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visual sociology on the urban fringes

Mohamed Saleh
making economics & history work

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IAST, Laboratory of Excellence

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Dear readers,

I was lucky enough to take on the role of IAST Director in September 2012, after a foundation year expertly piloted by Patrick Bolton following the creation of our Institute in 2011. Patrick and the whole IAST team paved the way for the intensive scientific activities that are now fully operational: a series of interdisciplinary conferences, seminars and research programs bringing together researchers from all over the world trained in different social sciences in order to facilitate cross fertilization, unlock new ideas and explore questions of central importance to human society in the 21st century.

Interdisciplinarity is the key to understanding our mission at the IAST: in a world of crisis where classic models alone fail to explain social phenomena, we aim to break down artificial disciplinary boundaries, creating synergies between social scientists in order to further understanding and provide new tools for modern decision-making.

Through this magazine we hope to give you a clear picture of how we are translating these goals into reality. In this first issue, Jordanna Mallet takes us on a whistlestop tour of the urban peripheries in post-colonial Africa and then back to France for her current project, combining visual sociology and economics to study questions of exclusion and identity in the new global economy. Mohamed Saleh takes us back to the times of Greek mythology and Adam Smith to explain how history and economics really do have a common agenda. We then give you an overview of our recent and upcoming events, highlights of our 2012-13 visiting fellowships, and finally details of our current open positions, all of which we hope will inspire you to get involved and join us!

Paul Seabright  IAST DIRECTOR

THE IAST...

was selected in 2011 as a "Laboratory of Excellence" in a French nationwide competition.

is hosted by the Université Toulouse 1 Capitole, a university for social sciences in the south of France.

is housed in the building occupied by Toulouse School of Economics (TSE).

hosted 55 visitors and ran 4 conferences and 31 seminars in 2012.

currently has open positions (deadline November 29th, see page 11).

THEMES

Anthropology

Biography

History

Law

Philosophy

Political Science

Psychology

Sociology

CURRENT DISCIPLINES

The IAST’s research program is currently organized around 5 broad themes:

- Governance and Markets
- Individual Motives, Actions, Innovation, and Well Being
- Individuals and Social Networks
- Society, Globalization, and Public Policy
- The Nation State and Global Public Goods

THESES THEMES AND DISCIPLINES PROVIDE AN INDICATOR OF THE KIND OF QUESTIONS WE BELIEVE REPRESENT SOME OF THE MOST FRUITFUL AREAS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION. THE LISTS ARE NOT EXHAUSTIVE AND WILL EVOLVE AS WE DEVELOP OUR OWN RESEARCH, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY. WE WELCOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS EVOLVING PROCESS FROM BOTH OUR CURRENT COMMUNITY OF RESEARCHERS AND THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO JOIN US IN THE FUTURE.

NOTES

The IAST is a research institute located in the city of Toulouse, France, dedicated to interdisciplinary research in the social sciences. This newsletter provides updates on recent research, events, and open positions at the institute. The newsletter highlights the institute’s focus on understanding global crises through interdisciplinary collaboration, with a particular emphasis on themes such as governance, society, individual motives, and public policy. The institute’s programs and activities are designed to foster a cross-disciplinary approach to social science research.
What was the context of your PhD work in Africa?

Jordanna Matlon studied the relationship between men and work in the new global economy. Whereas in post-colonial times African women were the most active workers, colonial rule imposed a Western ideal of a masculine labor force, and women were encouraged to remain in the home. This created an ideal of working masculine identity that was never fully realized in Africa and remains a troubling issue today in the context of protracted economic crisis.

My fieldwork was carried out in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire’s economic and cultural center. Men there are largely underemployed and subsequently unable to be “real men” in their society, they are considered social juniors in that men without a steady, well-paid job cannot marry, and hence cannot obtain the status of “adult” in Ivoirian/African society.

In this context, what was the main question you addressed?

J. M.: How do these male “social juniors” identify as men? What strategies do they employ for self-affirmation? In response, I found that many embraced cultural strategies, bypassing the state to identify with consumerist media images of black masculinity from the African diaspora, particularly American hip hop personalities and international football icons. My findings form a bridge to the research I will do here.

IT APPEARS THAT EXCLUSION IS AN ON-GOING PROBLEM FOR MANY “ESCAPEES” IN BOTH AFRICA AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA MEN ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY EXCLUDED FROM THE GLOBAL ECONOMY.

How is your post-doctoral project at the IAST linked to your Abidjan work?

J. M.: I was keen to do fieldwork in France in order to understand the post-colonial experience in Francophone Africa and the experiences of the African diaspora outside of the United States. In West Africa everyone talks about wanting to “get away” to escape exclusion. However, it appears that exclusion is an on-going problem for many “escapees”; in both Africa and the African diaspora men are disproportionately excluded from the global economy. I want to ask how economic exclusion here relates to cultural strategies of self-affirmation like in Abidjan. To what extent are Francophone-African men excluded from French society, and how might the metropole contribute to or contest narratives of exclusion? Coming to the IAST wanted to look at the visual representation in the media of black masculinity and how men respond with their own self-representations.

Jordanna joined the IAST in September 2012 as a postdoctoral research fellow after receiving her Ph.D. in Sociology from UC Berkeley in May 2012. Jordanna’s fascination with the science of society stems from her own personal voyage across continents and cultures, beginning in early childhood when her family moved from the USA to West Africa, witnessing first-hand the coup d’état that transformed Upper Volta into Burkina Faso in 1984. As an African-American having grown up in various countries, questions of race, identity and exclusion, particularly for members of the African diaspora, are of personal interest to Jordanna and form an underlying current to her work.
So why did you choose the IAST & TSE?

Mohamed Saleh: TSE is a renowned research institution, among the best economics departments worldwide. There was previously no economic history group at TSE, but with the creation of the IAST an exciting opportunity opened up for me to work with the TSE development economist group (ARDAD), and also to promote economic history via the IAST, bringing together economists, historians, and researchers from other disciplines to develop interdisciplinary collaborations.

What exactly is economic history?

Mohamed Saleh: Economics and history may seem to have little in common. However, in the past many renowned economists used history in varying degrees in order to develop their theories about economic development. Adam Smith, Alexander Gerschenkron, Karl Marx, and more recently Douglas North and Robert Fogel, are only a few. Modern economic theory is essentially based on what is happening today. But if we look into history and consider the long-term evolution of certain phenomena, we may get a totally different answer leading us to revise/adjust our theories. This is the major role of economic history: providing a larger “laboratory” of natural experiments that help economists test various aspects of economic theory.

Nowadays one talks of “new” or “quantitative” economic history, or “climometrics” (see below), essentially the application of economic theory and quantitative methods to the study of history. Until recently, the field was mostly confined to the economic history of the USA and Western Europe. Through my PhD I extended the study to the economic history of the Middle East.

What challenges do you face as the IAST history program director?

Mohamed Saleh: Must begin by defining economic history as an accepted and established field within the sphere of economics before I can benefit from interactions with other disciplines. I must then break down methodological barriers; economists believe economic theory is valid regardless of time and place whereas historians believe everything is linked to the context. This huge conceptual difference is heightened by the methodological tension between the quantitative analysis preferred by economists and the qualitative approaches used in history. Yet despite the differences, I believe that cooperation is possible, and there are many lessons historians can learn from economic theory, and vice versa!

Can you give us an example?

Mohamed Saleh: Take the relationship between health and income. Economists today find a positive correlation between income and health, and development economists also find a causal effect of income (or remittance transfers) on health outcomes. However, history shows that the major health improvements of recent centuries were not driven by income, but rather by advances in health sciences and public policies preventing the spread of diseases, such as the purification of drinking water or the creation of sewage. So, our conclusions may be altered depending on the historical context, and this is illuminating for economists: income matters for health but not as much as economists today might tend to believe!

FIND OUT MORE

M. Saleh: http://www.iast.fr/en/program/his/contact
IAST History Program: http://www.iast.fr/en/program/his
IN ADDITION TO OUR PROGRAM OF SEMINARS, THE IAST ORGANIZES SEVERAL TIMES PER YEAR CONFERENCES LASTING ONE OR MORE DAYS, INTENDED TO CREATE A MORE EXTENDED OPPORTUNITY FOR MULTI-DISCIPLINARY INTERACTIONS.

FOCUS ON...

Conference
WHEN BEHAVIORAL ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMISTS MET PSYCHOLOGISTS...

October 11-12, 2012
An interdisciplinary international conference sponsored by the IAST in collaboration with the ANR, the BDF and the INRA. The conference brought together 100 participants from all over the world: researchers and decision makers working in the fields of environmental and behavioral economics and psychology.

Can we rely on the goodwill of individuals and businesses to protect the environment?
Our societies today struggle to manage environmental problems, perhaps most notoriously climate change. Economists traditionally consider environmental management as top-down: companies and individuals pollute, and the state regulates the situation via taxes, standards, permits etc. However, evidence is starting to indicate that governments are inefficient, due notably to supranational problems, lack of information, scarce resources, and corruption. In the light of this assessment, the main objective of the conference was to discuss an alternative bottom-up approach to environmental management, coming straight from the “polluting” citizens and businesses who seem willing to make spontaneous efforts to mitigate the effects of their polluting actions.

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY THE CONFERENCE:
- How do people feel about environmental threats?
- To what extent are they willing to make efforts for the planet?
- Do they seek to punish polluting companies?
- How can NGOs and governments support this movement?
- Is this movement simply a trend with unrealistic aims in times of crisis?
RECRUITMENTS + CURRENT VISITORS

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THE APPOINTMENT IN SEPTEMBER 2012 OF IAST’S FIRST RESIDENT FELLOWS. THEIR INNOVATIVE AND VARIED WORK REPRESENTS AN EXCELLENT START TO THE IAST’S PROGRAM OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH.

JUNIOR CHAIR

> MOHAMED SALEH
PhD in economics from the University of Southern California. Mohamed Saleh focuses on economic history, development economics and political economy. At the IAST, he directs the “History” program.

POST-DICS

> ALISSA MACMILLAN
Alissa MacMillan recently finished her PhD in religious studies at Brown University. Her research focuses on Thomas Hobbes and religion, philosophy and religion in the modern era, pragmatism, naturalism, and religious theory.

> JORDANNA MATLON
Jordanna Matlon obtained her PhD in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley. Based on visual sociology, she studies people’s livelihoods and ways of life in the urban outskirt.

VISITING PROFESSORS

> SIMONE SEPE
Professor of Law at the University of Arizona. Simone Sepè’s areas of expertise include: business organization, corporate finance, contract theory and law and economics. At the IAST, he directs the “Law and Economics” program.

> JÜRGEN WEBBULL
Professor at the Stockholm School of Economics. Mathematician and economist, he has worked on world and economic evolution. In collaboration with Ingela Alger, he organizes the “Economics and Biology” seminar series at the IAST.

> ROBERT BARSKY
Professor at Vanderbilt University, within the French, Italian and English departments. He is an expert in the field of literary theory, refugees, immigration, refugee law, and also Tosam Chomsky.

APPLICATIONS


> JUNIOR CHAIRS
The IAST is offering Junior Chairs (equivalent to Assistant Professorships) in various disciplines, starting Sept 1, 2013 for a period of 6 years corresponding to a three year contract renewable once after a “mid-term” review. The holder of the chair will then be offered a permanent position in the French academic system following a successful tenure evaluation.

The closing date for applications for the 2013–14 academic year is 23rd November 2012.

PROJECT

Professor Robert Barsky. IAST visiting professor in 2012–13, is carrying out a study on individuals and social networks, focusing on the experience of Jewish students in France and the USA during WWI.

The hypothesis of his project is that college experiences shape the values, aspirations and convictions that guide individuals in the transition from late adolescence into mature adulthood. Given the importance of this particular period in students’ lives, it is especially important to understand how they network, and what effects the specific networks they develop have upon the social action in which they engage.

This is a comparative project that focuses upon France and the United States, and it will be centered on a comparison between the experiences of students in two Jewish organizations, l’Union des Étudiants Juifs de France (UEJF, created in 1944) and the American Jewish Zionist Organization Ansheh (created in 1925 and folded in 1944–45).
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