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**Human Rights :
a thorny path**



Work shown at UNESCO (September 2008).
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Courtesy Xavier Hufkens, Brussels (Belgium).
"Chamber" (1996), Antony Gormley (UK). © Antony Gormley

From Franco's regime in Spain to Hindutva historical revisionism in India by way of South American dictatorships, the dismal memory of the past can contribute to human rights as long as it is revealed and repaired.

To mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Courier presents some backward glances that can help us move forward.

In our editorial, Pierre Sané, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, reviews the status of the dignity of the individual in the world today.

Cover photograph:
Memory, a key to human rights.
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HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMAN DIGNITY

Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, what is the reality for individual dignity and observance of human rights, in a world where billions of people suffer from poverty? Safeguarding the ideals and missions contained in the Declaration means fighting poverty.

Pierre Sané, *UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences*

All international texts on the protection of human rights are based on the concept of human dignity, as proclaimed in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Often the concept is understood more through what assaults or opposes it, not what enriches and honours it; undoubtedly this is because of its very particular background, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Nazi death machine. This strong affirmation of dignity shared by all humankind leads to the first and most famous article of the Declaration: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

But equal dignity for all human beings does not generate only rights. In addition, and primarily, it represents a call to action, vigilance and prevention. Recognizing our own dignity makes us answerable to everyone else; there can be no dignity without genuine solidarity and brotherhood.

Sixty years after the adoption of the Declaration, where are we regarding fundamental respect for human dignity and integrity, these cornerstones of human rights?

We must recognize that today half the people in the world do not benefit even minimally from due consideration of their identity and their status, despite well-known international advances in domains as basic as the fight against torture, legal sanctions for assaults on women, or the recognition of the rights of refugees and migrants.

The poverty that causes billions of people acute suffering obviously violates the ideals promoted by the Declaration and calls into question Article 28: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized."

Defending the ideals and missions contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights requires above all fighting poverty, this tentacular phenomenon. We know its causes, sometimes rooted in the social and cultural reality.

The fight must first tackle prejudices, particularly the idea of human dignity as a mere refuge in face of the combined effects of discrimination, exclusion, inequality and injustice. The concept of human dignity goes far beyond that. It is inconceivable without the right to education, decent housing, sanitation. And it

rejects resignation and helplessness in the face of situations experienced as inevitable.

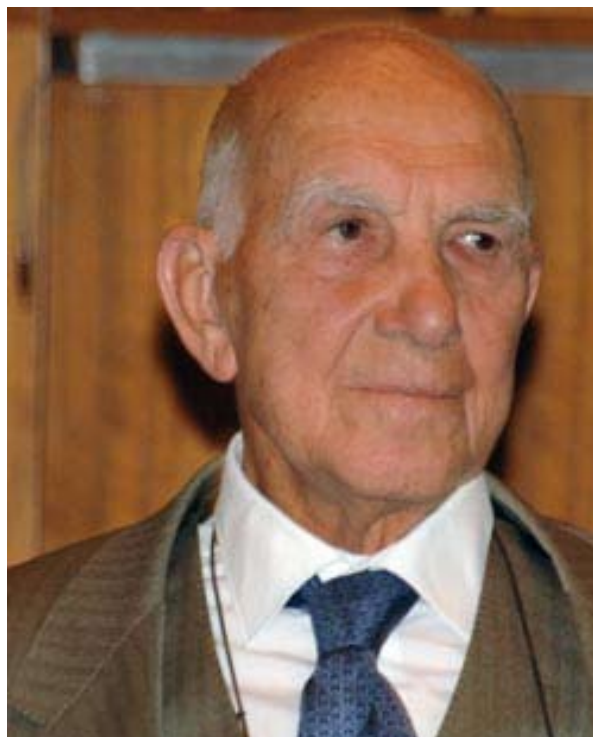
A single example to stress once more – the fight against extreme poverty – represents a problem that UNESCO, the NGOs, political decision-makers and civil society must put as first priority on their agenda. Their cooperation is a decisive element in the fight to eradicate poverty and to ensure an international order that guarantee the observance of the rights contained in the Declaration.

More than ever it is our duty to ensure the effective implementation of all the human rights in the Declaration. We must concretize this respect for human rights, which means simultaneously respect for the other in his difference and self-respect. ■

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INALIENABLE AND INDIVISIBLE

Stéphane Hessel, French-German diplomat and writer, participated in the great adventure that was the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hessel, a concentration camp survivor, explains how the document is unique and why it must remain universal – but also why it might not be adopted today.

Stéphane Hessel answers questions from **Vincent Noce**, French journalist.



Stéphane Hessel at UNESCO (2008).
© UNESCO/D. Bijeljac

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What was the prevalent feeling when the Declaration was adopted?

Relief. Don't forget we were already in the midst of growing opposition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Out of the first 50 countries who were members of the

United Nations, 30 were Western. The battle was by no means already won. There were seven abstentions. As only the positive or negative votes were counted, the Declaration was adopted by consensus. The third UN general assembly (which adopted the Declaration) was held in Paris,

at the Palais de Chaillot, by chance. The building set to be the Manhattan headquarters was still under construction. The press was quite enthusiastic, but it didn't pay much attention to what was going on at the UN. Particularly in the European countries, which were rather nationalist.

And the preliminary meetings?

The first meeting of the nucleus committee was held in early 1946 in Manhattan. As for the secretariat, it was housed in a disaffected aeronautics factory on Long Island. Sometimes we met in New York, other times in Geneva. René Cassin from France was one of the driving forces behind the preparation. It was thanks to him we were able to draft a text that was ambitious and unique in the history of international texts. We were working under the authority of Henri Laugier (France) who was the deputy secretary general for social issues and



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in Paris, at the *Palais de Chaillot*, in 1948. © UN

... human rights, and John Humphrey from Canada, director of human rights, who had only one arm. It gave our committee a certain aura, because people thought he was a war invalid (note, his arm had been amputated when he was a child).

Afterwards, when the Human Rights Commission was set up in 1947, it took over. It was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, who played a very active role.

It should be noted that participants did not represent their governments. They were suggested by their governments, according to their capacity, and picked by the secretary general. It gave us great freedom, although we were careful not to make things difficult for the states. René Cassin never had to report to the French government.

As for me, I was called in February 1946 to become Henri Laugier's cabinet director, which led me to get actively involved in these preparations. I stayed at the UN for four years. It was an extraordinary period of expansion and innovation to make it the fine edifice it became.

There were a few thorny issues in the committee, like the place of trust territories. We were still in the time of the Empires. But the main tension was between the West's emphasis on freedoms, versus the East's preference for economic and social rights.

A "unique declaration", you said?

Already in the preamble, it stipulates the universal right to human dignity. That was our objective, after all the tragedies we'd lived through, from Auschwitz to Hiroshima... The states found themselves under the



Genocide museum in Phnom Penh (Cambodia).
© Arjun Purkayastha

unquestionable leadership of Roosevelt in a strong institution that affirmed the person's rights and freedoms.

The League of Nations (forerunner of the UN) had peacekeeping as its goal, but it did not concern itself with individuals. As for the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, its purpose was to protect the citizen against the arbitrariness of royal power. The whole ideology of human rights was thus positioned between power and those it dominated. But to extend this protection to an international level, and even universal, that was very bold.

This was the innovation: we are responsible for human dignity and the rights of the person. It was democracy's catechism. In other words, we do not govern for the

pleasure of power, but to guarantee the exercise of a democratic society. We were able to declare that governments could be held responsible for the rights of their citizens.

We had affirmed the universal responsibility of human rights. The word "universal" is obviously fundamental.

How could the Khmer Rouge hold a seat in the United Nations?

There were no criteria for admission to the UN, like the ones Europeans are imposing today on new European Union members. States that had gained independence automatically became members. It was inevitable, but it had consequences.

The UN wager was the following: countries must come in, and once they were in, they had to be led to respect human rights. ...

●●● **Conflict - fundamental conflict - therefore exists between diplomacy for peace and peace for human rights.**

These are concessions made to cooperation. When we talk about diplomacy for human rights, of course it implies obtaining states' consent. The declaration is not a legally binding treaty, even though it was followed by two pacts that are legal instruments ratified by states (note, the pact concerning civic and political rights and the pact covering economic, social and cultural rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966). We can incite states to ratify pacts, we can say to them watch out! We'll bring charges against you to the Human Rights Commission. But there have been no

exclusions with the exception of South Africa, for apartheid.

Some criticize human rights rhetoric for its strictly western values.

Human rights are inalienable and indivisible. We must absolutely resist relativism. We cannot plead cultural differences to deny them. Moreover, western countries can be just as guilty, look at the prisons in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. It isn't because they're western that they're any less responsible. We have to remain faithful to the principle of universality – it is fundamental.

We can wonder whether the Declaration would have a chance of being adopted today as it was in 1948.

The circumstances aren't conducive. The shock of the Second World War made possible such radical ambition. Yet we could have a comparable shock tomorrow, notably about saving the planet. Or wild financialization of the economy. If we were terrified by a worsening crisis, a text with the same range, about the environment, for instance, could have the same chance of success. Whereas 60 years ago we weren't ready. ■

Tribute to Jeanne Hersch (1910-2000)

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1968, Jeanne Hersch, first Director of UNESCO's Division of Philosophy, supervised the publication of a seminal work entitled "Birthright of Man", a collection of quotations from a wide variety of the world's cultural traditions.

In her view, the concept of human rights, while not universally recognized, responds to a need expressed in all cultures and all languages since human societies first existed. Hersch calls strongly for standing up against the trampling of human rights all over the world.

She disagrees with critics who anchor human rights to a specific time and place – out of the question, for her, that they first materialized out of nowhere in the "liberal" 18th century west.



Jeanne Hersch, first director of UNESCO's Philosophy Division.
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CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF ABSENCE

Argentine photographer Gustavo Germano's exhibition, "Absences", explores the universe of the victims of "disappearances" during Argentina's "Dirty War" (1976-1983). Photos are juxtaposed in pairs, one old and one recent. On the new one, a person is missing. Disappeared for ever, without leaving a trace.

Interview conducted by **Lucia Iglesias** and **Casey Walther** (UNESCO).



In your photo exhibition "Absences", you have documented the repression that occurred in Argentina. Why is it important to document these violations of human rights, instead of allowing these painful memories to rest, as some have suggested?

Some of the gravest human rights offenses, in my opinion, are those committed by States – that is to say, when the State is the agent of terror and becomes an instrument of illegal repression by using methods so perverse as the forced disappearance of people. These sorts of actions have consequences for society: Initially, there is the fear and uncertainty. Then

over time, there is the sense of not being able to mourn.

So what I am trying to convey in my work is that, more than just the forced disappearances of people that happened in Argentina, there is also the time that has passed. I want to reflect the double effect that time has had. On the one hand, there is the time that the survivors endured while living in the absence of their lost loved one. On the other hand, there is the time forfeited by the persons who disappeared and did not have a chance to live out their lives. When I was creating the concept of this show, I thought that it would be good to capture the

aging of the survivors. And it is this very basic and human concept that the terrorism of the State destroyed.

How did your work develop with the relatives of those who disappeared?

In all cases there were moments where real connections were made and where they relived the moment in the original photo. It was truly a journey to the past and, at the same time, a look into the future. There were cases where some of the relatives had never since returned to the place in the original photo. I don't know whether it was consciously or instinctively, but every one of the relatives ●●●



... gave me their complete trust to work with them. I think this is reflected in the photos. Personally, I am humbled to have been the vehicle through which these people were able to denounce these crimes, and to have created the moment that allowed this to be conveyed. I also believe that, even though my intention was not to do an autobiographical project, the fact that I myself experienced losing someone in my family to these same crimes has allowed a greater rapport with these people, because between us there is a shared brotherhood. And through this project, my own family has been able to grow.

What's more, all the people that I photograph are from the Entre Rios Province in Argentina, where supposedly "nothing happened". I come from that province, and I felt that it was important to document cases of disappearances that were not known and affected normal people from distant villages and to show that the tragedy affected this province as well.

What is the current situation in Argentina with respect to these crimes?

In Argentina, they have abolished the laws that, until recently, had hampered the prosecution of those

responsible for these crimes. Little by little, these people are finally being brought to trial, although to defend themselves they're evoking the time that has passed and arguing that prosecution should wait until their lives have ended since they are already very old. Nonetheless, a few have been convicted, which we of course applaud. This is why my work tries to raise public awareness of this issue.

In 1999, UNESCO awarded its Prize for Peace Education to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an association of mothers whose children disappeared in that period. ■

History and Memory

Romila Thapar

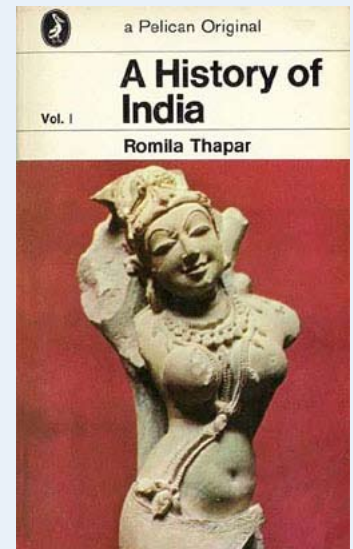
Seeking sanction from the past involves memory and history. Very often people think that history is in fact memory formalized, as it were, but that is not the case. History is very different, and therefore it is important to differentiate between memory and history.

Memory is primarily a personal thing, and if it's taken up by a group, it is reformulated as a collective memory. Collective memories, therefore, are not spontaneous. One person's memory can evoke the memory of others, and can create an echo in others as well. But the coming together of all this is something which is a deliberate act.

History, by definition, is not personal -- it has formal rules by which one arrives at a particular conclusion. It is the end-product of a clear-cut process which involves various stages -- where the data is textual and one is using written records, the process is very very clear. It becomes a little more ambiguous in archaeology, for example, when one is dealing with artefacts, which have to be interpreted by an archaeologist. They say very little, and the archaeologist has to try to represent what the object signifies. In fact, this is also true of textual data, because the historian has to interpret the text and get more data out of it.

The most difficult separation between memory and history comes in oral history, where the data is limited to memory, and the processing becomes much more difficult.

The role of memory is very important in terms of remembering the human rights part of it. The emphasis is on the fact that there are certain rights which are fundamental, and those rights have to be reiterated for each generation. The memory that goes with events that have occurred concerning those rights, that is very important. But memory can also be abused, like when people talk about setting right the wrongs of the past. This is an appeal to a kind of memory which is very different from the memory that concerns human rights, and the results are very different.



Cover of Romila Thapar's book "History of India"
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IDEOLOGY CLASHING WITH HISTORY

Early in the decade, a woman raised her voice against Hindu fundamentalism asserting Aryan superiority. And she was heard. Her name: Romila Thapar. The famous Indian historian explains here how spurious identities founded on pseudo-historical arguments affect human rights.

Romila Thapar is professor emeritus of History at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, and one of the world's foremost experts of ancient Indian history. Her seminal work, "History of India, Vol. 1" has been in print ever since it was first published in 1966. Dr. Thapar, who believes in interpreting ancient Indian texts in the light of new insights, has taught at top institutions including Oxford University, Cornell, the College de France in Paris, and the University of London. She has been involved in her country's debates about historical truth, political identity and social reform.

Interview by **Shiraz Sidhva**, Indian journalist.



Vedic.com. © Vedic texts.



Romila Thapar is the first Holder of the Kluge Chair in Countries and Cultures of the South at Library of Congress (in 2004). © John Harrington

You have strongly opposed the attempt to use history in support of an ideology of religious nationalism by the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was in power from 1998 to 2004. There was an attempt at the time to rewrite Indian textbooks. How does the rewriting of history

to endorse recent political ideology affect human rights?

Let me clarify here that my fight was against the BJP-led government and the Hindutva view of Indian history, and not against other governments in India. The Hindutva lobby that insisted on the changes in Indian textbooks endorses a Hindu right-wing ultra-nationalism – often described as Hindu fundamentalism – and is trying to propagate a revisionist history in classrooms and political discourse. The parent organization in India, known as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has a distinctly religious fundamentalist political agenda. The RSS and its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP), gained power defeating moderate secular Indians by exploiting Hindu nationalist sentiments. The RSS has been involved in several high-profile incidents of religiously motivated violence over the last twenty years.

The controversy on my work involved some textbooks I had written for middle schools, where I had talked about the lives of Aryans as we knew it from the Vedic texts. I had mentioned, for instance, that the early Indians ate beef – the references in the Vedas are clear, and there is archaeological evidence for this. The Hindu right wing extolled the Aryans as the great model society for ancient India, and were opposed to any criticism of them. When they objected to this and other statements of mine, I provided evidence

••• from the texts as proof. But they insisted that children should not be told that beef was eaten in early times. My reaction was that it was historically more correct to explain to school children why in early times beef was eaten, and why later a prohibition was introduced.

Though the attack on me was vicious, I was not the only historian attacked. There were about six of us, who had authored the earlier textbooks, and others who spoke up against the changes in school curriculum and textbooks by the (then) government, made without consulting educational bodies that would normally have been consulted. The government then described us as being anti-Hindu, and therefore anti-Indian, and therefore anti-patriotic, and therefore, traitors.

The deletion of passages from our books and the ban on any discussion of the deleted passages raised a number of issues of various kinds pertaining to the rights of individuals and the ethics of government institutions.

There was also a virulent protest by some Indians living in the United States when the US Library of Congress appointed you as the first Kluge Chair in Countries and Cultures of the South in 2004. What became of these protests and were textbooks revised when the Congress government replaced the Bharatiya Janata Party in New Delhi?

The Library of Congress rejected without any hesitation the demand from the Hindutva lobby, particularly Indians living in the United States, to reverse my appointment, therefore the demand was slowly



The restored Hindu temple of Somnath. © Flickr

silenced. The abuse online and through e-mails continued unabated.

When the Congress reclaimed power in 2004, it decided to do away with all the previous textbooks, written by us as far back as the 1960s and 70s, as well as those produced by the BJP government just prior to its fall. A new set of books was commissioned, which are now in use. They are different from the ones we wrote and reflect some of the new interests in history as a discipline, and do not push a Hindutva hard line.

The worrying thing is, what will happen if the Bharatiya Janata Party returns to power in the next election, which will be held within 12 months? Will they change the textbooks again? I worry for the school children who have to be examined in the subject and depend on textbooks.

Once we accept one religious group's agenda and beliefs to be taught in the public schools, it opens the door for every other group to do the same thing. As educators, we have to make a distinction between history on the

one hand, which involves questioning existing knowledge about the past where necessary, and faith on the other hand, where even myths are acceptable. The two have to be kept separate. The first is the domain of the historian and the second that of the priest.

On a wider international level, many human rights atrocities in recent years have sought to draw legitimacy from history, using the pretext of setting right the wrongs of the past. How can this be avoided?

Political parties today draw heavily on ideology and also on history, because a lot of the current politics is determined by imagined identities – either imagined racial identities, or imagined religious identities, or whatever the identities may be, there is a construction of identities. They are projected back into the past, but in effect really arise out of concerns of the present. And these imagined identities that go into the making of political ideologies are very likely to grapple with history. The grappling also takes the form of creating the notion

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SPAIN: PACT OF OBLIVION

Nearly 70 years after its civil war, Spain has yet to establish an accurate tally of the victims of repression during Franco's regime. Thousands of citizens want to know where their murdered relatives were buried. No investigations, no trial, were held. Only now is the country beginning to uncover this part of its past.

Antonio González Quintana, President of the Spanish Association of Archivists as civil servants

Baltasar Garzón, judge of the National Audience, one of Spain's highest courts, decided last August to start a investigation to locate those who disappeared during the civil war and its aftermath. This is very new for Spain, which had drawn a veil over these events until

70 years since the end of the civil war, but we still have no real measure of the full impact of political repression, illustrated by a total number of victims. Thousands of people have no reliable information on where their missing relatives were buried.

Unlike other European countries emerging from dictatorships around the same time, Spain never launched investigations or staged a trial. The archives remained under the "pact of forgetting" tacitly imposed by the transitional government. This contributed to the 1977 amnesty law that freed imprisoned Franco opponents, allowed the return of those in exile, but

also relieved the military and previous regime's high officials of any responsibility for suspected atrocities.

Amnesty International and other non-governmental organizations raised an outcry in 2004.

Thirty years have passed since the death of the dictator Franco and nearly

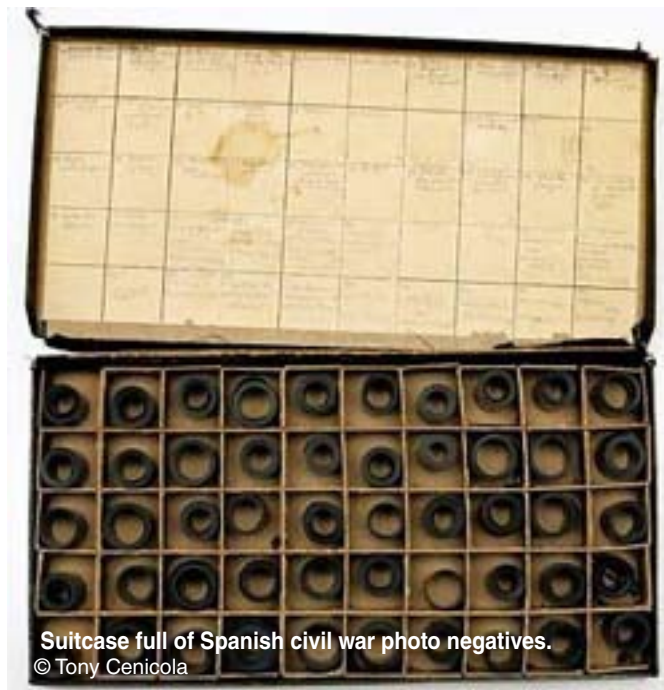
In fact, numerous collections of documents were destroyed or lost; others

remained inaccessible for decades. Even today the main documents referring to repression under Franco's rule are either unavailable for public use or so badly preserved they are unusable. Even worse: since 1977, no government has managed to regulate the military justice archives, which exist in a legal void.

Resurrecting the past

But Spain could not for long remain opposed to the general trend, beginning in the 1990s, to uncover the truth about crimes against humanity. The duties of memory, truth and justice converged within this movement into a single cause. Following the Truth Commissions experience and the creation in 1998 of the International Criminal Court, after the trials of General Pinochet and the junta in Argentina, associations for the recovery of historical memory sprang up all over Spain.

The year 2006 was declared the Year of Historical Memory by the congress of deputies (Congreso de los Diputados), and revealing ●●●



Suitcase full of Spanish civil war photo negatives.
© Tony Cenicola



Madrid, April 1939: demonstration at the end of the first civil war.
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... the past became one of the main thrusts of Rodríguez Zapatero's government in his first mandate (April 2004 – March 2008), after which the "law of historical memory" was passed.

Historical memory outside the law

Nonetheless, all the new government's good intentions have not produced any strategies to preserve archives. Only the creation in 2008 of the Historical Memory Document Centre – a controversial project, its structure and nature still in need of clear definition – can be cited as a concrete measure taken by the Spanish government in this domain.

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In contrast, the large collections of military documents considered secret (in some cases containing documents dating back to 1905, but mainly extensive documentation on the 1936-1977 period) are still waiting to



Gerda Taro's photo archives on the Spanish war (International Center of Photography, New York). © René Solis

be opened for consultation. As for the archives of the military tribunals, they will only be useable when they are assigned an appropriate location and an entity or organization to manage them.

Moreover, the general government archives and the national historical archives are unable to process more material, due to saturation of their library space and limited staff already hard put to meet current challenges.

Spain needs concrete measures, not declarations about the importance of knowing the truth about the past, so often used as a weapon against political opponents. It must pass legislation to regulate access to information and clearly define the structure of its archive system, setting out responsibilities and duties regarding the country's documentary heritage. ■

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... of what is believed to be a national culture, THE national culture. This is never questioned, because if you question it, you become a traitor to the nation. And it is usually a single, carefully selected strand from the broader culture which is drawn out and exaggerated, and this facilitates the potential exclusion of some citizens on the basis of either religion or race or language or whatever identity is conveniently within reach. This is very harmful to issues of human rights, because it gives priority to certain groups and their cultures over others.

But isn't it a dangerous notion, for those in power to believe they can set right the wrongs of the past?

This is a commonly made claim. We have an example, in the Indian case, where a Hindu political faction led by BJP leaders destroyed the (16th century) Babri Masjid at Ayodhya (in Northern India) in 1992, and claimed that they were avenging Mahmud of Ghazni's attack on Somnath (a Hindu temple) and thereby setting right this wrong of the past.

First of all, did it have to take a thousand years before this act (of Ghazni) was avenged if indeed the idea was to avenge it? More important, how did it set right the wrongs

of the past? What was the result of the destruction of the Babri Masjid? It made not the slightest difference to our reading of the past. What it did was that it resulted in a massacre of Muslims in (the Western Indian state of) Gujarat, and since then, a continued series of bomb explosions in the major cities of the country. So what is argued as setting right the wrongs of the past cannot be set right in this fashion. And in any case, it's a rather silly argument, because the past is that which has happened. It cannot be changed, and therefore, it's much more important to set right the wrongs of the present, rather than harping on what might have been the wrongs of the past. ■

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

I serve those who lived in 1600 and I'm serving those who will live in 2200, says Librarian and Archivist of Canada Ian Wilson. He promotes digitization and free access to archives, which can play a crucial role in the fight against human rights violations.

Ian Wilson, who was elected president of the International Council on Archives (ICA) in July, answers the questions of Jens Boel, UNESCO's head archivist.

Ian Wilson.
© V. Tony Hauser



Archives and human right was the topic of the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA), a conference that you presided in Cape Town (South Africa) in 2003. Shouldn't archivists leave human rights to politicians?

The archival world is not passive. We are actively engaged in sculpting social memory.

In Cape Town, we looked at the relation between archives, human rights and the protection of minorities. We had the pleasure of meeting Archbishop Desmond Tutu (South-African, Nobel Peace Prize, 1984) who said archives are the bulwark against atrocities we must never forget. He was engaged in this issue and he understands the absolute power of the record.

Under former repressive regimes in South America, colleagues struggled to keep a record of the disappeared, those citizens who had run up against the regime in power and simply disappeared from the face of the Earth.

Democratic countries have similar problems. During decades, the Canadian government supported residential schools, those boarding

schools maintained by churches to assimilate indigenous children. The children lost their language, their culture, their family, their identity. The government has apologized to the survivors and we have established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Canadian Archives are very active in making available the existing record about this traumatizing experience. We are also going to work with the Commission to preserve the testimonies and documents families bring forward.

Why is it so important to come to terms with the painful past?

We need to learn. The society needs to understand itself, to look at its strengths and weaknesses as it deals with the challenges of the future. In Canada, we are trying to build a truly multicultural society that respects and engages all cultures... The record on residential schools sat in archives for decades and decades, nobody ever looked at it. Finally the society was ready and began asking questions.

There is an interesting dynamic going on as to how the society engages with its past. Archivists have a role in enabling that and in making sure that we take a comprehensive and

very systematic approach to the preservation of the record.

How shall the International Council on Archives (ICA) support human rights?

We are not very structured to do advocacy. However, one thing we passed the motion on in Cape Town was to support our colleagues who work to preserve records under repressive regimes and very difficult conditions.

Maybe we can engage some of the agencies of the United Nations who might be able to assist and put some pressure to bear, to bring the archival dimension to attention. Maybe there is room for us to talk to Amnesty International too.

Do you believe ICA should take a public stand in situations where fundamental "archives rights" are violated? For example, in the case of systematic destruction of records or denial of citizens' right to have access to archives.

ICA could muster some of its network through one of its key elements: the professional associations around the world. There are ways ICA could monitor the situations, develop the facts and get the news ...

••• to professional associations, with some advice on how to communicate with the national governments and other bodies involved. All of this depends on capacity and capability, but the capacity of ICA to really pull out together and send out news notes and suggestions is limited. There are things one would like to do and there are things one can do.

What is the role of archives and record management in conflict and post-conflict societies? Do you see issues of governance and building of democracies as priorities for ICA?

We need to study how we can be effective. The Archivist of the United States, Allen Weinstein, and myself have already been to visit with colleagues in Israel and Palestine. We looked at the importance of the shared record to develop understanding of people in a very difficult region of the world who frankly have certain elements of a shared history and a shared documentation.

There are common needs there. Both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Archives talked to us about training and digitization of records of common interest. The Israeli Archives have been very generous, saying they have certain series of



Digitizing ancient manuscripts, Gandan monastery (Mongolia).
© UNESCO/Dana Ziyasheva

records inherited from the British that they would be delighted to see digitized and shared. They have census records back to the Ottoman empire for that area! Can't we get them up online and available? There are in Israel significant collections of Palestinian newspapers from the 1920s to 1948 in horrendous condition, brittle and fragile, that need to be preserved. There are ways the international community can work in those situations, but in areas like Afghanistan and Sudan, where it is deeply troubled, I'm not so sure.

What is the relation between archives, truth, memory and history?

To me, archives are the fundamental source material, a mean of communication across time. We allow the generations to talk to each other, we work in the fourth dimension. What we preserve and maintain, what we inherit from our predecessors and what we add ourselves are all part of this communication process. Each generation asks

questions about its past, depending on its concerns about its future. To me, archives are essentially about the future.

Human rights issues right now are very important for societies. As I said before, many records on human rights sat on the shelves for decades, for example in Canada, and nobody looked at them. Only when society was ready to look and learn about such things, we began to see these records used.

Truth is a difficult issue. We can never document a society in all its complexities and diversity to get the whole truth.

But I think archives really are about that dialogue across generations. The current population of Canada is about 30 million but I serve 300 million Canadians. I serve those who lived in 1600, I'm serving those who will live in 2200. ■



Archives in Haiti. © UNESCO/Dana Ziyasheva

TOWARDS AN “INTER-HUMAN PACT”

Disenchantment with democracy, despair among African youth – a diagnosis from Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Senegalese philosopher known for constantly seeking new perspectives. He rejects the ideas of “new frontier” and “co-development”, advocating a “cosmology of emergence” as a world view.

A former vice-dean of Cheik Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal, he is also a founding member of CODERSIA, the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa and currently teaching at Columbia University in New York.



Bachir Diagne at UNESCO (2007). © UNESCO/Michel Ravassard

Souleymane Bachir Diagne answered questions from **Gabrielle Lorne**, journalist for RFO-A.I.TV. With this interview, the *UNESCO Courier* joins in the celebration of World Philosophy Day (20 November 2008).

You recently coined the concept of “urban intensification”. What does it mean?

By around 2050, one of two Africans will be living in an urban environment, if the growth of cities in Africa continues at the current pace. Yet there is no surge of industrialization to go with the urbanization that would make it possible to offer hopes for the future to those who leave the rural areas. In European countries, the rural exodus went hand in hand with an industrial revolution. Those who arrived in the towns came to take work, jobs and positions created by industry. This is not at all the case in Africa.

Millions of people are crowded into shantytowns, on vacant lots, getting by as best they can. There is no real preliminary urban planning – no housing, no drinking water, no

plumbing or electricity. Shelters spring up in a completely chaotic way.

The expression “urban intensification” designates both the way in which people arriving from the country take over this new space, by transposing their own ways of life there, and the transformations that thus take place at the level of values: the solidarity, sharing, generosity, sense of the collective that characterize our way of life are rapidly corroded.

Do you see risks in terms of “human security”?

“Human security”... It’s a good thing this notion emanating from UNESCO is being imprinted on people’s minds, because security is linked not only to the fight against organized crime or terrorism, but also to life in gene-

ral and to the future. Yet a complete uncertainty about the future is precisely the most deeply rooted feeling in young Africans. It produces a fear of tomorrow, and this fear can in turn give rise to ethnic or religious fragmentation. In addition, the run-down and overburdened state of the institutions supposed to forge the future, such as schools and universities, adds to human insecurity and adds to democratic disenchantment.

You said “democratic disenchantment”?

The daunting question that our societies must answer today is: what degree of poverty is compatible with normal democratic development? Senegal often serves as an example of democracy in Africa.

It’s true, elections are organized there regularly, and ...

●●● those in power admit defeat and congratulate the winner. But is that enough? The prevailing level of poverty produces a despair that compels young people literally to throw themselves in the water to get away.

For a long time, we analyzed emigration as the search for greater economic and social well-being somewhere else. What is troubling is that today everybody knows this elsewhere is not paradise! They know it! On the other hand, they know that where they live, that's hell. When a continent's youth thinks its future lies elsewhere, we are forced to take notice.

Can the pan-African ideal, which you say is resurgent, perhaps provide impetus against this despair?

The failure of the African state has already been noted. The African nation state is much too small to provide a real space for development. So the idea of an African union seems good to me, because it can offer larger spaces by decentralizing, by giving an expression to all differences, including the smallest ones that exist at a regional level. An integrated Africa can stand up to the trend towards fragmentation that we see here and there.

The consolidation of States is the best response to young people and to the outside pressure of globalization. That's why I sometimes use the very American expression of "new frontier". We have to imagine some form of future opportunities for the youth of our continent.

Do you believe that the international community and the donor countries

will think it is in their interest to support this integration?

These outside communities do indeed realize that in helping us they are helping themselves. Our emigrants are their immigrants, after all. Recently we're talking about "co-development" again. It's time to flesh out that concept. If it consists of sprinkling a little money on our countries, it's ineffective. In contrast, if the necessary measures are put into it, to help us build viable spaces of development, it takes on its full meaning.

The African states and the European states can coordinate to allocate development aid to the creation of a physical space for integration. They can say to themselves – let us build together the infrastructure for development and leave the development for the people's initiatives. That's what helping means to me. If the continent's young people feel this space exists and it is open to their imagination, their spirit of enterprise, we will see their initiatives blossom.

In *Making peace with the earth* (UNESCO, 2007), you advocate a "cosmology of emergence". How should this be understood?

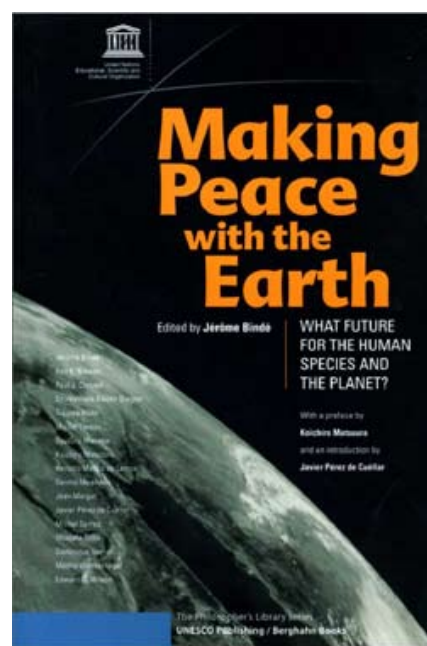
The cosmology of emergence means the cosmos is alive, it evolves constantly. This theory of evolution must be a way of thinking about the world and of ourselves in the world. It can make us conscious of our responsibility to bring the whole earth into being, which is at the same time humanity and nature.

Humans are conscious of the world's direction, while other living beings are subjected to this evolution.

Because they have this consciousness, they have the responsibility for supporting this evolution, towards the positive, towards sustainable development. It's a responsibility we must imbue ourselves with to perpetuate the movement.

You suggest establishing the pact of our responsibility towards nature in an "inter-human pact".

I don't much like the expression natural contract, or with nature. Nature is not a legal entity, we can't sign a contract with it. It is between ourselves, we humans, that we make contracts. And our duty towards nature is a duty of humanity. It is because we are humans that we have the duty to safeguard the earth for future generations. And to be modern is to link a constantly emerging cosmology with the political work of broadening an open society. ■



Cover of "Making peace with the earth" (UNESCO, 2007). © UNESCO

Landmarks

RESTORING AFRICA'S DIGNITY

The Professor, his compatriots affectionately nicknamed him. His ambition: to unite science, consciousness and life as much as possible, to create a “different world”. Joseph Ki-Zerbo was born in Toma (Burkina Faso) on 21 June 1922; he died on 4 December 2006 in Ouagadougou.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo was one of the fathers of modern African historiography, the high point of which was the publication of eight volumes of “General History of Africa” (UNESCO Publishing, 1970-1990). A member of the scientific committee for the production of this collective work, Ki-Zerbo played a key role in the pioneering project.

Doulaye Konaté, professor at the University of Bamako and president of the African Historians Association.



Historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo. © Le Soleil

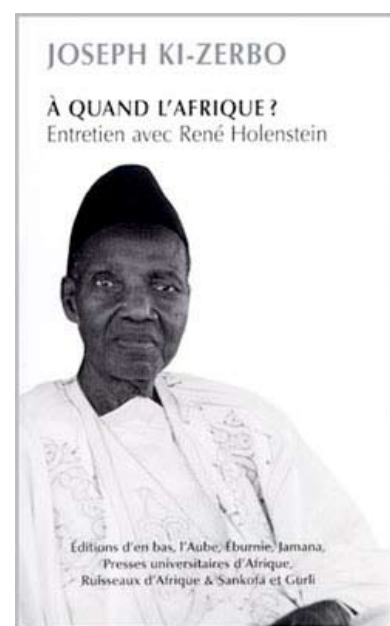
Most African countries gained their independence in the 1960s. These new circumstances called for a decolonization of history. Theories - including Hegel's - that kept Africa on the sidelines of history (calling it an “ahistorical” continent) had greatly influenced Europe-centred approaches to the African past: African history was considered an appendix to European history. African oral traditions were considered unreliable “repetitive memory” and could not, according to those fixated on writing, serve as a source for history. It was even forgotten that Africa was not only a reservoir of oral tradition but had a long tradition of writing, not just in Egypt but also in Ethiopia, Mali (Timbuktu), Nigeria (Kano) and Tanzania (Kilwa).

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, alongside Cheick Anta Diop from Senegal, was the standard-bearer for decolonizing

African history. His intellectual leadership was key within the so-called “1956 generation” that set the foundations of African history “starting from the African matrix”, by ridding it of racist prejudice. Breaking with earlier approaches and methods that were inappropriate for reconstituting the African continent's past, the Professor pushed for acceptance of traditional African oral traditions as historical sources, in addition to written and archaeological sources. He called into question the idea of prehistory referring to the period preceding the invention of writing, which particularly on the African continent was rich in creativity. He directed Volume I of the “General History of Africa” published by UNESCO (1970-1990), devoted to this topic of African prehistory as well as to problems of methodology.

In addition, his “Histoire de l'Afrique Noire d'hier à demain” (1972) (History

of Black Africa) is the pivotal text that represents a new approach to African history, one that tries to identify the internal and external processes that can explain the long-term evolution of the continent.



Cover of the book “À quand l'Afrique ?” by Joseph Ki-Zerbo. © All rights reserved

Historian and activist

Ki-Zerbo's intellectual opus cannot be analyzed separately from his political activism, which began when he was a young student and participated in the founding of different political parties including the *Mouvement de Liberation Nationale* (MLN, National Freedom Movement), to promote independence and unity on the continent. A staunch pan-Africanist, supporter of N'Krumah (Ghana) and Patrice Lumumba (Congo), he made a point throughout his life of turning his thoughts into actions. In this spirit he cofounded the African Historians Association, of which he was president from 1972 to 2001. He expressed his commitment to defending human dignity on every front.

For Ki-Zerbo, "The real historian is the intellectual in the polis, the organic intellectual involved in his environment while maintaining a certain distance, without which he would be a mere partisan." His edifying analyses of today's challenges – development, globalization, education, environment, identities – gave rise to a series of books with evocative titles: "Educate or Perish" (1990), "The other's mat" (1992), "When Africa?" (2003). The knowledge and wisdom that impregnate his work give it universal impact. It is rooted in humanism, fed by profound African values and inviting otherness (the kind that does not alienate) to build "a different world" of solidarity and mutual respect.

In 2004, Dany Kouyaté directed a documentary about and with Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "*Identités et identité pour*

The Professor

First African to receive an agrégation teaching degree, Joseph Ki-Zerbo had a long career as a professor that took him from France to Senegal and Guinea before returning to Upper Volta (former name of Burkina Faso) in 1959, where he held important positions in education and culture: Director General of National Education, President of his country's National Commission to UNESCO, academy general inspector. His courses and lectures in numerous universities and at conferences all over the world helped train many African leaders and help ensure an "African presence" in the intellectual debate on the great challenges of the late 20th century.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo also contributed significantly to a certain integration of higher education in Africa, particularly by cofounding CAMES (higher education council for Africa and Madagascar), of which he was the first Secretary General. This inter-African institution harmonizes teaching programmes and develops common criteria to promote teaching careers in higher education, thus participating in the sharing of member states' human resources and know-how.

D.K.



l'Afrique"; it is available at the Centre d'Études africaines pour le Développement africain (CEDA) founded by Ki-Zerbo in 1980. ■

The Professor, his compatriots' affectionate nickname for him. © Right Livelihood Award Foundation Archive

Next month

THE UNESCO COURIER CELEBRATES ITS 60TH BIRTHDAY

What are the key points today in the debate on racism? What were they 20 or 30 years ago? And on the environment? On peace? The Nobel Prize winners Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Martti Ahtisaari (Finland) and Luc Montagnier (France), among other contributors, will address a series of fundamental questions in next month's Courier, which marks our publication's 60th anniversary. Articles on the same topics reprinted from earlier Courier issues will illustrate the evolution in our points of view and ways of thinking.



Front page of the first issue of the UNESCO Courier, published in February 1948. © UNESCO

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