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NOTIONS OF COEXISTENCE BETWEEN CUSTOM AND LAW:
A CURRENT EXPERIMENT IN THE EMERGENT STATE OF ABKHAZIA

MICHAEL COSTELLO

Abkhazia requires its own Renaissance to allow the cultural nucleus of *apsuara* [code of honour, practice and etiquette] to be joined to the pragmatic values of modern civilisations. (Arshba et al. 2003: 4)

Introduction

Arshba et al. assert that traditional ways, or custom, may be retained in a society in which the government has set out to govern by means of a written constitution, laws and state enforcement agencies. My presentation of findings in the Abkhazian society of the south Caucasus demonstrates that their proposition invites scrutiny. I shall be presenting ethnographic data on current dispute resolution procedures to provide raw data on notions of custom and law and the ways in which they are expressed today.

The generally held, if at times vague and contradictory conceptions and beliefs about how or whether notions of traditional culture may operate within a capitalist state is a question that is of more than parochial interest. My research in Abkhazia has therefore involved examining a contemporary issue, but one which is in part determined by the Abkhazian past and how this is 'read'; it is a matter of 'moving forward while looking backwards' in the words of Paula Garb, who has studied Abkhaz customs (2000: 7).

Whereas a little short of three years ago one could write of Abkhazia as part of a region which had been in ferment since the collapse of the Soviet Union, of which it had been a constituent part for over seventy years, this is no longer the case. In 2008 Russia lifted the economic blockade that, together with Georgia, it had imposed on Abkhazia in 1995 in a failed attempt to prevent the Abkhazians from gaining independent statehood. This has allowed me to examine the topic of relations between law and custom in conditions of relative social and economic stability, ones which are now unlikely to be upset by any new Georgian military adventures.

The close of the Soviet period ended full employment, cheap housing and communal services, universal comprehensive education and the national health system

and slashed the value of pensions and other social provision. The disappearance of past economic certainties, of what was familiar to Abkhazians, has opened up a space in which notions of custom and law are contesting for dominance. While ethnic Abkhazians do not form a majority of the population of the Republic of Abkhazia, they are the largest single group among several, and they dominate the process of building the state and its institutions.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed in Abkhazia by a breakdown of law and order during and after the 18 months' war of 1992-93 against Georgia's attempt to deny Abkhazia independence and to incorporate it. Economic ruin and social dislocation were prolonged by years of an economic blockade that was applied by bordering Russia and Georgia, the EU and other states.

Some Abkhazians are delving into the past to find applicable 'traditional' values and practices – the *apsuara* and *apsua tsas* of customary rule, elements of which had survived the tsarist and then Soviet periods. The Abkhazian state is seeking a place within the globalizing world while allowing for customary practices whose essence is largely rooted in kinship and conceptions of a communally based economy which have survived from pre-capitalist periods. The consolidation of the Abkhazian state is bolstered by a history of battling against foreign domination, the latest being Georgian, during which nationalist convictions put down strong roots that underlie much of Abkhazian anthropological and literary writing.

Constructing an order of custom in a new state

The compendium of the country's laws has been designed by its authors to underwrite the Republic's post-Soviet construction of a capitalist state, and its wording has borrowed extensively from the laws and constitutions of the liberal democracies of 'the West'.¹ Their attempts to reconcile custom and law² in its local application would deny the universality of John Merryman's opinion that 'the importance of custom as a source of law is slight and decreasing' (1985: 24). Limiting the state in the performance of what Merryman saw as one of its central characteristics – exercising the sole right to impose legal sanctions (ibid.: 70) – protects custom from state legislation. I do not set

¹ 'The West' and 'western', and sometimes 'modern' or 'civilized', are terms used to denote 'capitalist' or 'bourgeois' in Marx's sense, i.e. capitalism, and their use in the present text will be so understood. A justification for this can be found in Wood 1992.

² It might be noted that the term for 'customary law', *obychnoye pravo*, which is used in Abkhazia in the literature written by Russians and Abkhazians, itself carries a contradiction as it means both Common Law and uncoded law.

out to provide a list of Abkhazian customary practices, which are extensively listed in the literature, notably by Fatima Kamkiya³ (2008) and in an extensive literature review by Rimma Chitasheva (2005). In this article I concentrate on some of them, namely those that display notions of ‘tradition’ which run counter to the spirit of law as understood by Merryman and, I suggest, are more in line with the views of Stanley Diamond, who perceived a fundamental contradiction between ‘the rules of law and the order of custom’ (1974). My not listing the elements of custom is also dictated by recognising that customs as such are dynamic, changing and contingent.

The Abkhazians intend their laws to permit law and custom to coexist without the former subjugating the latter. My observations from fieldwork in Abkhazia within the past three years contributes to the comparative study of processes that have been attempted over the latter years of colonial empires and are still on-going in many parts of the world, contrasting those with the Abkhazian experiment, which is very different from the route chosen in any other historically newly independent country. Yet, with the exception of Paula Garb (1984, 1995), there are no western-educated anthropologists who are consistently pursuing anthropological research into Abkhazian practices today, and none who have addressed the theme of this article. I intend to demonstrate the renewed relevance to today of the discussions of law and custom in ‘Western’ anthropology of the 1970s and the first years of the current decade.

Abkhazians and Abkhazia

In this section I give some details about the Abkhazians themselves, their history and the cultural system of beliefs which they conceive as providing their ethnic self-identity by bringing in the relevance of kinship, religion and other elements that come into play in daily practices.

The peoples of Abkhazia, numbering 242,826 (State Statistical Office 2011), constitute an independent state wedged between the north-east shores of the Black Sea and the central range of the Caucasus Mountains, bordering the Russian Federation to the north and Georgia to the east. The country is today going through great social changes brought about by wars and demographic shifts that are depopulating its villages, which ‘... fulfil [] the important function of preserving traditions, customs and

³ Erroneously transliterated in the article as ‘Kamkiia’. I have left this error in the bibliography for this work while elsewhere in my text using the spelling ‘Kamkiya’, which the author acknowledges as correct (personal communication, Sukhum, July 2010).

the peoples' culture, which have been shaped by the centuries' (Akaba, 2010). Abkhazia is part of the Caucasian checkerboard of statelets, where custom and claims on history are weapons in the battle for statehood.

Legacies of the past

Kin-based clan structures largely survived into the twentieth century, as independent princedoms coalesced under a sovereign prince. They have held on to many beliefs in the powers of deities and spirits, the guardians of every living and inanimate natural phenomenon, and of social practices. Abkhazian religion embraces beliefs in guardians of stones, trees, rivers, diseases, animals, rain, fire and iron-making.

Language and custom were rooted in a past egalitarian structure of which relics still remain in notions of an ideal society today. Ethnic identity dates, according to Inalipa (1965: 360ff.), from the early nineteenth century. Kin groups exploited the land and had common pasturage and hunting territories which were defended against the encroachments of neighbours. Like the populations of other statelets in the Caucasus, they accepted Christianity and Islam on their own terms.

The Soviet practice of implementing positive discrimination in education and in the allocation of administrative posts through quotas reserved for titular national minorities did, to different degrees at different times, favour Abkhazians within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, which incorporated Abkhazia as a nominally autonomous unit in 1931 (Lakoba 1998: 94). Despite persecution of what were deemed anachronistic and harmful practices, 'survivals' of the past, and at times severe persecution of practitioners, custom, however modified, continued to govern much in the areas of property relations and individual conduct in the Soviet period, through the upheavals that accompanied industrialisation and the collectivisation of the peasants' land holdings in the 1930s (Krylov 1999: 44 and personal communications) and was often protected with the connivance of local Abkhazian Soviet authorities.

Clan linkages held together the networks of Abkhazian society in their village communities, with its institutions of respected elders and the worship of local deities that validated customary practices. Today these are being challenged by the process of state-building and its commercialisation of the economy (Yamskov 2007: 500-511). The displacement of large sections of the population, especially young people, has opened society up to new perspectives and expectations derived from experiences away from the tutelage of elders and customary rules, as a result of army service during the fight

for independence and having been forced to seek work in the towns, where the sway of village-based customary practices is weaker (Krylov 1998: 26). The parlous state of the economy has also forced tens of thousands of young people to leave for work in Russia, where not only is the arm of tradition weaker, but circumstances have driven some to crime. However, demographic change has been a feature of Abkhazian reality for a long time.

Twenty years ago the Abkhazians in the capital, Sukhum, were a small proportion of the town's then population of 120,000. The well over 60% of its present-day population of 64,478 (State Statistical Office 2011) is a result of an influx of Abkhazians from rural areas and the exodus of the vast majority of Mingrelians and Georgians following the 1992/93 war with Georgia.

Abkhazianness or apsuara

Abkhazians insist that the law should be based on or accommodate Abkhazian custom. A two-way pull is evident between 'traditionalists', who hold aloft the banner of what they identify as customary practices, and 'modernisers', who want to sweep these away, since they view them as barriers to building a 'modern' state. But to leave it at that, to present only the extreme polarities of opinion, would be grossly to oversimplify the true picture. In reality, within a boiling cauldron of contradictory approaches that at times threaten open conflict and national disunity, there remain two unifying foci. The first is agreement that there is such a phenomenon as Abkhazian ethnicity, based on *apsuara*, which includes etiquette and self-perception, as well as a set of beliefs about Abkhazian language, history, religion and myths that exerts a strong influence on much daily conduct. Coupled with *apsuara* is *apsua tsas*, the customary rules for relations among Abkhazians (Kamkiia 2008). Chitasheva goes so far as to argue that the components of 'abkhazianness', taken all together, provide a conceptual system that can intrinsically serve as 'a theoretical and practical nucleus, the methodological basis' for being prepared for all eventualities and permit an understanding of Abkhaz society (2005: 163). This scholar gives detailed references to interpretations of abkhazianness in Abkhazian scientific works and literature.

The evidence of the retention of customary practices was evident throughout Abkhazia, and I will focus on a number of them, viewed mainly through the lens furnished by the management of disputes. Responsibility for looking after all children and the elderly belongs to extended families that are defined by their surnames. The

rules of exogamy forbid marriage with anyone who carries the same surname or with anyone who is traceable through the patrilineages or matrilineages of affines. In the villages Abkhazians bury their relatives in family plots by their houses. The clans (*azhvla*), which I will translate as *names*,⁴ and the patrilineages (Dasania 2006) function as linkages between the traditional co-operative units (*kiaraz*) that bring families together on a residential basis for ploughing, harvesting, helping the poorest in the villages and war. Such structures are shared by other peoples in the Caucasus (Inal-IPA 1965: 399-413), as they are to some degree by the *zadruga* of the Balkans described by Eugene Hammel (1968: 17-38). In Abkhazia the *kiaraz*, like the Balkan *zadruga*, was the term used for collective farms in the Soviet period. Abkhazians retain holy sanctuaries dedicated to *Antsva*, the God of creation (Kunacheva 2006: 35), whose keepers have a place of honour at state functions. People hold celebrations around the family-linked holy hearths and at local holy groves for their deities (Solovieva 2007: 521). There is extensive syncretism, and followers of the pre-Christian 'traditional' religion, Christians and Moslems share mutually recognised shrines and festivals. The Orthodox (Eastern) Christian Church's premises are still used for pre-Christian festivals, and the old deities double up as Christian saints. The Church promises the definite fulfilment of requests that are addressed to the icons of myrrh-weeping saints, and there is widespread belief in miraculous waterfalls, groves and shrines that are associated with spirits and saints in all parts of the country, and are sometimes also venerated by local Armenians and Ossetians (Krylov 1999). The Church identifies itself with nation-building in Abkhazia and ties in with *apsuara*, witness its appeal for orderly conduct on the eve of presidential elections: 'to exclude violation of morality canons and the God-granted code of Apsuara in election speeches and activity' (Appeal 2009: 1).

Apsuara and *apsua tsas* make up the traditional network of practices and beliefs, which include the growth in one's social standing with age, what is considered worthy conduct and what unworthy, something often associated with the conduct that is described in the Abkhazian epic tales of ancient heroes, the Narts (Dzhapua 2003, Dzhapua and Hewitt 2008, Abaev 1957, Colarusso and Hewitt 2003), the strict gender relations in society and the general ideas of collectivity alongside individual responsibilities within it. They include the notion of honour (*alamys*), any challenge to

⁴ I use the italicised words *name* and *names* to denote the Abkhazian variation of clan, as do the Abkhazians to cover all people with the same name.

which must be rebutted and punished with retribution. These notions will be examined in this article and compared with the legislation the state is enacting to ‘modernize’ and accommodate custom.

Discussion of the issues at stake in anthropology

This section will show the relevance of some major debates within ‘Western’ anthropology on the relationship of custom and law, after a brief summary of ethnographic writing on the area.

In her study of the relationship of custom and law among the Abkhazians, Fatima Kamkiya (Kamkiia 2008) noted: ‘Scholars continue to debate whether customs can be considered rules of law’ (2008: 39). Kamkiya argued:

some rules of Abkhaz customary law (sic)⁵ may include a social norm that is simultaneously moral, religious and legal. In such cases, custom bears the imprint of normative syncretism.... Abkhaz legal customs (sic) regulate social relations involving retribution and compensation, property, and family relations, [and] inheritance. (2008: 46)

Kamikya lists a number of works on Abkhazian custom (2000) published from 1965 to 1998. Other relevant literature on the Abkhazians includes that by Sula Benet (1974), George Hewitt (ed.) (1998) and Shalva Inal-ipa (1965). For our purposes, the value of Kamkiya’s work lies more in her description of law and custom, as the Abkhazians are setting up their institutions to compartmentalize the two structurally, though not by granting different areas of responsibility to higher and lower courts, as under colonial, post-colonial or neo-colonial systems of indirect rule (see Shadle 1999; also Demian 2003). Kamkiya’s work provides a theoretically based study that carries us into a post-Soviet examination of the Abkhazians. There is, in addition, a useful summary of writings on Abkhazian history (including anthropology) from the nineteenth century up to 2007 (Salakaia 2009). The most valuable reviews of the Russian and Soviet schools of anthropology are, in my opinion, an extensive article by Plotnik and Howe (1985: 257-312) and Ernest Gellner’s edited volume on a discussion between Soviet and western anthropologists (1980).

The customary rules of the peoples of the Caucasus have been extensively, if

⁵ A common elision of the terms ‘custom’ and ‘law’ that has been carried over from Western legal thinking into much anthropological writing.

sometimes anecdotally, accorded coverage by travellers and conquerors, principally in the course of and following the Russian conquest.

Modern scholars on Abkhazian custom draw extensively on historical accounts that take the reader up to the early twentieth century and then, in the main, skip over the Soviet period. Outstanding among Abkhazian scholars was Shalva Inal-ipa (1916-1995), who made a brief mention of practices in Soviet times, such as the continuation of mediation (Inal-ipa 1965: 445). A central element of reconciliation that he draws attention to was that it sought to bring about forgiveness, although it also contained punitive elements such as exile and ostracism. A mass ceremony of reconciliation and forgiveness that took place within living memory was described by Ruslan Gozhba (1998: 53-4) and shows similarities with a ceremony described for Montenegro by Hubert Butler (1990: 304-12).⁶ A listing of other writings on Abkhazia is given by Marjorie Balzer (2008).

How tradition and law are perceived to be related inside Abkhazia

Victor Avidzba, MA, Deputy Dean of the History Faculty, Abkhazian State University, noted that the Soviet authorities tolerated the use of mediation even when the law did not provide for it. Mediators were initially respected elders, but later, in each village, the Soviet authorities created ‘reconciliation commissions and councils of elders’ to fulfil that function, and these continue today in the post-Soviet period (Avidzba 2008: 184), with the addition of a nationally, state-incorporated council of elders. He argued that today ‘There is a pressing need for traditional Abkhazian legal proceedings and the full-blooded functioning of its principles to be underpinned by laws’ as a means to achieve ‘harmonious correspondence of state and individual interests’ (ibid.: 186). He noted that at the ancestral shrines (*anykha*), families and clans, and cross-clan associations appeal to guardian spirits when seeking justice in disputes. Such a case of appeal to the spirit has been described in detail by another modern Abkhazian researcher, Bartsyts (1999a: 41), who also notes:

Abkhaz society, dissatisfied with official law (sic), maintains the practice of third party intervention through its reconciliation commissions and councils of elders that for over 100 years have served as a buffer between the people and non-traditional state law. These practices can be traced back to previous centuries when Abkhazia was governed only by indigenous law. (Bartsyts 1999b: 4)

⁶ I thank Justin Otten, a research student at the University of Kent, for drawing my attention to this.

However, ten years later she found: ‘There is a danger that Abkhazian ideology will become dissolved in the market economy; one notices an estrangement from our own culture, contempt for traditions in society’ (Bartsyts 16.6.2009). That resonates with a much earlier observation about a similar process that was underway in the British colonies: ‘...the basis of holding land is changing from one of community and custom to one of individualism and contract; wealthy native capitalists are appearing...’ (Meek 1946: v).

Councils of elders are not truly free of the world of law in Abkhazia, nor outside the battles for political control over the state, as is borne out by a description of struggles within the elders’ national council over candidates who were standing for election to the country’s presidency (Krylov, 2004: 1-2).

The literature illustrates the different approaches to custom and law that are taken by Abkhazian scholars, including those who favour ‘the codification of the traditional system of rules [and] the arising need for juridical recognition of several de facto operating subsystems of common law [and] their integration into law’ (Bartsyts n.d. 2008). Bartsyts has written extensively on the Abkhazian tradition of avoiding the use of force in dispute resolution, which she saw as deriving from a collectivist outlook in society (Bartsyts 2006).

Relevance of major discussions in ‘Western’ anthropology

These different takes on the issue inside Abkhazia resonate with those found in Western anthropology. Among the wider discussions on custom and law, we may note the different approaches taken by, for instance, Stanley Diamond and Paul Bohannan, by Brabadzan and Aitkin, and by Louis Assier-Andrieu and Sally Falk Moore. The concentration on ‘customary practices’ in the anthropological literature on law and custom, sometimes called ‘customary law’ or just ‘custom’, and sometimes using the term ‘tradition’, with all its baggage of invention, reinvention and post factum revision, has been confusing. It has at times blurred the fundamental differences between law and custom that were argued to exist by Diamond (1974) and Assier-Andrieu (1983) and something that was understood by British colonial administrators, such as Brett Shadle writing about Kenya (1999). Yet even the latter confused the displaced dominance of the order of custom with relics of its practices that the British rulers of Kenya were grappling with, while modifying them in their own interest through law. A

consideration of ‘customary practices’ that continue outside the law in industrialised ‘western’ countries is outside the scope of this article.

In the literature on custom and law there are two immediate problems, one of definitions, the other the dominance of ‘Western’ concepts of law in much anthropological writing. These have treated the rules that govern conduct in pre-stratified and pre-law-based societies as a stage in a continuum from custom to law, that is, to societies which have specialist state enforcement agencies that take precedence over institutions from within a community. The latter would place emphasis on the resolution of disputes through reconciliation of the disputants and forgiveness, sometimes including punishment, but not by the specialised state agencies, which are a feature of law. State agencies enforce laws and, more to the point today, meet capitalist state requirements (see Bohannan 1965, Babadzan 1998, Keesing and Strathern 1998, discussion in Babadzan 2004 and Aikin 2004, 2005). It is to a great extent within the paradigm or Procrustean bed eliding custom and law and not clearly delimiting their distinctions that the subject is often fitted. It was within that paradigm that Bohannan⁷ could write about ‘law’ among the Tiv of Nigeria, without placing it in the context of the overarching power of British state law – a legacy of the structural-functionalist writings that have been with us since the early twentieth-century giants of anthropology that included Evans-Pritchard (1969) and Malinowski (1959). This paradigm has been applied to the topic of law and custom in writings about different societies, whether those where pre-state custom dominates, or where there are attempts to produce hybrids with state-regulated law, but also where there is straightforward enforcement of law at the expense of custom.

However, as the presentation of cases of disputes resolution from research in the field show us, the Abkhazians are attempting to find a way to have their cake and eat it, that is, to have custom and law accommodate each other, conceiving them as different and separable, and capable of existing side by side.

In some of the literature specifically related to law and custom, the latter is seen as the property of societies that are pre-literate or pre-state (Shershenevich 1911: 369) and law as ‘custom that has been restated in order to make it amenable to the activities of the legal institutions’ (Bohannan 1965: 36). For the sake of our analysis of what is

⁷ Only one among many that included Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard, who would describe native (i.e. colonially subjugated) societies, their regulation and mechanisms for settling disputes without discussing the law that was in the hands of the rulers, and which still today justifies central ‘Western’-style government interference in customary practices whenever the government wishes.

actually taking place in Abkhazia, I will now consider some contrasting approaches from among those I have mentioned. In his essay *The Role of Law and the Order of Custom*, Diamond (1974: 255-80) argued that custom and law are mutually exclusive social institutions; thus contesting Bohannan's view (1968: 73-8).

Bohannan held that common law was a transitory stage between custom and law, embodying many of the former's practices. There are many variants and much blending at the margins. Thus Malinowski had earlier written that 'the rules of law form but one well-defined category within the body of custom' (1959 [1926]: 54), which was 'designate[d as] the sum total of rules, conventions and patterns of behaviour' (ibid.: 51), an opinion differing radically from those of Diamond (ibid.) and Assier-Andrieu (1983: 86-94).

Diamond (1974: 256) also took issue with Bohannan (1965: 33) for stating that the incorporation of custom into law represents 'the 'double institutionalization' of norms and customs that comprises all legal systems', again stressing his own view that law, by its very nature, is a social phenomenon defined as a set of regulations that are enforced by agencies of the state within a hierarchically divided society by powers emanating from outside the flexible, shifting and ever contingent and mutually agreed conventions among members of a custom-regulated non-hierarchical sociality. I would suggest that Clifford Geertz's words about religious ritual being 'the model *for* and the model *of* aspects of religious belief' (1966: 34) might be applied to the beliefs and practices of societies which conduct themselves according to custom. In these the rules are understood and enacted by all their members to regulate their own affairs, including dispute management, thus making of custom the *for* and *by* of society. Diamond (1974: 259) approvingly cites Maine (1889: 230): 'Civilization is nothing more than the name for the...order [which has] substituted several property for collective ownership', and Jeremy Bentham⁸ to support his argument that 'law is symptomatic of the emergence of the state; the legal sanction is not simply the cutting edge of institutions at all times and in all places' (1965: 259), *pace* Bohannan. According to Max Gluckman:

Bohannan has insisted that each people has its own folk system of concepts in terms of which the study of non-Western juridical processes and institutions should be made. He has insisted that it is essential not to use the folk concepts of Western jurisprudence to handle the folk systems of other cultures, for, being a folk system themselves, they cannot constitute an analytical system. In contrast, Gluckman and Epstein (and to a lesser extent

⁸ Bentham, J. cited by Diamond (1974: 259) n.d.

Llewellyn and Hoebel, and earlier, Barton) have set their analyses against the type of analyses made of Western judicial processes, in order to highlight both similarities and differences. To pursue this comparison, they have used conceptions, such as the reasonable man and reasonable expectations, right and duty, which are used in Western jurisprudence. (Gluckman 1968: 293)

What is relevant to our topic is not the difference between Gluckman and Bohannan that Gluckman pointed to above, for that is only what amounts to a difference about research methodologies. Of greater import is what they have in common: neither of them detect any fundamental difference between what they refer to as 'Western judicial processes' and (what they are to be compared with) 'non-Western juridical processes', despite the difference over the use of 'the folk system of concepts' for analytical purposes. Both would reduce the difference between custom and law and their practices to 'concepts'. In this lies the nub of the difference with Diamond, who described custom and law as social institutions that are incompatible. Keesing, writing about custom (using the Pacific Pidgin rendering as *Kastom*) in Melanesia, points out that the fact of custom being 'codified in law' demonstrates 'the hegemonic force of colonialism' (1989: 27-8), for which one might read the laws derived from capitalist society. It is my contention that whether Diamond or Bohannan-Gluckman's view prevails in Abkhazia (and other societies that are attempting to keep both custom and law) is relevant to the process of state-building that is going on in numerous countries, and specifically to whether the Abkhazians will be able to marry custom with law. Whether customs are today defined as a collection of relics of the past, as 'survivals' (Inal-IPA 1965) or as 'traditions' (Inal-IPA 1978), or as evolved social instrumentalities that justify the laws of contemporary society by conferring on them the status of being supposedly modernised aspects of 'custom' (the imprimatur of popular 'tradition'), it is generally accepted that custom existed before law. This does suggest that they are at least historically autonomous entities. This understanding of difference retains its hold, as illustrated by the interpretation of case studies in a Papua New Guinea village court and 'an urban national court' within the past decade by Melissa Demian (2003). It may be compared and contrasted with Brett Shadle's survey of the manipulative approach to 'African courts' by British colonial administrators in 1930-60 (1999).

Sally Falk Moore's work on 'an anthropological approach' to the issue I am examining would appear to be unaware of the possibility of any contradiction, but, while criticising Diamond for his alleged 'adherence to the rigidities of an early

evolutionism’, she does accept that he raised questions that ‘have not been thoroughly investigated by other anthropologists (Moore 2000 [1978]). Nor has any consensus on this been reached to this day, and that includes in her own later work, where Diamond no longer merits a mention (Moore ed. 2005). Like most writers in this edited collection of readings on the law and anthropology, she subscribes to the still-reigning school of thought that allows for the gamut of writers from the 1920s onwards to describe custom and law as coexisting in the colonial and now in the post- or neo-colonial periods, through variants of what might I think be called a continuation of ‘indirect rule’ by a state. This neglects the fact that the laws of the colonial power and of its state-builder successors of today had and do have the final say and held and still hold the power to enforce their will, whatever their concessions to what appear to be the relics of customary practices. The difficulty of trying to reconcile two opposites is illustrated by Julio Ruffini’s discussion of how the indigenous Sards of Sardinia settle disputes over sheep-stealing through an ‘indigenous system’, which he describes as ‘an informal legal system’. This continues to be practised even though the Italian legal system has outlawed it and insisted on its own exclusive jurisdiction over disputes involving animals and livestock theft (2005 [1976]: 151). Ruffini writes of this as ‘a plural legal system’ (ibid.: 136). In Abkhazia laws are not enforced against customary practices.

These cases and considerations add thoughts for consideration by scholars who have examined, and still are examining, the workings of local courts in the Third World (the remnants of custom in their modern mutations or straightjackets) and the ways they modulate the laws of the country and operate in ‘gentle violation’ of the law. The problematics of this have been recognised, and Melissa Demian has written that ‘the “problem” of legal pluralism is an especially vexing one for lawyers and anthropologists alike’, citing other authors who have drawn attention to this (Demian 2003: 97).

Evidential structures and cases

I give first some details of some of the features which bind Abkhazians together in their practices and beliefs and then move on to the cases I observed and data from informants to provide basic evidence for the practices of custom in different parts of Abkhazia. It is when one takes beliefs and practices together that the cohesive social structure for ‘the order of custom’ becomes visible, evidencing its validity. The data will be set out under subheadings and given with texts of laws with which they dovetail to meet cultural conceptions of the *apsuara* code of practices and etiquette.

A mesh of traditions and beliefs

Conduct is embedded in the influences of the extended family, understandings of honour, valour, revenge, patriarchy, hospitality and, embracing everything, of community. There are networks of clans and families, and of neighbours (carrying a meaning almost as close as ‘blood’⁹ relatives). There are the village territorial communities – *obshchinas* in Russian, age categories, especially the elders, all with their elaborate rituals of marriage, birth, death, mourning, and religious feast days. These were based in the villages, which most Abkhazians I met (but not all) refer to as ‘home’ and which they visit to repair the family house, care for parents, look after plots of land and share in communal rituals. In accordance with the prescriptions of religious beliefs that are centred on ever-present sacred deities, Abkhazians call upon the family and locality deities for a good harvest (as witnessed in July 2010), appealing for rain (information from a university-educated woman in 2010 who led a procession through Sukhum during a dry period) and for other interventions by the deities. These practices continue despite the decline in the sizes of families in the villages (Biguaa 2010: 28-36). Alongside the above are institutions which are of more recent vintage, such as loan networks (see Wooster 2005), associations of women and of war veterans, political parties vying with each other in the provision of cultural and social services, and trading networks to obtain goods from across the border with Russia and sell into Russia. There are the Big-Men-type town figures, who may be musclemen who settle disputes for a consideration or simply to bond people in debt to them, as well as the new national holidays that associate Abkhazians with the sacrifices and gains from the struggle for independence.

State-aided campaigns to give primacy to the Abkhazian language over Russian, which is more widely spoken, taking in the other ethnic communities (Chirikba 2008: 9-10) act as unifiers and makers for Abkhazian solidarity.

It was widely said that ‘traditions’ (*apsuara* and *apsua tsas*) can and should be protected or restored, either by enacting laws to insist on this or by not having legislation that would exclude them, while at the same time having a body of laws that could be brought into line with what was universally called ‘a civilised society.’

⁹ The term ‘blood’ is as widely used as it is in English, as in ‘that’s in the blood’, while informants, when pressed on this, did agree, albeit reluctantly, with the cultural and not biological meaning of the word, as when referring to a child of ‘mixed blood’ parentage from an Abkhazian father and a Georgian mother or the other way round.

Cases of the operation of custom instead of law

The Abkhazian ‘Criminal Code’ states (my translation):

A first time offender [under the categories] of a crime of small or medium degree may be freed from criminal responsibility if it [he/she] has made it up with the victim and made amends for the harm occasioned to the victim. [The two mentioned categories are:] Crimes of *small gravity* [that] are premeditated, and accidental acts for which the maximum penalty ... is not above three years of confinement [and] Crimes of *medium gravity* [that] are premeditated crimes for which the maximum penalty is not more than five years of confinement, and accidental acts for which the maximum penalty is not more than three years of confinement. (Zakon 27.4.2009: 3, clauses 2, 3, and: 15: clause 70)

While these two categories do not at first glance provide for out-of-court settlements of graver crimes such as premeditated murder and others for which the perpetrator would be liable to five years or more of imprisonment, the very many exemptions and the list of mitigating circumstances in other parts of the Criminal Code make it possible in virtually any case to ‘shift’ the assessment of the gravity of the crime into one of the categories for which the matter can be settled between the parties concerned. This resonates with the practice of *straightening* in village courts in Papua New Guinea, ‘which connotes both the means of finding a route through the complexity of a dispute and its desired outcome’ (Demian 2003: 102). And, indeed, in Abkhazia too this is practised, but without separate courts to manage this as in Papua New Guinea, but in the unique form of state deference to custom, to an overarching role for custom over law, allowing it to maintain the rules of society.

In one case, when he was approached by an Abkhazian lawyer for an opinion on whether one could build a defence in court on the authority of custom, ‘the cultural defence’ (Demian 2008: 432), a specialist on Abkhazian custom referred the lawyer to the constitution and codes of laws (personal communication, August 2009). His refusal to give an opinion on the cultural defence, he explained, was not a denial of the importance of custom, but an insistence that in Abkhazia law and custom are separate entities. Indeed, the words of the new criminal code and law on the family accommodate this dualistic approach. The cases I examined in which the law’s tolerance of customary practices guided judges and pre-trial investigators did give warning signals of possible conflicts between the use of law and custom, as not

everyone thought it was proper to leave it up to individual judges to decide where the demarcation line should be drawn and how custom was to be fitted into the growing accumulation of laws, as the following case suggests.

The case about which the lawyer sought guidance was as follows. A woman was arrested on a charge brought by another that she had committed a crime against the latter, and she was held in pre-trial custody for more than a year. The court found in favour of the accused and she was released. She then demanded that the woman who had brought the charges should compensate her for insulting her. The view of my informant was that it was the state should pay compensation to the woman for holding her for over a year, not the woman who had brought the charge.

The judges seek to minimize the use of the laws and often take the initiative in seeing that even criminal charges do not reach the courts but are tackled through what are spoken of as customary mediation and reconciliation procedures. These will be described under the headings of etiquette, the role of clans, reputation (honour), male lineage and adoption, to show how they are fitted into the growing accumulation of laws. While placed under headings, it will be borne in mind that they are all interlinked and make up the whole of a fabric.

a) *Apsuara* or etiquette

One informant told me that '*apsuara* is not just etiquette but a system of beliefs and principles for conduct'. Another called it a code for 'proper behaviour'.

An elder who was active in mediating disputes and effecting reconciliation argued that state-enforced education in the values of *apsuara* was the best way to bring about responsible behaviour. He also illustrated how what he saw as elements of traditional' customs could be given the mantle of law when he said that the elders should be given legal responsibility for bringing harmony to society, despite his expressed opinion that the shape of today's councils for reconciliation was not ancient and was a survival of the way they functioned in Soviet times, when they were subordinate to, and moulded by, the local Communist Party and Young Communist League. He also said that the national council of elders should become a centralised organisation, 'like a Politburo' (personal communication, August 2009).

But what is 'traditional' and the essence of *apsuara*? Nikuola Khashig, a member of the country's Council of Elders, expressed this as follows:

Honour and pride lie at the heart of the matter and a return to the universality of *apsuara* is possible if the laws of the country were to enshrine shaming those who break the rules of proper conduct, rather than handing out punishments which do nothing to teach respect for proper conduct and to reconcile people who feel aggrieved against one another, or one family against another. (personal communication, August 2009)

Some informants spoke in favour of some aspects of the etiquette of *apsuara* evolving when necessary and not just being hallowed by age. But few examples were supplied of how this should take place. Yura Argun, the country's recognized leading academic on *apsuara* and the Abkhazian diaspora, did instance one case in which diasporic ethnic Abkhazians in Turkey (who are held by some traditionalists to have been able to retain traditions which have been lost in Abkhazia itself) agreed, at the request of the Turkish authorities, 'to cease firing off guns on all celebratory occasions' (personal communication, September 2009).

b) *Names* or clans

Custom recognises clans or *names*¹⁰ as corporations, as the 'emic units' of a society (Goodenough 1971: 1151). It is not the individuals who are immediately involved in a dispute who are seen as the main societal units that are parties to disputes and their resolution, but the *name* is. A university professor who shot his son when the latter confessed to abducting, raping and then murdering a neighbour's daughter (Garb 2000: 6) some eleven years ago is spoken of with almost universal approval today: 'He made things right by restoring balance between the two *names* and practicing fairness,' according to an informant who was brought in to explain to doubters the way in which a problem of relationships between *names* had been well dealt with. In the eyes of the girl's family, the father's killing of his son compensated the family for the murder of their girl and thereby ruled out the need to seek blood vengeance, a practice that is spoken of as rare nowadays. The state's prosecutor protested but was unable to take the matter to court.

The *name* includes any person with the same surname or the surname of anyone married into the family over several generations, going back through both male and female lines. It can be small or cover hundreds of people, and marriage among any of its so-defined *name* members is considered incest. It is within the *name* or its sub-groups of

¹⁰ I use the italicised words *name* and *names* to denote the Abkhazian variation of clan, as do the Abkhazians to cover all people with the same name.

nuclear families that disputes are settled or collective action is decided upon. When the dispute involves members of two or more *names*, matters are nowadays usually pursued through putative customary arbitration procedures. I was told: ‘It is within the *names* that values and duties are inculcated in the young, and everything must be subordinated to the defence of the honour of the *name*’ (personal communication, September 2009). There are instances of the continued and universally approved use of the customary sanctions of ostracism and exile to deal with severe violations of norms, such as incest. These sanctions remove the protection that the *name* is normally said to confer on all its members against being offended by any outsider. The elders or the priests of the sacred shrines often act as conciliators who make for ‘reconciliation washing everything clean’, as I was told (September 2009).

Some informants were quite clear about the family – in its most extended sense the *name* – being the basic institution of social life, settled on the family house of the eldest male in the village and being the pivot of kin ties which privilege the male lineage, despite the law laying down equal rights to each party to a married couple, a matter I shall return to.

c) Honour

Society tolerates and, indeed, expects individuals to exact retribution for insults, viewing them as committed against the individual’s family reputation. Those who settle scores are held in high esteem. What is more, nowadays, when a member of a family, on the instruction of its elders, carries out an act of retribution on a fellow family member for besmirching the family name through an offence against a member of another family, then a dispute with the offended family is halted without the courts, as illustrated by the case of the professor killing his son. I was told that the vengeance was justified in the Abkhaz saying: ‘A father is responsible for the conduct of his son’.

Here there is more than a hint of the real relationship between customary practices and law: custom centres its attention on restoring harmony. Punishments are decided by the immediate community or *names* that are concerned with the matter, and they prevail over the law. A respected elder from a northern Abkhazian village described to me in June 2010:

A night watchman shot and killed a young man who was caught in the very act of stealing power cable metal. The young man’s family demanded redress, upon hearing which a

respected judge contacted me [my informant, MC] by telephone and asked me to help stop the case going to court. I went to see the father of the boy who had been shot and acted as mediator between the families of the watchman and the young man, and the matter was settled after long deliberations. The family of the victim was spared the shame of losing a court case against a state employee who had acted in the course of carrying out his duty, and compensation was paid by the watchman's family to help the widow and children – an unnecessary court action was avoided.

The judge's fear, my informant explained, had been that the certainty that a court would find in favour of the watchman would have served no useful purpose, as relations between the two families involved would not thereby be restored to 'normal', and a prison sentence would not have prevented the dispute between families from continuing.

Another recent case of the use of customary practices to restore harmony was described to me by the same elder. A young man challenged another to wrestle. When the challenger had been thrown to the ground for the third time, he decided he had been publicly insulted and killed the other with a knife. It would have been an open and shut case had it gone to court, but, my informant explained:

A court sentence would have done nothing to return the dead man, nor left his family less aggrieved, so I was telephoned by a judge and asked to effect a reconciliation (September 2009). Nor would it have mitigated the effects of a family losing its breadwinner. So I was brought in as an elder, and the result of much to-ing and fro-ing was that the matter was smoothed out. The family of the young man who had unfortunately killed the other agreed to help finance the widow to bring up her two orphans. Good relations were restored in the village [in central Abkhazia] where the incident took place. It is true that there is now a danger that the dispute between the families will flare up again because the perpetrator of the killing was soon afterwards careless enough to go to a wedding in the village, a celebration, a joyous occasion, without first clearing this with the dead boy's father, and so soon after the death. There is more conciliatory work to be done there and it will not be easy, as 'loose-tongued women' are stirring things up, as women usually do.

One might note that the elder conducted his substantial negotiations with the widow's father-in-law as head of the family the woman had entered by marriage and brought him together with the father of the boy who 'used the knife'. This was not the incorporation of custom into law but precedence being given to the former, contrary to the literature that sees law absorbing custom (Bohannan 1965: 33-42).

d) The individual

There are laws that forbid violence and killing, and the courts can mete out jail

sentences to offenders and, at times, do so. Yet the formulations in the Criminal Code allow for avoidance of the automatic intervention of the courts, especially when a matter of 'honour' has arisen. Thus one reads of 'a murder committed when in a sudden state of strong emotional upset (temporary insanity) brought about by force, mockery or gross insult on the part of the victim or by other illegal or amoral actions (or inaction) by the victim...' (Zakon 27.04.2009: 22: clause 101) being accepted as mitigations. This falls well outside the scope allowed for crimes of passion that one finds in many countries. An added indication of how individuals should behave when insulted is found in another clause of the Code. This virtually negates any law being applied against a person who has reacted violently to a perceived slight, as it asserts 'the right of a person to defend him-/herself irrespective of whether there are opportunities to avoid a dangerous infringement of public order or [the availability] of other individuals or organs of the state [i.e. the police, MC] to provide assistance' (Zakon 27.04.09:7: clause 36).

e) Family and patrilineage

The general practice of virilocal residence for a married couple enforces patrilineal ownership of the house the wife goes to live in. A story told to me by one of my hosts in the capital, Sukhum, in September 2009, unambiguously illustrated this:

There was a funny man in Zugdidi who married a woman and decided to live in the home of his wife's family, where she was the only child, hoping that it would give him a claim to the woman's family's house and that he would inherit it on the death of her father [laughter]. The man later divorced the wife and, funny fellow, he wanted to leave the house and asked for a share of its value! What a laugh! Fancy him thinking he could inherit from the wife's family. Was it not enough that by going to live in her family's house no one could understand who the husband was and who was the wife: he had become the 'wife', as it were, by living there, so how could he possibly claim any rights to the property?! [laughter] It all became public knowledge when the crank took the matter to court and the judge, of course, rejected his claim. What a laugh!

According to the law, property that has been accumulated by the partners to a marriage should be divided equally between them on divorce. The laws on marriage describe it as a union between one man and one woman, yet it is not uncommon for a man to take a second 'wife' should there be no children from the first, and for the 'first wife' to remain in residence to help bring up any issue from the 'second wife', acting, as it was expressed, 'like a grandmother to her grandchildren'.

f) Adoption

The new laws on the family (Zakon 2008) provide a detailed list of procedures that potential adoptive parents must go through in order to adopt a child, including registration of intent with the authorities, presenting a list of completed applications and documents, and registration of the lot by various state agencies. However, I was assured that in practice none of that paperwork had to be gone through and that it was sufficient to reach agreement with the child's mother in the nursing home or before the birth and then to take the child home. I met a couple who had adopted a child in a village in the north in this fashion, and they assured me that their case was no different from any others and that neighbours and friends knew all about it. They were surprised to hear that the law laid down procedures for what the adopted father called 'natural behaviour'. They were adopting under accepted customary procedures, that is, by arrangement with the mother. The whole idea that laws should determine adoption procedures was a subject of merriment in the circle in which I met the adoptive parents.

Simplicity in adoption is very much in line with Abkhazian customs, which have traditions that include adoption through milk kinship or *atalyk* (Inal-ipa n.d.), which are shared by other Caucasian peoples. This is so widely known that children who had been orphaned during the Second World War were sent from other parts of the Soviet Union in large numbers to Abkhazia for adoption. One informant in a village in south-east Abkhazia told me (September 2009) that she was the daughter of a Soviet Greek in the Ukraine and had been orphaned when the Nazi army murdered all her relatives. She heard of Abkhazian customs and travelled on her own to Abkhazia, where she was taken in by a family and later married an old Abkhazian, my informant's father.

There are virtually no orphanages in Abkhazia, and the fact that they have recently made a limited appearance is rarely spoken of and is seen as a national shame and a sign of the breakdown of society and values following the war with Georgia.¹¹ Looking after children is seen as the responsibility of parents and grandparents, and the new law makes this a legal responsibility. Even in the case of divorce, access to children is guaranteed by law to both parents and all grandparents until the child comes of age.

¹¹ Abkhazia's vice-president, Alexander Ankvab, estimated the cost of 'the enormous damage to agriculture, industries and holiday resorts...in which whole villages and towns were burnt to the ground' in the war of independence against Georgia in 1992/93 as totalling US\$13-14 billion (Apsnypress 27.5.2010).

g) Ritual

My observation of a ceremony for the mourning of the dead showed how much more simplified it is compared to the way in which it was described as recently as the 1950s, when women tore their faces and men, including those who were present by chance, would violently beat their heads (Lakerbay 1982: 176-87) to show their respect and sadness for the departed. Nowadays even relatives, and that may include those many times removed, may only put in brief appearances and contribute little more than some defraying of costs, a bow and a few words to console the widow and children. But it is still regarded as obligatory for all relatives to be present, and deaths are announced on television. Traditionally runners or *a.shwadzh.hwa.jw* (the *gorevestniki* of Russia) would have informed every relative of the death and the arrangements for mourning. While the law stipulates that the dead are to be buried in municipal sites, there is a derogation 'for those with customary practices' (Zakon 2007: 43), and it would appear that the first stipulation only applies to the minority of urban dwellers who have lost links with the villages. I observed that in the villages the dead are buried alongside the family house, and food and drink are placed on the tables by the graves. The fourteen-year-old boy of my host family in Sukhum expressed amazement: 'Is it really true that you do not feed the dead in England!?' Respect for the ever-present dead, a link with the spiritual world, is an obligatory requirement of *apsuara*.

Distortions of custom, contradictions in changing times

The examples I have cited might suggest that disputes are all settled amicably, but that would be to forget that the reality of unequal family standings (and sizes) plays a part in distorting any idealised picture. Thus, the small family of a woman who, during a row with another, was axed about the neck recently took the matter to court. However, according to my informant, a judge in the capital, the axe woman was acquitted after her family packed the court room and interrupted proceedings by shouting and threatening to destroy the metal cage in which the accused had been placed, arguing that the woman who used the axe had been provoked. The judge's comment to me was: 'It is quite likely that what happened in the courtroom influenced the local judge's decision...'.

In the view of my informant, part of the problem was that the courts lacked 'the air of solemnity that I observed on a visit to Scotland' and were unprotected by not having staff to enforce order in the court ('I have seen how there is personnel with truncheons in courtrooms in Germany') and depended on the local police to arrive in

time should a fracas break out – ‘and they can take a long time.’ In my presence, the chairman of the Supreme Court telephoned from his office for police assistance to stop a fight that had arisen in town between two families. A court order that had been issued some months earlier for a family to vacate a flat had not been enforced, and the family on whom the eviction order had been served was physically resisting the efforts of the other family to move in.

A recently retired senior police officer told me how mobilisation of a very large *name* with important connections ‘in many spheres of life’ secured the freedom of a relative, a drunken bus driver who had run down and killed a pedestrian on the verge of a country road. Within hours of the incident, agents of the influential *name* of the driver had re-asphalted the section of the main highway where the death had occurred, removing the skid marks left by the bus’s wheels, ‘persuaded’ the investigating commission to move the point of collision from the side of the road on to the highway, and secured a judgement in which the dead pedestrian was held to be responsible for his own death.

The law is turned to when a person’s family shows weakness in settling scores, or is unable to restore harmony through retribution or gift exchange and ritual commensality. The list of cases to be heard over two weeks in Sukhum’s courthouse when I attended was almost entirely about the ownership of small properties and rights to residence in them.¹² About 70 per cent of all cases heard in local courts are disputes about property or ‘the accommodation question’, as Tamaz Ketsba, a well-known local lawyer, told journalists (10.2.10).

In a trial I sat in on in Sukhum, the state charged several young men with burgling a woman’s flat. The two of the accused who responded to the summons to appear were from single mother families, unemployed and poor and clearly with no *name* to defend them. One of the young men appeared mentally confused. In private the prosecutor impressed on me his concern that, bearing in mind that most of the stolen property had been reclaimed, some way of keeping the accused out of prison should be found.

Statistics on reported crime are very suspect, showing a total for all kinds in 2007 of 692, when a police informant told me that over a thousand cases of car theft took place at around the same time. Debt collecting is generally carried out by the family members of the creditor or ‘people of standing in the community’ using threats and

¹² Such disputes have in large measure been occasioned by shifts of residence and people moving into flats abandoned by those who fled during the war with Georgia.

violence (port worker, taxi driver, policeman and tour guide among other informants).

Divorce is, according to official statistics, on the increase, being over twice as high a fraction of marriages in towns as in the rural population in 2007 (State Statistical Office 2008: 24), a possible indication of new, unmastered pressures on the high proportion of the population that has become urbanised over the past two decades and for whom traditional practices are not a powerful enough mechanism to maintain cohesion.

A legal obligation has been placed on adult children to care for their parents and grandparents, in an effort by the lawmakers to recognise customary practices. What penalties might apply when the law on these aspects of the family are broken has not been tested. A sign of changing times is the frequency with which I encountered an interest, especially among women, in the smaller nuclear family that we find in Britain and in the social provision of care for the elderly, women being freed from much of what some Abkhazian women saw as the burden of being tied to ailing elders and grown up children in the same house. On several occasions the same women who had spoken with pride in traditional Abkhazian family values turned to cursing the burdens that were placed on them. They spoke of the heavy manual work that Abkhazian women carried out these days, including pulling loaded handcarts across the border with Russia to sell agricultural produce. With another voice they extolled the strictly gendered features of Abkhazian families, especially the view that the man was breadwinner and the woman was house-maker, as if this still applied throughout. It was striking to be told in September 2009 by the vast majority of a group of female students, with whom I had a discussion in the history department of the university, that they did not see their future as working in a profession outside the household.

My own experience of the practice of the correct conduct sought through the *apsuara* social code was being met with much politeness, standing up in my presence and receiving the first handshake when I was the oldest present, even from a complete stranger who joined the company. On more than one occasion a stranger anonymously paid for my coffee in a cafe. On the other hand, I was told, the failure I observed of young people to give up their seats on a bus to an older person was something very new, as was young people shouting in public and noisily racing cars around the streets in town at night. No informant denied that changes were taking place, while at the same time stating as axiomatic that 'abkhazianness' demanded conformity with the old ways of behaviour.

Conclusion

In my years as president, I have never reacted to any written provocations. No one harassed Inal Khashig [an Abkhazian newspaper editor, MC] when he was criticising the state. It was only when he wrote about my family – and in a vulgar way – that my relatives and a few of my close friends got angry. They sat him in the car, and they said to him: ‘Now it’s not just about the president; now it’s personal.’ But that’s the Caucasus. Around here, you have to answer for insults like that. (Sergei Bagapsh, President of Abkhazia, *SpiegelOnline*, 16.7.09)

We want a state based on a constitution and founded on the norms of international law. That requires new laws and a new way of thinking. (Sergei Bagapsh, President of Abkhazia, *SpiegelOnline*, 16.7.09)

Informants in general saw no contradiction in principle between custom and law, as illustrated by the two statements by Sergei Bagapsh above. Customary practices for dispute resolution were spoken of as deriving from a higher authority than what can be enshrined in law, taking precedence over law through moral imperatives of what they understood by tradition, by *apsuara* and *apsua tsas*. It was something of a play on ‘Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21), or on the contradiction between God-given custom and the demands of the state and its law that was posed by Sophocles in his *Antigone* and much debated in the many *Antigones* that have followed it (Steiner 1984).

While Abkhazians orally subscribed to the idea of a need for law enforcement, and for government and police, this was, for most informants, only in order to tackle problems that have arisen in what are described as the extraordinary conditions of the post-war years, which has led to the break-up of communities and resultant crime, disputes over property and damage to traditional gender roles. With hoped-for improvements in living standards and stability and with security reinstated, some informants spoke of their expectations that there would be a return to community-grounded custom, which retains its power as an ideal. These hopes were even expressed by those I observed not keeping to traditional etiquette and gender roles in their daily conduct, by those who were abandoning communal approaches and by women who decried the very inequality of genders they saw as part of custom.

The new laws allow for custom to reconcile the parties to disputes, to keep

disputes out of the courts and to avoid penalising those the law would find guilty but without effecting reconciliation. This is not agreed by those who want to see their society more founded on law. There is, from the evidence, no intention to have in operation a two-tier system of laws and courts as found under colonial indirect rule or some post-colonial systems. At the same time, there are voices calling for the incorporation of ‘factually existing sub-systems of customary laws [sic] into legislation’ (Bartsyts n.d.). This approach suggests that it is worth re-examining the anthropological discussion on formalism and substantivism of the 1960s (Spencer 2004) and to trawl relevant ethnographic texts that might contribute to developing a methodology¹³ for research into a society in which there is an attempt to embed law into custom. The work of de Certeau (1988) and Scott (1985) among others on how cultural and social institutions express the manner in which societies and the individuals within them – not necessarily the same – pursue the fulfilment of their needs and desires can also prove relevant. It would be a mistake to omit Karl Marx’s studies on the socio-economic relationship between people’s conceptions and changes in the relations of production in societies (1998), especially as Abkhazia is undergoing radical economic change.

This article has concentrated on the evidence of customary practices in the management of disputes. The cases that have been examined demonstrated aspects of customary practices, etiquette and the rules of behaviour or *apsuara*, as well the ideals of honour, fairness, reconciliation and of direct (participatory) democracy or *apsua tsas*. Even informants who did not agree with the approach shown in the first of President Bagapsh’s citations that head this section revealed in discussion that this was motivated more by their view that the journalist Bagapsh criticized was in the right, as there has been a paucity of prosecutions of known or believed-to-be corrupt officials,¹⁴ rather than by the extra-judicial use of ‘persuasion.’

While informants widely expressed support for *apsuara* and *apsua tsas* as representing a time-proven system of values and rules for personal conduct, there were different interpretations of their contents and how these could nowadays be implemented. For some it was a matter of emulating the personal qualities that are personified in the heroes of the Nart epic, while for others it was an idealised picture of

¹³ Using the term in the sense of ‘the systematic study of the principle guiding...anthropological investigation and the ways in which theory finds its application’ (Ellen 2010: 291).

¹⁴ Mr Bagapsh has expressed concern that ‘today many business structures are run by criminal elements’ and recognises that there are cases of corruption among state officials (Apsnypress 26.5.2010).

‘the past’. For yet others it was a project for selecting from the past with the exclusion of, for instance, blood feuding.

Some saw it as simply a matter of maintaining decent and respectful behaviour, promoted by education in the family and school, and underpinned in law; for others, customary practices should be allowed to continue and laws were just a fall-back, to be used as little as possible. It is this last position that is allowed for in the body of today’s Abkhazian laws and that makes the experiment the country is undergoing unique in modern history. This represents a fundamental modification of the experience of most states in that it reverses the relative positioning of the rule of law and the order of custom, which in principle accepts the central argument of, among others, Stanley Diamond – that custom requires that producing harmony is not the business of state agencies from outside the community but can be safeguarded within the community, with the pre-eminent aim of bringing about the reconciliation of the parties in dispute. It was only when I was the one who asked how the differing and conflicting approaches of custom and law were actually to be reconciled that informants had something to say about it. Some suggested that custom should be included in the laws, while others spoke vaguely about ‘making them work together according to the mutual respect embodied in *apsuara*’. In such discussions I came across no supporters for the idea of abandoning the law and leaving all matters of ‘bad behaviour’ to be resolved in the community in today’s circumstances. This was apparently because there was an underlying awareness (which I did not question) that, whatever their stipulations, those who drafted the laws did not spell out in so many words that custom had pre-eminence, but gave it, as it were, the first bite of the cherry in resolving problems.

At the same time, some informants voiced reservations about this being the best way of resolving disagreements when it came to specific cases where physical or other methods of intimidation were used by powerful individuals or *names* to get their way, and where corruption was said to sway some of those in positions of civil responsibility, especially in the state administration. The most important influence on people’s notions was today’s crime wave, which, informants agreed, traditional methods of reconciliation have not been able to prevent or contain, although there are instances when direct action has been used to good effect, such as the accepted gunning down of drug dealers in the most lawless years of the early 1990s. Informants did cite the new growth in extensive private ownership of property, of houses and cars, of a growing divide between those for whom life is very tough and those who have become rich as major factors in this

new situation for Abkhazians, opening up a space for inroads into customary practices to be made by law, especially on property, as instanced by the high proportion of cases of property claims the courts deal with.

President Bagapsh gave weight to this view when he told me: ‘For a person occupied with business, *apsuara* is the last thing he thinks of, and his business comes before everything else’ (personal communication, 10 July 2010). In the same interview he spoke of the strength of a sense of self-respect among Abkhazians: ‘There is no toadying to ranks here, unlike in some countries’. While extolling the virtues of *apsuara* for being ‘in the first instance, respect, respect for elders, respect for the family, for the father, for the mother,’ he added that there was ‘a conflict between the tradition of reconciliation and punishment, [but] the foundation must be the law [...] Today we must have the law, above all else, law which takes into account traditions – something that is very delicate. The time has passed for the President to be the head of a clan or an arbitrator’.

Nonetheless the wording of the laws encourages customary procedures: the principle that all matters that can be resolved outside the courts should be kept out of them. Yet, the cases of car theft and incidences of rape (a rare thing in the past), of drunkenness and the use of drugs, of burglaries and ‘hooliganism’ (rude and intimidating behaviour in public places) and corruption have led informants to seek stronger redress from the laws and protection by its enforcers, especially the police.

The trend is towards demanding that legal agencies be used to curtail anti-social behaviour in the broadest sense, accepting that customary practices are not able to tackle problems linked to the historically new phenomena of the private ownership of property and business, of the means of production, and that widening class differences in wealth and power in the aftermath of the collapse of Soviet collectivism are all narrowing the scope for the resolution of disputes by customary practices that are grounded on principles of egalitarianism. Today the principles of custom are being undermined more than they ever were in the Tsarist and Soviet periods. According to Paula Garb, ‘The Soviet state also objectified indigenous custom that it sanctioned, which has left a powerful legacy in the thinking of post-Soviet anthropology and of the intelligentsia of indigenous peoples’ (2000: 8).

In the first post-Soviet years, there arose a strong revivalist movement to return to ‘tradition’ that continues, as witness a recent characterisation by the leaders of the Abkhaz Orthodox (Christian) Church of the code of *apsuara* as ‘God granted’ (Appeal

of the Abkhaz Orthodox Church, 2009). Whatever the semi-official mediation in disputes that, at times, involve the guardians of the spirit sanctuaries and the presence of these guardians on state ceremonial occasions, the establishment of a consultative Public Chamber in which what is called ‘civil society’ has a voice and the existence of a state-recognised Council of Elders, it is significant that the recent appointment of judges throughout the country was of individuals with qualifications that are legal and not customary. All informants spoke, usually regretfully, of elements of what the literature in Abkhazia describes in glowing terms as the virtues of *apsuara* and *apsua tsas* as becoming lost or as atrophying.

It would appear that states only accommodate customary practices widely when they are weak, as noted among Abkhazians (Garb 2000: 4) and pointed out by Richard Antoun from a study of Jordan (2000: 443). I am led to conclude that the hold of customary practices will decline should the social and economic changes now taking place continue. Certainly President Bagapsh’s words express such an expectation. Shortcomings in the workings of the state’s institutions, especially among its enforcers, have opened up a space for elements of ‘law-lessness’ that are also ‘custom-lessness’, as is the case in other societies with weak state structures. Powerful sections of society – big *names*, the nouveaux riches, gangsters and the rest – by-pass both law and custom, even if they are dressed up in the understandings of some as customary regulators. Abkhazians find that calls for fairness are not answered by the state and that the egalitarian foundations of ‘traditional’ custom (if such a term is permissible) and, indeed, of the Soviet period are fast disappearing. The state is trying to reconcile this with its laws, the wordings of which still allow for the continuation of *apsuara* and *apsua tsas* (without naming them) to the extent to which people are able to apply them. *Apsuara* and *apsua tsas* remain powerful ideals. The contradictions that arise from wanting both custom and law are highlighted in the quotations above from President Bagapsh. For the time being, at least, the Abkhazian approach to custom and law represents a unique attempt to treat them as coexisting entities. This topic must be kept under review by anthropologists. There is also much room for research into other features of Abkhazian practices and conceptions, to dig into ‘the veritable gold mine’ of Abkhazian culture that the interesting Swedish cultural historian Harald von Sicard glimpsed (1961) when he read a 1960 monograph on the Abkhazians by Shalva Inal-ipa.

There is a very real sense in which Abkhazians, through their attempts to hold on to what they perceive as custom, are seeking in a novel way to achieve what Herzfeld

has suggested should be the object of anthropology when he asked: ‘...how can anthropology contribute to a rethinking of the social that will make it, not the space of regulation, punishment, and blame, but rather that of relief, care and acceptance?’ (Herzfeld 2001: 217). There is considerable room for further research on this issue.

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THE 'BIG BANG' OF DRAVIDIAN KINSHIP

RUTH MANIMEKALAI VAZ

Introduction

This article is about the essential nature of transformations in Dravidian kinship systems as may be observed through a comparison of a few contemporary ethnographic examples. It is a sequel to an earlier article entitled 'The Hill Madia of central India: early human kinship?' (Vaz 2010),¹ in which I have described the structure of the Madia kinship system as based on a rule of patrilateral cross-cousin (FZD) marriage. I concluded that article by saying that a complex bonding of relations, rather than a simple structure, seems to be the essential feature of the Proto-Dravidian kinship terminology and that it is only from the point of view of such an original state that Allen's (1986) 'Big Bang' model for the evolution of human kinship would make sense. The aim of the present article is first, to discuss certain aspects of the transformations of Dravidian kinship, and secondly, to reconsider Allen's 'Big Bang' model. I begin with a review of some theoretical perspectives on Proto-Dravidian as well as on proto-human kinship and a brief reference to the role of marriage rules in human kinship systems. This is followed by the main content of this article, which is a comparative analysis of three Dravidian kinship systems (actually, two Dravidian and one Dravidianized) and an Indo-Aryan system, on the basis of which I have proposed a revised 'Big Bang' model.

Why the 'Big Bang' analogy for Dravidian kinship?

Trautmann has used the analogy of a tree trunk and its branches for proto-Dravidian kinship, while stating that the 'trunk' does not exist anymore (Trautmann 1981: 229). In his view,

¹ That article presents the Madia kin terminology, which I do not reproduce here. However, there is an error in an observation I made there that I wish to correct here. I said that 'although all of the Madia kin types have address terms, not all of them have reference terms. The relatives in G +2 are the only grand-kin who have reference terms' (Vaz 2010: 10). In retrospect, I would rather say that, while most kin types in levels G 0, G +1/-1, and +2 have reference and address terms that are distinct, most terms in the levels G +3/-3, and G -2 do not make this distinction. The ethnonym 'Madia' appears as 'Maria' in earlier works on this tribe.

contemporary Dravidian kinship systems, as variants and co-descendants from that common trunk, are all equally daughters of a historical source, and none of them can be seen as Proto-Dravidian. Therefore, according to him, it is not correct to speak of any one contemporary system as being derived from any other. However, my own study of the few key types of Dravidian kin terminologies suggests otherwise. In this I have found Allen's metaphor of the 'Big Bang' to be more appropriate, but am using Allen's model in a sense in which he himself apparently did not intend. When Allen (1986: 107) proposed the 'Big Bang' analogy for the evolutionary process of human kinship systems, he did so in conjunction with a tetradic model he had created for 'the simplest possible social organization' (with just four sociologically recognized kin terms and hence 'tetradic') as the starting point for human kinship systems. However, as I mentioned earlier, the 'Big Bang' analogy fits better with a complex and compact beginning than it does with the 'simplest'. After all, the 'Big Bang' theory is all about a super-dense, super-compact and super-symmetrical beginning of the universe wherein the four fundamental forces of nature existed as a homogeneous entity.

If finding an appropriate metaphor is one problem, finding appropriate terms to describe the process of transformations in kinship systems is another. If I am to use the 'Big Bang' model as an analogy to describe the process of transformations of kinship, then I probably should not use the term 'evolution'. Because of its association with biology, evolution is generally taken to be a process whereby complex structures are derived from simpler ones. The term has been generally used in kinship studies to mean simply an increasing divergence from an original condition. In Dravidian kinship systems I see this divergent movement as proceeding from complex to simple structures and not vice versa, and therefore the term 'diffusion' seems more appropriate than 'evolution'. Hence, diffusion is what I mean, even when I sometimes use the term 'evolution', following my predecessors. And diffusion is possible only if the original kin terminological system, which we assume to be the historical source, is a compact, dense and symmetrical structure (which is more or less what I have found the Madia kinship system to be).²

² Readers will be better able to follow the arguments in this article if they first read my earlier article in the previous issue of *JASO* (Vaz 2010).

I describe later in this article the diffusion process, which, I suggest, has given rise to different types of kinship systems, but before I do so, I wish to address two more key issues here.

Links between the debates about Proto-Dravidian and proto-human kinship

The debates about Proto-Dravidian and proto-human kinship appear so connected that I find it difficult to discuss the former without bringing in the latter. The Madia kinship system possesses certain key features such as alternate generation merger, cross-generational self-reciprocity and cross-cousin marriage prescription, which have been proposed by different theorists as features of great antiquity. It is for this reason that I included the phrase 'early human kinship?' in the title of my previous article even though the main aim of that article was only to describe the complexity of the Madia kinship structure. Similarly even now, though my main aim is to describe the 'Big Bang' process for Dravidian kinship, I will discuss here theories about proto-human kinship as well. I do so not just because it has been hypothesized by several anthropologists that a Dravidian-like system was the most original but mainly because the many types of Dravidian kin terminology found today seem to have derived from a Madia-like kinship system. This point is elaborated on and becomes clear later in the article.

Trautmann's enormous undertaking to reconstruct the proto-Dravidian kinship system remains unparalleled to this day, but it had ended in a dilemma as he could not decide whether it was the central or the south Dravidian that was more original (Trautmann 1981:236). A few years later Parkin (1988a: 1) responded to this situation suggesting that, since alternate generation merging is an archaic feature, and since it has mostly disappeared in south India, it is the north and central Dravidian that 'most closely represent Proto-Dravidian' kinship. This was followed by Tyler's (1990) reconstruction of the 'Proto-Dravidian address system' using the Raj Gond, Koya, Pengo and Dhurwa kinship systems, all of which are central Dravidian.

When Allen began hypothesizing about a tetradic model as representing proto-human kinship, he too cited alternate generation merger as the number one feature for his model.

Writing two decades later, Dziebel (2007) introduced the concept of superreciprocity³ and said: 'I suggest that we should look carefully at Superreciprocal Relative Age systems, since their logical cogency, worldwide distribution, and evolutionary productivity...makes them a good candidate for great antiquity. Their low frequency around the world also suggests an archaic status' (Dziebel 2007: 248). Dziebel's description of the 'superreciprocal relative age terminology' seems to fit the Madia data in almost every way.

With all these different theoretical perspectives and debates, the stage now seems set for viewing the Madia as representing the most original of Dravidian kinship structures, and perhaps also typifying the most ancient of human kinship systems.

Approach through marriage rules

Trautmann's work is highly relevant to the discussion here because it contains excellent observations about the Madia terminology with reference to two special features, the distinctions of grandkin for crossness and the merging of alternate generations.⁴ In his own words: 'I believe that the two patterns may be related to one another, for they find their unity in a third pattern, the Maria Gond rule of marriage'. However, the Madia marriage rule seems to have eluded him. He assumed it was a bilateral alliance rule, although Grigson's data (1938) clearly pointed to the Madia's patrilateral form of alliance, which was later reported as such by Moore (1963). Trautmann still wondered about 'what precise form that ancestral rule took' among the Madia Gond, but he continued to work with the assumption that both unilateral alliance rules derived from the bilateral rule. What I wish to point out here is that he concluded his substantial survey of the Dravidian kinship systems by providing direction for further research: 'the future of the inquiry into the nature, and necessarily also the history, of the Dravidian kinship system lies in Central India' (1981: 236). This direction, pointing to Gond kinship, combined with his

³ Dziebel has presented five subtypes of alternate generation merging (2007: 205), and he describes superreciprocity as alternate generation merger in its strongest form (ibid.: 245). These features are found in the Madia terminology in which not only does the even-numbered generations merge but also the odd-numbered ones. (However, this feature applies to the terms for parallel and cross relatives only, not to affinal relatives).

⁴ Trautmann reports other sources to show these two features in a few other central Dravidian kin terminologies, such as Kurukh, Kondh and Gammu Koya (Trautmann 1981: 141, 144, 189).

argument correlating 'the Madia Gond marriage rule' with alternate generation merger and crossness for grandkin (all of which, he has said, are the common features of the Hill Madia and the Kariera⁵), provide support for some of the arguments presented in this article.

Now I wish to turn my readers' attention to arguments concerning marriage rules made within the debates about proto-human kinship. Allen's tetradic model of early human kinship (Allen 1986, 1989) is based on the assumption of bilateral cross-cousin marriage as the most original form. But Dzielbel has challenged this assumption on the basis of his research involving 'a database of some 2500 kinship vocabularies' (Dzielbel 2007: xx) that represent African, Australian, Austronesian, Papuan, Eurasian, North and Middle American Indian, and South American languages. He has claimed that superreciprocal relative age terminologies represent the most ancient and that these are never found in societies with bilateral cross-cousin marriage (ibid.: 249).

Such seems the scenario that faces us today as we consider the Madia data. My previous article (Vaz 2010) argues for FZD alliance being the rationale for all the equations and discriminations found in the Madia kinship terminology. The present article argues for the antecedence of the FZD rule over the other two cross-cousin marriage rules and, for that matter, over all other types of marriage prescription. The proposal that patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (where the FZD is not also the MBD) was the starting point for human kinship is nothing new. Lévi-Strauss, who recognized alternate generation merger as one of the 'immediate functions' of FZD marriage (Levi-Strauss 1969:219), had also seen the plausibility of the transitions from patrilateral to bilateral to matrilateral systems (ibid.: 218). Though such ideas were later disputed by Needham (e.g. 1962: 108-19) and his followers like Korn (1973), who sought alternative explanations for the same data that he had analysed, Lévi-Strauss' conclusions about the 'evolution' of the marriage rules, which he had made in the light of Australian data, seem to fit the case of the Dravidian kinship systems, as we shall see in the following sections of this article.

The significance of marriage rule for kinship systems should already be clear. 'Who should marry whom?' was the question at the dawn of human society. If a society's marriage rule is the

⁵ For Trautmann on Kareira, see 1981: 237, 435.

basic assumption on which its kin terminology and social organization are built, then it is important that we understand the correlations between changes in marriage rules and those in terminologies when we discuss the 'evolution' of kinship terminologies. Besides, since there exist only a few basic types of marriage prescription, approaching the study of transformations in kinship through the marriage rules should prove less complicated. This is what I shall do now, instead of individually examining various key aspects of kinship terminologies for their antiquity, as seems to have been the general practice.

Transformations in Dravidian kinship

The following is an attempt to discover the pattern of changes in Dravidian kinship by tracking those that occur in the terms for three key relations from three different generations (i.e. grandfather, maternal uncle and cross-cousin) in three different types of kin terminology⁶ (i.e. two Dravidian and one Dravidianized) that are each based on a different rule of marriage alliance (i.e. patrilateral, bilateral and matrilateral). Besides, I have also considered a non-Dravidian kin terminology (i.e. Hindi, a system which is based on the prohibition of blood relatives in marriage), for by doing so I find support not only for the argument about the historical primacy of prescriptive alliance over proscriptive alliance, but also for the 'Big Bang' like process of transformations of kinship systems.

On the track of the cross cousins

In tracing the changes in terms for cross cousin, it is helpful to follow the term for the male cross cousin rather than the term for his female counterpart. The general norm among south Dravidian peoples is for a man to marry a woman younger than himself. Since it is a common practice to address any younger relative by his/her first name, it is acceptable for H to address his W by her

⁶ I follow the kinship notations recommended by (Parkin 1997:9). The abbreviations I have used here are F, M, B, Z, S, D, H, W, P, G, and E for father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, husband, wife, parent, sibling, and spouse respectively. To these are added 'e' to mean elder and 'y' to mean younger. The 'e' and 'y' are placed before the symbol to which they relate. When in final position, however, these refer to the whole specification. The 'ms' and 'ws' stand for 'man-speaking' and 'woman-speaking' respectively.

name.⁷ For this reason, the kin type H⁸ usually has an address term, whereas the W does not. (It is generally taboo anywhere in India for a wife to use her husband's first name.) Moreover, since it is only the older female cross cousins who have address terms and since these kin types are not marriageable anyway, these terms only serve to show the categories that a man must avoid in marriage. This means that there are usually no terms specifying a female cross cousin as spouse-designate.

On the other hand, the terms for the older male cross cousins indicate the categories that are prescribed for marriage, making easy their identification. This is also made easy because south Dravidian terminologies are not known to distinguish between the cross and affinal relatives. Thus the Tamil term for older male cross cousin *athān*,⁹ which is also the term for H, leaves no doubt as to who the cross cousin spouse-designate is. Besides, this term is found both in bilateral and matrilineal alliance terminologies, which also helps in comparisons. For all the above reasons, it helps to examine the term for the male cross cousin rather than that for his female counterpart in our exercise to identify the marriage prescription in South Dravidian. However, the changes in the terms for the female cousins too are crucial for understanding the process I describe as diffusion, and so we will consider these as well.

For the following exercise, I use three examples from Trautmann (Trautmann 1981:312-313), one of which is based on bilateral alliance (Tamil non-Brahman), another on matrilineal alliance (Tamil Brahman), the third being a proscriptive system, i.e. one not permitting cousin marriage (Hindi) (ibid.: 93).¹⁰

⁷ The W has only terms of reference such as *manaivi*, *penjathi*, *pendati*, all meaning literally 'wife'.

⁸ Where there is no address term for H, euphemistic phrases like 'Are you there?' or 'What am I saying?' are called out by the W to get the attention of her H. Though terms such as *athān*, *machān* and *māma* for H are well-known in Tamilnadu and are commonly used by women to refer to or address their husbands, a generation or two ago the indirect way of addressing the H seems to have been the norm. Most women in my mother's generation never used these kin terms for their H.

⁹ Trautmann's *attān* (Trautmann 1981:312).

¹⁰ Trautmann's source for the Hindi kinship terminology is Vatuk (Vatuk 1969).

TABLE 1. CHANGES IN CROSS-COUSINS TERMS: DIFFUSION PROCESS¹¹

Type of Alliance	Cross-cousin terms	
	Male	Female
FZD Alliance (Madia)	<i>sangi</i> (MBS = FZS ≠ H)	<i>sango</i> (MBD = FZD ≠ W)
Bilateral Alliance (Tamil non-Brahman)	<i>athān</i> (MBSe = FZSe = H) <i>attai/māmā-makan</i> = FZSy/MBSy ¹²	<i>attāci</i> (MBDe = FZDe ≠ W) <i>attai/māmā-makaḷ</i> (FZDy/MBDy)
MBD Alliance (Tamil Brahman) ¹³	<i>athān</i> (FZSe = H) <i>ammānji</i> (MBSe ≠ H) ¹⁴ <i>attai-makan</i> (FZSy)	<i>attāngāḷ</i> (FZDe ≠ W) ¹⁵ <i>ammāngāḷ</i> (MBDe ≠ W) <i>attai/māmā-makaḷ</i> (FZDy/MBDy) ¹⁶
Non- prescriptive (or proscriptive) system (Hindi: Indo-Aryan)	<i>bhāi</i> = B, FBS, MBS, MZS, FZS	<i>bahen</i> = Z, FBD, MBD, FZD, MZD

¹¹ Since I myself am a Tamil hailing from the very town of Thanjavur (Trautmann's Tanjore) from where Trautmann's data come, I have taken the liberty of adding relevant data that are lacking in his text and also to make a few minor corrections where necessary.

¹² Trautmann reported the term *maccunan* for MBS and FZS, but this refers primarily to WyB, though the term *macān* (a colloquial use of *maccunan*) is sometimes jokingly used by male speakers for their MBSy and FZSy. The terms of reference for FZSy and MBSy are *attai-makan* and *mama-makan* respectively, and these are simply descriptive terms meaning 'father's sister's son' and 'mother's brother's son'. However, as mentioned earlier, personal names are used for younger relatives (except for the affinal categories EGy). Trautmann has also given the term *maccuni* for FZD or MBD, but this applies only to WyZ ms.

¹³ Here Trautmann has made use of Gough's list (Gough 1956, appendix)

¹⁴ Some Brahman communities use the term *marumān* for MBS.

¹⁵ Trautmann reports *attāci* as another term for *attāngāḷ*, but this is not correct.

¹⁶ This is the kin type that is the potential wife. However, it is incorrect to report MBDy = W (as does Trautmann) because the term for MBDy is not applied to W. There are no terms for female cross cousin spouse-designate, because she must be a younger relative who is addressed and referred by name.

The Thanjavur non-Brahman kinship system, which is one of bilateral alliance,¹⁷ has the equation $MBSe = FZSe = H = athān$. Here the cross cousins MBD and FZD are not terminologically distinct, but are both distinguished for relative age in order to mark the older ones who are not marriageable. Thus:

$$MBDe = FZDe = attāci \neq W; \text{ and}$$

$$MBDy = FZDy = māmā/attai-maka]$$

This terminology is different from that of the Brahman community (Indo-Aryans who have assimilated into the Dravidian kinship system) from the same town of Thanjavur. This Brahman community is known here for its system of matrilateral cross-cousin alliance, where the following terminological equation is found in the terms for the elder male cross cousins:

$$MBSe ammānji \neq FZSe athān = H athān$$

Note that this terminology has an additional distinction for the elder female cross cousins, which is not found in the bilateral system:

$$FZDe attāngā] \neq MBDe ammāngā]$$

The above distinction simply corresponds to that found in the terms for elder male cross cousins. Besides, we see that the terms for the younger female cross cousins are not distinguished. Thus we have:

$$MBDy = FZDy (māmā/attai-maka])$$

There are two things here that I would like to draw my readers' attention to. One concerns the changes that occur in the term for the female patrilateral cross-cousin (FZD) as she seems to move away from her original position in the FZD-MBS alliance system. In the Madia kinship system, both female cross cousins are known by a single term (*sango*), and there is no distinction of age or type (like $MBD \neq FZD$ or $FZDe \neq FZDy$). But we understand the central importance of the kin type FZD to this system when we view the Madia kinship structure in its entirety and

¹⁷ This is the community I belong to. Besides the bilateral cross-cousin marriage rule this community is also known for eZD-MyB (avuncular) marriage and for this reason the terminological equation $MB = H = māmā$ is well known here. Because of the practice of avuncular marriage, the term *pu[[a*, which is an address term for SW (and often used in a generic sense for female relatives in G-1), is also used for W. Thus we see that this community's kinship, while no doubt being a classic example of a system based on bilateral marriage alliance, co-exists with the avuncular variant.

consider how the FZD rule may be the motivation for all equations and discriminations found in this terminology (which is the main argument presented in Vaz 2010.)¹⁸ In the Tamil non-Brahman (bilateral) alliance, we find that FZD and MBD are both distinguished for age and that FZDy is only as much a potential spouse as is MBDy. But in the matrilateral alliance system, the FZDy is no longer a potential spouse. Lastly, in the proscriptive system we find that FZD is not even distinguished from the parallel cousins FBD, MZD. Thus we see that the kin type FZD moves steadily away from her original central position until she becomes entirely peripheral. Metaphorically speaking, the FZD is the unifying force in the original system who, acting like a gravitational force, holds the kinship system together by being the rationale for the vertical and horizontal mergers of the terminology. The 'Big Bang' diffusion process begins with the distinction of the FZD from her counterpart, the MBD. Such a distinction leads to the FZD's central and neutral position in the terminological system being compromised and this change effects a sort of destabilization of the compact system, thus setting in motion a progressive diffusion of kin categories. As the original (i.e. FZD) rule gives way to other types of cross-cousin alliance, the terms for the female cross-cousins begin to show distinction for age and/or

¹⁸ Some may not accept the FZD rule as the basis for Madia system, citing the lack of the terminological 'prescription' to show a distinction in the terms for cross cousins (like MBS \neq FZS or MBD \neq FZD) and to denote the spouse-designate. As far as I am able to understand Madia kinship, it is actually crucial for such a compact system to have the cross-cousins undistinguished. A distinction here would make impossible the high degree of vertical (i.e. alternate generation) merger of terms and the self-reciprocity that we observe in the Madia terminology. Moreover, it is no coincidence that none of the other Gond sub-tribes that say they practice FZD marriage (e.g. the Gaitha, Bison-horn Madia, Nilkanth) show terminological distinction of cross cousins, and that all of these systems exhibit transgenerational crossness (i.e. crossness in all generation levels), which would be necessary for cross-generational self-reciprocity, besides also exhibiting varying degrees of alternate generation merger. Another point I wish to make here is that in Dravidian kinship systems the absence of a distinction in the cross-cousin terminology for either age or laterality or designation for marriage seems as important an indication of the marriage rule as is its presence. Therefore we must seek a careful explanation of the absence of terminological 'prescription' in these central Dravidian systems, especially since the Dravidian systems in India are well-known as classic examples of 'prescriptive systems'. If a prescriptive system does not show 'prescription' in its cousin terminology, then it may be so for a significant reason. In systems where such a distinction is present we find it easy to identify the marriage rule, but even where the distinction is not found, we will still be able to identify the marriage rule by taking into account the entire terminological system, as well as key cultural practices, as I have done for the Madia kinship (Vaz 2010). Therefore I suggest that we do not reject the FZD system as unviable solely on the basis of the cross-cousin terminology. Perhaps we should now return to the old practice of applying the idea of 'prescription' to the marriage rule rather than to the kin terminology because it is the rule that *generates* the terminology in the first place, and it cannot be vice versa. It is true that the terminology, in turn, can and does serve as a 'guide' to spouse selection (Good 1981), but this does not disprove the above mentioned fact about where lies the generative power and in which direction the causal arrow points.

for laterality - something that is neither found in the FZD kinship system nor would be compatible with it.

The other point I would like my readers' to note here concerns the nature or pattern of change that cross-cousin terms seem to undergo. In the proto-Dravidian system the terms for cross cousin are just two (*sango* and *sangi*). In the bilateral system there are four (*attan* and *attai/māmā-makan* for males, *attāci* and *attai/māmā-makan* for females). And in the matrilineal system there are six (*athān*, *ammānji* and *attai- makan* for males and *attāngā*], *ammāngā*] *attai/ māmā-maka*] for females). This pattern indicates the diffusion - the many kin types that were originally contained in a single category (thus concentrated and compact) became increasingly differentiated and scattered. This diffusion process can be illustrated even more clearly in the examples taken from G +1 and G+2 levels, which I present in the next two sections.

The term for MB: the vertical and horizontal diffusions

The changes in the cross-cousin terms can give us only a partial view of the transformations that are taking place in the system as a whole. This is the reason why we must also consider the changes that occur simultaneously in the other generational levels. The changes that happen in the G+1 level can be seen by following the term for the mother's brother. There are many reasons why the term for MB is the best choice from the G+1 level. For one thing, the term *māma* is the same for the MB in the central and south Dravidian languages, and that makes the comparisons easier than it would have been with other terms. Secondly, and even more importantly, *māma* in the original terminology shows alternate generation merger very clearly, and so the loss of this feature becomes strikingly evident in the changes that this term undergoes in other systems. Moreover, the term for MB is a helpful example as it is a less complicated category (terminologically speaking) since it is not distinguished for relative age, as are the terms for FB and MZ. For these reasons, the term for MB seems the best choice for our present exercise. In Table 2 below, I present the changes in the kin term *māma* (MB) in order to illustrate the unfolding of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of an originally compact system.

TABLE 2. CHANGES IN TERMS FOR MB: THE HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL UNFOLDING¹⁹

Alliance rule	The kin types in the category of <i>māma</i>
FZD – Madia (Central Dravidian)	<i>māma</i> = MB, FZH, EF, EFB, ZHF, BWF, FMF, MFF, EFFF, EMMF, ZS ms, SSS ws, DDS ws, DSS ms, SDS ms) ²⁰
Bilateral – Tamil Non-Brahman (South Dravidian)	<i>māmā</i> = MB, FZH ²¹ <i>māmanār</i> = EF ²²
MBD – Tamil Brahman (Indo-Aryan assimilated to Dravidian)	<i>māmā</i> = MB <i>attimpēr</i> = FZH <i>māmanār</i> = EF
Non-prescriptive – Hindi (Indo-Aryan)	<i>māmā</i> = MB <i>phūphā</i> = FZH <i>sasur</i> = EF <i>māvsā</i> = BWF, ZHF

We see from Table 2 that the term *māma* originally referred to a host of kin types. Following the changes in the marriage rules, and as more and more discriminations were made, this term consistently kept losing its referents. If at the beginning the kinship system was universal and all-

¹⁹ It is possible to present this data showing the cross and affine distinction in the Madia terminology, but doing so will not have any bearing on the arguments made here, and therefore I have avoided that unnecessary detail.

²⁰ Grigson (1938) reported *bachā* for FZH, thus distinguishing the latter from MB, *māma*. But the term *bachā* is not used for FZH in the Bhamragad and Etapalli regions, where it is used as an address term for WBS.

²¹ The MB is referred to as *thāi-māman*, specifying that *thai* 'mother' is the linking relative, and thus distinguishing MB from the other kin types listed here. The address term, however, is the same for all: *māmā*.

²² The term *māmanār* is used only in reference to EF while the address term for the same is *māmā*.

pervasive, and thus encompassing the entire society, it steadily lost such pervasiveness to the process of diffusion. What is striking here is the sudden loss of cross-generational self-reciprocity as shown in the equations $FMF/MFF = MB = ZS = DSS$ ms. The loss of this feature represents the vertical unfolding. The horizontal unfolding is seen in the loss of equations such as $MB = EFB = EFFF = EMMF$. The numerous kin types that were originally included in the single category *māma* were dispersed and many of these eventually came to be viewed as non-relative because the distance from ego is considered too great (e.g. EFFF or EMMF). Such relations may be considered as lost in diffusion.

We find a single term at the beginning (i.e. in the FZD system) covering many different kin types and from different generational levels, but we find two terms in the bilateral system, three in the matrilineal and four in the proscriptive system, which I think illustrates well what I have called the diffusion process. More terms become necessary as the compact system opens up and as the few key kin types become differentiated. Simultaneously, more and more relatives move outside the boundaries of kinship. The loss of distant relatives from the sphere of social categories and the increasing distinction of the immediate relatives who remain in the system are what I describe as the vertical and horizontal unfolding. This causes the systems to become more and more scattered until the classification itself is in a sense lost in systems like the Euro-American (or what are called descriptive terminologies), where the kin type MB becomes totally indistinct from the FB or FZH (e.g. the single English term 'uncle' applies to MB, FB, EMB, and EFB).

The term for FF: loss of symmetry

The loss of symmetry or homogeneity is another key change. Unlike the two features, alternation (vertical) and complementary (horizontal) merger, which disappear rather slowly and steadily, the loss of symmetry seems to occur quickly and almost totally. (If alternation is found in bilateral alliance systems, it is probably so because this feature disappears only gradually.) But the symmetrical character seems to disappear without leaving any trace, as is seen in Table 3. The polar categories (the terms in G+2) are the indicators of the symmetry in the original system (see Fig. 4 in Vaz 2010), and therefore I choose to examine these to understand this particular

change. The table shows terms for male relatives, and it is possible to do the same using terms for their female counterparts.

TABLE 3. CHANGES IN THE TERM FOR FF: LOSS OF SYMMETRY

Type of alliance	Terms for grandfather	
	Parallel	Cross
FZD alliance (Madia)	<i>thādho</i> = FF, MBWF, MMB, EMF, MFZH, SS ms	<i>ako</i> = MF, FZHF, FMB, EFF, FFZH, DS ms
Bilateral alliance (Tamil non-Brahman)	<i>tātā</i> ²³ = FF, MF, MBWF, FZHF	
MBD alliance (Tamil Brahman)	<i>tātā</i> = FF, MF, MFZH <i>attimpēr</i> = FZHF, FFZH (same as FZH) ²⁴ <i>ammangi</i> = MBWF (same as MBSe) ²⁵	
Non-prescriptive terminology (Hindi)	<i>dādā</i> ²⁶ = FF <i>nānā</i> = MF <i>dādsarā</i> = EFF <i>nānasarā</i> = FMF	

²³ Trautmann is incorrect in saying that *appucci* is FF (or FFB, MMB, MFZH) because it is in fact the term for FM (cf. Trautmann 1981: 312). A single term *tātā* applies to both FF and MF. Only the grandmothers are distinguished into two categories: *appāyi* or *appucci* for FM, and *ammāyi* or *ammucci* for MM.

²⁴ I have placed the terms *attimpēr* for FZHF/FFZH and *ammānji* for MBWF in the parallel category because I am not sure if these kin types are viewed as cross relatives by the speakers themselves.

²⁵ This information is not found in Trautmann's diagram but was provided to me by informants who are from a Brahman community living in Thanjavur.

²⁶ Vatuk's (1969) data use term *bābā* for FF in Hindi, but this is actually *dādā*.

The symmetry (or the balanced proportion of parallel and cross kin) that is seen in the Madia kinship system is due to the fact that crossness is maintained across generations. This dimension extends to all levels and never allows merger of the two kinds of grand relative. The equation which keeps the Madia kinship a balanced dual structure is this:

$$FF = EMF = MBWF = dhādhā \neq MF = EFF = FZHF = ako$$

What is evident from Table 3 is that this balanced character or homogeneity is actually the very first feature to be lost in the diffusion process. While the terms for grandfathers in Tamil do not show the crossness dimension, the terms for grandmothers do (*appāyi* or *appucci* for FM, and *ammāyi* or *ammucci* for MM). But symmetry is not something we can discuss in terms of degree or gradation; it is either present or absent. Therefore, even when the crossness dimension is found in the terms for grandmother in the Tamil terminology, I would still say that the symmetry is absent.

What seems unique about the Madia or Central Dravidian kinship is that this symmetry is found even at the G+3 level²⁷ It is impressive that, out of the few dozen kinship terminologies²⁸ that Dzielbe had found suitable for discussion in his book on proto-human kinship, the Central Dravidian (Raj Gond) is the only one that shows crossness in the G+3 level. As shown in my earlier article (Vaz 2010), the following equations in the G+3 level are found in the Madia terminology:

$$FFF = MMF = EMFF = EFMF \textit{ pēpi} \neq \textit{ māma} = FMF = MFF = EFFF = EMMF$$

$$FFM = MMM = EMFM = EFMM \textit{ pēri} \neq \textit{ ātho} = FMM = MFM = EFFM = EMMM$$

It does not seem that such symmetry can be achieved without the transgenerational crossness and the skewing of generations which seem to work together to create a superreciprocal terminology, and it is my understanding that only FZD alliance is able to do this. Once the FZD rule ceases to be the basic assumption, the symmetric structure crumbles.

²⁷ This is observed in a few other central Dravidian kin terminologies (Tyler 1990).

²⁸ These few dozen are chosen from his larger database of about 2500 kin vocabularies.

Changes in Madia kinship

Of all the kinship systems considered here, the Madia system is the one where kinship seems the most pervasive, and such pervasiveness is generally assumed to be a feature of ancient kinship systems. However, the Madia kinship is no more immune to historical changes than are the other systems. There are a few important differences between Grigson's list (1938) and my own. In his time the Madia of Bastar (now Chhattisgarh) seem to have distinguished between FZH *bacha* and MB *māma*. But both these relatives are now known by the same term (*māma*), and the term *bacha* now remains only as a reciprocal term: *bacha* or *bacha* = WBS²⁹ (this is so at least in the Bhamragad and Etapalli regions where I conducted my research). Another archaic term is *poye* for FZ, which has been replaced by *ātho*. If I consider *poye* to be more original, it is because this term still exists among the Bison-horn Madia and the Gaitha to denote FZ; among the Hill Madia it exists only as a reciprocal term for BDws (which is similar to the case of *bacha*). The Marathi term *aji* is beginning to replace the Madia term *bāpi* among school-going children. The terms for cross cousins, *maryox* and *mandarī*, are now being replaced by the terms *sangi* and *sango*, as not many people are aware of the former any longer. Moreover, I am seeing these days that the practice of patrilineal cross-cousin marriage itself is being challenged by some of the Madia youth. What accelerates such changes in marriage practice as well as in terminology, more than anything else, is perhaps the coming of formal education to the Madia society in the recent past (actually just in this generation) which provides some exposure to other ways of life. Isolation seems to be the primary factor that has contributed to the preservation of the Madia practice of FZD alliance and the archaic kin terminology.

The question that begs to be asked is this: 'In what ways could the original Madia kin terminology have been different from its present form?' When Tyler reconstructed Proto-Dravidian on the basis of alternation, he said it could only apply to address usage (1990: 161). In my previous article I discussed the vocative nature of the Madia terminology and mentioned the significance of the address terminology in understanding the kinship structure. Could it be that

²⁹ It was my oversight not to have reported this term for WBS in my earlier article (Vaz 2010). I am so accustomed to hearing and using the Hindi term *bacha* 'child' that I had ignored this Madia term, thinking it must be a borrowed term from Hindi, but I now realize that it is actually an indigenous Madia term.

the Madia kinship terminology was originally purely an address system and the reference terminology followed later?

Madia as Proto-Dravidian

What is the point of the above analysis? Precisely this: if by 'evolution' is meant the increasing divergence from a previous condition, then it makes sense that we should be able to trace it back in the opposite direction to an original condition from which it all must have started to change. If Hill Madia kinship is representative of Proto-Dravidian, then it must be demonstrable that the other types are derived from it. If Madia kinship represents the most compact structure, then it must be evident that the other terminologies have structures that are increasingly diffused as they move away from the most complex starting point. And if the FZD alliance rule is indeed the rationale for the structure of the Madia kinship, then it must be evident that the adoption of other types of marriage rules causes, or at least is correlated with, the variations found in the other kinship structures. If my reasoning here is sound, then it would mean that Allen's 'Big Bang' model is more helpful in understanding the 'evolution' of Dravidian kinship than Trautmann's model of the tree trunk and branches. However, Allen's 'Big Bang' model itself would need some revision in the light of the arguments made so far in this article.

A revised 'Big Bang' model

Allen founded his tetradic model for the simplest possible social organization on 'three important types of equation' which are alternate generation merging, prescriptive equations and classificatory equations (Allen 1986:99). The prescriptive equation that he proposed was based on bilateral cross-cousin marriage, but he found it difficult to link the bilateral alliance rule with alternate generation merging. With the bilateral rule he could explain the 'horizontal' relations but not the 'vertical' merger of relations; and the tetradic structure he envisioned needed both dimensions covered (2011: 99). There is no way the bilateral rule could explain tetradic structures. This seems to have led Allen to reverse the direction of the causal arrow and to propose that the tetradic structures itself could be *generative* of the alliance rule (ibid.: 104). On

the contrary, and as we have seen through the analysis of the Madia kinship system, the patrilineal alliance rule covers both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of relations and by doing so it generates the tetradic super-structure (as in G +2 and G +3). Both my earlier article and the present one argue that it is the alliance rule that generates the structures, and not vice versa. On the basis on these observations, I suggest that Allen's 'Big Bang' sequence for kinship needs some revision.

Allen has proposed a unidirectional (generally speaking) and irreversible evolutionary path for transformations of kinship, which he presented as a sequence of disruptions in terminological equations as shown below:

1. Loss of alternate generation equations (which merged relations in alternate generations)
2. Loss of prescriptive equations (which merged cross and affinal kin, indicating bilateral alliance rule)
3. Loss of classificatory equations (which merged same-sex siblings).

However, the analysis presented in this article suggests that the loss of the FZD alliance rule, combined with that of the cross-generational self-reciprocal equations (which imply transgenerational crossness), must precede the loss of alternation.³⁰ This would mean that Allen's disruptive sequence depicts the transformation process at its second or third stage. Moreover, my analysis also suggests that, instead of viewing the transformations of kinship systems as a sequence of loss of equations and discriminations (which are numerous and make the study complicated), we could view it as the unfolding of relations horizontally and vertically, and as a movement away from an original condition of concentration and compactness to becoming increasingly diffused and scattered.

³⁰ When alternation is found in a kinship system based on bilateral alliance rule it is usually so only with regard to a few kin terms, and these can be explained as vestiges from a former stage. With regard to matrilineal alliance though, it would be interesting to investigate if alternation is effected in section societies because the MBD exchange must work in circles here. A study of the Australian aboriginal societies which have a high degree of alternation found in the MBD systems would shed more light on this issue.

It is significant for our discussion here to note that a meagre retention of alternation is found in the Kurukh kinship (a north Dravidian system) and that it is so even in 'the absence of preferential cross-cousin marriage' and in spite of 'a preference for marriage with nonrelatives' (Trautmann: 1981: 143-4). Whereas the Tamil-Brahman kin terminology is a case of an Indo-Aryan community having been assimilated to a Dravidian kinship system in south India, the Kurukh is clearly a case of a Dravidian society in northern India where it has assimilated to the dominant practice there, i.e. of the Indo-Aryan proscriptive marriage rule.

If anything at all, the analysis of the Dravidian data presented here should clearly bear out the fundamental importance of marriage rule for kinship and social organization since we see that changes in the rule effects changes in the kin terminological systems. Therefore, assuming that marriage rule is the logic of human kinship, I have proposed below a revised 'Big Bang' model, one that is based on the few basic types of marriage rules and one that provides a sort of historical perspective showing the general direction of transformations in kinship. Following the analogy of the 'Big Bang' of the universe, I have illustrated this process using concentric circles. Here I have added two more kinship systems to the ones discussed in this article, namely the parallel-cousin marriage that is well known in Arab societies, and descriptive systems of which the Euro-American kinship terminology is usually taken as an example.

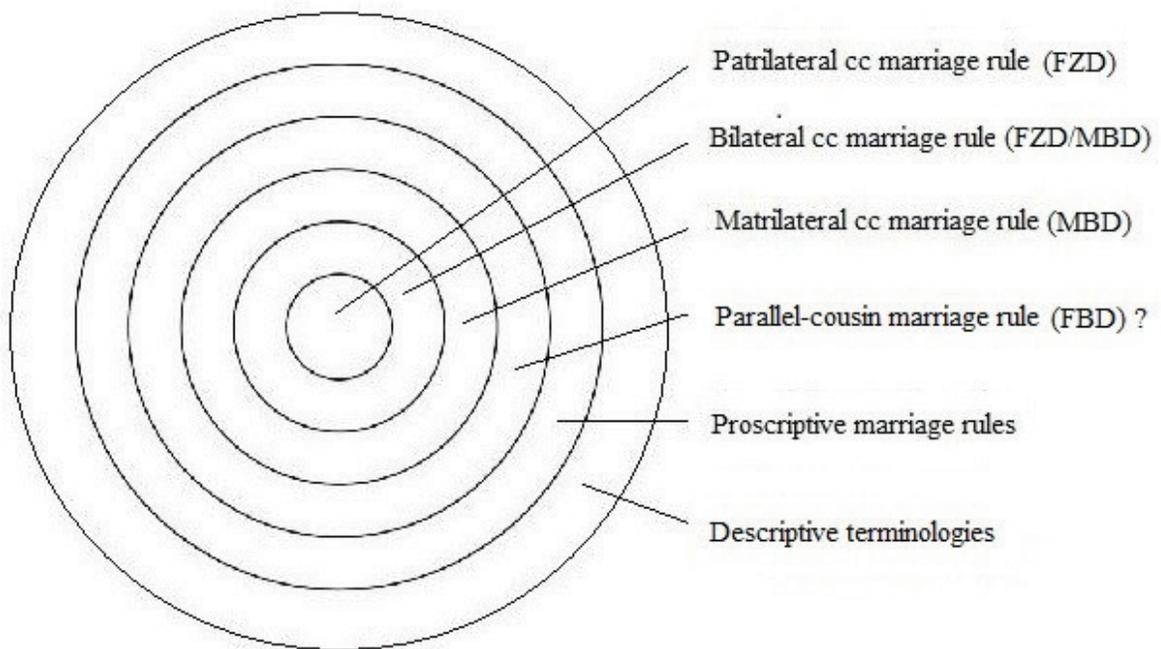


Figure 1. The 'Big Bang' for kinship systems

Let us consider briefly a few of the variations (that abound for sure) within the few basic types of alliances mentioned in this illustration. Oblique marriages are one example. The ZD-MB (avuncular) marriage is a variant of the bilateral type. The eZD marriage among the Thanjavur

non-Brahman Tamils does create certain peculiarities in this bilateral terminology, but the overall kinship structure and the social organization would not be transformed by this practice. For example, in this terminology we come across equations like $WM = eZ = akkā$, $DH = yB = thambi$, $MB = H = māmā$, and $HM = ammāci$ (same as MM), $FZH = tātā$ (same as FF), equations that are found in the particular cases where eZD marriage takes place. However, this marriage is fairly common here, and its influence on the bilateral terminology must be noted. A few examples follow. The equation $WM = eZ = akkā$ is also found in marriages that are not between eZD and MyB, specifically where ego's WM happens to be merely a few years older than he is. Similarly, girls who are married to men who are considerably older than them (a not so uncommon practice) address their husbands as $māmā$ (MB) and their HF as $tātā$ (MF). The equation which is most commonly found in the bilateral terminology but which I think exists because of the influence of eZD-MyB marriage is this one: $DH = yB = thambi$. All such occurrences mean that certain relatives can be either pushed up or down to the adjacent generational level without jeopardizing the kinship system, for in spite of such peculiarities the Thanjavur non-Brahman Tamil terminology remains a bilateral system. Because the eZD terminology is absolutely compatible with that of the bilateral, the ZD marriage can be seen as a variant of the bilateral rule. Conversely, the terminology that goes with eZD marriage is not compatible at all with the FZD alliance system.³¹ This takes us to the next point, which is significant to note.

As mentioned above, the eZD-MyB marriage causes the blurring of adjacent generational levels with regard to certain relatives (e.g. $H = MB = HF/WF = māmā$), and this is entirely compatible with the bilateral system. This is something that the Madia (FZD) terminology could never allow because a clear demarcation of generational levels is fundamental to the Madia kinship system. When my Madia informants heard about the equations cited above from the Tamil terminology, they were horrified that some men would actually marry their eZDs. If eZD-MB marriage is totally compatible with the bilateral system but not at all so with the kinship

³¹ Trautmann (1981: 206) seems to draw a parallel between eZD marriage and FZD marriage, which must be rejected in light of the discussion here.

system based on the FZD marriage, how then can we say that the FZD alliance is simply a variant within the bilateral form of alliance?³² (see also footnote 18).

Let us now turn to variants that exist within the FZD system. First, marriages with FFBDD or MMBDD would be variants of the FZD system, as these cousins belong to the same category as the kin type FZD. I imagine that alliances where the FFBDD and MMBDD are prescribed would effect certain changes in the structure of the terminology, causing it to be different, but perhaps not fundamentally so, from the system based on the FZD marriage rule. The Dieri system (Radcliffe-Brown 1914) is given as an example of such second-cousin marriage, and it is significant that Lévi-Strauss (1969: 204-7) considered it to be a case of transition from asymmetric to symmetric exchange – an idea that fits well with the 'Big Bang' model I have proposed because this marriage can be seen as a stage between the FZD and the bilateral.³³ (It would be illuminating to study second and third cousin marriages in MBD systems and consider how these may fit in this model.)

Another type of variant within the FZD system is an oblique marriage. Among the Madia, while marriage with a man or woman from an adjacent generation is unthinkable, the MF-DD marriages (i.e. relatives from alternate generation) are considered acceptable (as noted by Grigson and quoted by Trautmann and others). Madia MF-DD marriage seems a natural companion of the FZD-MBS alliance because the former falls so perfectly within the latter, requiring no change at all in the FZD terminology (e.g. HF = MFF is already *māma* anyway). The reason why MF-DD marriage is so totally compatible with FZD marriage is because this marriage does not violate the basic structure of alternate generation equivalence as would eZD marriage. This explains the disgust the Madia express for Tamil eZD marriage. A Madia man who is found guilty of marrying his ZD or having had sexual contact with her (who is in the same category as MyZ in the Madia kinship system) is made to pay a heavy fine and is put

³² Besides this, there are at least two other reasons why the FZD marriage is distinguishable from the bilateral type of alliance, and so cannot be covered within the umbrella of direct (bilateral) exchange (Parkin 1997: 101-4). First, cross-generational self-reciprocity, which seems to be an effect of the FZD rule, is not associated with the bilateral type of alliance. Secondly, the delayed reciprocity as a 'principle' forms the basis of the FZD exchange and results in a unique kinship structure; and therefore it cannot be equated with the arbitrary delay that may often be the case in the direct exchange due to demographic reasons.

³³ Since data from the study of Australian aboriginals abound in systems with second- or third-cousin marriages, a comparative study of these would throw more light on this topic.

through a ritual of purification before he could be restored back into the social and ritual life of the community.

Let us move on to the next type. All I know about the parallel-cousin marriage rule is that it is always the FBD and never the MZD who is the prescribed bride. I have yet to familiarize myself with the kinship terminology that goes with this alliance rule, and therefore the placement of this system in this illustration may not be accurate. However, it is by following the idea that proscriptive systems proceeded from the prescriptive systems that I have placed the FBD alliance above the proscriptive marriage rules.

Then come the proscriptive marriage rules which are well known in India. Most ethnic groups in the country would not allow marriage between a man and a woman having the same family name. In addition, the prohibition on taking a bride from the same village because the groom and bride drank water from the same well and therefore are like siblings is also known. I have heard of places in the northern states where there are rules prohibiting a man from taking a bride residing within a certain range, say a thirty or forty kilometre radius, of his ancestral residence (presumably because the couple would have shared the same natural resources, particularly the underground water). In the south Indian state of Kerala, it is a common practice for the name of a person's ancestral village to be part of his/her personal name, and a man and a woman carrying the same village name cannot marry. The Hindi kin terminology used in my analysis in this article is based on a rule that prohibits all blood relatives from marriage. Thus, water, blood and territory are some of the things marriage proscription in India is based on, and there certainly are many other kinds of proscriptions.

The last in my illustration, the descriptive system, of which Euro-American kinship can be used as an example, is the furthest from the FZD type, and this is where the kinship structure and social organization seems the least complex. It is simple not just in the sense that there are only a dozen core terms or kin categories (if affixes like 'in-law', 'grand-', 'step-' and 'ex-' are not considered). It is simple also because the number of kin types included in this kinship system is smaller. For example, FZHF or EMBWM is excluded from the range of kin as he or she is seen as too distant to be a relative.

Overall, the sequence of the transformations in kinship systems as illustrated above would be, as Allen has said, irreversible and generally unidirectional. I have found the 'Big Bang'

model extremely helpful in conceptualizing and understanding the transformations in Dravidian kinship, where I did not find it problematic to include the three non-Dravidian and non-prescriptive kinship systems, as these seem to fall very much in line with the movement from prescriptive to proscriptive to descriptive systems. Such transformations in kinship would perhaps coincide with transformations of societies as they move or moved from being very small-scale, localized and collectivistic to becoming increasingly dispersed and individualized ones.

Conclusion

The main conclusion I make in this article is that Madia kinship represents the most archaic of Dravidian kinship systems and that the FZD rule is the most ancient of cross-cousin marriage rules. However, here I would also like to refer once again to a point I discussed early in this article, namely the link between the debates about proto-Dravidian and proto-human kinship systems. As recently as 2001, Per Hage (Hage 2001:487) summed up the history of the analyses of the transformations of kinship systems by citing an impressive list of authors and analysts:

Grand theories of the evolution of human kinship systems usually take as their starting-point a Dravidian-like system based on cross-cousin marriage as in the transition from elementary to complex (Lévi-Strauss 1969), prescriptive to non-prescriptive (Needham 1967), and tetradic to non-tetradic system (Allen 1986, 1989, 1998)... Historically, the available documentary and linguistic evidence reveals 'rightward' shifts away from Dravidian as in the Burmese (Spiro 1977), Chinese (Benedict 1942; Fêng 1937), Mon-Khmer (Parkin 1988b), Nasupo (Kryukov 1998), and Algonquian systems (Hockett 1964; Wheeler 1982), but not 'leftward' shifts towards Dravidian... 'no evidence of Dravidian having been formed as a result of the transformation of a system of any other type has been found so far. (Kryukov 1998)

Hage's summary indicates that there exists a general consensus about the ancestry of a 'Dravidian-like' system as the historical source of human kinship systems. The data analysis and arguments presented in this article may help to further narrow it down to a Madia-type system.

A wider question

Allen's tetradic structure as proto-human kinship is dated back to 60,000 years ago, implying the unlikelihood of modern ethnographic evidence for it. Regardless of the great interest Allen's tetradic theory holds for neo-Darwinists, the question about the dating of proto-human kinship can only be secondary to the logical and empirical questions. We have seen that the Madia kinship system is tetradic in its super-structure having four terms in $G +2/+3$ (see Figure 4 in Vaz 2010). Besides, Madia society is divided into four exogamous god-groups, each god-group having a certain number of gods ranging from four to seven (Grigson 1938; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1979). Note also that the numbering in the god-group system begins with four.

Allen's dating of his tetradic (early human) society may agree with trends in neo-Darwinism that see correlations between primate and human kinship. But Parkin, Dziebel and McConvell have all warned against the dangers in this trend even as it is threatening to override kinship studies. Parkin, for one, warns against multidisciplinary approaches in which social anthropology is given only marginal importance and the regrettable tendency to abandon traditional and technical study of kin terminologies (Parkin 2009). He has also pointed to the 'strong tendency' in neo-Darwinism 'to reduce human society, which we can interrogate directly, to those of our primate relatives, whom we cannot', saying that this tendency leads analysts 'to ignore or downplay the uniqueness of humans as a species (which is due not least to culture and to cultural difference) ...' (ibid). Dziebel, for another, points to an unfortunate belief among anthropologists that kinship systems 'are incapable of generating historical reconstructions of their own, but are restricted to either supporting or contradicting archaeological and linguistic evidence', whereas he sees kinship systems as actually 'the most secure field of reference' because of their 'unique formal properties' (2007: 140, 144).

McConvell too has urged social anthropologists to avoid 'fuelling speculations' and to work to make 'actual' hypotheses, beginning by first identifying, through rigorous methods, the proto-kinship terminologies of the language families of the world. This alone, he says, will lead to an understanding of 'possible systems and changes to systems and the chronology' and help us to 'assess the plausibility of reconstructing a single Dravidian-type kinship system as the primeval system, or alternatives, including different systems in different parts of the world'

(2009:7-8). It is my hope that the presentation of ethnographic data and analysis in this article is a step in that direction.

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MAIZE AS MATERIAL CULTURE?
AMAZONIAN THEORIES OF PERSONS AND THINGS

THERESA MILLER

Introduction: the ‘nature’ of materials in anthropological analyses

As a significant sub-discipline within anthropology, material culture studies have been at the forefront of ground-breaking theories regarding the relationships between people and things. A whole genre of object biographies have been produced, based on Kopytoff’s (1986) article on the ‘social life of things’ (cf. Saunders 1999, Thomas 1999, Harrison 2003). Daniel Miller’s (1987) interpretation of Hegel’s dialectical materialism led to a serious discussion of how people and objects mutually reinforce and create each other. While Kopytoff’s theory has been widely criticized for its passive, semiotic approach (Thomas 1999, Holtorf 2002), Miller’s notion of ‘materiality’ (1987, 2010) moved away from the meanings of objects to focus on how they act within the field of social relations. As more anthropologists and archaeologists engage with material culture studies, however, the assumptions on which this sub-field have been based are being called into question. Rival’s edited volume (1998) includes ethnographic accounts attempting to reconcile the symbolic and material aspects of person–thing relationships. Ingold (2007b) adopts a more radical view, bypassing a discussion of symbolism and critiquing ‘materiality’ for being an abstract category. His phenomenological approach calls for an analysis of the material substance and affects/effects of things. Instead of analysing the ‘thinginess’ of things, as is the case in materiality studies, Ingold advocates an exploration of how things are ‘thingly’; that is, how they emerge in the world of both people and things (Ingold 2007b: 9). In this sense, things are not essential, unchanging entities but are instead contingent (Holtorf 2002) on time, space, and their relationships with other emergent things and people.

This brief summary of material culture studies reveals that the basic relationships under analysis, those between people and things, are by their very nature complex and unfold over time. As anthropologists, how are we to make sense of this ‘mess’ (cf. Hicks 2010: 71) of things and people? In this article, I will argue that a better understanding of people–thing relationships must begin from an expanded

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notion of ‘material culture.’ Within material culture analyses, the materials most commonly investigated are manufactured objects. Miller (2010) studies cell phones and saris, Latour (1993b, 2000) researches trains and keys, and many other authors have analysed everything from knapped bottle glass artefacts (Harrison 2003), to potsherds (Holtorf 2002), to rubbish (Shanks 2004). Although Ingold (2000, 2006, 2007a, 2007b) has produced theoretical writings on non-manufactured materials such as trees and the weather, he has yet to write an ethnographic account of such materials in the lives of particular people. While the relationship between people and manufactured objects is undoubtedly important, in certain communities other materials also take on a central role. This article will focus on indigenous Amazonian encounters with things, including artefacts, animals, spirits and plants. Human–plant relationships will be given a particular emphasis, as these engagements are understudied and not usually included in the domain of ‘material culture studies’ (an important exception is Rival ed. 1998). It will be shown how a more complete theoretical understanding of the relationship between people and all sorts of things can be found in the rich ethnographies of Amazonia.

Within material culture studies, the overarching theories of Latour (1993a, 2005) and Ingold (2008) have been particularly influential. In Latour’s actor network theory (ANT), people and things, or humans and non-humans, are best understood as actors within networks. Every actor-thing, whether human or non-human, is of equal importance and is distributed along the symmetrical and horizontal network. In this sense, it is impossible to speak of distinct ‘subjects’ and ‘objects,’ since these human and non-human actor-things together form ‘monstrous hybrids’ (Latour 1993b: 375-376). Instead of analysing what has traditionally been known as ‘society,’ Latour calls for an analysis of these hybrids, which can be done by tracing the movements of actor-things along the network (Latour 2005). While Latour raises some important issues regarding the objects of social science analyses, ANT fails to seriously take into account the importance of embodied relationships among people and things. Latour’s (2000) fieldwork on the Berlin key network in pre-unification West Berlin apartment buildings provides a snapshot of particular relationships among ‘mediators’ that are seen as abstract nodes in an even more abstract chain of events. Who are these West Berliners using such unusual keys? We are told how the key is operated in a technical sense, but the embodied skill required to utilize such keys is overlooked. In

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this way, Latour ignores the centrality of embodied relationships and skills that emerge within networks of people and things.

Embodied behaviour and skill acquisition are central to Ingold's (2000, 2008) theory of the 'meshwork.' He playfully critiques Latour's ANT by creating his own acronym, SPIDER: 'Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness' (Ingold 2008: 215). In this theory, the meshwork is likened to a spider's web that extends through time and space. In contrast to the network, which is a horizontal chain of associations (Latour 2000), the meshwork is a three-dimensional matrix that enmeshes all sorts of persons and things. Relationships among persons and things emerge along the threads of the meshwork and are themselves material (Ingold 2007a: 81; 2008: 210). Ingold likens this process to the weaving of a spider's web, which emerges from the movement of the spider's body and then connects spider and fly, albeit in a predatory way¹ (Ingold 2008: 211). In this way, the persons and things in the meshwork become connected through embodied processes of growth and movement. Persons and things are contingent, however, and their attributes and characteristics will undoubtedly change as they interact with each other in this tangled web of existence (cf. Ingold 2000, Holtorf 2002). This is in stark contrast to the hybrids of Latour's network, which are composites yet retain the essential, fixed qualities of each entity involved (Latour 1993a, 2005). By incorporating embodied movement and growth, and by emphasizing the contingency of persons and things, Ingold's meshwork is made more analytically useful than Latour's network. Unfortunately, Ingold tends to focus on theoretical issues at the expense of ethnographic analysis. This article will attempt to bridge this gap by examining the meshwork in light of Amazonian ethnographies. Using a broadened understanding of material culture, the article will outline how Amazonian ethnography can provide insights into and even reinvent material culture studies.

Material culture in Amazonia: linking persons and things

Before the creation of 'material culture studies' as a distinct sub-discipline in the 1980s, the study of material culture had largely been relegated to the basement storage of ethnographic museums (cf. Belk 1995, O'Hanlon 2000). In the 1920s and

¹ Predatory relationships among people and things, which are common in Amazonia, will be explored later in this article. It is unclear whether Ingold purposefully utilizes a predatory creature for his theoretical discussion of person-thing relationships.

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1930s, the advent of extended fieldwork and the monograph as the pinnacle of anthropological scholarship rendered the analysis of artefacts secondary to the investigation of an ephemeral culture or society. Ethnographic accounts of Amazonia began around this time and focused on kinship organization and myth largely at the expense of material objects (cf. Nimuendajú 1939, 1946). Amazonian material culture, narrowly defined as man-made artefacts such as pottery and weavings, was said to be 'primitive' and lacking in cultural significance (cf. Meggers and Evans 1973). Archaeological accounts reinforced this notion with findings that material culture did not play an important role in prehistoric Amazonian societies (Roosevelt 1980). As part of the structural turn in anthropology as a whole, Amazonian anthropologists focused on the semiotic structural aspects of indigenous societies, namely socio-political organization, myth, and ritual (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966, 1970; Rivière 1969; da Matta 1973; Maybury-Lewis 1967, 1979). Material objects had no place in these analyses and were seen to be purely functional or supportive of more 'complex' ritual activity.

However, from the late 1970s to the late 1990s, anthropology in general began to move away from structuralism and explore other ways of analysing social phenomena. Material culture studies developed as a counter to structuralism and revealed the activity of objects in society and social history (cf. Belk 1995, Hancock 1998, Thomas 1999, Gosden and Marshall 1999). In Amazonian ethnographies, the focus shifted from kinship structures to gender, embodiment and personhood, all of which were found to be inextricably linked to material things. For many Amazonian communities, material objects are central components of constructing both persons and society. Jewellery, body paint, musical instruments and weapons serve as markers and creators of social identity and status (cf. Turner 1995, S. Hugh-Jones 1979, Rival 1996). In the last decade or so, anthropologists from each sub-field have been attempting to reinvent material culture and Amazonian studies respectively. Researchers of material culture are searching for new objects of enquiry and new ways to engage with such objects, while Amazonianists are investigating the myriad ways indigenous communities conceive of 'persons' and 'bodies.' Despite distinct differences, there are similarities between the two sub-disciplines that have not yet been thoroughly explored. A recent edited volume on Amazonian material culture (Santos-Granero 2009b) shows that creating a dialogue between these seemingly disparate areas of research has the potential to enrich both sub-fields. This article is an

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attempt to create a space for such a dialogue by building upon recent scholarship in both Amazonian and material culture studies.

Amazonian theories of personhood and thing-hood are fluid and largely interchangeable (Santos-Granero 2009a: 3). Humans and non-humans are constantly changing and being constructed throughout their life courses, and each type of being has the potential to transform bodily into another type of being. Known as perspectivism, this philosophy is founded on the notion that all beings—including animals, plants, spirits, and artefacts—have a point of view that is located in the body (Fausto 2008: 348). All beings possess a similar type of ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’, but it is the body that differentiates beings from one another (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471). An embodied perspective is linked to the notion that all beings perceive themselves as a part of ‘human’ culture (ibid.: 470). Thus, while people view the jaguar as eating raw meat, from his perspective he is eating manioc bread, a type of food typically associated with human culture. As a theoretical model, perspectivism has mainly focused on the predator–prey relationship among beings with different bodies (Århem 1996). Humans usually see themselves as predators and animals as prey, while animals, especially large ones such as the jaguar, see the situation in reverse. Predator–prey relationships are seen as the basis for Amazonian hunting and shamanic activities because both involve taking on one of these perspectives and potentially moving between the two (Fausto 2007a, 2007b, Rival 2005). Predation is fundamentally about the incorporation of another being’s point of view through ‘mastery,’ which is a fluid, ambiguous process (Fausto 2008: 332-3, 340). Although the shaman can acquire mastery over the jaguar’s point of view, this dominion is ambivalent and easily reversible. There is also an ambivalence surrounding the specific type of master–mastered relationship, since a master (predator) can be protective or oppressive to his prey.

While human–animal engagements of mastery have been widely documented in Amazonia (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1992, Kohn 2007, Fausto 2007a), the entanglements among humans and artefacts have only recently received attention. Viveiros de Castro (1998: 471-2) has argued that the perspectives of large predatory animals are most important within perspectivism, but recent ethnographic accounts show how human–artefact relationships are no less important. Objects are central to many Amazonian myths and often form the basis of both human and animal bodies (Santos-Granero 2009a: 5). The embodied engagements of people and artefacts also

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extend beyond myth into present-day lived realities. For the Urarina of the Peruvian Amazon, baby hammocks are seen as an extension of the mother's body, and the infant's body is said to fuse with his or her hammock through a process of 'ensoulment' whereby the hammock forms part of the child's personhood (Walker 2009: 84-5). In this way, the hammock is not only a mediator between mother and child, but actively creates a bodily connection with and between the two (ibid.: 89). Some artefacts actively create and nurture personhood, while others act upon humans in a predatory way. The Urarina stone bowls or *egaando* are purely predatory until they have been successfully controlled by shamans. Through an extended process of ritual seclusion, a shaman can 'tame' the *egaando* into an obedient servant who teaches healing techniques to its master (ibid.: 94). It is dangerous to engage with an *egaando*, however, because there is always the possibility it will not submit to shamanic treatment and will attack the shaman and his family instead.

Dangerous relationships with things are also seen in the Wauja community of the Upper Xingu, Brazil. The *apapaatai* are monsters who have the capacity to make people ill by stealing parts of their souls (Barcelos Neto 2009: 130). In order to heal the sick person, the *apapaatai* must be controlled through ritual action. Originally spirits, the monsters are created as masks, flutes, and other objects and are then fed human food in order to remove their monstrous predatory abilities (ibid.: 131-2). Through commensality, a fundamentally embodied encounter between the monster-artefacts and humans, the Wauja are able to 'de-animalize' (ibid.: 134) and gain mastery over the *apapaatai*. Especially durable artefacts such as flutes are considered more than *apapaatai* and more than human, being 'hyper-retentive of personhood' (ibid.: 148). Wauja families nurture these supra-human artefacts by feeding them cooked human food for years after the ritual in which they were created occurred. In this case, nurturing is inextricably linked to mastery, a dual relationship that is common in Amazonia (Fausto 2008: 350). Cashinahua men and women have a similar relationship with the *ayahuasca* vine and designs respectively (Lagrou 2009: 200). While men engage with the *ayahuasca* vine through visions, women interact with designs through weaving and body painting. By creating these designs, Cashinahua women simultaneously materialize and control the *yuxin* spirit beings, who are said to speak and act through designs (ibid.: 201). Once materialized, designs have the capacity to act in the world (ibid.: 198), albeit under the control of the women who create the designs on human bodies and in weavings. Not all Cashinahua

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artefacts are considered to be manifestations of spirit beings' capacities. Ritual carved wooden stools are thought to be the children of their makers in that each one is unique and has its own goals and destiny (ibid.: 209).

Based on the above examples, it is clear that there are myriad ways of being both an object and a person in Amazonia. Persons and objects are simultaneously things and embodied social relationships (Santos-Granero 2009a: 3-6). Some objects are considered nurturing and constitutive of persons, while others will predatorily attack humans unless subjugated by master-owners. There are even artefacts that are seen as more human than humans and must therefore be nurtured by human communities. However, even nurturing parent-child relationships include an element of mastery or ownership of another being. In all of these relationships, the master becomes a 'magnified person' consisting of the 'multiple singularities' of those whom he is mastering (Fausto 2008: 341). Thus, Amazonian engagements among people and things are hierarchical in that one being is attempting to gain mastery over another by accessing and incorporating the Other's perspective. Additionally, every Amazonian society conceives of some beings as more active or important in human-non-human entanglements than other beings. Large predatory animals such as the jaguar are central to many Amazonian societies, as are certain artefacts such as tools and musical instruments. For the Yanéscha community of the Peruvian Amazon, different things are engaged with in varying ways depending on their perspectival perceptual abilities. Depending on their life histories and current contextual situations, beings have different degrees of 'animacy and agentivity—measured in terms of goal-oriented thought and action, motion, and feelings' (Santos-Granero 2009a: 124-5). Analysing the complex and diverse Amazonian notions of 'life' is outside the scope of this article (but see Rival n.d.). Suffice it to say that Amazonian societies conceive of non-humans as having varying levels of perspectival access. Therefore, any analysis of Amazonian material culture must begin with an understanding of the diversity of perspectival encounters.

Amazonian cultivated plants: human-manioc and human-maize engagements

Perspectival engagements among persons and things are not uniform, partly because not all persons and things are considered to have equal perspectival perceptual abilities, and partly because these relationships are fluid and change over time. In Amazonia, persons and things are constructed and composite entities. That is, every

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being is considered to be a ‘bundle of affects and capacities’ (Fausto 2007b) formed by relationships engaged in throughout the life course. Due to a variety of factors, some persons and things form a more intimate composite entanglement than others. The reasons behind emphasising particular relationships over others are still being investigated, but may deal with the intimacy of daily encounters (Santos-Granero 2009a), the ceremonial significance of certain relationships (Viveiros de Castro 1992), or the degree of power and mastery associated with specific engagements among persons and things (Fausto 2007a, 2007b). Fausto (2008: 348) claims that perspectival encounters of mastery can involve all types of beings, including humans, animals, plants, spirits and artefacts. Human–animal and human–spirit relationships have been thoroughly explored, and human–artefact relationships are currently being analysed by a wide variety of Amazonianist scholars. However, human–plant engagements remain an understudied area of research (cf. Rival 2010), despite their combined practical, symbolic, aesthetic and perspectival importance in many Amazonian societies.

A wide variety of plants are cultivated in Amazonian communities, such as yam, sweet potato, peanut, maize and manioc. Many of these cultivars are accessed perspectivally through the use of generative concepts and are often likened to persons or even to the children of their gardeners. However, unlike human–animal and some human–artefact encounters, human–plant relationships tend to be based on a form of mastery that does not include a predatory component. While human–animal relationships tend to emphasise affinal adoption and seduction (cf. Kohn 2005, 2007, Viveiros de Castro 1992), human–plant relationships are usually based on consanguinal ties between, for example, a mother and her child (cf. Taylor 2001, Rival 2001). Fausto (2008: 350) notes that motherhood is a distinct form of mastery, and what distinguishes it from other forms appears to be the non-predatory incorporation of other beings.

Non-predatory mastery has been documented between people and manioc in the north and northwest Amazon, although the particular ways men and women are likened to and engage with manioc varies greatly among societies (cf. Heckler 2004, Rival 2001, Taylor 2001, Descola 1997). For the Makushi of Guyana, growing manioc is linked to concepts of ‘sexual reproduction, the generative process, consanguinity, and identity’ (Rival 2001: 58). In this society, there are three overarching types of manioc. Plants grown in the wild that reproduce themselves

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through seedlings are seen as ‘sterile’ and male, while ‘fertile’ female manioc grown in gardens from stem cuttings reproduces itself and its ‘children’ in the form of new stems (ibid.: 71-4). Spontaneous seedlings or *tepuru pîye* are seen to have potential fertility and are therefore allowed inside the garden space when stem cuttings have become less productive (ibid.: 71). Thus, for the Makushi manioc has a generative potential that can either be male or female, or even somewhere in between, as is the case with *tepuru pîye*. The Tukanoan-speaking Barasana of Colombia conceive of manioc tubers as ‘children’ and women as ‘food mothers,’ and manioc gardens are the site of human conception and birth (S. Hugh-Jones 1979: 167; C. Hugh-Jones 1979: 115). Cultivating manioc plants is therefore linked specifically to native conceptualizations of motherhood and nurturing.

A similar correspondence between manioc gardening and mothering can be seen in the Achuar community of the Ecuadorian Amazon. In this society, the master spirit of manioc, Nunkui, is conceived of as both the ‘mother’ and ‘owner’ of manioc plants, and women are linked to their gardens through creative, regenerative symbolism (Taylor 2001: 51-3; Descola 1997). Nurturing motherhood is part of the woman–manioc relationship, but there is also an element of danger in this engagement. As with some artefacts in Urarina and Wauja societies, for the Achuar manioc plants are potentially dangerous beings who will suck the blood of young children unless controlled by Achuar women through ritual singing (Descola 1997: 93, 98). Therefore, accessing the manioc plant’s perspective simultaneously involves a consanguineal mother–child bond between a woman and her manioc plants and mastery over the plant’s lethal potential. Motherhood and mastery are also part of human–manioc entanglements in the Piaroa society of Venezuela. Cultivating manioc involves harnessing powerful and potentially dangerous productive forces. Only Piaroa women, with their maternal abilities, have the particular strength needed to harness manioc’s regenerative capabilities (Heckler 2004: 243, 248). Once again, actively controlling and mastering the manioc plants is an integral part of gaining access to the manioc plant’s point of view.

While human–manioc relationships have received some attention in the ethnographic literature, other human–plant engagements have not been given serious analytical attention (an exception is Ewart 2000 on Panará relationships with peanuts). Maize in particular is a significant yet understudied cultivar for many societies, including some Tupi-Guaraní and most Gê-speaking societies in central

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Brazil. As with manioc, human–maize engagements are also often predicated on consanguineal relations of parenthood and are linked to generative concepts. The Araweté are unique among Tupi-Guaraní-speaking groups for cultivating maize over manioc as a staple food crop. Maize is consumed mainly as beer during ceremonial events in which men play a central role. Women are in charge of making the beer, and the process of fermentation is likened to female gestation because both take place through female transformative activities (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 129). Beer is also placed in opposition to semen, and is sometimes known as the ‘female semen’ (ibid.: 131). Through the ceremonial process of making beer, then, certain aspects of maize become associated with the Araweté notion of femaleness as opposed to maleness. In this way, maize in its fermented state becomes a material manifestation of female personhood. While processing beer is how Araweté women in particular engage with maize, both women and men relate with the plant through gardening activities.

Linking garden crops, and especially maize, to conceptions of personhood and regeneration is a general trend among Gê societies. For the Suyá, there exists a general ‘physical bond between people and crops which is similar to that between parent and child’ (Seeger 1981: 105). As an important ceremonial and food crop, maize is likely to be a particular focus of Suyá–plant engagements. This embodied parental bond with cultivars exists for both men and women. The garden owner and her husband must undergo food restrictions until harvest time in order to protect the crops from harm, a practice that is also undertaken by the parents of new-born babies. Additionally, people who tend the crops (presumably women) will chant near them in the hope of encouraging their growth (ibid.: 104-5). In this way, both Suyá men and women engage with garden crops, especially maize, through relationships of perspectival mastery and ownership. The Apinayé also have a ‘personal sentimental bond’ with their plants (Nimuendajú 1946: 60). As with the Suyá, women conceive of garden crops as ‘children’ and give them human names (Nimuendajú 1939: 90). Certain men have a particularly intimate relationship with cultivated plants. While the woman of each family claims the garden plot as her own, the Apinayé install two men, one from each moiety, to ensure the safety of all the gardens and their crops at the beginning of the planting season (ibid.: 89). During the trekking season, the two men stay behind in the garden area and watch over their ‘children,’ singing and performing magical acts that will encourage plant growth (ibid.: 89-90). Cultivated crops, with maize being one of the main cultivars, also receive other ritual treatments

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similar to those performed on children during the naming and formal friend rituals. Certain adults within a moiety sponsor human children to receive names and moiety-based friends, and specific men of either moiety also sponsor annual new garden ceremonies and special maize harvest ceremonies (da Matta 1973: 284-7; 1982: 68). Through these parallel rituals, both Apinayé and maize children are being perspectively mastered and controlled by Apinayé adults.

In Panará society, it appears that only peanuts are directly analogous to children and the creation of personhood (Elizabeth Ewart, personal communication; Schwartzman 1988: 180; Heelas 1979). Maize is perceived as generative without being specifically linked to personhood *per se*. Gardens in general are also said to ‘articulate generative concepts’ (Heelas 1979: 272). For example, a Panará man should observe food taboos while some crops in his household’s plot are growing. Monkey or armadillo tail must be avoided because both foods would cause the maize crop to ‘grow like tails’ and therefore be inedible (*ibid.*: 252). Food restrictions indicate a link between a man and his crops, but in this case the specific link between a Panará person and maize is based on a generalised notion of regeneration. For some Gê societies such as the Xavante and the Kayapó, engaging with maize is a way to materially manifest individual and societal regeneration and growth. In Xavante society, a portion of the maize harvest is kept solely for ceremonial purposes and combined with hunted game into maize pies, which ‘form the basis of all ceremonial prestations’ (Maybury-Lewis 1967: 42) in the communal naming, male initiation and marriage rituals.² Maize pies are essential to the culmination of important communal life stages, and in this way are integral to individual growth and societal regeneration. While the Kayapó do not consume maize pies, the crop is central to many ceremonial activities. When someone important in the community dies, a ‘death ceremony’ is performed during the maize harvest using a maize crop grown in a separate mono-cropped garden (Hecht and Posey 1989: 182). A ritual also accompanies the initiation of the maize growing season (Posey and Plenderleith 2002: 4). It may be that the maize death ceremony is in conceptual opposition to the life-giving power of the maize growing ceremony, although this cannot be known for sure without further

² For a more in-depth discussion of the importance of these rituals in Xavante society, see Maybury-Lewis 1967). A more thorough explanation of the centrality of maize pies in Gê societies can be found in T. Miller 2010).

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research. Suffice it to say that these ceremonies show the importance of the plant in the maintenance of Kayapó society.

These examples show the myriad ways in which humans and maize become entangled in Amazonia. The plant can be treated as if it were a person, as with the Suyá and Apinayé, and it can be a material manifestation of individual and/or societal growth, as can be seen in the Araweté, Panará, Xavante and Kayapó communities. Although the relationships among people and maize vary among all of these societies, attempting perspectively to access and master the plant does appear to be a common theme. Similar to manioc in the north-west Amazon, most of these Tupi-Guaraní and Gê societies attribute some kind of ‘soul’ to maize and conceive of it as being controlled by a master spirit. In Kayapó society, all beings possess a ‘soul’ or ‘energy’ known as *karon*, and socially significant animals and plants each have a master spirit who must be appeased through ritual performances. Through these ceremonies, humans control the master spirits and their plants and animals, ensuring a continued ecological, cosmological and societal ‘balance’ (Posey and Plenderleith 2002: 79). As mediatory ‘balancing agents’ (ibid.: 35), maize and its *karon* must be engaged with and mastered through ceremonial performances. According to Kayapó myth, the supernatural being in control of maize is either Mouse or Rat, depending on the version employed. Mouse/Rat assists the people in perceiving maize as food, because prior to his arrival it was seen as inedible and the people were eating rotten wood (Wilburt 1978: 223, 227). Thus, the Kayapó are able to engage perspectively with maize only with the assistance of Mouse/Rat, the mythical master or ‘owner’ of maize. The Suyá maize origin myth is similar, with Mouse showing a mother and her son the maize plants growing near the bathing hole (Seeger 2004: 26-7). Once again, the Suyá had been eating rotten wood even though maize was growing in their village because they were unable to perceive the plant as a food crop. Only by accessing the perspective of Mouse, the master spirit of maize, were the Suyá able to interact with the maize itself. Mouse is also conceived of as the ‘owner’ of maize in the Panará myth, and he shares his knowledge of the ‘beautiful’ maize to an old Panará woman (Ewart 2000: 151). While Mouse, the owner of maize, is conceptually second to Agouti, the owner of peanuts (ibid.: 153), the relationship among Mouse, maize and humans is still central to Panará society.

In Apinayé society, all beings have a soul known as *me-galõ* that leaves the body after death (Nimuendajú 1939: 140). This may help explain why maize is treated

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as if it were a person. However, the Apinayé were also not able to engage perspectively with maize prior to its introduction by the mythical Star-Woman. In both of the recorded Apinayé maize origin myths, Star-Woman is responsible for showing maize and its techniques of cultivation to the community. While one version has Star-Woman showing maize growing from a tree to her mother-in-law, the second myth portrays her bringing the cultivar down from the sky (Wilburt 1978: 213-14). Whether maize is interpreted as ‘heaven-sent’ or an earthly product, it is clear that Star-Woman has dominion over the plant and shares her masterful perspective of maize with the Apinayé people. For the Araweté community, the masters of maize are *azang* spirits that control its growth (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 263). The Araweté do not perceive a need to engage in direct perspectival relationships with these spirits, choosing instead to focus on encounters with the gods, or *mai*, during the mild and strong beer festivals. Maize still plays a central role in this engagement, serving as the mediator between shamans and the supernatural *mai*. Unfortunately, specific human–maize perspectival entanglements do not appear in the literature on the Xavante (cf. Maybury-Lewis 1967: 48), although future research would most likely reveal similar human–maize relationships. In many Gê and some Tupi-Guaraní societies, however, maize is an integral part of a variety of master–mastered relationships that together comprise the Amazonian perspectival world view (cf. Fausto 2008). While the plant may not always be directly mastered by humans, the triadic relationship between humans, maize and master spirits is central to the material culture of these societies and must not be overlooked.

Some archaeologists and anthropologists have criticized the placing of cultivated plants in the category of ‘material culture’ due to their status as purely ‘functional’ entities solely required for nutritional intake (cf. Roosevelt 1980). There has also been a tendency to overlook Amazonian cultivation practices due to the apparent ‘inefficiency’ with which semi-nomadic communities tend their gardens (Maybury-Lewis 1967: 47). However, it is clear from the above ethnographies that manioc and maize are important socio-culturally emphasised cultivars in various Amazonian societies. While the cultivation of maize and manioc may not appear significant at first glance, a more thorough analysis reveals that the plants are central to many aspects of integrated Amazonian ecologies, cosmologies and societies. In addition, these cultivars are integral to Amazonian material culture, or person–thing engagements. A thorough analysis of material culture in Amazonia and other parts of

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the world must include an investigation of plants as well as artefacts, designs, supernaturals and animals. Maize has a particular significance in Amazonian material culture, and its analysis can lead to insights into material culture studies in Amazonia and beyond.

The meshwork applied: implications for Amazonian and material culture studies

If we understand material culture studies as centred on the relationships among persons and things, then this sub-discipline must take into account any item that is considered either a ‘person’ or a ‘thing’ within the society under investigation. In the Amazonian case, beings can alternate between ‘persons’ and ‘things’, and they can fall under both categories simultaneously. As has been shown in certain Amazonian indigenous societies, cultivated plants have a particularly ambiguous status as alternatively persons and things, subjects and objects, masters and mastered beings. The analysis can be taken a step further, however, by investigating what sort of process is taking place within human–plant relationships. Are these encounters between composite entities acting within a network, as Latour (1993a) suggests? Although there are beings such as the *apapaatai* that are considered both ‘monstrous’ and ‘hybrid’ (Barcelos-Neto 2009: 133-4), they are not equivalent to Latour’s (1993b) ‘monstrous hybrids’ due to their emergent and embodied characteristics. The *apapaatai*, like other artefacts, animals and plants, are in a continual process of becoming and of re-negotiating their statuses in the web of Amazonian relational experiences. These beings are not simply one part human, one part non-human (cf. Latour 1993a), but rather include complex mixes of humanity, monstrousness, subjectivity and objectivity.

Based on the ethnographic analysis undertaken above, it can be argued that actor network theory does not apply to Amazonian lived realities of embodied engagements among various processual, emergent beings. Instead, it appears that Amazonian person–thing relationships can be understood as part of an overarching meshwork that extends through time and space (Ingold 2008). While Ingold keeps his discussion of the meshwork at a theoretical level, his theory does seem to correspond closely to the Amazonian ethnographic material. In order to understand this correspondence more fully, a brief sketch of a potential Amazonian meshwork must be outlined, with a particular focus on human–plant encounters. According to Ingold’s theory, all sorts of beings live out their life courses ‘along the lines of the meshwork’

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(Ingold 2008: 212). In this sense, the meshwork is an experiential web that encompasses all types of human–non-human entanglements. At this macro-level, then, the meshwork is simply the realm of human experience that could be applied to any society or community. Outlining the differences (and similarities) among various groups of people-and-things appears to be difficult within this overarching meshwork, and Ingold has been criticized for focusing on the biological and often ‘asocial’ aspects of person–thing relationships at the expense of the social and material ones (Knappett 2007: 21; D. Miller 2007: 27). The meshwork does account for the complexity of and differences among non-human life forms, in contrast to the symmetrical network of equally agentic humans and non-humans (Ingold 2008: 214; Latour 2000). However, the distinctions among non-humans are framed as biological, and the socio-cultural differentiation and valuation of non-humans and humans is overlooked.

This hole in the overarching meshwork theory can be patched through an analysis of a uniquely Amazonian meshwork. Within this web of experience, all beings are enmeshed through everyday encounters that are fundamentally embodied. While the biological diversity of Amazonian beings is clearly apparent, there is also a perspectival diversity of viewpoints and subsequent value judgments. That is, certain perspectival encounters are valued over others by both persons and things. Some Amazonian people prefer to engage with maize and its master spirits, while others become entangled with manioc and its supernatural accomplices. It can be argued that maize and manioc also actively choose and value their experiences with people. For the Cashinahua, maize plants ‘want to turn into people,’ and humans oblige them by singing them songs and giving the plants proper names (Lagrou 2007: 82).³ Although Ingold (2008: 214-15; 2000) focuses on the perceptive attention of certain beings and not others, his theory would be greatly enhanced by an ethnographic analysis of how perceptual experiences are valued in specific contexts. Additionally, Ingold’s notion of a hierarchy of more and less skilled, attentive beings could be expanded to include other types of hierarchical relationships. For as we have seen in the Amazonian context, person–thing relationships are embedded within a series of perspectival master–mastered hierarchies. Thus, the Amazonian meshwork would incorporate how

³ Animals have also been known actively to seek out encounters with humans; see Vilaça 2009) on jaguar seduction of Wari’ people.

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persons and things perceive and make value judgements about each other, recognizing the fluidity of these perceptual experiences.

An Amazonian meshwork would be processual, emphasizing the growth and movement involved in person–thing encounters. For example, the relationship between a person and maize develops and changes over time as each being's life process unfolds. For the Panará, a child may be likened to a young maize plant that is still growing in the earth, while an adult Xavante man engages more with cooked, processed maize pies than with the plant itself (cf. Schwartzman 1988, Maybury-Lewis 1967). In Apinayé society, maize is particularly engaged with while it is growing, while the Kayapó and Suyá tend to encounter the crop perspectively when it is harvested (cf. Nimuendajú 1939, Posey and Plenderleith 2002, Seeger 2004). The Cashinahua continue to engage with maize even after it is eaten. Maize lives inside the human male body until the man's semen, made of maize itself, creates a child inside the mother's womb (Lagrou 2007: 82-3). This last example displays the centrality of embodiment within the Amazonian meshwork. Some encounters, such as those between the Cashinahua man and the maize he consumes, are so enmeshed that it is impossible to distinguish between the 'person' and the 'thing'. Indeed, the Amazonian meshwork would not create distinct categories of 'persons' or 'things', instead recognizing that fusion and fission among various beings is not only possible but often desirable in Amazonian societies. The Araweté warrior who kills his opponent is fused with part of the opponent for eternity (Viveiros de Castro 1992), while shamanic curing involves the fission of the ill person and the spirits who are making him ill. The Cashinahua example also sheds light on the importance of commensality within these fusion and fission relationships. Eating with someone or eating someone can create varying relationships of fusion or of separation, depending on the society and contextual situation. Eating meals together is often seen as constitutive of sociality and personhood (cf. Overing and Passes 2000, Gow 1991), while eating the ashes of the dead is a way for some communities such as the Wari' to distance themselves from their dead kin (Conklin 2001). Although the importance of consumption within human–maize relationships has not yet been thoroughly explored, the centrality of the body in these engagements cannot be ignored. Consuming maize is undoubtedly an act of mastery over the plant, but it may also materially express an intimacy between person and cultivar, as is shown in Cashinahua society.

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This analytical exercise reveals an Amazonian meshwork that incorporates the complex processes of embodiment, consumption, growth and movement involved in person–thing encounters. In this way, the theoretical Amazonian meshwork, and particularly its emphasis on human–plant entanglements, brings new insights into the realm of material culture studies. Amazonian material culture is profoundly complex, with persons and things constantly changing and trading places in the perspectival hierarchy. A person can become like a stalk of maize, that same plant can turn into a person, and the two beings can bond together or break apart through shared embodied practices such as eating, singing or planting. While the perspectival aspect of person–thing encounters appears to be unique to the Amazonian context, the contingency of both persons and things can provide insights into other areas of the world and to material culture studies in general. In fact, some archaeologists such as Holtorf (2002) and Hicks (2010) have already been advocating investigating the contingent, processual nature of things on a broader scale. The Amazonian meshwork can also help shed light on the embodiment of persons and things in other contexts, as explored by Conneller (2004) in archaeological person–antler relations. Finally, applying the meshwork in Amazonia shows the necessity of including value judgments within material culture analyses. If we begin from the starting point that person–thing relationships are perceptually (if not perspectivally) experienced, then it follows that such experiences will be ascribed varying values by both the persons and the things involved. While not all things may be seen as having perceptual capabilities, those that are perceived in this way must be taken seriously.

In Amazonia, cultivated plants and especially maize are seen as having varying levels of perceptual capabilities, although this has not yet received sufficient analytical attention. This article has attempted to fill the gap in the Amazonian literature on human–plant encounters. I have attempted to outline some preliminary ways in which Amazonian material culture could incorporate cultivated plants and maize in a more thorough manner. Material culture studies in general would also benefit from this addition, given that the current ethnographic literature includes even fewer accounts of human–plant engagements than the Amazonian material. Plants are a particularly important and unique part of human society, as simultaneously ‘artefacts’ of past societies (Brush 2004), material markers of current socio-cultural processes and living organisms in their own right. Material culture studies, whether in Amazonia or elsewhere, cannot overlook the centrality of plants in person–thing

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relationships. A serious analysis of cultivated plants as alternatively ‘persons’ and ‘things’ will undoubtedly enrich both material culture and Amazonian studies.

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SOCIAL PROPERTY IN CUBA:
THE IDEAL VERSUS THE REALITY

MARISA WILSON

‘El verdadero revolucionario no vive *de* la Revolución, vive *por* la Revolución’ [A real revolutionary does not live *from* the Revolution, he lives *for* the Revolution]. José Martí (cited by informants)

‘For it is not what *is* that makes us irascible and resentful, but the fact that it is not as it *ought* to be’. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (quoted by Dumont 1977: 108)

Introduction

In a discussion regarding the relatively recent (2007) political campaign to establish a new group of social workers in Cuba (*trabajadores sociales*), I asked people from Tuta¹ to explain these new workers to me. One woman replied: ‘They are young people, *disvinculados* [literally, those who are unbound to society], with problems in school or social problems.’ I asked her what kind of social problems and she responded:

They used to spend their time selling things on the street, engaging in non-productive activities and so on. They did not work for society (*la sociedad*), but took away from society. These people are targeted to go to special schools for *trabajadores sociales* and are given very intense ideological training. When they get out of school they work in Cuba or some get the chance to go abroad to work, to Nicaragua, Venezuela, Brazil ... and the state pays for everything. They are the bad ones yet they are being treated better than the *real* workers! And the normal people who work for society have to suffer!

In the same conversation, another woman spoke of the time before the ‘Special Period’ (the economic crisis of the early to mid-1990s, which for some Cubans persists into the present) when people who worked for ‘society’ got their just due back from the state. During this time, her daughter spent forty-five days a year working in the agricultural

¹ As with the names of people mentioned below, I have disguised the name of the town where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and its inhabitants as ‘Tuta’ and ‘Tutaños,’ respectively.

fields with her secondary school classmates. In return, the state provided her with things their family could not afford:

Our daughter's *quinceniara* [the Latin American coming-of-age party held for girls on their fifteenth birthday] was approaching, and we did not have enough money to buy her a nice outfit. She went with her class to work in the fields for the forty-five day period. And she came back with a large piece of nice fabric given to her by those in charge of the student brigade. I made her a beautiful blouse from it. [...] But now this kind of help for *normal* people doesn't exist. Now it is only party members and deviants who get help!

The juxtaposition of the two above comments is enlightening. In the first, a complaint is made about a group of people who, in the speaker's opinion, do not deserve to receive benefits from the state. In the second, a mother recalls a time when work done by her daughter was rewarded with material benefits. Viewed from a Cuban perspective, both discourses point to a single ideal: social property.

According to some people from Tuta I met during a period of ethnographic fieldwork (2005-07), the ideal of social property, which conforms to the communist adage: 'to each according to his needs, from each according to his capacity', is now being replaced by rewards to select groups in Cuban society such as *trabajadores sociales* or high-level members of the communist party, people who are not always seen as 'normal', that is, humble and hardworking members of society. In contrast to the accumulation of private property by individuals, in the state model that Cuba adopted in the early 1960s, individuals 'ought' to work to create and protect collective assets or social property, which is, in turn, redistributed as use values to secure the 'needs' of all members of society. Social property should be redistributed from the national centre to individual citizens in relation to their state-defined 'needs', as well as their work effort in producing collective assets.

Like many other aspects of Cuba (and elsewhere), the 'ought' of political economic ideas often contradicts the 'is' of reality. In this article, I will further explain how the ideal of social property is supposed to work in Cuban communism, at least through the eyes of Tutaños, and then turn to some local reconceptualisations of the concept, which, perhaps surprisingly, continue to reflect dominant understandings despite Tutaños' innovative strategies for economic survival. In the process, I hope to

reveal how people in Tuta find their own personal version of the state's moral economy – who is entitled to what – via a set of alternative values that are still partially drawn from those promoted by the communist state. Throughout the article, I use extensive quotes from interviews conducted with Tutaños, an anthropological strategy that aims to provide the reader with a more nuanced understanding of how a particular people view their world and what they can justly demand from it.

The ideal of social property in Cuba

In all versions of Marxist-Leninism, state property is regarded as belonging to ‘the people’; it is thus referred to as social property or the patrimony of the people. State property used in production makes more state property, and the latter is, in theory if not always in practice, distributed to the people via state distributive networks (i.e. places of work, neighbourhood distribution centres [*bodegas*], schools, etc.).² Production by workers creates goods which are passed on to higher levels and, in turn, redistributed to people at lower levels as social property.

One interviewee provided a detailed example of the network of Cuban institutions that are supposed see to it that local level *bodegas* and other distributive institutions have foodstuffs for the workers and population at large (at least in 2007; see footnote 2):

There is a Ministry of External Trade and a Ministry of Internal Trade. The latter is divided into the Major Empresa and the Minor Empresa. The Ministry of External Trade is in charge of supplying the Major Empresa, which is in charge of supplying the Minor Empresa. The Major Empresa gives a quota of foodstuffs – rice, beans, spices, meat, as well as bathing soap and washing-up soap – to the Minor Empresa, according, for example, to how many people in a certain locality hold *libretas* (ration books) with special dietary needs or how many workers there are in a work unit. This is how the people at the top keep records of where you live, who you live with and what kind of work you are doing. The Minor Empresa [in turn] distributes these goods to each municipality according to how many primary schools, work nuclei, hospitals, maternity wards, *bodegas* [distribution centres, etc.] they have. Tuta has five thousand work nuclei. All people of working age must work in order to receive their due. [...] It is all very well controlled.

² Raul Castro's reforms in the past year have altered this situation somewhat, seemingly phasing out distribution to work centres and schools, as well as rations. The local effects of these gradual changes have yet to be studied by the author.

According to this explanation, the (re)distributive infrastructure in Cuba links the national, regional and local levels, making each Cuban citizen ‘legible’ (Scott 1998) to the Cuban state by keeping records not only of their nutritional needs, but also of their locations of work and residence (as well as their family situation). A concern for the nutrition, work and residential and familial status of each Cuban is thus the responsibility of institutions at each state level – national, provincial, municipal, council – each of which produces and distributes social property according to plans created by bureaucratic and political institutions at the uppermost levels. The paramount level is the National Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party.

Imbued in this process and other kinds of redistribution in Tuta is a valuation of the individual in terms of the norms of the Cuban communist system, that is, occupation, level of ‘culture’ (as measured, for example, by one’s reputation according to reports from citizens and/or the neighbourhood Committee for the Defence of the Revolution), whether or not a note has been written on one’s dossier with reference to illegal or ‘uncultured’ acts, etc. (see Wilson 2009a: 153-61). It follows that, underlying the conception (and practicable ideal) of social property is a normative view of the person as a noble worker who produces for the revolution and receives his just due from the revolution.

But the Guevarian ‘New Man’ of communism (Guevara 1971 [1965]), whose sole desire is to work for the collective patrimony, has not ‘yet’ been formed in Cuba. Indeed, as the 2007 [1999] version of the Cuban Rules of the Communist Party states (which I was only allowed to read in secret), the amount of state property at ‘this’ socialist *época* (era) is not *yet* sufficient to satisfy the needs of the population (Rules of the Communist Party 1999: 7). According to this line of reasoning, sometime in the future the socialist state will reach the highest level of communism, when it has the means to provide for the needs of all ‘the people as workers’ (ibid.). At this point in the ‘progression of humankind’ (ibid.: 3) money will be abolished, and the only concern of the worker will be his work, a symbol of his or her contribution to the social patrimony.

The normative (and cultural; see below) reasoning for who gets what and why, or the moral economy, is especially important in Cuba since so many ‘normal’ people are seeing scarce goods being diverted to special categories of people, such as *jefes* (high-

level officials or managers of state enterprises). As for many other areas in Cuban society, the relationship between one's occupation and one's rewards is, in local terms, 'complicated' (*complicato*), a word Cubans in Tuta used when referring to issues that may not be easy to discuss, often due to political sensitivities. In interviews, several persons (mostly party militants) claimed that it is right for workers and/or *jefes* at higher levels (such as members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces) to receive more from the state than those in lower positions because, as they said, 'those who are at higher levels do more work for us.' Many other people, however, found this system of graduated rewards and privileges unfair and contrary to socialist goals which set 'the people' above any one individual.

The argument that higher level officials do more work and, in turn, create more social property would perhaps be more convincing if it were not so evident to many Tutaños how many higher-level officials take advantage of their positions to obtain limited goods and resources, as well as how many illegal transactions (e.g. bribes) occur which benefit only those who hold special privileges. Just as there is a way to justify, in political and ideological terms, why some people in Tuta 'eat better' than others (in post-1990s Cuba at least, what one eats is a reflection of one's status; see Wilson 2009b: 6), so, according to one young Tutaño man, there is a way to justify the system of references whereby a person may get a 'better' job in, for example, the tourist service industry, with a good letter from his or her CDR (Committee for the Defence of the Revolution). The idea behind these references from high members of one's CDR is to reward Cubans who follow the example of Che's 'New Man' – he or she who is willing to give up the most time and money for the Revolution, that is, those who engage in a lot of voluntary work. In reality, such privileges may be due more to personal connections than revolutionary dedication.

Deviance from the ideal allocation of social property in Cuba not only jeopardizes the legitimacy of state officials, due to scarcities it also creates the need for locals to create alternative distributive networks. And, as I will argue in the next section, some of the ways Tutaños explain these alternative economic acts is via cultural codes imbued in the very system that often excludes them.

Local reformulations of social property: *particulares*³ and work value

While the ideal of social property is linked to work effort and revolutionary dedication, it is obvious to many Tutaños that state benefits do not always accrue to the most productive, ‘humble’ (*humilde*) people. Personal factors often affect who gets what, as I have already indicated. Thus, despite the communist ideal of centralized redistribution, goods may be diverted at one of many levels by those who ‘grab’ from the state at intermediate stops in the distributive process.

Contrary to private vendors in socialist contexts such as contemporary China, for example, Cuban *particulares* who sell goods derived from both legal and illegal origins are largely not counted in the state distribution system; for this reason they often must buy the components of the products they produce illegally. The official explanation for excluding *particulares* from the state political economic structure may be that goods sold by private vendors, though increasingly seen as an essential addition to the insufficient quantities of items distributed by the state, are not officially recognised as social property. However, in the process of buying and selling, goods may become *localised* social property. When a scarce item such as cooking oil becomes available through black market networks, it is often available only for purchase to a particular group of people, that is, to friends, family or long-term clients of the vendor. Each has access to property exchanged between them largely because of their contribution to and inclusion in the network. Like the official distributive structure, access to black market goods is determined by personal relations. In these circumstances, devotion to the local and/or nuclear ‘family’ (*familiares*) and other looser-knit units (i.e. networks of traders and clients) must co-exist with or even supersede devotion to the national collective (see Wilson 2009a: 163-170).

Contrary to the views of some neoliberal economists (e.g. Ritter 1998), who view the black market in Cuba as a gateway to an emerging market society, goods exchanged between *particulares* and their clients are not ‘free’ flowing commodities at all. Like national networks distributing social property (at least as it is allocated in practice), these

³ *Particulares* are legal and illegal vendors who usually acquire goods through networks of (legal and illegal) suppliers and clients.

goods are moved through complicated channels involving personal relationships. It matters from whom one buys meat, for example. In Tuta, ‘everyone’ knew that *el chino* (the Chinese one)⁴ sold better quality meat at the market than *el gordo* (the fat one). Indeed, as in other (post)-socialist countries, in Cuba ‘supply constrained’ (Verdery 1993: 174) consumers survive mostly by working around the system. And, an essential way of accessing goods is by acquiring information about their location and about people’s trustworthiness (Humphrey 1998; Verdery 2003: 62). Constant communication about where one may find a second-grade item such as fodder ‘taken’ from a factory floor characterizes the ‘acquisitionmanship’ (vs. ‘salesmanship’; Verdery 1993: 174) of such ‘economies of shortage’ (Kornai 1980). Indeed, as Anna Cristina Pertierra argues (2007: 121), personal relationships in consumption and exchange are more prevalent in socialist societies such as Cuba:

Consumers in all societies, whether socialist, capitalist or otherwise, can be seen to cultivate personal relationships that defuse the social distance that trade is often seen to create. Nevertheless, the emphasis in socialist states on the state-managed distribution of goods does seem to have a particular counter-effect in that many socialist consumers value even more highly their personal networks as a resource to offset state-imposed constraints.

While trade between looser-knit ‘communities’ of traders and clients resembles the ‘dark’ side of social property in practice (i.e. access through personal connections), closer-knit patterns of redistribution also encompass more orthodox values embedded in the communist system. For instance, often the way people valued goods allocated to the family and close friends was through the very work effort that went into locating or offering them. Indeed, quite a few Tutaños I spoke with used work as a foil for material values such as quality and variety. Because activity in the home is considered ‘work’ (*trabajo*) as much as paid work is, labour value in Cuba is the cultural scheme through which many Tutaño women rationalised serving foods that were not of the foreign recipient’s standards. When receiving a prepared dish, for example, the person giving

⁴ In Cuba, descendents of Chinese immigrants who have Asian features are often referred to as ‘*chinos/as*,’ just as Afro-Cubans are often called ‘*negros/as*.’ One of my Afro-Cuban friends told me once that such terms only denote racism when used in a negative or harsh manner, rather than the usual joking manner in which they are used.

me the food would often add: 'It is not the best food, but it is made with love.' And before I was served a meal, it was repeatedly made clear how much time it took to find all the ingredients necessary for its preparation:

I had to go to *La Loma* [the hilly area of town to buy the onions, the market to buy the cucumbers and garlic, the pizzeria a state-owned restaurant which includes a state kiosk that sells some foodstuffs] to buy rice, the *chopin*⁵ to buy oil and to several houses to buy enough eggs. I didn't just go to *El Rápido* [literally 'The Rapid,' a store which sells imported and domestic goods in hard currency] to get all of the items at once, like you are used to! It is called *El Rápido* for a reason!

As opposed to strictly practical ideas of 'need' in the Cuban distributive system, such as nutritional requirements, in Tuta the kind of food one gets matters. Supplying provisions for the household or larger social grouping is not just about nutrition or nurture. For women especially, food provisioning is about other values, such as the amount of work it takes to locate goods and make a meal.

Like social property, provisions and cooked food represent more than just material goods to satisfy individual desires; these items also represent a sense of duty to the social group. While the boundaries between nation and family are often fluid, shared understandings and values allow people within their confines to determine who gets what and why.

Conclusion

Edmund Leach wrote that concepts of property and ownership are very important for anthropologists as 'they provide the categories in terms of which social relations are linked with economic facts' (Leach 1965 [1954]: 141). In this brief article, I have tried to show how political constructs such as social property become cultural through economic and social processes that unravel in particular places through time. These processes are two-way, for, as Eric Wolf argued, there is a kind of 'intellectual politics in the creation of culture' (Wolf 1999: 141).

⁵ The '*chopin*' is pronounced like the English word 'shopping' and is used as a noun to describe places where food and other items are sold in CUCs (Cuban Convertible Dollars).

As in other places, in Cuba there is a dialectical relationship between top-down and bottom-up norms and actions, creating unique socio-economic and political patterns that are often missed by those whose sole focus in Cuba is the ‘iron fist’ of state power. In Cuba as in many other communities – whether national, local or otherwise – people are guided by an overarching ideology, but this tells only part of the story. As Louis Dumont wrote:

Any concrete, localized whole, when actually observed, is found to be decisively oriented by its ideology, and also to extend far beyond it ... in every concrete whole we find the formal principle at work, but we also find something else, a raw material which it orders and logically encompasses but which it does not explain, at least not immediately for us [the outside observers]. ... [This raw material] must ... be set in [its] place and related to the ideology which [it] accompan[ies] in fact, it being understood that *it is only in relation to the totality thus reconstructed that the ideology takes on its true sociological significance*. (Dumont 1980 [1966]: 37-8, emphasis in the original)

Although the ideal of social property has not (yet?) materialised in Cuban reality, it is still an important cultural code from which many Cubans in Tuta draw meaning. Indeed, as I have tried to illustrate here, the communist ideal of social property has a great bearing on the meaning and practice of informal exchanges on the ground. I have argued elsewhere (Wilson 2009a: Ch. 1) that in Cuban values such work and social property have historical roots: they are directly tied to the communist version of the person spread most widely in Cuba by the writings of Che Guevara. Despite the power of communist ideology, however, I have also argued (ibid.) that such cultural codes were formulated much earlier in Cuban history, especially through the writings of José Martí, one cultural ‘artefact’ who may indeed be the significant link between Cuban nationalism and Cuban communism.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Mikael Aktor and **Robert Deliege** (eds.), *From stigma to assertion: Untouchability, identity and politics in early and modern India*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press 2010, 230 pp.

This edited volume contains eight chapters, most revised versions of papers originally presented in a panel at the European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies in Prague in 1998. Mikael Aktor tells us in the Preface that the papers seek to ‘put the colonial and post-colonial notion of Untouchability in a wider temporal perspective covering pre-colonial textual material as well as present-day debates over Dalit rights and identity’. Untouchability is thus considered within a vast time frame and from various contrasting angles: from an analysis of ancient Hindu scriptures to the manipulation of caste by slum dwellers in Dharavi. One might think that this wide coverage would make for a disjointed text overall. In fact, the papers relate to each other surprisingly well and together make an original, interesting, insightful and highly readable contribution to the topic.

Robert Deliege’s introduction is characteristically provocative. In his distinctively frank style, he argues that Untouchability is ‘largely a problem of the past’ (p. 24), and that today’s Untouchables cannot be considered as such in the strict sense of the term. Deliege is highly critical of what he calls ‘Dalit ideology’ (a problematic term, in my view) and suggests that contemporary changes to caste have produced a set of paradoxes: first, Dalits have become most assertive at the very moment when Untouchability is most diminished; second, Dalit militants are generally not oppressed themselves, and yet they claim to speak on behalf of the masses about oppression; and third, instead of annihilating caste, activists perpetuate caste distinctions (and prevent class alliance) in pursuit of state benefits. Ultimately, Deliege argues that Dalit rhetoric exploits Untouchability to gain advantage over low-caste groups with whom they are competition.

Aktor’s chapter considers Untouchability in Brahminical law books. Aktor argues that ‘Untouchability in the law books cannot be explained simply in terms of impurity and status’ (p. 58). Untouchables are a distinctive group, he says, represented by a set of avoidances exclusively applied to them. But avoidance is based not simply on impurity, it is also based on ‘inauspiciousness’, a concept that he elaborates in the chapter. Aktor is careful to point out that,

while the law books provide important information about the rules of treatment of Untouchables, they cannot tell us how seriously these rules were taken in practice.

Eleanor Zelliot's illuminating chapter complements Aktor's by analysing some of the work of four extraordinary Untouchable poet-saints of the Bhakti movement: two early Tamil saints, Tiruppan Alvar (Vaishnavite) and Nantanar (Shaivite), the Marathi saint Cokhamela, and the best known of the Untouchable saint-poets, Ravidas. Their legacy not only speaks of the nature of devotion, it also tells us about Untouchability in the medieval period as experienced by Untouchables themselves.

Moving into the post-colonial period, Jocelyn Clarke argues against the tendency to treat the issue of Untouchability as a 'footnote' in the dominant narrative of Indian nationalism and instead cogently discusses anti-Untouchability and anti-Brahman movements alongside the genesis of the Indian National Congress. She examines the attitudes of the major political figures of the period towards the Untouchables, showing how these changed and evolved at the turn of the century with the advent of Independence.

Wyatt's chapter presents current research on Dalit theology and the politics of the Indian Christian churches. This is a welcome contribution to a subfield which is under-studied and often opaque. Wyatt's critical approach is particularly helpful.

Simon Charsley's rich and nuanced chapter builds on his 1996 *JRAI* article in its concern with the construction of Untouchable identity and the possibilities presented by caste-based assertion. Charsley discusses Dalits' creative construction of *jati* identities as a feature of present-day Dalit politics. These identities have meant that 'a common or Untouchable identity has no more than marginal significance for many' (p. 171). He suggests that 'the resilience of *jatis* as major units of collective identity in the society generally means that, instead of "Dalit" displacing those separate identities, it is something added to the available repertoire' (p. 156). Importantly, he also points out that it is the weaker and less organised castes that are least able to assert a distinctive caste identity and are more likely to rely on a common Dalit label. As such, Charsley's chapter provides an important analysis of this cultural turn in Dalit identity formation.

Kathinka Froystad's ethnographic chapter presents research from suburban Uttar Pradesh. She argues that the extension of reservations under the Mandal Commission recommendations has led to a 're-legitimation of discriminatory practices against Untouchables' in urban Uttar Pradesh (p. 180). She presents evidence to suggest the existence

of ‘upper-caste retaliation’ against the recipients of reservation (p. 193), and makes an important point about the re-entrenchment of caste-feeling against lower castes and Dalits.

The final chapter examines Dalit slum-dwellers’ manipulation of caste as a political tool. Based on fieldwork conducted in Dharavi in Mumbai, Saglio-Yatzimirsky shows how Cambhars, Dhors and Holars use caste as a ‘mobilizing agent, a community, a movement’ (p. 226). Illustrating the complexity of political organisation in Dharavi, she highlights the primacy of caste identification and the way in which such loyalties are manipulated by both political parties and Dalits themselves. Like Froystad, she argues that already intense caste rivalry is exacerbated by the reservation policy. But despite these rivalries, interestingly, she predicts an affirmation of Untouchables as a ‘pan-Indian political force’ (p. 229).

These latter chapters beautifully illustrate the forms of complex self-fashioning in which Dalits are currently engaged. The chapters corroborate scholarship on the ‘substantialisation’ (or ethnicisation) of caste and show how the *jati* identity of some (though not all) Dalit castes have become increasingly important in the competitive arena of Dalit and electoral politics. They point to the increasing fragmentation among Dalits, as well as the centralising pulls towards a common ‘Dalit’ denominator. They also highlight the problems with any label that claims to represent and unify those castes that have suffered Untouchability, and the way in which the state has been implicated in categorisation.

This intense concern with issues of identity in contemporary India makes it difficult for scholars to imagine and understand Untouchability as it existed in the past. Reading the second half of the book alongside the first is helpful in this regard and reminds us of the historical specificity of Untouchability as it is understood today.

Predictably, my criticisms concern the coherence of the volume. In this regard, each of the authors might have made more effort to link their own papers with others in the volume. It also would have been helpful if the editors had discussed the papers both thematically and theoretically at the start. Moreover, although Aktor discusses the contributors’ choice of terminology (p. 12; somewhat inadequately in my view), given the topic of the volume, a more detailed discussion of the very words ‘Dalit’ and ‘Untouchable’ would have been useful. As it is, the authors’ use of ‘Untouchable’ gives a somewhat out-dated feel to otherwise up-to-date descriptions of a contemporary scenario.

On the whole, however, this is an engaging, original and important intervention into the field. It makes a critical, finely observed and empirically based contribution to several debates

on the ‘Dalit question’. It presents new material from different parts of India and is provocative and stimulating in its arguments. Taken together, the papers encourage a Dalit-oriented re-reading of history, while also prompting us to consider the usage and indeed the applicability of the term ‘Untouchability’ in contemporary India.

CLARINDA STILL

Dawn Chatty and Bill Finlayson (eds.), *Dispossession and displacement: forced migration in the Middle East and North Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, xiii, 298 pp. £21.99.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region encompasses a complex history of population displacements, and recent forced movements resulting from wars in Iraq and Afghan underscore the importance of further research on the topic. In *Dispossession and displacement*, the editors, Dawn Chatty and Bill Finlayson, present eleven case studies from this diverse region, grouped into four themes: displacement, repatriation, identity in exile and policy. The volume’s chapters, drawn from a 2008 British Academy conference, encompass multiple disciplinary approaches and research on a range of displaced populations – Turkish Cypriot, Palestinian, Sahrawi, Afghan and Iraqi – in several MENA countries, namely Cyprus, Palestine, Algeria, Iran, Jordan and Iraq.

In her legal analysis of the prospects of the Turkish community settled in northern Cyprus, who face pressure to repatriate to a country most of them have never entered, Yaël Ronen assesses the proposed relocation within a comparative framework of international human rights law, concluding that the arguments for repatriation may override settlers’ rights to stay settled as they are. In another view on Cyprus, Peter Loizos and Tobias Kelly compare its peace process with that between Israel and Palestine, focusing particularly at the roles of refugees in both protracted conflicts. By systematically comparing the historical, legal, economic, political and geopolitical frameworks of each conflict, the authors show that the importance of refugees for the achievement of peace depends on political and economic power: Greek-Cypriot refugees are comfortable enough that ‘solving’ their situation through return is neither needed nor sought, whereas Palestinians are widely marginalized, making their situation a much more pressing concern in conflict resolution.

The extent of this marginalization is the focus of Maher Anawati Bitar's chapter on internal displacement in the occupied Palestinian Territories. Whereas the topic of Palestinians living as refugees throughout MENA is reasonably well researched, little attention has been paid to Palestinians, either as internally displaced or as 'internally stuck'. Bitar examines the direct and indirect triggers of such displacement, showing how the government of Israel acts to expand its territory – most dramatically its ongoing construction of a 700-kilometre concrete and fence barrier, known as 'the Wall' – have amounted to a systematic process of depopulation. Given the humanitarian implications of this, Bitar's argument for greater attention to internal displacement in the occupied Palestinian Territories is well-taken, especially as he lays out initial strategies for further research.

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh provides a compelling examination of the relationship between Algeria-based Sahrawi refugees and the Spanish groups that provide direct aid and host Sahrawi youth for education in Spain. Based on extensive fieldwork and interviews, the author argues that enthusiastic Spanish solidarity with the Sahrawi is predicated on a particular and problematic representation of the refugees that frames them in contrast to the rest of the Middle East, particularly with regard to Islam and gender equality. Sahrawi political leadership has adapted to this 'conditional solidarity' in order to ensure its continuation, despite the tensions it creates – most dramatically in the case of three Sahrawi girls living in Spain who became the centre of a political storm when their parents asked that they come home.

Four chapters of *Dispossession and displacement* provide views of the dynamics of Afghan forced displacement, from the macro to micro levels. Alessandro Monsutti uses multi-sited fieldwork on international Afghan migratory networks to illustrate the importance of transnationalism in the anthropological study of forced migration. Mamiko Saito and Paula Kantor examine the 'return' of second-generation Afghan youth from Pakistan and Iran to a little-known homeland, arguing for anthropological perspectives and methods to inform more appropriate policy responses and reintegration programming. Zuzanna Olszewska takes a literary approach, examining poems by Afghan poets in exile to illustrate the ambivalent identity and confusion faced by young Afghans in Iran and upon their return. Sarah Kamal contributes a yet finer-grained view with her longitudinal study of four Afghan young people over five years, from their existence in Iran to their return and eventual reintegration into Afghanistan. Taken together, these chapters complicate any notion of simple push and resolution in Afghan refugee movements.

Unlike the Afghan-centred chapters, the three papers concerned with Iraq complement rather than build on each other. Géraldine Chatelard argues that the popular framing of the post-Saddam Hussein refugee crisis conceals a long and complex history of Iraqi and regional politics, relationships and migratory patterns; she takes a historical approach that ‘re-embeds’ recent movements in the context that shapes them. Laura Hamblin and Hala Al-Sarraf’s paper is in contrast ethnographic and brief, analysing the oral histories of seventy Iraqi women in Amman to highlight their views on class, religion, gender roles and child-rearing, and how each of these identity elements has been challenged by their precarious legal and economic statuses as refugees in Jordan. Nabil Al-Tikriti focuses primarily on the war in Iraq, critiquing the policies that have cleaved the diverse country into three parts along artificial ethnosectarian lines, fuelling violence and destroying social capital in the process. Al-Tikriti chronicles the breakdown of social and political order through a review of policy milestones, concluding with their impact on population displacement.

The forced displacements discussed in *Dispossession and displacement* are wide-ranging but by no means the sum of forced migration in MENA. Instead the volume aims to identify issues and situations for further research, which, as Chatty argues convincingly, is both urgent and important. In the epilogue, she examines how ‘the past is prologue’ with a historical review of displacements in the region, from the end of the Ottoman, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires to the mass displacement of Palestinians. In the call for continued research, Chatty highlights the situation of Iraq’s exiles, and, acknowledging the limits of the book, refers to some of the refugee-hosting countries – Pakistan, Syria and Egypt – not addressed in it.

The volume will be most useful for anthropologists interested in themes of identity, transnationalism, gender, migration and exile, and for those studying the populations or countries it covers. It is an accessible reference, with notes on each contributor and a section of abstracts easing the review of its contents.

Although it certainly contributes valuable ethnographic and policy analysis to discussion of its four themes of displacement, repatriation, identity in exile and refugee policy, *Dispossession and displacement* is primarily descriptive. Its contributors engage in theory to varying degrees – especially Monsutti, with his discussion of transnationalism – but the volume as a whole does not make a particular theoretical argument, nor does it attempt to. However, what it does, and does successfully, is bring to its topic the fundamentally anthropological

principle of comparison. As such, the volume is strongest when its authors converse with each other. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Kamal and Olszewska each refer to other texts in the volume or to the volume as a whole. This is a practice that the editors of any collection of diverse papers would do well to encourage, developing as it does an internal cohesiveness, a sense of conversation, and the building of themes and knowledge across a volume.

A book on displacement in MENA might seem at first glance superfluous in the face of the considerable, if frequently policy-oriented body of research on forced migration in the region. *Dispossession and displacement* is a rare and important effort, however, considering the absence of work of its scope since the recent mass displacements in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the generally disparate and geopolitically stratified character of existing research. Too infrequently, particularly in urgency-imbued fields such as refugee studies, do we step back from our particular areas of focus in order to reflect on their implications, similarities and differences. Chatty and Finlayson have done so by presenting the selected papers side by side and discussing them in their wider regional context, thus both contributing to and advocating further research into forced migration in the Middle East and North Africa, and opening up a space for discussion and comparison within this field.

NORA DANIELSON

Rebecca M. Empson, *Harnessing fortune: personhood, memory and place in Mongolia*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press and British Academy 2011, xv, 408 pp., £65.00 in hardback.

Harnessing fortune offers a welcome overview of Buryat Mongol notions of *hishig*, a polysemic phenomenon that may alternatively mean ‘blessings’, ‘grace’, or in Empson’s analysis, ‘fortune’. Studies on Mongolia have long shown that *hishig* is part of an extensive repertoire of idioms about the contingency of events, such as *buyan* (merit or virtue), *khiimor*’ (fortune or vitality), *az* (luck), *zavshaan* (opportunity), *khuv zaya* (fate) or *üiliin ür* (karma). The title of Empson’s volume immediately evokes its namesake, Krystyna Chabros’s (1992) seminal volume *Beckoning fortune: a study of the Mongol Dalalya ritual*. Empson, though, offers a new window on to how Hori Buryats in Hentii Province conceive of *hishig* and

produce their sociality and livelihood through it. In this spirit, *Harnessing fortune* contributes to the wealth of anthropological knowledge that has recently emerged on the different kinds or ‘shares’ of fortune – including the lack of fortune – in present-day Mongolian households (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Hamayon 1995; Højer 2009; Humphrey 1996; Pedersen and Højer 2008; Swancutt 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2008).

The book’s strength is its new ethnographic findings on the household chest, photographic displays, embroideries, rebirths and even arson attacks within Mongolia. Empson grounds her analysis upon the ‘separation and containment’ of both human relations and *hishig*-fortune, although she also contrasts the visible/hidden and attached/detached relations between people, objects, forces, etc. She highlights how these different registers of Buryat life hang together through a ‘tension’ which renders them mutually constitutive (p. 321). To this end, she builds upon perspectival approaches from the anthropological literature on Amazonia, Strathern’s oeuvre on personhood in Melanesia, and other works that emphasize how the *processual person* lives through ongoing processes of change. Whilst Empson says that her analysis ‘avoids a dual idea of bone versus blood, elders versus shamans, or centre versus periphery, district centre (or city) versus countryside’, I feel that she actually gives ethnographic contextualisation to these oppositions, showing their overlaps and mutual dependence, rather than merely collapsing the distinctions between them (p. 19).

Each part of Empson’s book presents useful findings for the anthropology of Mongolia. The Introduction discusses the modes of social and economic livelihood within the present-day Mongolian district centre called ‘Ashinga’ and its remote countryside. Within it, Empson suggests that Buryat social relations are never static, but are reconfigured over time through ever-shifting constellations of new and older contacts. Chapter 1 gives a thorough description of Buryat history – especially in relation to Ashinga – connecting narratives of migration, dislocation, persecution and loss from the first couple of decades of the twentieth century to the present-day pressures of navigating within the neo-liberal Mongolian economy. In Chapter 2, Empson describes how *hishig*-fortune is alternately beckoned through everyday popular religious practices and sacrifices undertaken during seasonal rituals held at stone cairns (*ovoo*) on mountain tops. Drawing on a term coined by Piers Vitebsky, she argues that there is an ‘aesthetics of propriety’ surrounding the handling of *hishig*-fortune, which is first gathered in accordance with ideas about ‘the right way of doing things’ and then contained in brightly

coloured fortune bags sewn for the purpose, which are occasionally opened to disperse and receive its contents (p. 95; see also pp. 93-4).

Revealingly, the heavy emphasis which Buryats in Ashinga place upon the proper means of beckoning fortune appears to be specific to *hishig* – which is conventionally translated not as ‘fortune’ as for Empson, but as ‘blessing’, ‘grace’, ‘favour’ or ‘boon’. I feel it is important to flag that, in addition to *hishig*, the Mongolian field of fortune contains a vast repertoire of related notions, which are ontologically distinct enough to require different modes of engaging with them. So I offer just some brief examples from my own work here, to highlight these subtle differences. Fieldwork that I carried out in 2000 among Hori Buryats in the Evenk Nationality Autonomous Banner of Inner Mongolia, China, showed that ‘blessings obtained through merit’ (*buyan hishig*) are ideally *not* pursued as a transaction, or with the aim of extracting any kind of fortune from the spirits or gods (Swancutt 2003). Instead, these very Buddhist Buryats emphasised that *hishig*-blessings should be obtained through modest and upright labours – a notion which resonates with Empson’s ethnography about the ‘right way’ of beckoning *hishig*-fortune.

By contrast, my long-term fieldwork among the more shamanic Aga Buryats of Dornod Province – who live about 500 km east of Empson’s research district of Ashinga – gave rise to different findings. These Aga Buryats hold that, when shamanic spirits or Buddhist gods observe people behaving especially virtuously (*buyantai*), they often send them boons of *khiimor*’, which literally means ‘wind-horse’, but refers to ‘fortune’, ‘vitality’ or even the material incarnation that fortune assumes when printed as a galloping horse on the fortune-summoning flags flown outside the home (*khiimoriin dartsag* or *khiimoriin tug*). Accordingly, these Aga Buryats consider that some people might act virtuously, with the hidden intention of attracting ample boons of *khiimor*’-fortune (Swancutt in press-a).

One last point of difference is worth mentioning here. Both my Aga Buryat friends and Empson’s Hori Buryat friends share the ‘more general perception that there are certain “right” or “correct” ways of doing things and these should not be innovated upon, nor do they need to be elaborated with different meanings’ (p. 99). However, Aga Buryats do not belabour these points about propriety whenever the ‘correct’ practices fail to raise their *khiimor*’-fortunes, but instead promptly produce innovative magical remedies to improve them (Swancutt in press-b, 2008 and 2006). I feel that, among other things, this difference is traceable to the fact that *hishig*-fortune and *khiimor*’-fortune have different semantic and moral registers. This makes

sense in light of the fact that, at different historical moments, *hishig*-fortune, *khiimor*'-fortune, and other kinds of Mongolian fortune – such as *süld*-fortune (the 'battle-standard' fortune which conveys 'militant strength', 'might' or 'majesty') – have appealed to specific groups of Mongols and attracted different responses from them. Taking account of this rich range of difference within the Mongolian field of fortune is therefore essential to gaining a full understanding about it.

In Chapter 3, Empson describes how seasonal movement creates an ongoing reconfiguration of homes, personal affects and interpersonal relations, especially between the district and far countryside locations. This is the backdrop to her discussion about the household chest, photographic montages, embroideries and photo albums as media which convey elements of relationships that are 'separated' from or 'contained' within the household. Although I would have liked to have seen more in-depth discussion about the academic literature on montage, Empson usefully compares Buryat photographic montages and genealogical diagrams, showing that each of these are formal media with specific aesthetic criteria that are meant to be looked at, so that they comprise a 'photographic event' in Pinney's sense of the term (Empson, p. 132). Similarly, she demonstrates that embroideries may display women's aspirations and hints of their personal sentiments. In contrast, Empson reveals that photo albums offer spontaneous, un-posed configurations of people, which are contained within the household chest until their owners wish to share them privately within the home.

In Chapter 4, Empson highlights the 'liminal' qualities of life experienced by Buryat infants, young children and daughters-in-law. Here, she describes the 'umbilical relation', or close connection felt between mothers and children, which is often protected by storing the child's last trace of umbilical cord inside of the natal household chest. Importantly, on pages 172-4, Empson also links dangers surrounding the liminal phase of childhood to more general anxieties about trust within Ashinga, thus calling to mind Lars Højer's (2004) study of the 'anti-social contract', enmity and suspicion in northern Mongolia, which I felt it would have been especially fruitful to engage with here.

In Chapter 5, Empson launches a discussion of figure-ground reversals which is heavily influenced by Roy Wagner, showing that different kinds of Buryat mirrors may trap elements of the person or cause that person to adopt different perspectives. Two diagram-led discussions reveal that the Buryat who looks into the mirror displayed on the household chest receives an 'exemplary' view of him- or herself, surrounded by family portraits (and their reflections)

which flank either side of the mirror (p. 197; see also p. 185). But while the portraits and the viewer's reflection cast a collective gaze back on to the Buryat person – which 'separates the viewer from his gaze' in an oddly tête-à-tête experience – different elements within this assemblage of viewer, mirrors, portraits and chest comprise the shifting foreground or background of the total experience (p. 197).

Some parts of Chapter 5 could have been enhanced through comparisons with parallel works in the field. Empson's discussion of the exemplary Buryat person, whose image appears when looking at the household chest, hinges upon the idea that 'the figure revealed through the chest is impossible for a living person [to become], who, although a mother, daughter-in-law, and sister, etc., cannot visibly enact all these relations at a single moment in time' (p. 197). Her point is that only the artificial technology of the mirror placed on top of the household chest can reveal the exemplary view of the Buryat person because the mirror displays the sum total of that person's qualities, capacities and achievements. The mirror on the household chest, then, offers a view on to the Buryat person from all angles at once. Ideally, Empson would have linked her thoughts to Holbraad and Willerslev's (2007) penetrating 'Afterword' to a special issue on perspectivism in *Inner Asia*, which she co-edited together with Pedersen and Humphrey. Holbraad and Willerslev draw upon works by Merleau-Ponty, Holenstein and others to show that the 'view from everywhere' is actually the 'normative ideal' which no person can fully match, so that 'not all perspectives are of equal value' (2007: 340). Their findings would have underscored Empson's argument that the exemplary image cast by the household mirror 'idealises the subject's real position' *precisely because* that image is the normative ideal from which all other views of the Buryat person deviate (p. 198).

Later in Chapter 5, Empson offers the important insight that 'separation is an ontological precondition for harnessing and increasing fortune for the household and its herds' (pp. 200-1). Empson's argument is very convincing in the cases of *hishig*-fortune that she describes, 'such as extracting the tail hair from a cow, [where] something [i.e. the cow for sale] has to be given away in order for a piece [i.e. of the sold cow's tail hair] to be kept back to support and increase fortune for the household' (p. 200). This finding in particular expands our knowledge about the different ontological foundations of the field of Mongolian fortune. For instance, just as Empson shows that *hishig*-fortune follows the principle of 'separation', I would suggest that *khiimor*'-fortune improves or declines in response to a running streak of good or bad *khiimor*', so that it follows the principle of 'like attracts like' (Swancutt in press-b).

Shifting the focus to rebirths in Chapter 6, Empson demonstrates how children or possessions may act as temporary ‘vessels’ which carry a specific Buryat’s personhood across space and time. This emphasis carries over into Part Three of her book, titled ‘Absent Presences’, which could have been taken a step further by engaging with Lars Højer’s (2009) work on ‘Absent Powers’. From Chapter 7 onwards, Empson explores the influence of movement and animistic capacities within the Hori Buryat environment. She reveals the anxieties of Buryats in Ashinga about extracting resources through hunting or mining. Significantly, she also discusses local shamans’ efforts to uncover sites of long-term historical importance in Ashinga, to which Hori Buryats give offerings, in the hope of underscoring their attachments to what could be called their ‘new homeland’, borne out of recent migration.

Chapter 7 is well worth reading, although some of the discussion about the ‘land’ merits further clarification. On page 238, Empson draws upon Pedersen’s (2007) study of Darhad perspectivism, which describes the ‘vast unmarked territory that is not inhabited’ by people as a ‘void’. Building upon this finding, she describes the ‘tension between movement across a void and fixed locations in a centred stillness’ that arises when Buryats disperse from their homes to hunt, collect nuts or berries, watch after children in the district centre, travel to the capital city, and so on (p. 238). Soon afterwards, though, she wants ‘to stress that people do *not* see the land as some passive background setting or empty void’ (p. 252, my emphasis). The inconsistency highlights the importance of pairing an indigenous term for places outside of human habitation – such as the Mongolian phrase ‘wilderness terrain’ (*zelüüd gazar*), which is the abode of land masters or nature spirits (*gazrin ezed*) – with finer definitions of what is meant by an abstract concept, such as the ‘void’. This is not to challenge the use of abstract thought, but to encourage (wherever possible) the most precise and ethnographically appropriate application of it.

The book reaches a dramatic highpoint in Chapter 8, where Empson introduces ethnography about the arson attacks in Ashinga, which simultaneously ‘level out’ wealth differences in the neo-liberal economy and revive the unspoken surveillance from socialist times. She calls attention to the fears that anyone might unleash an arson attack or be suspected of setting fire to a home in Ashinga, which is the *only* district at present within Mongolia where arson is regularly used to attack neighbours (pp. 281-2). We read that one Buryat household warded off these attacks by consulting a shaman, who advised ‘that they create a magical fence around the house that would protect the family against future attack’ (p. 282). This striking

ethnography echoes my earlier findings on Buryat curse-blocking and vampiric imp-blocking remedies that operated as magical fences around the home, which I describe in two different articles about shamanic innovations in the *JRAI* (Swancutt 2006 and 2008).

Tellingly, Empson views arson attacks as a means of unleashing ‘an extra element that is not always obvious with cursing and gossip-spells, namely *public* humiliation’ (p. 310, original emphasis). Her points about launching arson attacks to ensure public defaming, soothe envy and undercut the accumulation of wealth in the neo-liberal economy are all well-taken. But I wonder too whether houses are targeted in Ashinga because it has a flourishing house-making industry, which is fairly specific to Hentii Province, where logs are sourced and houses are built before being sent off to other parts of Mongolia? Like herd animals, these houses built for sale are meant to be ‘separated off’ from the total fortune of any given household in Ashinga, as a means of wealth-building. Conversely, locals in Ashinga live within homes that are wealth-receiving, so that they ‘contain’ the profits acquired through the housing business. It may well be, then, that the impact of the housing industry on arson attacks offers another avenue for Empson to explore in future. By way of conclusion, Empson draws together her main themes in Chapter 9, which is followed by several colourful and photo-rich appendices.

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KATHERINE SWANCUTT

Arthur W. Frank, *Letting stories breathe: a socio-narratology*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010, 209 pp.

What are stories, and what do they do? Stories can certainly be very diverse, ranging from jokes to autobiographies, from news reports to gossip, or indeed, stories about stories. Anecdotes, personal accounts and myths are just a few kinds that have traditionally dominated anthropological fieldwork. Not every narration is a story, and stories are more than just narration. Socio-narratology, as proposed by Arthur Frank, is ultimately concerned with how life becomes social, and as such offers an alternative take on what was always of greatest interest to anthropologists. This ongoing creation of the social takes place through the common symbolic work of stories and humans working together. According to Frank, stories are our companions, and do not just reflect life but actively shape it. Building on the premise that openness is one of the main properties of stories, he rejects the idea of a definition in the strict sense and, armed with a rich collection of examples, instead focuses on what stories are capable of doing, that is, their *capacities*.

Most stories share a common sequential form. A typical story begins with an *abstract* which attracts the listeners' attention and may indicate the genre, followed by an *orientation* setting out main characters, time and place. Then something out of the ordinary happens: a *complicating event* requiring a response, leading eventually to a *resolution*. This may be followed by an *evaluation*, or commentary provided by the storyteller, and a *coda* that eventually brings the story to an end, indicating that others may take their turn at speaking. The central part, or *complicating event*, which may or may not present a problem or difficulty to the characters, refers to something out of the ordinary that starts the development of a plot. This is why one of the most important capacities of stories is *trouble*. Stories offer us ways to deal with trouble, but can also make trouble, as, for example, when stories of the past are used for political indoctrination or military mobilization.

A related capacity of stories is to make one *point of view* particularly compelling. While this may expand our understanding of another's situation and help to develop empathy, listeners can at times get 'caught up' in a story. If it is too compelling, they might feel that the point of view presented is the only one that matters. Stories captivate people through their capacity for *suspense*, through which people are reminded of possibilities for different developments and various endings. Stories are centred around characters and have a capacity to reveal people's *character* along with different possibilities for action. People can work with these as resources for their own identities. Stories show how to act and how not to act, they distinguish good and bad through their *inherent morality*. They tell the *truth*, but they also have a capacity to perform it, not just to report it, and by including various voices they convey the truth that there are many truths. Above all, stories have an open quality, being open to various interpretations. This *interpretive openness* enables them to transmit a form of knowledge that is versatile and can be used in situations that could not have been predicted. Stories themselves can thus get *out of control* and act in ways that storytellers did not anticipate.

Socio-narratology might offer a way of looking at people's lives through the stories they live with, since stories seem truly to shape everyday experience – what people do in the world, not just how they see it. This active aspect is well captured in Frank's description of stories as 'material-semiotic companions' to people, drawing on the ideas of John Law and Donna Haraway. Stories have a semiotic quality, just like the material world; they are made of signs and sometimes take a material form. They are also the companions of humans, in the sense of the 'companion species' explored by Haraway. Companion species take care of each other and shape each other in the process, developing together and allowing each other to be what they are. Frank's claim here resonates with recent anthropological interest in human-nonhuman relations and hints at a way past prevalent distinctions between concepts and things, objects and agents, or the material and the psychological. Stories stand between these opposites and make the distinction irrelevant.

Being material-semiotic companions of humans, stories allow humans to be. They do this in a variety of ways, by connecting people and providing collective identities, for instance, and by calling for collective action. Because of their openness, they can mobilize people who can recognize their differing interests, in various guises, within the same story. Stories can tell people who they are and shape their narrative identity through identification with its characters. Frank acknowledges that this identification is not simple or straightforward and that different

stories succeed at capturing people to different extents, depending on their prior knowledge, or rather the other stories they already know. Stories that do not seem to ‘speak to’ those we already know might fail to register. Stories help make sense of the world, as they provide us with a guidance system for selection and evaluation, thereby enabling us to focus our attention. In short, stories provide us with an apparatus for seeing the world, without which judgement is impossible.

Frank’s arguments in this regard might usefully be traced to Gadamer’s notion of prejudice, a central notion in his project of hermeneutics, which is as much a study of interpretation as a theory of knowledge. Prejudice in Gadamer’s work does not have the strongly negative connotation it has in everyday usage but refers simply to all the prior knowledge and beliefs one holds that enable us to focus on some things and not others. While undoubtedly restrictive, this is also indispensable for any form of understanding, a prerequisite for making sense of what is interpreted, but also the world at large. One simply cannot make any sense of the undifferentiated mass that is the world. But to achieve understanding one must be open, and both the restrictiveness of our knowledge and this openness to the new and the other are summed up in the idea of our knowledge as our horizon. The process of understanding the other involves the merging of these horizons.

Frank explicitly acknowledges the influence of Gadamer when discussing the interpretation of stories, using his ideas to move away from simple decoding towards nuanced *understanding*. Yet one could argue that Gadamer’s influence is much more pervasive, since it underlies Frank’s own theory of knowledge. In fact, it underpins his ideas in two ways: in terms of how knowledge is acquired, enabling humans to understand the world; and in terms of how the interpretation of stories can proceed: through openness and striving toward understanding of the other. This is not unlike the work of anthropologists.

Based on hermeneutical insights, Frank proposes a method for working with stories which he calls dialogical narrative analysis, which stresses openness and dialogue. Dialogue is important because it helps us to avoid fixing things, pinning them down, giving a final verdict on the meaning of the story or its content. Finalization sums everything up to the point there is nothing more to be said, either about the story or the storyteller. It makes a total pronouncement: ‘there is nothing more to be said about you’. But stories resist finalization. Like humans, they are ‘always *more*’.

IZA KAVEDŽIJA

Keith Hart, Jean-Louis Laville and Antonio David Cattani (eds.), *The human economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2010, xvi, 371 pp.

Economics is often called the dismal science, a dismissive attitude that has had a certain tendency to be translated on to anthropology as well. However, one man who has pioneered its study as something far removed from dry statistics and formal models is the anthropologist Keith Hart, well known in particular for his work on the so-called ‘informal economy’, precisely that aspect of the economy which escapes such statistics, not to mention the state’s taxation, permits, borders, etc., yet is vital in sustaining livelihoods the world over. Now he has joined two professors of sociology in editing a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary volume of shortish general essays on aspects of the contemporary world economy. The overall framework in which the book is set is the recent world financial crisis starting in 2008 and the severe, though not yet fatal challenge and shock it has presented to neo-liberal, exclusively market-oriented economic models and practices. However, its genesis actually goes back way beyond that, to the World Social Forum held some ten years previously in Porte Alegre, Brazil, which sought to chart an alternative pathway for economic development than that mapped out by the still western-dominated Bretton Woods institutions and the more recent World Trade Organization, a pathway designed to do more than these institutions seem able to do to improve economic conditions for the millions of the world’s marginalized and disadvantaged. The Forum, therefore, like this book, highlighted third-world and alternative (i.e. mainly non-Anglo-Saxon) perspectives on the world economy and its biases towards wealth-production for the already wealthy at the expense of poverty-production for the already poor. This led to a series of publications in other languages (chiefly Portuguese and Spanish because of the pioneering influence of Latin America, but later also French—the language of another variant sceptical of Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism), before developing into the present text. This focus gives overall coherence to the otherwise disparate themes brought together here, preventing the book from being just another encyclopaedia or dictionary of economics.

The book is therefore not a purely anthropological text – indeed, only six of the 35 authors are anthropologists, most of the rest being sociologists, economists, activists or other types of specialist – nor does it pretend overall to be a ‘neutral’ academic text, since it does take a specific oppositional stand against neo-liberal, laissez-faire economics, structural adjustment programmes, the unfair combination of western import restrictions and dumping on

the world's poorer economies, and the like. That said, the essays are still uniformly intellectual products and highly informative about current world conditions and prospects concerning a whole range of economically relevant issues. It would be invidious to single out any particular essays for detailed discussion here, but some examples follow, concentrating on the anthropologists involved: Catherine Alexander on 'The third sector', T.H. Eriksen on 'Globalization', David Graeber on 'Communism', Chris Hann on 'Moral economy', Keith Hart on 'Informal economy' and (with Vishnu Padayachee) 'Development', and David Lewis on 'Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)', to which might be added the sociologist John Urry on 'Mobility'. But there are also essays by non-anthropologists on a range of other issues, including so-called 'alter-globalization' or anti-capitalist movement(s), feminist economics, community and parallel currencies, and the digital commons.

Undoubtedly a timely volume, this book is certain to stimulate debate regarding the alternative economic futures the world is faced with, which will have an impact on many contemporary themes in anthropology, as in the other social sciences, and not limited to the purely economic.

ROBERT PARKIN

Ruth Marshall, *Political spiritualities: the Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2009.

I have been a fan of Ruth Marshall's since first hearing her deliver a paper about ten years ago and therefore was eager to read her long-awaited book, discussed here, not least because there can be few people better qualified to write a definitive tome on the tidal wave of Pentecostalist Christianity which has swept across most of West Africa in the last three decades.

Pentecostalism is doubly challenging to the social researcher, first in its ubiquity across the region, and secondly because of the challenges of encountering it and writing accounts of it when we originate from the perspective of secularising academic discourses and have to engage with such spiritually charged holistic understandings of the world and its works.

Marshall's book is a close-up examination of the nature of this movement as it has evolved, spread and reinvented itself in its biggest single national environment, Nigeria. It

benefits from nearly two decades spent tracking the Pentecostal movement, interacting with both its ordinary adherents and some of its leaders in thought and theology, as well as its texts, both core and marginal, including the often hyperbolic ‘grey literature’ of popular testaments and what Marshall terms their ‘radical excess of meaning’.

Central to the book is Marshall’s theoretical approach, set out very thoroughly in the first chapter, on *Rethinking the religious and the political in Africa*. In what follows, the author says, Pentecostalism is not to be approached (as certain other sociologists have done) as being ‘really about’ – or an expression of – something else, but *sui generis*, as a particular historical subjectivity. Pentecostalism is to be treated here as nothing less than a fully inhabited way of being in the world, as well as a way of *understanding* being in the world. The whole is built upon a tightly argued and theoretically solidly constructed Foucauldian framework to which the concept of history as event is central and which is ‘political’ in its very broadest sense.

This approach makes sense first because it respects the material, analysing without reducing the faith of the Pentecostals with whom Marshall has interacted, and captures the material in its fullness; secondly because being ‘born again’ as a way of *being* is how it is experienced by its adherents; and lastly because Pentecostalism is explicitly a project about remaking the self completely in Christ. The authorial voice is agnostically respectful while letting the nature of believers’ faith shine through, thus setting it far apart from and above the implied secularist sneer which certain other authors have failed to disguise.

The next section deals with the evolving theologies and institutions of Nigerian Pentecostalism, an open window into the strands and debates within this faith movement that is very welcome to those of us who are not otherwise in a position to discern the subtle ebbs, flows and constituencies. Marshall’s work is particularly strong in charting the rise and transformation of particular churches, tracing the Deeper Life Bible Church and Redeemed Christian Church of God from campus meetings and Yoruba-language minority sects respectively to multinational million-member organisations with bureaucracies, schools and even, in the latter case, a university of its own.

Although adamant that Pentecostalism is not ‘about’ something else, Marshall sees clearly that the boom in this kind of faith is intimately related to social transformations, political stresses and economic cycles of boom and bust throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 3, on *Revival and the postcolonial crisis of government*, engages with this, gathering together the threads of the metaphysics of decline and fall and the evolution of a culture of

shortage, aspiration, desperation, seeking and self-empowerment, and connecting the chaotic realities with their spiritual responses. Yet it neglects to lay out the prosaic material basics which chart that story, and because of that is not entirely successful as an explanation. Granted, crude indicators may have their weaknesses, but some information on incomes, inflation, emigration and declines in life-expectancy or literacy would have helped greatly to enlighten us on the context. As it is, I, a reader familiar with Nigeria, just about managed, but much of the religious studies readership at which this book seems squarely aimed would surely struggle to be clear about the connection between lived reality and the embracing of a Pentecostal approach to engaging with it, which Marshall does neatly capture – but elsewhere – as ‘the sense of the apocalyptic that contemporary life in Nigeria inspires’.

The rest of the book deals with what we might call the ‘lived theology’ of Pentecostalism, as God’s Subjects (Ch. 4) shape their spiritual citizenship through conduct and participation, and as the author deals with the linkage between ethics and political economy (Ch. 5) in its very broadest sense, including fraught underlying tensions such as debt and obligation. Chapter 6 deals more explicitly with political convictions, where divine grace and miracles are introduced most abruptly to strike at the core of immoral contemporary politics, and where discourse and institutions combine in the form of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria to give a material community to the new conceptions of spiritual sovereignty. It covers the particular dynamic introduced into Pentecostalism by oblique reference to the influence of Islam at the national level through the period of military rule, as well as the rise of a kind of authoritarianism by the Overseers within the Pentecostal movement itself. Despite the exhortations to government by and of the righteous, she describes the very muted role that, she contends, such churches took in organising opposition to dictatorship, as well as the indiscernible difference which has been made when prominent Pentecostal Christians have occupied high public office. Much more than that, though, she ties these institutional events to a historical consciousness imbued with the endlessly deferred potentiality of God’s grace.

In fact, as one would expect from an author with such familiarity and careful insights, there is little to fault in the book. The problem lies in what *isn’t* in it. Three major issues are glaringly notable by their absence. First is the issue of embodiment: a faith movement which accents and *politicizes* dress, bearing, particular ways of speech, trance, possession, speaking in tongues, dance and comportment surely suggests giving more than just a little anthropological attention to these issues.

Secondly, and more problematically, the book contains barely a mention of an issue related to embodiment, namely sexuality (like ‘promiscuity’ and ‘virginity’, it does not appear in the index). The construction of gender, relationships, personal sexual conduct, and especially issues around promiscuity and abstinence are key to Pentecostals’ ways of being in the world and of dividing the saved from the immoral, especially as regards the huge youth demographic and the accent on virginity and chastity amidst the highly commodified sexuality that looms large on the cultural landscape, certainly too large to reasonably exclude.

Thirdly, while the book does not ignore the relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and the electronic media, it certainly under-addresses it. Marshall documents, for instance, the progression of media used for the Pentecostal message from the church and word of mouth to tapes, television and newer media and the dissemination of testaments and confessions, and she notes the central place that spectacle and music has had in the success of churches like House On The Rock. But this is not enough: as other scholars’ research hints, the relationship between Pentecostalism and the electronic media seems as central as the relationship between the rise of early-modern Protestantism and the printed word (and thence, with new publics and their politics). To underplay this is to leave out something central to the development of this particular historical subjectivity.

As it stands, however, the author has produced a great work which gives us perhaps as much insight into the experienced world of Pentecostalism and its political subjectivities as is possible without being oneself a believer; but because of its selected purview, that definitive work perhaps remains to be written.

OLIVER OWEN

Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A sociology of religious emotion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, vi, 270 pp.

This book is an outcome of a joint project by Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, both sociologists of religion whose main interest is in the religion of modern Western societies. The primary aim of the book is to serve as a contribution towards reviving the study of emotions in social-scientific scholarly inquiry. The authors enthusiastically argue for ‘taking emotions seriously’

in the study of religion and offer a new conceptual framework for a systematic study of religious emotions. Along with a critical analysis and reconciliation of existing theoretical approaches, the reader is provided with various case studies of religious emotions, both from their own research and from a range of other studies and disciplines, as illustrative examples throughout the book. The book consists of six chapters, enriched with an appendix addressing issues of method and practice, and a smaller photographic section.

The first step the authors take towards developing this new conceptual framework is a reconsideration of emotions as a focus of academic interest. In debates about the approaches to emotions in major social-scientific theoretical perspectives, they outline how the influence of positivism and a lack of systematic study have rendered emotions marginal to the mainstream, dismissing them as irrational, subjective and unsuitable for scientific inquiry. The authors argue against the opposition of reason and emotion, advocating instead their complementarity and using sociological arguments to disprove the reduction of emotions to private inner states accessible only to introspection (p. 17). The debate is not aimed to provide an overview of existing approaches, but covers just a number of themes selected in order to formulate a brief and straightforward legitimization of emotions in the focus of the social sciences.

The first chapter presents a revised understanding of emotions in general. The authors establish one of their cornerstones by suggesting a relational account of emotions as constructed in the interplay between individual agents, social structures and cultural symbols. Instead of characterizing emotions with reference to a particular feeling, they introduce a revised concept of 'emotional regime' that holds together all kinds of different emotions, which are now characterized by constituting the social and cultural relationships in which they arise. The relational approach to emotions is not a novel idea, but this book interestingly goes beyond the general scope of sociology by incorporating material culture into the analytical framework. This enables the authors to operationalize the study of emotions within a broader social setting and generate a more complex picture of emotions that might be informative for other social-scientific disciplines. Indeed, the authors attempt to provoke a critical debate of the proposed agenda on a multidisciplinary basis.

The concept of an emotional regime serves to characterize religious emotion in the same way. It is not understood as a distinctive experience unique to religion, but as any kind of emotion that arises within the relations of a religious community and its symbols. The authors follow the social-constructivist approach in order to distinguish religious emotional regimes from non-religious ones, but they provide an interesting compromise in relation to social-constructivist reductionism by claiming characteristic features of religious emotions. Based on the assumption that religions typically offer a frame of reference by which to interpret and live the everyday world, the authors describe religious emotional regimes as related to an ‘alternate ordering’ of reality, which in turn gives religious emotions the characteristics of ordering emotional experience, offers emotional transcendence and provides orientation and inspiration in life (p. 70). The argument is elaborated in the second chapter, though the clarity of the argument could have benefited from a more careful choice and organization of examples. Even though the authors claim generality for these characteristics, the predominance of illustrative examples from the Western Christian tradition, which might simply be a consequence of the research focus of both authors, leaves the claim vulnerable.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce the conceptual scheme to analyse the inner emotional dynamics of religious communities. The chapters are more ‘technical’ in the sense that the reader is provided with a description of a model of dialectical relations between the constituent parts of religious emotional regimes. First, the principle of dialectically balanced regimes is clarified, where relations are mutually constitutive. In this case, symbols represent collective feelings and individual experiences, where on-going adjustments serve as regulations for maintaining the balance. In dialectically unbalanced regimes, on the other hand, one or more constituents fail to address the others, and such cases lead to extremes of intense emotions on the one hand (e.g. ecstasy) and tempered or absent emotions on the other (e.g. hypocrisy). The framework is pretty well elaborated, without evident inconsistencies, and presented in a comprehensive manner. Clear explanations of particular cases and an insightful choice of examples keep the reader engaged despite the ‘technical’ nature of the chapters.

The discussion of the general conceptual framework culminates in Chapter 5. Religious emotional regimes are presented in relation to the concept of power, understood here as the capacity to make a difference and incorporated into a broader societal context. The authors

discuss how the dynamics of religious emotional regimes are related to emotional regimes in other parts of society. Being able to identify the nature of these interconnections, either complementary or dissonant, they argue, can illuminate the issues of the legitimizing, rejection and transformation of religion in society. However, the authors are not 'blinded' by their own interest in emotions and regard the developed framework to provide enrichment for existing approaches in the ongoing investigation of these issues.

The last chapter is empirically the most interesting one and provides the application of the proposed analytical scheme on the concrete examples of religious emotional regimes in late modern society, mainly the transformation of Christianity in today's world of multiple modernities. The material provided does not create a compact picture, but even the partial analysis presented here demonstrates the utility of the approach for articulating the role of emotions in transformative processes. I see the greatest advantage of this project in the stress on the dialectical character of the processes within the schema that puts all constituent parts on the same level of importance. The research on the individual, societal and symbolic levels of culture thus welcomes methodological pluralism as a way of obtaining data from which to draw the explanation for each level individually, and it does not seek to formulate a meta-emotion describing the society, which is often just an empty expression to enrich the rhetoric, but not the explanation.

Ending with an appendix discussing practical methodological issues, the book presents a compact framework that may serve as a helpful tool for incorporating emotions into the overall analysis of ongoing processes in society. Apart from minor opacities caused by the weaker organization of empirical examples in some parts, the authors successfully argue that there is much to be gained by including emotions in the focus of the study of religion and other dimensions of social life. Even though the title of the book indicates its direction towards the sociological community as its audience, it is relevant for anybody who is looking for inspiration concerning how to approach emotions in their research on society.

ALEXANDRA ĎURČOVÁ

Hairong Yan, *New masters, new servants*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 328 pp.

In this innovative and entertaining ethnography, Hairong Yan examines post-Mao migration as an ethnographic site. Focusing her project on ‘interpreting the world’, Yan skilfully debates issues of development, modernity, neo-liberalism, post-socialism (p. 23) and consumer citizenship in the process of post-Mao reform. Treating ‘post socialism as an unstable process in which the emerging hegemony of capitalism in China must deal with living socialist legacies, claims, and structures of feeling that surround the current relations of production and sociality’ (p. 13), Yan focuses on the discursive power experienced during the rural to urban migration of domestic workers in post-Mao China.

The fieldwork for the book was undertaken between 1998-2000 by Yan, who also incorporates the views and experiences of her own parents. Yan also draws upon her fluency in Mandarin to develop a rich ethnographic tapestry. Noting that she interviewed 104 migrants (p. 27) and ‘thirty-five or so’ employers (p. 54) in Nanjing, Tianjin, Hefei and Shanghai too, Yan successfully conveys the importance of maintaining trust with her informants, noting that she never interviewed domestic workers and employers in the same households (p. 55). Yan also maintained contact through reunions and embeds her experience of having worked as a Chinese interpreter who was privy to numerous meetings between US economists and Chinese officials in the ethnography. She is well positioned to analyse the keywords used by economists to refer to post-Mao reform processes such as ‘structural adjustment’, ‘global governance’, ‘efficiency’, ‘development’ and the like. In addition to examining the emic dimension of the terms used by the elites, Yan is also easily able to develop thick descriptions of salient Mandarin concepts such as ‘*ren*’ and ‘*suizhi*’.

Yan includes gripping informant testimonies of the deferential master–servant relationship and the falsehood of fictive kin or familial relationships through a generational lens of two cohorts of migrants from the late Mao period of the 1970s and the later migrants of the 1980s-90s. Her use of case studies and numerous informant testimonies, poems, journals and media reports gives a great deal of texture to the ethnography. Juxtaposed against this are rich informant testimonies from the female migrants themselves. For example, one migrant recalled how her employers referred to her as one of the family and yet in practice treated her as an outsider: ‘When they would bring goodies back from their daughter’s home, they would share the goodies among themselves and urge each other to eat more. They would never ask

me to eat, even if they couldn't finish it. Sometimes when fruit began to rot, they would ask me to eat it' (p. 214). In another example, Yan notes the classic and well-known predicament of the domestic worker's labour having to sustain two families, and yet in the process she cares for her employer's family more than her own (p. 215). Her family depends on the wages that she sends home; for example, in Wuwei almost one third of households are dependent upon the wages sent home by migrants, and many villagers complain that farming is a waste of effort (p. 226). By sending wages home, the migrant worker earns her family's respect for the economic contribution that she is making (p. 215), yet in her employer's home her value is very low. For example, the part on 'Baomu's diary and her employer's response' outlines the suffering of the female migrant and shows that her employer does not see that suffering. In the margins of the worker's personal diary, the employer writes: 'What if you're hungry? [...] What's wrong with making you look after the child when you're not yet full? Remember you're not one of our family. You're only a *baomu*. We have paid you, and you have to work!' (p. 218).

Demographic change is a fact of labour migration, and Yan notes that the Chinese rural areas developed the classic layout of larger proportions of children and elderly (p. 222). As in India, Yan's informants also note how major festivals and events are no longer well attended and are shrinking year by year, making the countryside seem 'dismembered' (p. 222). One of Yan's informants notes that Chinese New Year was a major event and that 'sometimes there were almost a hundred of us...now just a few youngsters get together – only three or five, at most seven or eight' (p. 227).

As already noted, Yan also contributes a generational analysis of post-Mao migration by examining two cohorts of women who migrated in the late-Mao period in the 1970s and the neo-liberal period of the 1980s to 1990s. While the generational aspect is vitally important to many social phenomena, it is seldom incorporated into most ethnographies. She begins her analysis by introducing the concept of *ren*, 'a possessor of socially validated and meaningful personhood or subjectivity' (p. 35) that is only realized through social action. *Ren* is essentially inculcated and learned behaviour. Only about three to four thousand women migrated from Wuwei to the cities in the 1970s, but by 1993 this number had increased to 263,000. In order to reduce the gap between country and city, the post-Mao state decided to achieve rapid industrialization, a process that left rural female migrants vulnerable. While the 1970s generation of women faced food shortages, patriarchy and the devaluation of their productive work (pp. 32-3), the subsequent cohort experienced even more significant social ruptures, due

in part to the fact that the Mao and post-Mao projects were different, ‘with Mao-era modernization based on the improvement of national self-sufficiency and post-Mao modernity defined as the nation’s reinsertion into the global capitalist market’ (p. 37). Regarding Chinese migrant women during the post-Mao era, Yan was most interested in exploring the relations between rural and urban, which she explained in terms of the modernity and transformation of self-identity and how they are working together to, in turn, transform society. This is an example of how ideas, words and discourse can change and modify reality, as Hegel and his followers like Max Weber, Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault were trying to show. Yet she also asserted the ways in which these migrant domestic workers felt tension and discontinuity in the social processes in the Mao and post Mao-eras and did not experience the promise of neo-liberalism as a pleasure, but as a process of eating bitterness. Some of the women from the 1970s felt some security, even amidst the patriarchy of the Mao period, and in the 1980s they longed for that security. Some workers cried due to that tension and the embrace of the post-Mao privatization of factories.

Successfully captured are the tensions between status mobility and superficial class ‘transformation’ and the harsh reality of being a migrating domestic worker. It is also notable that, although she employs a Hegelian analysis of the power of discourse, she also retains a healthy scepticism toward Hegel’s idealism (p. 120). For example, she is very clear that post-Mao reforms have ‘violently destabilized old structures of identity and security’ (p. 200).

In this book, Yan presents a rich and fascinating ethnography that exposes the lived realities of women migrants in post-Mao China. Yan shows, quite forcefully and eloquently, the importance of discourse in shaping society, while at the same time recognizing that neo-liberalism is not a finished project, nor a just one. Yan’s ethnographic humanism offers an exciting way forward for other anthropologist to continue their fascination with the exploration of emic categories in transforming global economies.

REDDI SEKHARA YALAMALA

CONTRIBUTORS TO VOLUME 3, no. 1 (2011)

Michael Costello is a research student in social anthropology at the University of Kent.

Nora Danielson is a research student at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.

Alexandra Ďurčová is a research student at the Department of Social Anthropology, Comenius University, Slovakia.

Iza Kavedzija is a research student at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford

Theresa Miller is a research student at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.

Oliver Owen is a research student at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.

Robert Parkin is a Departmental Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.

Clarinda Still is a Lecturer in Modern Indian Studies, Contemporary South Asian Studies Programme, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies (SIAS), University of Oxford.

Katherine Swancutt is an AHRC-ESRC Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.

Ruth Manimekalai Vaz recently received her doctorate in anthropology from the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, California).

Marisa Wilson is a Lecturer in Human Geography, Department of Food Production, University of the West Indies (St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago).

Reddi Sekhara Yalamala is a PhD Candidate and Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research Fellow, Dalhousie University, Canada.