would guarantee a full space for the development of their cultural differences, but furthermore it entails an important vehicle of social and political mobility geared towards a full accession to power.

Upon analysing the particular case of Syria we arrive to the conclusion that secularism in the dominant political ideology of the Ba'ath Party implies, in fact, a given form of externalization of a fundamental primordialism. Hence, secularist ideological practices need to be de-constructed to arrive to their sheer social and historical connotations in terms of ethnicity, rather than their merely formal discursive denotations. The development of a secularist discourse in the Near East is intimately linked to the dynamics of the projections of ethnic power in the region, to the extent that it has served as an ideological vehicle for national hegemonic projects under the leadership of given 'ethnic classes'. The paradox seems to be that this type of 'modernizing discourses' that attempt to place themselves beyond religions, sectarian, communal, tribal or regional definitions of political community, constitute in reality the mere shells of ideological practices that have an enduring ethnic character.

### **Clandestine Culture of Protest in Colonial Situations**

SUSANA B. C. DEVALLE

ANTICOLONIAL STRUGGLES HAVE BEEN CONSTANTLY backed by the cultural resistance of the dominated people. It is hardly a coincidence that the anthropological traditions which developed in the metropolis for a long period devoted their efforts to a systematic study of the cultural aspects of the colonial societies. This interest often became enmeshed in the ideological network of scientificist justifications to back the colonial project. In addi-

tion, the cultural field provided the foundations for the consolidation of assimilation or the practices of "cultural transformation" (deculturation). Assimilation and acculturation aimed ultimately to neutralize both the actual and possible resistance to domination from endogenous cultures.

In colonial and dependent societies, for a true process of liberation to succeed, the struggle in the economic and political fields must be closely linked to a struggle against cultural repression or destruction, against the cultural co-optation of the indigenous elites, and the cultural deformation of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisies. The instruments used against this "cultural colonialism" are to be found at the popular level, among the working rural and urban sectors for whom culture is not alienated from life, but is centered instead in the fundamental grievances and aspirations of the oppressed and made up of endogenous elements grounded in a consciousness of social contradictions. The contestatory cultural manifestations of the subordinate sectors show the efforts made to recover and preserve a people's historical memory, and the attempts to interpret and combat social realities. They express the collective will to forge independent social projects. They renew the promise of liberation.

## Wang Meng and New Chinese Fiction

FLORA BOTTON BEJA

IN OCTOBER 1979, THE FOURTH National Congress of Writers and Artists set a new pace for artistic and literary production in the People's Republic of China. Many writers who had been criticized and ostracized during the Antirightist Campaign in 1957 and during the Cultural Revolution in 1966, were rehabilitated and many of them were present at the meeting. Among those present was Wang Meng, a writer in his late forties, who at the age of twenty two had been severely criticized in a nation-wide controversy. His crime was to write a story called *A Young Newcomer to the Organization Department* where he presented a rather sceptical and slightly cynical image of party cadres. Wang Meng was exiled in a remote province and was not heard of again until his return to Beijing in 1977.

Wang Meng reappeared as a mature writer who had lost nothing of his critical spirit. His stories, which began to appear in journals and newspaper, reveal a continuity of spirit with the man who once had criticized a corrupt and indifferent bureaucracy. He again suggested the unnecessary flaws of present reality and described human beings in realistic terms: not absolutely good or bad but rather strong or weak, either victims of circumstances or makers of their own destiny.

Wang Meng once again could not escape from criticism and controversy. Since 1979 a great number of articles and letters have appeared in Chinese journals praising or criticizing him, wondering about his style, his innovative literary techniques, his use of "stream of consciousness", of flashbacks, of psychology. Some chastize him for what they consider his pessimism, others criticize his subjectivism. This article discusses the controversy and Wang Meng's reactions to it and gives examples of the writer's style by mentioning several of his short stories.

Wang Meng has become more cautious lately and his recent essays and statements are less bold. It is not clear whether it is a real conviction that made him change or rather the hardening of a political line in China.

## Structural Change, Economic Interdependence and African Development

H. M. A. ONITIRI

IN AFRICA, MORE THAN IN any other developing region, the problem of structural transformation from dependant colonial regimes to viable independent economies capable of effective participation in an interdependent world economy has proved particularly difficult.

In recent years, Africa's growth rate has lagged behind growth in other developing regions while demographic trends have moved in the opposite direction. Worse trends are revealed by other indicators: a falling per capita growth in agriculture, decrease in export volume etc. These trends, experienced by a region with most of the world's poorest countries, have kept the basic indicators of economic development well below levels for all developing countries.

The African experience has been the subject of much discussion and debate. The World Bank draws attention to three main factors: a) internal constraints based on "structural" factors that evolved from historical circumstances or from the physical environment, b) adverse trends in international economy, particularly since 1974 and c) domestic policy inadequacies. While the WB emphasizes the third point, the Brandt report gives more weight to unfavourable external factors and basic internal constraints arising from historical and physical circumstances. The report prepared by the ECA was more concerned about what needs to be done to arrest the adverse trends than about explaining them.

All these views are critically examined and analyzed in their various proposals and the author offers his own views of what should be done. One of the conclusions he reaches is that the critical transformation that many African countries still have to go through would require far greater mobilization of domestic efforts and much bigger and better designed programs of international assistance.