

# JASO-ONLINE

N E W S L E T T E R



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THE AWKWARD SOCIAL SCIENCE?  
ANTHROPOLOGY ON SCHOOLS, ELECTIONS, AND REVOLUTION IN NEPAL<sup>1</sup>

DAVID N. GELLNER

*Vice-Chancellor, Warden, Colleagues, Friends:*

As an anthropologist of religion and ritual I am conscious of a duty to follow custom, and it is the custom on occasions like these to begin by invoking the ancestors. Of Oxford ancestors, the two who tower over the field are A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and E.E. Evans-Pritchard.

A French reviewer of my first monograph was kind enough to see in it the influence of Evans-Pritchard.<sup>2</sup> Evans-Pritchard, as many of you will be aware, gave an inaugural lecture in which he praised and endorsed the explicitly comparative and positivistic view of anthropology of his predecessor, Radcliffe-Brown. Later, he changed his mind and decided that anthropology should be seen as a kind of cultural translation and that therefore anthropology belongs properly with the humanities. In his Marett Memorial Lecture of 1950, he famously declared that ‘social anthropology is a kind of historiography, and therefore ultimately of philosophy or art’; consequently ‘it studies societies as moral systems and not as natural systems...[it] seeks patterns and not scientific laws...[and] interprets rather than explains.’<sup>3</sup> For anthropologists at the time, this must have come as a shocking and iconoclastic retreat from the conventional position enthusiastically advocated by Radcliffe-Brown.

One thinks of the post-war decades, and particularly the time when Evans-Pritchard was making these pronouncements, as a golden age of social anthropology—funding

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1 Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford, held in the Examination Schools on 15 May 2009. I have preserved the main text as it was spoken. References and passages omitted in order to keep to the allotted hour of the lecture are given in the footnotes. To view the PowerPoint presentation that accompanied the lecture, see Appendix.

2 Gellner (1992). I referred to Evans-Pritchard explicitly just three times, though one of these was a prominent invocation, alongside Weber and Durkheim.

3 ‘Social Anthropology Past and Present’; see Evans-Pritchard 1962: 26.

pressures were few, research opportunities plentiful, classic ethnographies just waiting to be composed, and post-colonial guilt a distant cloud on the horizon. So it is chastening to read Evans-Pritchard writing in the *Oxford Magazine* in 1951 that ‘the members of the Institute are so overburdened with teaching, supervision and administration that they are unable to get on with their own research or even essential reading’ (Evans-Pritchard 1951). One’s first reaction is to exclaim that the pressures of 1951 surely *cannot* have been equal to those of today, but perhaps it was ever thus.

Evans-Pritchard’s successor, the pioneering anthropologist of Chinese society, Maurice Freedman, rejected the choice between his two great predecessors. He wrote that the dilemma between anthropology as art and anthropology as science was, in his words, ‘largely an illusion’ (1979: 26), because all that anthropologists were doing when they claimed to be scientific was affirming ‘an idea of rigour and objectivity in method and a faith in the ultimate orderliness of what they have chosen to study’ (ibid.). However, Freedman was writing before the rise of postmodernism, with its rejection of ‘orderliness’ in method, in the object of study, and in the way it is represented.

Freedman’s successor, Rodney Needham, famously deconstructed kinship and declared that it did not exist, and he took the same position on many other concepts that common sense would have us accept as human universals. Needham’s own inaugural lecture was none the less an affirmation of faith in the possibility of comparative work. The abstractness of his list of what can be compared might have astonished Radcliffe-Brown, including as it did ‘symbolic forms’, logical relations such as symmetry and asymmetry, modes of classification, and so on (Needham 1978: 17-21). But he affirmed unequivocally that there is a universal psychology and—with David Humean phrasing that was no doubt deliberate—likewise affirmed the existence of a universal ‘mode of reason proper and common to all men; and [he added] this crucial finding is an achievement, necessarily, of comparative ethnography and the discipline of social anthropology.’ A nice connection to my own subject matter is made by the fact that Needham, having served with the Gurkhas, could (as I cannot) sing Nepali songs, when suitably lubricated and in congenial surroundings such as the Turf Tavern or King’s Arms. It is said that he broke down in tears during his inaugural lecture when asking his audience to remember and honour the sacrifices of the Gurkha troops with whom he fought in Burma, one of whom (though he did not mention it at the time) had saved his life at the battle of Kohima.

Needham’s successor, John Davis, was and is probably more with Evans-Pritchard than with Radcliffe-Brown; but with *his* successor and my immediate predecessor, David Parkin, the pendulum has begun to swing back the other way. Parkin calls for a ‘holistic’ anthropology, one that is expansive enough to include the kinds of universal questions about humankind and innate human capacities that animated nineteenth-century

anthropology and that are being asked, with renewed urgency, by evolutionist, cognitive, and other scientifically inclined anthropologists (Parkin 2007).

As well as these institutional ancestors, as it were, I must remember my own literal and academic forebears—my parents (whose field site in Morocco I visited in 1978 long before I had one of my own in Nepal and to which we returned *en famille* in November 2008), my maternal grandfather who (I'm told) loved his time administering a remote part of Ethiopia at the end of the Second World War, and my teachers in Oxford—Steven Lukes, Richard Gombrich, Alexis Sanderson, and Nick Allen. I would particularly like to thank Richard and Sanjukta who came to visit me in the field in 1983—fortunately sufficiently far into my fieldwork that I could actually speak Newari, demonstrate some knowledge of my surroundings, and translate a talk Richard gave to the Young Men's Buddhist Association of Lalitpur on, as I remember, the radical re-interpretation the Buddha gave to Hindu concepts (conclusions that had quite controversial implications in those far-off Panchayat days).

I would also like to thank my wife, Lola Martinez, whose application of anthropology to contemporary global popular culture, especially films, is far more innovative than anything I have attempted or could attempt.<sup>4</sup> Finally, I would like publicly to embarrass my children by saying that their academic and musical achievements make their parents proud—all three have, understandably, declared that there are quite enough anthropologists in the family.

### **The Awkward Social Science?**

I turn now to my title—'the awkward social science'. Some of my colleagues, as I have hinted, would give a resounding endorsement to Evans-Pritchard's view that social anthropology has more in common with history and other humanities than it does with social sciences. Others would like anthropology to adopt the testing procedures of quantitative sociology and psychology, but in diverse cultural contexts.

In the mundane sense of being a part of the Social Science Division of this university, anthropology *is* a social science. But *should* it be?

For what it is worth, most other UK universities agree with Oxford (by a margin of 3 to 1). Eleven other universities put anthropology in Social Sciences (though Sussex hedges by adding 'and Cultural Studies'), four disagree, putting it with Humanities, Arts, or Arts and Humanities, Goldsmith's doesn't have Faculties or Schools, and Cambridge sits on the fence: it has one Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and another Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences—anthropology is in the latter, so our Cambridge colleagues can have their cake and eat it.

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4 See Martinez 2007, 2009.



As a way of approaching the question, I propose to examine three contexts on which my own recent work in Nepal has touched—namely schools, elections, and the Maoist insurgency or revolution.

It should be clear from this choice of examples that anthropology is closer to other social sciences than ever before because we are often studying in the same places and the same kinds of institution. If it ever was plausible to claim that anthropology had its own, protected subject matter, about which anthropologists could pronounce with authority and on which others should defer to them, it certainly is not so now. In an earlier age, some of my predecessors could calmly and blithely define anthropology as the study of simple societies, safe in the knowledge that other disciplines would not invade their territory, and safe also in the knowledge that the people they wrote about would not read what they had written. ‘Simple’ (or ‘primitive’ as they were once called) societies were defined precisely by their lack of just such institutions of modernity as schools and elections. Where there was ritualized rebellion, this was analysed so as to bring out its *difference* from the revolutions that marked the history of complex societies (Gluckman 1954). Anthropologists studied societies that were supposedly ‘without history’, as Eric Wolf (1982), who did as much as anyone to overcome this view, put it.<sup>5</sup>

Today, there are two fundamental differences with anthropology as it used to be. First—fans of Bruce Parry and the TV programme *Tribe* please take note—the anthropologist’s natural habitat is as likely to be an NGO or government office as a tribe or a village. Often, in fact, it is the headquarters of the tribe’s own NGO, and often enough the anthropologist is the academic adviser, political representative, or even the founder of the NGO in question. Second, the fields in which anthropologists study are swarming with other disciplines: development studies, sociology, politics, religious studies, historians. Furthermore, members of the societies studied are just as qualified in these disciplines as we are, even if they are usually still worse resourced than us.

Underlying the radical differences between the situation of anthropologists in the past and today is the presence everywhere of the *ideal* of the modern state, with its promises of development and democracy. Our forebears were working in the shadow of the colonial state, which guaranteed the peace that allowed them to do research. Today, because of that history, programmes like the US Army’s Human Terrain System that recruit anthropologists and other social scientists to help them do better in the task of pacifying Afghanistan and Iraq generate enormous unease and have been condemned by the American Anthropological Association.

Despite the colonial context of the older anthropology—and anthropology has spent considerable energy on expiating its guilt at not paying sufficient attention to it at the

5 Or ‘out of time’ as Nick Thomas (1989) phrased it.

time—enough remained of other ‘traditional’ spheres of life to allow the anthropologist to experience radically different ways of viewing, understanding, and being in the world. Today, by contrast, we are left studying ‘alternative modernities’. *Then*, anthropologists studied radical difference, *now* they study different ‘perspectives’ on shared aspirations.

Two aspects that have remained constant are: (1) the concern, one may say obsession, with having a minute, in-depth, and personal relationship to the material on which generalizations are made; and (2) a constant doubt and questioning about the adequacy and coherence of those materials. A venerable member of our profession, Clifford Geertz, complained that the worrying had descended in recent times into ‘epistemological hypochondria’ (Geertz 1988: 71) such that generalizations no longer get made at all. Anthropology has indeed been afflicted, perhaps more than other disciplines, with doubts about its viability, about whether one can ever know anything about another culture, about whether anything remains to be studied, and about whether anthropologists have the right to go about poking their noses into other people’s business. The levels of reflexive anxiety and the consequent refusal to attempt big generalizations have no doubt contributed to other social sciences’ puzzlement about or hostility to anthropology.

Anthropologists often do find themselves in an awkward position in trying to justify themselves, whether to other social science colleagues or to grant-giving bodies, or indeed to their aunts. That the general public are in the dark about what it is we really do may be shown in a number of ways—though Bruce Parry and Kate Fox may have done more than most to remedy that.<sup>6</sup> Certain it is that the very word frequently ends up as ‘anthropogy’ or ‘anthroplogy’ on the spines and covers of our books. Inevitably, anthropologists are still seen as experts in the exotic and the small-scale. Those social scientists who make use of fieldwork do not see any need to defer to anthropology just because they use ethnography as a major method. More textbooks on how to do ethnography have been written by sociologists than by anthropologists—by, I would estimate, quite a big margin. The journal *Ethnography* was set up by scholars in cultural studies, and one could argue that the whole discipline of cultural studies owes its existence to the lack of interest on the part of most anthropologists in studying modern popular culture.

So, can anthropology move beyond an endless refrain, ‘It’s not as simple as that’, addressed to other social scientists, as well as to those such as politicians, lawyers, development practitioners who have to act on the basis of imperfect understandings of the world? Or, to put it in somewhat more portentous language, can anthropology move beyond endlessly pointing out that other social sciences’ explanatory frameworks fail to capture the complexity and contingency of social life?

6 Possibly assisted by the many novelists (some of them anthropologists themselves) who have not been able to resist the trope of anthropologist as bumbling incompetent. MacClancy (2005) surveyed 170 examples of the genre (in some cases the anthropologist is the hero).

‘One cannot escape the impression that anthropologists do not generalize lightly’, wrote Keith Thomas (1963: 6) in *Past and Present* almost half a century ago. A jaundiced observer might say that with time they have learned both to generalize lightly and, in other cases, not to generalize at all. Model-builders and hypothesis-testers from other subjects are understandably impatient with endless deconstruction of the terms in which they pose their questions.

What I hope to show is that social anthropology can indeed reach the parts that other social science disciplines cannot reach. Of course you do not expect me to say anything else—to many of you I am preaching to the converted. For the rest, you are unlikely to be persuaded by any intricacies of argument or rhetoric that I might summon up in half an hour. Rather than try to *argue* the case for anthropology’s relevance, let me attempt to *illustrate* it. Perhaps ethnographic examples may persuade you, where special pleading cannot.

### Three Examples from Nepal: Schools, Elections, the Rise of the Maoists

#### 1. Schools

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world and has had probably the highest level of non-military aid per capita in Asia over the last fifty years. A part of Nepal’s development since 1951 could conceivably be told as a success story: literacy and health indicators have shown a continual improvement, despite considerable rural-urban and regional variations. On literacy, for example, in Nepal as a whole, more than 50% of women and two thirds of men can now read (though in some far western and some Tarai districts female literacy remains below 20%). Similarly, in spite of the big increase in the population, there have been economic improvements and improvements in health.

One has immediately to point out that there are massive disparities between different districts. Large amounts of money are concentrated in the capital, Kathmandu. This has meant that an equally dramatic gap has opened up between the urban areas and the rest of the country, large tracts of which remain without electricity, roads, or properly staffed hospitals.

As you might expect, there have been numerous government and INGO reports, lots of recommendations, and so on, plenty of quantitative studies of education in Nepal. There have also been two outstanding ethnographic monographs which take education, or aspects of it, as their theme: I refer to Tod Ragsdale’s *Once a Hermit Kingdom* (1989) and Laura Ahearn’s *Invitations to Love* (2003). Ragsdale showed how the education reforms of 1973-4, intended to modernize the curriculum, in fact introduced a Kathmandu-centric and middle-class bias, with exam questions that would mean nothing at all to

rural children growing up far from the capital.<sup>7</sup> Ahearn started from over 200 love letters she collected from young people in her village. Though courtship and elopement existed long before schools came to her village, clearly the ability to write letters and to present oneself in writing to the object of courtship introduced a new kind of agency and choice into young people's lives.

These two books, by authors with a deep knowledge of the culture and society in which the educational institutions and practices they examine are based, are far better, richer, and more stimulating, than something like Jennifer Rothchild's recent *Gender Trouble Makers* (2006), even though it too is based on ethnography in and around the classroom. The problem is that Rothchild's categories are given by international agencies and Western common sense: 'This head teacher...spoke of gender differences as being "natural", when, in actuality, they were socially constructed' (p. 100). The author expresses no doubt about the actuality of social construction, nor much interest in or feel for the cultural categories that the children are bringing to the classroom.<sup>8</sup> Rothchild had no difficulty in having her two research assistants harvest a crop of quotes to show that Nepalis, of all levels of education and none, regard males and females as different and therefore have different expectations of them. Rothchild's monograph shows that ethnography on its own, however engagingly and revealingly written, is not enough if the questions and framework of the researcher are already set in stone before arrival in the field. She was determined to find patriarchy and inequality, and of course she found plenty of evidence for it.<sup>9</sup>

My own work on schools was more superficial than any of the three authors discussed so far, but I can at least say that I had made a prolonged study of the cultural background, since it was fourteen years after I first started formally studying in the Kathmandu Valley

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7 Ragsdale was also able to do some interesting ethnography of the 'everyday state'. He observed: 'In Kaski during 1974 one might wonder whether statistics had not been made into a new religion. The supervisor who was supposed to visit the Lamnasa middle school treated his job as a sinecure; his chief activity was making impressive statistical charts for display. These were shown to visiting dignitaries as well as to villagers, the latter duly impressed by the air of mystery emanating from them.... The supervisor whom the author accompanied on his two-week walk to schools in Kaski spent much of his time instructing teachers how to make statistical charts for their office walls.... Privately, this supervisor assured the author he thought the charts nonsense and little related to what was really going on' (Ragsdale 1989: 180-1).

8 Furthermore, she completely ignores the distinguished anthropologists who have written subtly and insightfully on gender in Nepal long ago, such as Lynn Bennett, Linda Stone, Sherry Ortner, Nancy Levine, Mary Cameron, and Kathryn March (and I suspect that not one of these would yield to Rothchild in their affirmation of feminism).

9 The books by Ragsdale and Ahearn study schools and literacy in their social and cultural contexts. Ahearn shows how literacy and schooling produce a different kind of personal self-consciousness and a different kind of 'self-making'. These are books that are built on a deep acquaintance with the village culture in which the school is a Trojan horse of modernity. Rothchild's, by contrast, though ethnographic in a sense, is really ethnography lite.

that I ventured into a school for research purposes. I studied two schools, but the one I want to focus on today I shall call JSBK for short.

Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi (JSBK) is a private, but government-recognized institution founded in 1990. It took advantage of the provision in the new 1990 Constitution of Nepal, which allowed primary teaching in the mother tongue. Newars are the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley (there are complexities about using the term 'indigenous' that I'll pass over here). The Newars are what Africanists would call a 'host tribe': i.e. the original inhabitants of the capital, but outnumbered in their erstwhile homeland.

During the ferment following the revolution of 1990, some educated female Newar cultural activists decided to start rounding up poor children who were not going to school and to teach them in their mother tongue, Nepal Bhasa or Newari. They received sponsorship at 3,000 rupees per child from senior Newar activists. CWIN, an NGO specializing in children's issues, also sponsored five children. Another activist donated the ground floor of his house as a temporary schoolhouse. A governors' committee was formed. At the beginning, the teachers taught without taking any salary.

The name of the school comes from one of the heroes of Newar cultural nationalism, Jagat Sundar Malla (1882-1952), a schoolmaster from Bhaktapur who translated Aesop's fables into Newari (Nepal Bhasa) in 1914. A statue to him was erected in the school in 2001.

The key to the development of the school was contact with a Japanese non-governmental social service foundation called HIKIVA (Hirakata Katao International Volunteer Association), based in Osaka. Japanese members of HIKIVA pay approximately US\$150 per year, most of which goes to pay the educational expenses of a Nepali child.<sup>10</sup> Selection of the children to receive sponsorship is carried out by the staff of the school and is on the basis of need. Teachers from the school interview the parents in the home to assess the economic level of the family.

The JSBK pupils are largely from poor and/or low-caste backgrounds. Most, but not all, are Newars. I carried out a brief research project there in December 1996, working with children from classes three and five in JSBK. I compared the essays and pictures they produced with those of children in the equivalent classes in the government school in Lalitpur next door to the house where I had lived for nineteen months while doing my doctoral fieldwork in the early 1980s.

10 See HIKIVA website: <http://www.kcat.zaq.ne.jp/aaahu309/>. HIKIVA also funds other schools in Nepal. At the time of my research in 1996-7, there were two others: Nilbarahi primary school in Kathmandu, and Satyawati secondary school in Kumpur village, Dhading, 235 kilometres west of Kathmandu. Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi is the school with which it has had the longest connection and where it supports the most children (currently 240). The website indicates that now (2009) HIKIVA is funding seven schools in all, the four new schools being in Bhaktapur, Dhading (two), and Chitwan.

The fact that JSBK was founded and is run in accordance with the ethos of Newar cultural nationalism did not appear to make a big difference to the children at the school in 1996-7. Ten years later, in August 2007, with the help of Basanta Maharjan, I tracked down thirteen of the twenty children who had participated in the earlier study. Asked about their time at JSBK, they were highly appreciative of the love and attention that they had received at the school. Many of them noted that they received funny looks when shifting to other schools in class six or seven, and that people were often under the misapprehension, if they had heard of the school at all, that all one could study there was the Newari language.

But only one out of thirteen children had even a passing interest in Newar cultural nationalism as an ideology. In other words, despite daily exposure to the messages of Newar cultural nationalism in their school days, as young people in their early twenties, struggling to make a living in Kathmandu, they were strongly resistant to the ideas of cultural nationalism. In the epidemiological language of my cognitive anthropology colleagues, cultural nationalism, while very ‘catchy’ to some in Kathmandu, does not make much sense to many others, particularly the urban working classes from whom JSBK tends to take its pupils. In the different terms—what one might call patrician Viennese Marxist—of Eric Hobsbawm, linguistic nationalism appeals to ‘the lesser examination-passing classes’.<sup>11</sup>

We can see, therefore, that there are radically different expectations and understandings on the part of the parents, children, Newar activists, teachers, and Japanese donors involved in Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi. The parents are mainly concerned to get a good education for their children, and the children are happy that they have a scholarship which means that their parents don’t have to pay fees. The governors of the school wish to preserve Newar culture and Newari as a medium of thought, writing, and cultural production; this is also the aim of the teachers, though they give even higher priority to the interests of the children. The teachers work for less than the market rate because of their commitment to Newari. It does not take much questioning before the teachers (who are all bar one women) articulate, gently, a critique of the male activists for being all talk. The Japanese donors are primarily concerned with the uplift of poor and deprived communities in Nepal and the propagation of education. They could not care less about the ideology of cultural nationalism; in so far as they are aware of it (and I am fairly certain that most of HIKIVA’s supporters know nothing of the connection), they disapprove quite strongly. They do not wish to encourage anything that would stand in the way of a quality education—such as putting too much emphasis on Newari, which

11 Hobsbawm (1990: 118). In other words, it has no appeal to those who have no chance of getting low-level government or other clerical posts. Hobsbawm does preface this by saying, ‘I do not wish to reduce linguistic nationalism to a question of jobs....’ For my original research in JSBK, see Gellner 2004.



is precisely the aim of the governors. By 2007 the Japanese funders' ideas had, perhaps not surprisingly, won out over the ideology of Nepal Bhasha purism.<sup>12</sup> The only subject still taught in Newari was Newari itself.

'Any institution that is going to keep its shape needs to gain legitimacy by distinctive grounding in nature and in reason,' writes Mary Douglas (1986: 112).<sup>13</sup> This may well be true. What this example suggests, however, is that it is the experience of being at school as such, *not* the particular kind of school or ideology that guides it, that is the most important determinant of the Nepali child's experience. Being graded, classified, and assessed for academic achievement, becoming 'an educated person' as locally measured, is the deep principle of justice that legitimates the school. The explicit ideology of Newar cultural nationalism is just a veneer. The explicit messages about Newar cultural nationalism, though repeated, no doubt ad nauseam, throughout the children's school life, are received but not internalized.

It may seem self-evidently true that the participants in an organization or institution must share some common understandings for that institution to operate at all. But careful ethnography reveals 'hidden transcripts', backstage backbiting, very divergent views of what is actually going on. On the basis of this case study, we can perhaps go further and say that the aims of the different participants can be wholly distinct, and yet the whole can function and flourish. Of course, there must be some overlap: the Japanese donors had an interest in providing a good education, the children and their parents wanted to receive it, and the teachers were interested in providing it. From that point of view, it may appear that the nationalist motivations of the school board were an irrelevance. But that is not actually the case: nationalist motivations were central to the founding of JSBK, to the local support the school received, to acquisition of the land for the school, to the work that was done in getting it registered and getting permission for it to expand, and to the teachers in continuing to work for the school at much lower salaries than they could command elsewhere.

My contention is that this particular school represents, in only slightly more exaggerated form, what is true of all schools and indeed perhaps all institutions. Ethnographies of youth and educational institutions, from Paul Willis's *Learning to*

12 It is clear from what the HIKIVA vice-president, Takashi Khajita, wrote in a memorial booklet (*smarika*) produced in 2003 for the ten-year anniversary of the school's establishment that HIKIVA expected the school to become 'self-sustaining' within the next ten years. He reiterated the same point to me in an interview in Osaka in 2004. He told me that he has argued to the teachers and to the School Board that, by providing more instruction in English and Nepali, the school could make itself attractive to the middle class who could afford the fees. Mr Khajita stressed that, because of the selflessness of the teachers and the moral education provided, he regarded JSBK as a model school.

13 She continues: 'Any institution...starts to control the memory of its members.... It provides the categories of their thought, sets the terms for self-knowledge, and fixes identities. All of this is not enough. It must secure the social edifice by sacralizing the principles of justice.'

*Labour* (1977) and Michael Moffatt's *Coming of Age in New Jersey* (1989) to Roger Goodman's *Japan's 'International Youth'* (1990) and Anthony Simpson's *Half London' in Zambia* (2003), have all recognized this,<sup>14</sup> namely that educational institutions—no doubt also this august one—can operate, and operate successfully, turning out educated students, even producing research, despite the fact that the various 'stakeholders' have very different values, expectations, and understandings of what they are doing there.

## 2. Elections

I shall speak more briefly about elections, because, compared to schools, there is not such a long history of anthropologists studying them, either in Nepal, in India, or elsewhere. It is perhaps not so obvious that anthropologists, as specialists in the local and small scale, can contribute a radically different perspective from other social scientists. None the less, contribute they certainly can, as I shall show by talking about the 2008 elections to the Constituent Assembly in Nepal. This may also serve as an introduction to the following section on revolution.

On April 10<sup>th</sup> 2008 epochal elections were held to a Constituent Assembly. Even three days before they happened, UN officials and the foreign elite in Kathmandu were unsure that they would actually take place.<sup>15</sup> No one—neither political scientists, nor sociologists, nor politicians themselves—predicted that the Maoists, who had waged a ten-year war, their so-called People's War, would become the biggest party. If the Maoists had known how well they were going to do, they would not have repeatedly pushed for the election date to be put back, nor would they have insisted that 60% of the votes should be on PR, nor would Prachanda, their leader, have tried desperately before the election to forge an alliance with the UML, the Unified Marxist-Leninists—previously the biggest left party.

It was not only social scientists and politicians who failed to spot the wave of support that came the way of the most radical parties. Local civil society members in the districts, with their ears to the ground, also failed to see what would happen. I was told authoritatively in Birganj, just before the election, that the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) would be lucky to get ten or fifteen seats: had all the Tarai parties stuck together they would have swept the Tarai, but divided they had little chance. In fact the MJF swept to 52 seats overall.

14 On the ethnography of schools, see the survey by Delamont and Atkinson (1980). Interestingly, they show that the British tradition, more sociological, has actually paid more attention to the details of intra-classroom interactions than the American tradition, more inspired by anthropology, which focuses on the issue of the clash of 'indigenous' or 'tribal' or 'other' cultures with the White middle-class culture of education.

15 Apparently many politicians from the Congress and UML parties were also unsure they would take place, which accounts for their relatively feeble attempts at campaigning and their comparatively poor showing.



How, then, are we to explain the results? A complex combination of factors was evidently at play. Certainly, as the Congress Party (NC) and others complained, in some cases there was intimidation by the Maoists. But that is very far from being the whole story. There were many places where people voted spontaneously, freely, and enthusiastically for the Maoists. Many people believed that the Maoists should be given power, both to make them accountable and to prevent them returning to the jungle, a sentiment I heard expressed several times in Kathmandu. It was certainly a vote for change, for a new possibility, something different from the old parties who had failed the country so often. The 'zeal' (*jos*) of the Maoists impressed people, and if some had died, this was not held against them.

I myself was present for the election, but as an international observer invited by the Carter Center. My own area of ethnographic expertise is the cities of Kathmandu and Lalitpur (Patan). But I asked to be sent outside, mainly because I wanted to see somewhere new and different. I was sent to Parsa district on the border with India, almost due south from Kathmandu, a highly strategic area because 70% of Nepal's external trade passes through it.

The contrast is very clear between long-term anthropological observation and what can be achieved by an international observer, however well briefed and backed up. On my return to Kathmandu, I talked to old friends in Lalitpur about the election. More than one asked me if I had seen children voting in Parsa. When I said that I had not, they responded, 'What kind of international observer are *you*? We saw children voting in Parsa sitting at home, and just watching the TV. The journalist gave the name of the polling station and the polling officer!'

A vital contrast is presented by Judith Pettigrew (2008), who has been doing fieldwork in a Gurung (Tamu) village north of Pokhara for fifteen years, revisiting every year, usually several times a year, right through the conflict.<sup>16</sup> Between 2003 and 2006 the village was under the de facto control of the Maoists. In Kathmandu, one week after the election, she was able to give a detailed account to an audience of (mainly) Nepalis about the election in 'her' village. It focused on the case of an informant whom she calls Thagu, an intelligent man from a relatively poor background who has worked abroad as a labourer, but was not able to join one of the foreign armies that are the most prized career destinations. When the Maoists first started arriving in the village, he was deeply resentful of the fact that they stayed, sometimes for considerable periods, and that he and other villagers had no choice but to house and feed them, and—even more worryingly—store weapons for them. When she turned up for the election in 2008 and went inside the polling station, she was surprised to see Thagu there—as the political representative of the Maoists. What had

16 See Pettigrew (2003, 2004, 2007).

happened was that, over time, and with continual contact with the Maoists, Thagu had come to accept their diagnosis of what is wrong with Nepal and had come to see them as the only party addressing the needs of poor peasant farmers like himself.

Thagu's story made a deep impression on the Nepali audience in Kathmandu because it showed a thoughtful and intelligent villager coming to a long-term and reason-based decision that the Maoists were the right party to support. I don't think the Nepalis had ever heard support for the Maoists described in those terms—the usual discourse in the capital is that Maoist supporters are dupes and victims.

At the same meeting David Holmberg (2008), an American anthropologist who has worked on the Tamangs of Nuwakot for over thirty years, was able to explain, based on his long-term acquaintance with the area, an ironic and counter-intuitive situation, namely why the local Tamangs—supposedly an oppressed ethnic group in the national scheme of things—support the Congress Party (now the party of the Establishment) and the local high castes support the Maoists (supposedly the party of the oppressed). What he shows, in the words of the title of his piece (borrowed from Tip O'Neill), is that 'all politics is local'. In Holmberg's own words, 'decisions on voting are made according to highly localised sets of relations.... Party ideology is more often than not trumped by social relations' (Holmberg 2008: 11).<sup>17</sup> In this case, Congress had once been the party of the oppressed, and still today dense links of kinship tie local Tamangs, at least the Tamangs of Holmberg's village, to the Congress Party.<sup>18</sup>

Such detailed local knowledge is, of course, no monopoly of anthropologists. It is for that reason that I have cooperated with an ethnographically inclined Nepali political scientist, Krishna Hachhethu, on a project on activists since 2002.<sup>19</sup> But it is only anthropologists who have the patience to hang around for more than a year, or to return to the same place year after year—political scientists, even ethnographically inclined ones, are usually content with visiting for a week or less.

A final point about elections, a point on which no anthropological copyright can be taken, but on which anthropology can certainly contribute: it is clear that in South Asia elections have strong ritual, festive, and symbolic aspects. Holmberg (2008: 20) quotes a Nepali friend based in the USA telling him that elections are a *jatra*, in other words, a

17 For an important analysis on the same lines in Argha-Khanchi district, see Ramirez (2000: 268f). For background on the Tamangs of Nuwakot, see Holmberg (1989, 1990) and Holmberg, March, and Tamang (1999).

18 At the same meeting, Mukta Tamang spoke about his village—both in the sense that it is his home village and that he studied it for his doctorate. He showed how rural people, who may not fully approve of the Maoists' methods, come to support them none the less. His report showed how, just as in Kathmandu, many people in the countryside shared the idea that the Maoists needed to be given responsibility so that they could held responsible and so that violence could come to an end, and that a vote for the Maoists was a vote for change (Tamang 2008).

19 Hachhethu (2002) is the standard work on the Congress and UML political parties.

local festival. Elections are indeed a great Durkheimian periodic rite, both symbolizing the nation and emphasizing divisions at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. *Revolution*

The Maoist revolution in Nepal comprises my third example. In terms of the speed with which it was able to go from armed rebellion to the strongest political force in the country, it is the most successful Marxist revolution South Asia has ever seen.

The questions one is always asked about the Maoist movement in Nepal are: (1) What role did the royal massacre of June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, play in the Maoist success? (2) Are the Maoists backed by China? (3) Are they really Maoists?

The very short answers are: Some, No, and Yes.

Let me briefly answer all three. Yes, in the long run, the massacre did play an important role in de-legitimizing monarchy in Nepal. The most important sociological fact about the massacre is that the vast majority of Nepali people believe that King Gyanendra, who happened to be out of Kathmandu at the time, and whose wife and son, though present, survived, was behind the slaughter and somehow organized it. But, important though this is, it does not have quite the significance that Westerners usually assume. In the first place, kings have frequently murdered members of their families in the past and it has not, thereby, reduced their legitimacy one jot. If Gyanendra had been more intelligent, if he had cooperated with the political parties to isolate the Maoists, if he had been careful not to alienate India, he would still be King today. In other words, the biggest single reason for Nepal being a republic today is the foolishness of Gyanendra, or Mr Shah, as he is now known. Much more could be said on this subject, but let that suffice for today.

On the second question: The brief answer is that China was not backing the Maoist movement—on the contrary, they backed the King against the Maoists until the very last moment, just as the Pope backed King William and the Protestants at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. China backed the old regime in Nepal right up to the last moment. Now that the Maoists are in power, they have lost no time in cosying up to them, inviting their leaders frequently, and upsetting the Indians in the process.

On the third question: Are they *really* Maoists? There are certain affinities here with the question that anthropologists of Buddhism are familiar with: Are these peasants really Buddhists? When the observer, who so certainly declaims that they are not, is a Victorian Christian gentleman whose idea of Buddhism is based on a sentimental conflation of Christ and the Buddha, combined with another conflation between Buddhism and Protestantism, and a third conflation between *present-day* Buddhism

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<sup>20</sup> Mukulika Banerjee (2007) has stressed this theme in the context of Bengal recently. See also Hauser and Singer (1986).

and Roman Catholicism, so that all the evils of superstition and priestcraft are blamed on the decline of Buddhism from its pristine and rationalist original state, then we can confidently side with the peasants who believe themselves to be Buddhist. This is absolutely *not* to claim that the anthropologist must always assert 'My Native right or wrong'. Anthropologists have sometimes found themselves in philosophically tight corners when attempting to find their subjects right in everything. But the more serious point is that the interesting questions, when particular groups identify themselves as belonging to a given tradition, are not usually about their particular degree of orthodoxy, and it is not the anthropologist's first, second, and last duty to award their subjects a mark in the exam sheet of orthodoxy.

So, as far as the Nepali Maoists go, the basic rule of thumb is that, if it looks like a duck, claims to be a duck, belongs to the international duckist association, reads assiduously the works of Chairman Duck and the classic 'How to be a Good Duck' written by his right-hand mallard (later purged), then it is probably safe to say that it is a duck.

Now, there are many paradoxes and ironies when one considers the Nepalese Maoist movement. I will just mention three here:

(1) At the period when China was actively interested in exporting revolution to Nepal, Nepal itself seemed immune. Only a tiny coterie of Nepali communists, with little chance of attaining power, were interested. When a few of them attempted an uprising in 1973 in Jhapa, just over the border from Naxalbari in India, it was brutally and swiftly suppressed.

By the time a genuine and true-believing Maoist movement had emerged in Nepal, China itself was horrified at any idea that the people should revolt against the government, and denounced the Nepali Maoists as terrorists who were besmirching the good name of Chairman Mao. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, King Gyanendra seized power and himself chaired the council of ministers, thereby turning himself into his own Prime Minister. He put the leaders of the political parties under house arrest and seized and imprisoned leading members of civil society. Gyanendra found that he had alienated India, the USA, and the European countries, and the only countries to offer him support were Pakistan, Burma, China, and Cuba. A year later, as Gyanendra's hold on power faltered in early 2006, he had to receive a lecture from his visitor, the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, on the importance of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, and cooperation with political parties.

(2) When, in January 2007 the Tarai, the southern region of Nepal abutting India, rose up in revolt demanding representation for the Madhes, as they call it, the Maoists suddenly

demanded that the government take a firm line with these terrorists and hooligans who were undermining law and order.

(3) Following the elections of April 2008 and the formation of a new government led by the Maoists, Nepal's Minister of Defence was Comrade Badal, a.k.a. Ram Bahadur Thapa, one-time engineering student in the Soviet Union, during the civil war a leading PLA general, and a member of the Maoists' politburo. As mentioned already, having shunned them for so long, China has had to make up lost time in terms of building bridges with the Maoists, and has been assiduous in inviting Badal and others for official visits in the PRC. On the other hand, the Nepal Army is not at all happy at being formally under the command of one of their former adversaries. Tension over the amalgamation of armies issue has bubbled; now the tension has been exacerbated by the army continuing to recruit new soldiers to replace those retiring, despite explicit orders from the Ministry of Defence to desist. The Ministry of Defence got its revenge by not renewing the positions of the top eight brigadier generals. In yet another ironic turn of events, the generals then hired private lawyers to fight the lawyers of their own Ministry of Defence up to the Supreme Court in an attempt to keep their jobs.

Such ironies are to be expected in the looking-glass world produced by the peace process—and nearer to home are familiar from the incorporation of former Sinn Féin IRA commanders in Northern Ireland as Ministers in charge of the police service.

The question here is: What should be the role of anthropology in studying this process?

Anthropology is not the kind of subject that often makes predictions. An exceptional example, highly relevant to the present discussion, by someone who might count as an honorary anthropologist, is the 1992 article by development and Latin America expert Andrew Nickson, 'Democratisation and the Growth of Communism in Nepal: A Peruvian Scenario in the Making?' Nickson arrived in Nepal in 1990. Most of his article is a political history, but he also observed the striking structural and geographical similarities between Peru and Nepal. In both, backward and despised mountain areas had reason to resent the state and the elites. In both countries, education was the one development indicator showing real success. In both, the state's bloated bureaucracy simply could not absorb any more of the educated and semi-educated unemployed. Nickson concluded (1992; 381):

The Peruvian experience suggests that economic and social frustrations experienced by graduates from ethnic minorities and other low castes could well be translated into support for the all-encompassing political ideology of Maoism with its promise of a 'new republic' of equality and democracy.

He noted evidence that the Masal (the precursor of the Maoists) had already established guerilla training camps, and he suggested that, barring an extremely unlikely espousal of radical reforms by the ruling Congress Party, there would be widespread support for revolutionary solutions.

Nickson's paper—in so far as it was noticed—was pooh-poohed both by Nepal specialists and by the elite in Kathmandu, but turned out to be highly prescient. With his comparative framework, Nickson had noticed something that had escaped the anthropologists who worked on the very region which became the crucible of Maoism in west Nepal, not to mention all other specialists on Nepal.<sup>21</sup>

So, though anthropologists may have failed to anticipate—like almost everyone else—what was going to happen, what can they contribute now that it has happened? There are four areas in which they are currently doing so.

First, as with elections, ground-level descriptions and analysis of what life is like under the Maoists: Judith Pettigrew, whom I've already mentioned, has written several articles on these lines: the titles will give you an idea: 'Guns, Kinship, and Fear' (2003), 'Living between the Army and the Maoists' (2004), and 'Learning to be Silent: Change, Childhood, and Mental Health in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal' (2007).

Secondly, anthropologists have led the way in analysing how the Maoists have communicated their message and built their movement around symbols that reinterpret already existing Hindu notions of place and sacrifice. The pioneer author here is Anne de Sales, chargée de recherches at CNRS, but also an associate of our institute, ISCA. Her seminal article, 'The Kham Magar Country: Between Ethnic Claims and Maoism' (2003), has been anthologized in several places and is required reading for anyone interested in the issue. Her CNRS colleagues Philippe Ramirez (1997) and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (2004, 2006, 2009) have also contributed much to our understanding on these lines.<sup>22</sup> The cult of martyrs as part of a political movement was not the invention of the Maoists, but they have certainly raised it to new heights in the Nepalese context. Not only has it been an important part of motivating and building a successful movement, it has generated similar cults on the part of other movements, and indeed on the part of the Nepal Army as well. Other anthropologists have also looked at the role of political

21 Nickson wrote in 2005 that 'it did not take a stroke of genius in 1992 to predict that a radical Maoist insurgency would soon appear and make rapid inroads in Nepal'. He continued: 'Similarly, it does not take a stroke of genius to realise that a CPN (Maoist) government would be genuinely "pro-poor".' Therefore the British government and DFID should back them as the force most likely to enact their 'good governance' agenda (Nickson 2005). Augusta Molnar, a German anthropologist, had written a book on women in Thabang (Molnar 1981), the village that was to become the Maoists' capital and is now a site of leftist pilgrimage. In it, perhaps to protect her friends, she did not mention political affiliations or activities at all. However, we now know that communist teaching was going in a very open way at the very time she was there (Ogura 2007).

22 See also Steinmann (2006), de Sales (2003b). Another important edited collection, from this side of the Channel, is Hutt (2004).



theatre and cultural performance (songs, poems, plays) as a very important part of the Maoist movement.

A third anthropological perspective is to look specifically at those youth who join the movement. Two of my students, Rosalind Evans and Ina Zharkevich, have made important advances here. There had been anecdotal accounts linking the development agency discourse on empowerment to the appeal of the Maoists. I and others in Kathmandu have heard stories of Maoists turning up on the final day of a three- or five-day training camp paid for by INGOs. The Maoists ask to be allowed to give a talk to the participants, in which they say, more or less, ‘If you want real empowerment and real change, come with us’—whereupon many of the participants do indeed join up and go off with them. Roz Evans’ work with young Bhutanese refugees gives some substantial ethnographic grounding to this connection, showing that indeed it is often the most articulate, idealistic, and academically able students, who shine in the empowerment programmes run by Western and international INGOs, who join the Bhutanese Maoist movement dedicated to overthrowing the Bhutanese monarchy (Evans 2007, 2008). In the case of Ina Zharkevich, her close attention to the lives of young Maoists in Kathmandu and Thabang shows how—far from being a case of brainwashing, or victimization, as often portrayed—the process of becoming a Maoist is a deliberate and repeated choice about remaking the self, a conscious decision to seek education, self-improvement, and idealism (Zharkevich 2009).<sup>23</sup>

Finally, one of the interesting points about the Maoist movement in comparative perspective is the very large numbers of women involved. Some estimates put the number of women fighters in the People’s Liberation Army at one third. The theme of ‘Girls with Guns’ (cf. West 2000) has attracted some journalistic attention.<sup>24</sup> My belief is that the explanation for the high female involvement in the Maoists’ People’s Liberation Army can best be provided from anthropology. Women’s status is indeed secondary, compared to men, in Nepal. But it is, relatively, higher in many if not all Nepali sub-cultures than it is in most of north India. Thus, for women, joining the movement is definitely a step towards liberation (from household duties and expectations, whether in their natal home or in their husband’s home), despite the obligations and duties involved. Yet it is not an unthinkable step, as it would be in so much of north India. For men, on the other hand, accepting the discipline of the Maoist movement is less likely to seem like release from oppression, though they too are motivated by the altruistic desire to dedicate their life to bettering the country and doing something about poverty. On the question of gender, the explanation here is similar to that which is given to account for the surprising and

23 For some ethnography of the generations of activists who came of age before the rise of the Maoist movement, see Gellner and Karki (2007) and references given there.

24 Pettigrew and Shneiderman (2004) provide a preliminary discussion of the issue.

unexpected prominence of women in the Theravada Buddhist movement, as described in my book with Sarah LeVine: *Rebuilding Buddhism* (LeVine and Gellner 2005).

All these anthropological perspectives on the cultural and symbolic aspects of Maoism are an important counterweight to a more positivistic way of approaching the revolution encouraged by INGO donor funding, namely to look for the ‘causes’ of the revolution and to find them in the something called ‘exclusion’ or ‘poverty’. Simple correlations, which attempt to show that Maoist violence is highest in areas with the worst poverty indicators, go together with simple policy recommendations: spend more money in districts X and Y. While the backwardness of far west districts of Nepal and the fact that people are literally starving there while all development is concentrated in the towns, particularly the capital, is certainly to be deplored, nothing is gained by advancing these simple-minded explanations, which leave entirely out of account social relations, politics, and history.<sup>25</sup> The explanation why the revolution started in the districts of Rolpa and Rukum cannot avoid history, anthropology, and the choices of particular people.<sup>26</sup> It is precisely in this kind of context that anthropology’s message, ‘It is not as simple as that’, deserves to be repeatedly and forcibly expressed. Hopefully this can be combined with a more subtle historical account of just what those causes are (though that would be another lecture).

## Conclusion

I turn now to some concluding reflections. I chose to speak about these examples because increasingly anthropologists are studying social phenomena of equal interest to other social science disciplines, and I wanted to show that anthropology has something to offer those disciplines.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, anthropologists should preen themselves—rather than feel threatened—by the appearance of ethnography in educational studies, sociology, cultural studies, history, and so on. Many disciplines recognize that anthropological methods can serve their purposes too.

Anthropology can no longer maintain a fantasy, if ever it did, of being the queen of the social sciences. Its claims in that regard were even more fantastical than those of sociology, whether in Parsonian, Giddensian, or any other mode. But, on the other hand, it needn’t be despondent that its subject matter has disappeared or is disappearing.

Overall, I believe the history of anthropology is better seen in terms of a gradualist English political history model, rather than, following French political history, as a series

25 I am thinking here of analyses such as that by Murshed and Gates (2004), which was funded by DFID. A more sustained analysis, which does at least try to make use of the work of specialists on Nepal, is the book by Riaz and Basu (2007). In my case, they copy a table of governments of Nepal 1990-2002 from Gellner (2003: 14), including copying all the mistakes (Riaz and Basu 2007: 59).

26 See Ogura (2007, 2008a, 2008b) for some preliminary work in this line.



of revolutions which sweep away everything that has been before. Yes, the Malinowskian moment was indeed a major paradigm shift, as the conventional story has it. But thereafter I do not think that the overthrow of structural functionalism represented the same kind of radical change, whatever it may have felt like at the time, still less the supposedly radical shifts and new vocabularies that have been offered subsequently.

Anthropology in recent years has experienced so many ‘turns’—the hermeneutic turn, the postmodern turn, the material turn, the turn to embodiment, the linguistic turn, the Foucaultian turn, the cognitive turn, the rise of medical anthropology, the evolutionary turn—it is not surprising that some may feel more than a little dizzy. Others may claim that anthropology (and allied disciplines) has had more turns and more dead ends than an ornamental maze.

The postmodern critique that washed over the discipline in the wake of Clifford and Marcus’s famous collection, *Writing Culture* (1986), was always pulled in two quite contradictory directions. On the one hand, there was the line that stable cultures, and stable concepts, had always been exaggerated and ideological myths that traditional ethnographic method had bought into. Any attempt to represent another culture was and is inherently partial, and one interpretation can never be judged as better or worse than any other. On the other hand, there was a felt need to find better ways to describe and capture a changing, globalizing world. For the former position, postmodernism captured an eternal human condition; for the latter it was part of the *current* human condition. For the postmodern position, there was no objective way to capture social reality at any time. For working ethnographers, on the other hand, some kind of objectivity was possible, providing one’s methods were attuned to the social conditions obtaining at the time. This basic contradiction does not seem to have been clear either to Clifford and Marcus or to others at the time. It was evidently obscured by the iconoclasm of the moment. But the divide between those who deny the possibility of representation and those who seek more adequate means of representing seems pretty clear now, and the vast majority of anthropologists are with the gradual reformists rather than the revolutionaries on this issue.

Out of the ferment that followed *Writing Culture*, there has emerged much experimentation, some of it dotty, maybe—but I do not think that a variety of approaches should be seen as constituting a crisis, as is often thought. There is innovation in method of presentation—see, for example, Andrew Beatty’s recent book on Java, *A Shadow Falls*, which uses novelistic methods to convey ethnography about people’s changing experiences of Islam.

There is also great ingenuity in the places where ethnography is done. It is, inevitably, invidious to name names, but two that have caught my eye recently are Anthony Good (2007) writing on the British asylum courts and Tim Allen (2006) on

the institutionalization of human rights in Uganda. In our own department, we have exciting new work being done in medical anthropology, material and visual culture, on migration, and in cognitive and evolutionary anthropology—the only danger, as I see it, is that the constituent units will drift apart and fail to maintain their vital connection to the social and cultural mother ship and its tradition of long-term, intensive, historically engaged fieldwork in the vernacular.

Anthropology will, I am sure, maintain its ability to ask the awkward questions that often irritate fellow social scientists. Anthropologists will remain the specialists on getting the back story, what Gerd Baumann, in *Contesting Culture* (1996), his brilliant little book on ethnic politics in Southall, calls the ‘demotic discourse’ as opposed to the ‘official discourse’ or what James Scott calls the local knowledge or *metis* as opposed to the grand schemes and classifications of the state.<sup>27, 28</sup>

Moving beyond this task of giving voice to the voiceless and disrupting nationalist and other dominant narratives—being ‘awkward’ as I have put it—anthropology can and should attempt comparison and explanation. I am aware that I have not done it here, but it can be done in an anthropological and culturally sensitive intra-regional way, as with Adam Kuper’s *Wives for Cattle* (1982), a structuralist analysis of varying but related marriage practices in southern Africa, and Peter Rivière’s *Individual and Society in Guiana* (1984). There are, moreover, many possibilities for collaborative work, both between different branches of anthropology, and between anthropology and other social sciences.

Anthropologists do need to be more explicit about methods, about how we write, and about the standards of evidence expected. The days of making a mystery of our methods, of hinting to our audience that we know better than them but are not willing to divulge the sources of our knowledge to the uninitiated, are gone. Many of those who have called for more reflexivity have not been above such insinuations of superior insight.

As an evocation of another era on the methods front, but also as an expression of faith in the possibilities of total immersion participant observation, I would like to end with a story from Michael Gilson, formerly Khalid bin Abdullah al-Saud Professor for the Study of the Contemporary Arab World in this university.

27 On Scott’s *Seeing Like a State* (1998), see the important commentary by Li (2005) where she makes the case for anthropologists as specialists in studying the clash of high-modernist grand schemes and the resistance and compromises that become necessary as people are impacted by them: ‘the beyond of grand plans at particular sites and conjunctures’ (ibid.: 392).

28 We may, I hope, see historians like Shahid Amin as fellow travellers of anthropology. His book *Event, Metaphor, Memory* (1995), deals with an incident that occurred in a small town called Chauri Chaura, rather close to Nepal, in Uttar Pradesh. In 1922 a crowd, inspired by loyalty to Mahatma Gandhi, pursued 23 policemen into the local police station where they were burnt to death—thus leading Gandhi to call off his non-violent, non-cooperation movement. As a founding member of the Subaltern Studies group, Amin is, of course, concerned to recover the voices of the participants. Not content to restrict himself to the archive, he went to talk to the children of those who went to jail and were hanged for their part in the ‘riot’, who were, by the time he got there, either dead or in their eighties.

I have known the story in a slightly variant version for many years, and have frequently used it when teaching fieldwork methods, but for today's occasion I thought I should check it. So here it is, quoted straight from Michael's e-mail:

My memory is of writing to EP in total panic, city of 5 million, no cattle byres, no sacrifice, no wet season, dry season and basically saying 'help, what do I do' while knowing perfectly well that that was a fatal thing to ask. His reply, -- on one of those flimsy little blue airmail letter forms that you always opened somehow on the wrong join...

[For the younger members of the audience who have heard of letters but never actually sent one, and will certainly never have seen these blue airmail letters or aerogrammes, I include a picture; and part of the point here was that, if you wanted to, you used to be able to squeeze quite a lot of words on to one of these]

... -- was, more or less:

'Dear Michael (or was it simply Dear Gilsehan), thank you for your letter. I am sure that you will do whatever is best in the circumstances. Yours ever, E.E.E-P.' [Very Zen of him. Utterly wise or utterly indifferent? Perhaps the same?] Between EP and the Sufi Saint...which was more powerful or more enigmatic? or dangerous?

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# THE NEVER-ENDING DEBATE ABOUT THE MORAL BASIS OF A BACKWARD SOCIETY: BANFIELD AND 'AMORAL FAMILISM'

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**Abstract:** *This article analyses Edward Banfield's book, The moral basis of a backward society. According to this American scholar, prioritizing present orientation over future planning is the distinctive character of backwardness. For this reason, in understanding backward rural contexts, cultural factors are far more important than socio-economic factors. His research is extensively discussed in the first section of the article. Then, in the second part, the main criticisms in both international and Italian debates over the book are presented in order to contextualize the reasons for the strong scholarly interest generated by the theory of amoral familism.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Il vedermi con una sorella muoveva uno dei loro più profondi sentimenti: quello della consanguineità, che, dove non c'è senso di Stato né di religione, tiene, con tanta maggiore intensità, il posto di quelli. Non è l'istituto familiare, vincolo sociale, giuridico e sentimentale; ma il senso sacro, arcano e magico di una comunanza.<sup>2</sup> (Levi 1990: 78)*

In his famous 1945 book, *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*, Carlo Levi described the socio-economic conditions of a small village in Basilicata, the same region where Edward Banfield undertook his sociological study ten years later. While Carlo Levi is a non-academic writer, his understanding of the reality of peasant life contributed to the general public interest, already manifested in the political and academic worlds, in the so-called

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2 'Social organization and amoral familism in Chiaromonte: criticisms of Banfield's thesis by a familist'.



*questione meridionale*<sup>3</sup> (Compagna 1963; Franchetti and Sonnino 1974; Gramsci 1952; Rossi-Doria 1948, 1958, 1967; Salvadori 1977; Villari 1961; Vöchting 1955). Discussion of the economic and social backwardness of southern Italy involved many generations of writers and social scientists: for this reason, the publication of Banfield's book contributed to fostering an intensive debate that has a number of implications for social scientists today.

Banfield introduced the topic with clarity, but he had to face the reactions of an entire generation of Italian social scientists. According to them, Banfield's approach was stereotypical and simplistic, disregarding completely the historical development of the south. The result was a biased analysis, which contributed to the creation of a false paradigm: the structure of familial life in the south of Italy is the core reason for the absence of collective action and economic development.

*The moral basis of a backward society* was not the only research undertaken by American sociologists describing the characteristics of families in rural areas of the south of Italy. Norman Douglas, in his book *Old Calabria* (1915), anticipated the interest in these regions, and during the 1950s many American sociologists undertook fieldwork in the area, revealing to the Anglo-Saxon scholarship community the complexity of this part of the world, in which modernity and backwardness coexisted in the same nation. In general, this interest in Italy can be correlated with the massive Italian immigration to the United States, the escape of Italian intellectuals like Gaetano Salvemini from fascism and Italian books such as *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* mentioned earlier (Mazzarone 1978).

American sociologists (Friedmann 1954b; Moss and Thomson 1959; Lopreato 1961) had the merit of inaugurating a season of sociological study. In particular, Friedmann conducted participant observation in Matera with the aim of understanding how to manage the displacement of populations from the *sassi* to social housing without having a negative impact on social relations. He was struck by the dignity of Italian peasants in their way of coping with the so-called *miseria*. Nevertheless, Banfield was the only one to generate significant interest among scholars.

The success and distinctiveness of *The moral basis of a backward society* go beyond its description of the rural context and the reasons for the underdevelopment of southern Italy. Success can also be attributed to Banfield for providing a simple and straightforward explanation for a problem that has interested generations of writers, philosophers and social scientists. It has been said that, 'Theories that won't die are those that confirm our most basic assumptions' (Thompson 2005: 446). Amoral familism doubtless belongs to this category of theories.

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3 Thomson 2005: 446.

After being discussed for twenty years, Banfield's book has been rediscovered in the last decade thanks to the wave of interest in social capital. Robert Putnam (Putnam et al. 1993), in *Making democracy work*, follows the same path of analysis. He tried to strengthen Banfield's methodology and to improve his historical argumentation.

What follows is a critical discussion of Banfield's theoretical model, highlighting the main criticisms proposed and demonstrating the importance of this topic to current academic debate.

### *1.1. Banfield and his interest in the south of Italy*

Edward Banfield was an American social scientist who, apart from a short stay in Pennsylvania, spent his entire academic career at the universities of Chicago and Harvard. His wife, Laura Fasano, was the daughter of two Italian immigrants, who both came from two small villages in the Salerno area (Colombis 1992).

Banfield's interest in the mechanisms driving the generation of collective action and the increase in generalised trust started with unpublished research he conducted in Utah in 1952. He studied the south-western part of the state, an area considered chronically underdeveloped. The aim of the research was to understand how local peasants managed an environment that lacked primary resources. Banfield suggested the possibility of creating a 'sociology of efficiency' in order to explain the conditions that influence the proper use of the land and the other resources involved in agricultural activity. Culture, social structure and the mechanism of social change were the main categories of his analysis (Colombis 1992).

He led the research in a small village, assuming that only a small-scale study would be able to reveal the ethos of the inhabitants. Disappointed by his results, after his research in Utah he decided to apply the same methodology in another cultural context. He selected Italy because of a recent agrarian reform there and because his wife was able to understand Italian and its southern dialects.

He decided to focus on a village of less than 10,000 inhabitants, as he believed it would then be easier to understand the functioning of the economy as a whole and its relation to the cultural background. When he arrived in Italy, with the help of Manlio Rossi-Doria and Gilberto Marselli (one of his students) he travelled the south, finding in Chiaromonte—called Montegrano in his study—a perfect environment for his research. *The moral basis of a backward society* represents the turning point of his academic career. After its publication, he obtained a professorship at Harvard and intensified his consultancy activities for governmental agencies.

During his career, Banfield compared rural and urban contexts. He had an active role in policy-making, acting as a consultant to the US federal government during the Nixon administration and working in the field of urban development and poverty issues.

His research interests are well explained by his two main works: *The moral basis of a backward society* (1958) and *The unheavenly city* (1970, 1974). In these two books, Banfield constructed his analysis of 'amoral familism' and 'lower-class present orientations' using similar deterministic arguments. He argued that there is something embedded in culture that makes people behave in a certain way, with which public intervention cannot deal directly. Liberal scholars often accused him of reshaping old theories in an appealing way to affirm a conservative political ideology. However, with a background in agricultural studies, a passion for ethnography, and much experience in urban planning and the alleviation of poverty, he had the opportunity to write about many social issues, raising great interest and controversy in both the academic and political spheres in the process.

## 2. THE MORAL BASIS OF A BACKWARD SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION

*The moral basis of a backward society* begins with two quotations: Hobbes describing the difficult condition of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Tocqueville glorifying 'the Science of Association' as the mother of all sciences. The book's content was well explained by the premise that the south of Italy was in a disastrous situation because the 'Science of Association' was being ignored, and people were not able to formulate collective strategies in order to react against poverty.

Banfield states the aim of his analysis clearly, telling the reader that the cause of the region's backwardness is to be found in the lack of common actions to achieve long-term improvements. This idea of an inability to transcend short-term material interests is also a distinctive characteristic of the description of the lower classes in *The unheavenly city*. In *The moral basis of a backward society*, the inability to plan and associated endemic backwardness is explained by the presence of an amoral vision of the family, the so-called 'amoral familism'.

Amoral familism is generated by three circumstances: the first is socio-economic, leading to a high death rate; the second is historical, resulting in certain conditions of land tenure; and the third is purely cultural, namely the absence of the institution of the extended family. This final circumstance is considered the most important by the American scholar and is analysed diffusely in his book.

### 2.1. Associative life in Montegrano: exploring the cultural reasons for 'backwardness'

The lack of associative life is thoroughly considered by Banfield. It is interesting to note that all the indicators he used were revived 35 years later by Putnam for his famous quantification of social capital through macro-indicators in *Making democracy work* (Putnam et al. 1993). In this sense, Banfield's analysis addresses themes that have become central in social capital theory.

The evidence given for the lack of trust and collective action includes the absence of local newspapers or of charities, the existence of a single club, the strong control of the central administration from Potenza, the poor condition of the public schools and unstable voting at political elections. All these indicators are apparent signs of the villagers' inability to take collective action to improve the situation of the village. Banfield's exploration of social trust resembles the first conceptualization of social capital outlined by Hanifan (1916), in which she stated that rural communities can improve only if people work together to build social capital.

Banfield outlines common theories of underdevelopment: poverty, ignorance, apolitical behaviour reflecting class interest and antagonism, landowner conservatism, the inefficiency and remoteness of institutions, fatalistic attitudes; however, none of them can fully explain Montegrano's situation. The extreme poverty cannot justify the total absence of civic awareness among Montegrano's population. There seems to be something cultural that prevents people from acting together to improve the community. Banfield does not offer any further arguments about poverty or give any socio-economic reasons for backwardness. In this environment, there is no space for collective strategies. People are able to act rationally only out of their own self-interest. A clear example of this is provided by villagers' self-enforced regulation of the number of offspring to guarantee a better future for their sons. According to Banfield, this demonstrates that people appear pessimistic only in regard to collective action, not individual action.

Southern culture makes problems worse, since the *miseria* is not considered an economic issue. As Banfield states: 'What makes the difference between a low level of living and la miseria comes from culture. [...] There are primitive societies in which the level of biological well-being is even lower, but in which people are not chronically unhappy' (1958: 64-5). Culture makes people 'chronically unhappy' more than any other socio-economic cause. This point of view is demonstrated from the perspective of social class and the fear of decreasing social mobility. Even people at the bottom of the social scale fear degradation, and this is entirely a cultural problem.

Economic concerns do not affect notions of correct behaviour, any more than do the ways people think about themselves in relation to the rest of society. The risk of failing is always present; however, people do not similarly consider the opportunities for upward mobility. The only possibility to move upward is intergenerational. For this reason, families have progressively reduced themselves in size and invested heavily in one child.

The analysis of social class is completed by a consideration of the relationship between the lower and upper classes. Communication is mediated through the gift, which demonstrates that a person of lower class is not on a level of parity with those

above. The gift demonstrates the existence of a 'feudal' social structure, an idea that was reconsidered and expanded by Putnam (1993) to demonstrate that the lack of collective social action has a historical genesis.

## 2.2. *The postulate of amoral familism and its implication for analysis*

In the chapter entitled 'A predictive hypothesis', Banfield assumes a positivist approach and defines the postulate of 'Amoral Familism' and all its consequences. The success of Banfield's work is dictated by the clarity of his propositions; the main drawback is the lack of data to support his hypothesis. His approach has often been regarded as methodologically incorrect (Marselli 1963).

The basic explanatory hypothesis for the backwardness of southern Italy, the 'amoral familism' theory, is clearly announced: 'Maximize the material, short run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise' (Banfield 1958: 85). This proposition implies that everyone will act for the short-term gain of the family, thereby destroying every opportunity for collective action. This premise shapes all other relations in society, affecting the behaviour of civil servants and voting decisions, and destroying all opportunities for concrete change. The primary consequence of Banfield's theory is that people will have public concerns only when there is a potential for individual gain.

The only people for whom it is acceptable to show an interest in public affairs are officers and civil servants; if a private citizen were to take part in public affairs, he would be deemed abnormal and would likely be accused of self-interest. It follows that citizens cannot control officers, therefore only officers (superiors) can check other officers.

This condition will reduce the efficiency of control and the quality of the work of officers. In the context of self-interest and amoral familism, officers will use their position as a weapon against other citizens, rather than for the communal benefit as a whole. Officers will always be accused of bribery and improper behaviour without sound evidence.

These problems do not only exist among public services and officers. In an amoral familist society, there is no space for cooperation, trust or collective action in any situation; the general context of non-cooperation will make the law less applicable and disregarded if there is not a certain punishment attached.

This state of fear and short-term interest pushes the weakest people in society towards conservatism. They would prefer to be poor under the present order rather than totally ruined by a new one. In such an environment, it is not possible for leaders to recruit people to support serious intentions for political change. Even if a leader were able to prove his capacity, he or she would be viewed with distrust. The only approximation to leadership is the relationship between patron and client, but even this is not based on

pure leadership. The client will follow the patron in an attempt to maximize his or her own and family's self-interest (Banfield 1958: 100).

As with law and policy, electoral behaviour is said to be driven by the logic of the amoral family. Public and class interest do not affect the choice to the same extent. Everything is dictated by the principle of short-term advantage. Also, the vote does not have any stability because there is no political machine. According to Banfield, this happens for three reasons: first, the secrecy of the vote does not allow a secure agreement; secondly, there are not enough short-term benefits to justify investment in an electoral machine; and thirdly, it is economically unsustainable to maintain an organisation of this type in a context of poverty. In fact, this lack of electoral machinery and instability does not seem to respond to the general southern condition. While it is true that Banfield commented on the situation in Montegrano, the Communist Party and Democrazia Cristiana were actually prominent there at this time, and national elections showed an impressive stability from 1948 to 1992. In fact, Democrazia Cristiana, with the cooperation of other small parties, ruled the whole country in this period without any significant opposition.

### 2.3. *Ethos and possible future solutions*

After setting out and exploring his theory, Banfield describes concisely the ethos of Montegrano's inhabitants and how it impacts on their general behaviour.

First, an individual, and in particular adults, may not exist outside his role as parent. Secondly, people are pessimistic and believe in destiny, against which nothing can be done. Using TAT (thematic apperception tests), Banfield notices that the great majority of life histories he collected speak about calamities and misfortune: 'Only two or three of the 320 stories were positively happy in tone' (Banfield 1958: 109). The portrait created by Banfield is reminiscent of Giovanni Verga (1881) and his *Malavoglia*: to succeed in life, it is important to be lucky. In fact, all the conditions for improving one's own position are beyond one's control as an individual.

Thirdly, observing social links between fellow townsmen, Banfield approaches the subject of social networks and anticipates social capital theory. An illustration of this is where he describes bonds of trust between individuals as only functioning in the presence of possible punishment or direct control.

The current amoral ethos is embedded in history and derives from the particular conditions relating to land tenure. The land has always been in the hands of the aristocracy, making it impossible for small countrymen to work together and benefit from their own work. For this reason, people become suspicious even of members of their own extended family, with everyone trying to survive through a direct relationship with the

landowner. This hierarchical structure destroys all horizontal ties, making people selfish and interested only in their nuclear family.

Banfield does not want simply to contribute to descriptive research; in fact, in the final part of the book, he highlights the utility of his study for redesigning and implementing new policies. The only way of changing this amoral ethos is through the presence of an outside group that will become the agent for change, assuming leadership and forging a new path for the citizens of this backward area:

The possibility of planned change depends upon the presence of an 'outside' group with the desire and ability to bring it about. If all Italians were amoral familists, no such group would exist. In fact, the political left, the church, and the industry of the north all contain elements which might inspire and support reform in the south. (Banfield 1958: 164)

Yet even if there were an opportunity for change, the conclusion of his analysis is pessimistic. Examining the evolution of southern Italy, we can regard his final judgment as a prophecy:

Such changes will not at once be reflected in a new ethos. The present ethos will tend to perpetuate itself for a long time, even though many of the circumstances which gave rise to it no longer exist or no longer operate in the old way. Long established ways of thinking and valuing have a life of their own independent of the particular conditions which gave rise to them. This is what has been called 'cultural lag'. (Banfield 1958: 169)

In fact, after more than fifty years southern Italy remains underdeveloped, without any sign of economic convergence with standards in the north.

### **3. CRITICISMS: THE ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Banfield's strong conclusion and his ability to discuss a central topic among Italian scholars in a new manner sparked a long debate that still stimulates academic and political discussion today. The most important criticisms will be highlighted here, while also mentioning authors who wrote about the same issues from different perspectives.

The first section is dedicated to Rossi-Doria's arguments about the agrarian origins of southern backwardness. The second concentrates on the initial anthropological and sociological criticisms of Banfield. The third develops the criticisms advanced by Colombis in the 1970s. The fourth looks at the debate about the relationship between family structure and economic development in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, the fifth reviews the debate aroused after the publication of the third Italian edition in 2006.



### 3.1. Rossi-Doria and the agrarian origin of southern backwardness

Manlio Rossi-Doria, a famous professor of agrarian economy, was the first Italian academic to communicate with Banfield. He provided basic information to Banfield while he was visiting the south of Italy seeking a village for his study. Rossi-Doria's work (1948, 1958, 1967) deserves mention because, without directly criticising Banfield, he wrote extensively on the reasons for the absence of collective action in the south. However, he gave a very different explanation from that presented by Banfield in *The moral basis of a backward society*. According to Rossi-Doria, the absence of collective action in the south has been generated historically by the agrarian system and the poor conditions of the peasants.

In 1958, the same year Banfield's book first appeared, Rossi-Doria published his *Dieci anni di politica agraria nel Mezzogiorno*. In the first chapter of the book, he reviewed the development of Italian agriculture since the agrarian reform of 1950. He described the reasons for the backwardness of southern agriculture, the fascist policies of *autarchia* and the increased divergence from the north. Northern agriculture, based on cereals and animal husbandry, conformed to the needs of Mussolini's regime. Southern agriculture, by contrast, was based on wine and oil. The massive conversion of agriculture there in the 1950s did not produce any increase in productivity because the soil was not suitable for the new types of cultivation.

Agricultural problems, the tremendous demographic increase and massive emigration weakened the economic and social fabric of southern regions. The agrarian reform was not able to reverse a situation of exploitation that had existed for centuries. After Italian unification, peasants went from being dependent on the feudal system to being *braccianti* or day labourers. Little by little, the southern bourgeoisie became absentee landowners, and southern peasants became completely dependent on their idiosyncratic decisions. In this phenomenon is to be found the root of the deviant social and political behaviour of southerners (Rossi-Doria 1958).

Frightened by the fragility of agrarian contracts, conditioned by overpopulation and the consequent unemployment, under occupation, obtaining small parcels of fragmented land after the reform and perpetually lacking capital, credit, technical assistance and organisation, the peasants became suspicious of one another, competing to buy small plots of land rather than cooperating. In this situation, horizontal solidarity was destroyed, and with it the hope of developing a modern democracy with efficient institutions regulated by shared collective norms (Rossi-Doria 1958). In Banfield's book, with some minor exceptions, the historical argumentation is completely absent. The amoral familist peasants are not embedded in their historical and socio-economical contexts, therefore his analysis appears incomplete.



### 3.2. *Initial criticisms: anthropological and sociological perspectives*

In this section, Banfield's first direct critics will be highlighted, mostly Anglo-Saxon scholars with the exception of Marselli and Pizzorno. The criticisms can be divided into two groups: the anthropological perspectives of Frank Cancian (1961), Leonard Moss and Stephen Capannari (1960) and Sydel Silverman (1968, 1976); and the criticisms of the sociologists Gilberto Marselli (1963, 1976), Johan Wichers (1964), Alessandro Pizzorno (1971 [1966, 1976]) and William Muraskin (1974).

Cancian (1961, 1976) was the first scholar to discuss Banfield's book critically. In 'Southern Italian peasant: world view and political behaviour', he showed how Banfield's theoretical model can only account for peasants' political behaviour, not for their entire ethos. Banfield had compared American farmers with Italian peasants, but in the south of Italy the perspectives are different: a peasant struggles for survival and does not aim for accumulation. Banfield had also used an external perspective. Peasants are only a dependent variable of history, and their behaviour does not depend on internal decisions. According to Cancian, instead, the lack of collective action is directly correlated with internal causes, such as the lack of trust in the future and lack of confidence in control of the environment.

Moss and Capannari (1960) mentioned Banfield in their study of a village in Molise. They show how he disregarded the importance of *comparaggio* or grandparenthood. The theory of amoral familism does not explain the importance of grandparenthood, nor why grandparents normally live in other villages. Following Moss and Capannari, Silverman (1968) argued that the theory of amoral familism cannot be extended to the south of Italy as a whole: only certain backward zones have the characteristics highlighted by Banfield. She also agreed with Cancian's criticism that amoral familism cannot be considered a pure ethos, but only an explanation of certain behaviour.

The critiques of the rural anthropologists were softer in tone compared to those of the sociologists and agrarian economists writing in the same period. According to the latter, Banfield's theory had to be completely rejected.

The first sociological critique, mainly a methodological one, was formulated by Marselli (1963) in his article 'American sociologists and Italian peasant society: with reference to the book of Banfield'. Marselli rejected Banfield's methodology, focusing on the incoherence between the strong conclusions of the latter's work and the fieldwork he had conducted on which they were based.

First, interviews were used to demonstrate ideas already mentioned by the author as the drivers of his research. For this reason Banfield, according to Marselli, had carried out 'populist sociology', merely citing peasants to reinforce certain affirmations of his own. All these interviews, in fact, did nothing to support Banfield's position.

Secondly, Banfield applied an incorrect methodology in over-emphasizing psychological research methods that, while useful in urban contexts, are not applicable to a rural society. Peasants cannot struggle against the attitudes of the upper class, but have to conform themselves to the environment in which they live.

Marselli's argument appears forced: in fact, he criticised Banfield for asserting his theory of amoral familism on the basis of a weak methodology when in reality Banfield never asserted an absolute position, remaining quite cautious in the first part of the book: '... our intention is not to "prove" anything, but rather to outline and illustrate a theory which may be rigorously tested by any who care to do so...' (Banfield 1958: 11). Banfield replied with a short note placed in an appendix to Marselli's article: 'Hardly a sentence of his article reveals any comprehension of what we were trying to do' (Banfield, in Marselli 1963: 338).

The debate was now open: even if Marselli's analyses were incomplete and based upon anecdotes rather than systematic demonstrations, his contribution started a germane discussion among experts of Italian conditions. A year after Marselli's contribution, in the same review (*Sociologia Ruralis*), another critique appeared of Banfield's book, formulated by the Dutch sociologist Wichers (1964), who based his article on the lack of historical context in Banfield's work.

Banfield had compared a community in United States with Montegrano, pointing out the presence of voluntary associations as the main difference between the two communities. The lack of vibrant associations in the Italian small village had been determined by the absence of the extended family structure there. For Wichers, instead, the difference is historical and embedded in European culture. There is a different tradition in Nordic and Mediterranean countries among peasants, which can be traced back to feudalism.

Wichers compared Dutch peasants with Montegranian ones, showing that the theory of amoral familism has little historical background. To enhance his study, Banfield should have carefully examined Mediterranean culture and its roots. The arguments presented by Banfield are not solidly grounded in the history of this region, and his theory is too abstract to respond to the complex reality analysed.

Two years after Wichers' article, Pizzorno (1971) provided a decisive contribution to the debate. In fact, his approach strengthened some of the criticisms already highlighted by Marselli and Wichers and added new elements for reflection by revisiting the foundation of Banfield's theoretical model, focusing on its lack of contextualization when analysing relations with the public administration and with power, as well as on Banfield's description of Montegrano as a non-community, revealing results that Banfield omitted from his fieldwork such as the importance of friends, and stressing the need for a further historical investigation.

First, Pizzorno does not criticise the concrete case study (as Marselli did), but the theoretical model proposed by Banfield. According to him, Italian scholars have not taken into account or commented on Banfield's analysis because *The moral basis of a backward society* does not contribute any meaningful insights into the southern question. Montegranians follow their egoism, acting exactly like the British middle class in the eighteenth century. There is not much difference between southern Italian society and that described by Adam Smith (1937 [1776]) in his famous book *The wealth of nations*. The only difference from Smith is the idea of 'short-run material advantage'. Paradoxically, even in Montegrano the conditions for the accumulation of capital essential for the development of a modern economy do exist.

Second, there is another factor in Montegrano's development, one with more impact than the concept of short-run advantage, namely the absence of associations and formal social networks. According to Banfield, people are not able to join groups or to direct policy action in support of the entire community. But even this point appears biased by the author's background. In the Roman juridical tradition, administrative law does not take into account interactions with the public administration. Why should Montegrano's inhabitants do something that does not fit in with their own values? Why should they act in a way that would never generate a concrete effect? And what type of theory would have been formulated if Banfield had undertaken his study in a village where streets and hospitals had been built thanks to the action of some MP in the Parliament in Rome (Pizzorno 1971: 91)? These points, according to Pizzorno, show that amoral familism does not suffice to explain Montegranians' behaviour. The lack of infrastructure in Montegrano seems to be related to an incorrect functioning of the 'typical clientele mechanism', rather than the presence of amoral familism.

Third, analysing Montegrano's social structure is meaningless: the village cannot be seen as a community. Montegrano is a simple agglomeration of houses: each family lives for itself, and people consider any effort to improve present conditions completely useless. Fourth, Banfield omitted from his analysis the importance that Montegranians attribute to sincere friendship.

Fifth, Pizzorno re-states Wickers' criticism of the lack of historical contextualization, in order to introduce his theory about the backwardness of southern Italy. The key idea proposed at the end of the article is that the centre-periphery problem is central in explaining underdevelopment: amoral familism can only be seen as the outcome of a long historical process, not as the original cause. Only individuals can identify themselves with a new system and build new social ties: it is unlikely that an entire community will change if it remains historically marginal:

On the other hand, identification with the new system can occur solely individual by individual, in a place where a new life makes sense, that is, in seats of historical progress. To conceive of communities, of community action, of community identification in historically marginal zones, as long as they remain such, does not make sense. (Pizzorno 1971: 98)

Individuals can only emigrate to change their condition. If they are obliged to remain, they will generate 'human aggregates' and not communities, as in Montegrano's case. In conclusion, Pizzorno brings to the fore the importance of Banfield's analysis in scientifically revealing and discussing conditions in these marginal areas. Banfield nonetheless misinterpreted peculiar factors inherent in the southern Italian context: for this and the aforementioned reasons, his theory of amoral familism has to be rejected.

A fourth criticism was published eight years later by Muraskin (1974), whose position is stated clearly in the title of his article: 'The moral basis of a backward sociologist: Edward Banfield, the Italians, and the Italian-Americans'. According to him, Banfield offered a 'disturbing and oversimplified picture' (Muraskin 1974: 1495) of southern Italians.

### 3.3. *Bias and inaccuracies in Banfield's analysis: Colombis's criticism*

The debate around Banfield's theory arose in Italy only during the 1970s with the publication of the second edition of his book (Banfield 1976). The first edition did not attract great attention, probably because the title was less problematic: *Una comunità del mezzogiorno* (1961). The second edition (1976), with the original title literally translated, presented De Masi's introduction accompanied by many essays written in earlier years about the book. Most of them have already been discussed in the previous section. In this section, the focus will be on Colombis's original analysis.

Colombis meticulously verified the methodology of the research and the terminology Banfield had used and compared Banfield's results with his own fieldwork in the south of Italy. Colombis's first extensive article appeared two years before the second edition of Banfield's book in 1974: 'Organizzazione sociale e familismo amorale a Chiaromonte: critica della tesi di E.C. Banfield da parte di un familista' (Colombis 1974). The aim of the article is to examine the theory of amoral familism from the perspective of southern Italians.

The first criticism Colombis presents is terminological: Banfield uses the term 'amoral familism' as a synonym of egoism—amoral familists are fundamentally egoists. In reality, Chiaromonte's inhabitants are in a situation of extreme poverty and demonstrate a strong spiritual dimension through their devotion and attachment to the family. Colombis is surprised that a scholar coming from a social system where capitalism

has imposed a life-style based on the logic of increasing material consumption should complain about the lack of altruistic feelings in human relationships in a context where people have to struggle to survive (Colombis 1974: 447).

The second criticism is methodological: Colombis raises many questions about the reliability of Banfield's analysis (Colombis 1974: 449-67). Reviewing all the questionnaires used by Banfield, he discovered that there are no distinctions in term of gender or age, even when the questions could be heavily impacted by these variables. The questionnaire is not well constructed, and the answers are interpreted in a misleading manner. For example, 15 out 28 people interviewed preferred a man who cheats on the wife rather than one who steals. Therefore, the majority of those interviewed considered theft a more serious issue than adultery; however, theft damages the stranger, while adultery damages the nuclear family (Colombis 1974: 456). According to Colombis, these answers do not allow Banfield to define the Chiaromontesi amoral familists.

The third criticism relates to the logic of Banfield's argument. In Montegrano he catalogued 809 nuclear and 67 extended families. According to Banfield, inside extended families people learn to act collectively, while in nuclear families egoism toward other members of society is fostered. Therefore, the absence of extended families is one of the main problems in Chiaromonte. According to Colombis, this conclusion is illogical. In fact, growing up in an extended family does not amount to an ability to overcome egoism. If Chiaromontesi were amoral familists, the situation would not change with a larger number of extended families. Instead of maximizing the 'short-term advantage' of the nuclear family, they would maximize the advantage of the extended family (Colombis 1974: 457). Colombis's point is very interesting and applicable to current trends: for example, the current social evolution of southern Italy shows high rates of youth unemployment, which increases the time people spend at home with their parents and thus has a direct impact on the number of extended families. Nevertheless the larger number of extended families does not improve people's ability to act collectively.

According to Colombis (1980), Banfield did not understand southern Italian reality and applied the theory of 'democratic pluralism' in a place where cultural and moral values are distinctively different from the United States. In a context where illiteracy and poverty dominate, the best explanation for backwardness is provided by Pizzorno (1971): Chiaromonte is too isolated to be part of history. In emphasising relations, networks and psychological motivations, Banfield does not consider the structural factors that cause the Chiaromontesi to act individualistically. Following the modern development of cultural approaches to the analysis of the different institutional performances of nations, one can say that Banfield over-emphasised the importance of social capital without considering the structural problems of society.

### 3.4. *Family structure and development: the debate in the 1980s and 1990s*

*The moral basis of a backward society* remained one of the most frequently debated books among Italian scholars throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The reason for this interest is found in the fact that Banfield touched upon three central topics of southern Italian studies: the *questione meridionale*, the debate between structuralists and culturalists about the causes of southern backwardness, and the role played by the family in the process of modernization. For the purpose of this article, this section will concentrate on the debate about the family.

Francesco Benigno (1989) showed how the nuclear family model is not an exclusive prerogative of the south: it also prevailed in the north historically. The structure of the family cannot be the only reason for the economic and institutional divergence between Italian regions. The social importance of the family consists in its ability to mediate between the private and public spheres. When addressing the question of who does not have access to 'public resources', the importance of the family may produce a disregard for collective actions in society and a consideration of only private interest (Giannini and Salomone 1992). In Italy, this role of mediation assumed particular connotations. We can reasonably argue that everywhere the strength and loyalty of family ties have provided support against the specific institutional weaknesses deriving from the fragmented process of unification.

Therefore, the role of the family has been twofold. In the south, where private interests diverged from collective ones, the ability to act collectively has been reduced. In the north-east and centre, where private interests converged with collective ones, the familial model helped the development of an original productive organization during the 1960s and 1970s, namely that in industrial areas. When the family becomes the only perspective for individuals from the cradle to the grave, negative consequences for the formation of individual identity and the structure of society in general can be generated (Gribaudi 1993). The problem is not the 'familism', but the incapacity of welfare policy and the state to liberate individuals from the overwhelming support of the family (Mingione and Magatti 1997).

### 3.5. *The third Italian edition and contemporary debates*

The publication of a third Italian edition of *The moral basis of a backward society* (Banfield 2006) re-opened the debate, demonstrating the centrality of the issues discussed in the book. This section will focus on the most interesting and original contributions. The Italian review *Contemporanea* dedicated much space to Banfield, presenting four articles discussing his book from different perspectives.

Marco Santoro (2007) stresses how much Banfield's book was already out of date by 1958. The ethnographic research conducted by the Boas school, and particularly by



Ruth Benedict (1934), was already more advanced and accurate. Banfield's theory was merely an over-simplification of reality, and amoral familism rapidly became a national habitus that was also accepted outside the academic world. The creation of such a paradigm is largely due to the over-emphasis placed on Banfield's book. Instead, Italian sociologists should have given greater attention to the concept of habitus and its possible declinations in describing southern reality.

The second contribution (Kertzer 2007) draws attention to a paradox stretching beyond Banfield's success: a book written by a man who was hardly able to speak Italian, who spent only nine months in the country and perhaps never read any Italian books, became the most famous sociological study about the south of Italy. Dario Gaggio (2007) highlights how Banfield anticipated a shift from the analysis of social and economic history to cultural history. In fact, *The moral basis of a backward society* represents the basis for the modern conceptualizations of Putnam (1993) and Fukuyama (1995). The last contribution, by Pier Paolo Viazzo (2007), proposes, unlike the other scholars, a positive assessment of Banfield's book. *The moral basis of a backward society* still has much to tell us about the south of Italy. Banfield seems to have correctly forecast the reasons for the drastic reduction in fertility rates and correctly commented on the role played by the nuclear family in this regard. His only mistake was to disregard the importance of neighbourhood relations. Therefore, the ostracism of this classic book should be ended.

Another important Italian review gave space to the debate over *The moral basis of a backward society*. Antonio Blando (2007) published an interesting article in *Meridiana* entitled 'Il Ritorno di Banfield'. The Italian past, as Putnam argues (1993), did not really become past. The cultural and historical developments of recent centuries reduced the efficiency of Italian institutions. Therefore, to explain Italian reality, one needs to abandon the structuralist approach. According to this vision, Italy is becoming a battlefield to test theories successfully applied to American reality. Banfield has the merit of being the first to propose this shift: perhaps this is the strongest reason for the success and immortality of his book.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: 'Theories that won't die are those that confirm our most basic assumptions'**

*The moral basis of a backward society* described only a particular reality with a limited temporal and spatial validity. The central problem with Banfield's theory is the generalization of a small case study, undertaken in a very small and marginal area that is not representative of all southern reality. Amoral familism, therefore, cannot be treated as an anthropological theory, an ideological paradigm or a matter of choice: it is merely a historical product which has to be correctly contextualised. Banfield's framework can only partially explain the absence of collective action. An exhaustive review of all the



causes advanced to explain this phenomenon has been provided by Catanzaro (1983). Culture cannot be directly correlated, in a relationship of cause and effect, with the backwardness of institutions and the faulty development of economic and social life.

The danger with culture-centric theories is the construction of stereotypes that remain attached to some particular context. Southern Italy became the land of amoral familism, even though the historical evolution of the family institution does not diverge from that in the rest of the country. Banfield's theory seems to confirm many basic assumptions. In reality, as has been demonstrated in this article, his argument does not describe the south; rather, it provides a snapshot of Chiaromonte in 1955. Chiaromonte represented only a part of the south, and the 'familism' that connotes Italian social life can only be understood when it is embedded in a particular institutional and social context.

Nevertheless, more than fifty years after its publication, *The moral basis of a backward society* remains a book of great importance in the field of the social sciences. One can judge its impact from the number of commentaries on it and the great attention given to it by Italian scholars and worldwide. Great works are those that are able to raise debates that foster intellectual curiosity and further research. Banfield renewed the opportunity to discuss important sociological and policy issues based on provocative and insightful analyses. He re-read classical topics of social science and opened up new spaces for reflection. In this sense, the modern reader must admire the clarity and the richness of his work, even if many of his ideas are difficult to share and his methodological accuracy has been sometimes obscured by his political ideology:

Despite his attack on the orthodoxy of the time, most liberal academics conceded that Professor Banfield's scholarship was impeccable and deeply insightful. His colleague James Q. Wilson, a political scientist of great distinction, called Banfield 'the most profound student of American politics of this century'. (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 1999)

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# IDEAS AND IRONIES OF FOOD SCARCITY AND CONSUMPTION IN THE MORAL ECONOMY OF TUTA, CUBA<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The broad argument of this article is that national values embedded in what I call the Cuban national moral economy affect local valorisations of provisioning in Cuba and that such transmutations from the national to the local may be detected in some forms of language. I contend that local expressions of consumption and scarcity in Tuta, a town of about 10,000 inhabitants located forty kilometres southwest of Havana city, often stem from the value-laden ‘ideational repertoire’ (Wolf 1999: 8) of Cuban revolutionary nationalism. Terms such as ‘the [daily] fight [*lucha*] for provisions’, used in irony, are not only used to describe recurring challenges to household provisioning in post-1990 Cuba, but also to uphold, implicitly or explicitly, overarching values embedded in Cuban society. By drawing analytical distinctions, as well as assimilations, between linguistic expressions of national and local moral economies, I aim to show that ideas and ironies of consumption in Tuta are more profound than what may be ascertained from either nutritional data on the post-1990 economic crisis or outsider interpretations of the difficulties of daily Cuban life.

## I. Introduction

When, as one informant put it, the ‘Soviet tit went dry,’ the availability of affordable goods from state-owned stores, kiosks and markets plummeted in Tuta. The early 1990s ‘Special Period in Time of Peace’, as Fidel Castro called it, which had officially ended by the late 1990s, was certainly abnormally challenging according to many informants’ descriptions. Prices for goods skyrocketed, yet the average salary remained at 300 pesos per month (around £9 in 2007). Some Tutaños recalled that lard or vegetable oil, essentials for Cuban cooking, cost 100 pesos per litre during this period (in 2007 a litre cost about 10 pesos). Another staple—rice—cost 45 pesos per pound (the 2007 price

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the anonymity of my informants, I have disguised the name of the location where my fieldwork was conducted, as well as the names of individuals.

was 3.5 pesos per pound). Accordingly, talk of dietary deficiencies during these years was common during fieldwork, especially when informants were prompted on the subject: 'People lacked calcium and lost their fingernails ... their hands showed signs.' A person who had lost too much weight was identified as one who 'is eating [electric] cable'.

After spending over fifteen months (2006-7) living with a family in Tuta, I found that scarcities of food in this Cuban town not only led to biological deprivation, but also to new kinds of social reproduction, as illustrated by the innovative ways in which Tutaños 'invented' new versions of desired items when the latter were hard to find or afford. For instance, almost all households I visited cooked rice—a Cuban staple—with twice as much water so that 'it would grow', giving the impression that one had more food on one's plate. Others made up for the lack of meat by 'boil[ing] grapefruit peels, fry[ing] them and call[ing] them steak!' or by 'cut[ting] up plantain peels, fry[ing] them and [eating] them as if they were *chicharrones* [fried pork skins, a favourite food for many Latin Americans]'. Still others claimed they were reduced to eating *arroz con fideo* (rice with thin soup noodles), apparently a very humiliating way to sustain oneself. A young woman joked, 'We ate lizards!' The implication of eating the inedible<sup>2</sup> sparked a memory in her mother's mind: 'Some people were caught and arrested for selling what they claimed to be pork steaks prepared with flour, but were actually fried pieces of *frazada de piso* (rag used for mopping floors)!'

At first glance, these narratives of post-1990s Cuba are consistent with findings from the Central Institute for Economic Planning (CIEM) of the United Nations Development Program, which reported a decrease in daily calorie and protein intake of 78% and 64% respectively (quoted in Suárez Salazar 2000: 292). Longer-term studies, such as that conducted by the Statistics Division of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, also indicate a higher percentage of 'undernourishment' during the early and mid-1990s than in other countries in the region (FAO-STAT 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Despite their value, however, such statistics reduce all food consumption to physiological criteria. Nutritional 'facts' presented in such studies are based on the assumption that estimates for daily per capita intake can be accurately assessed by averages, a quantitative method that completely disregards the prevailing situation of unequal access to food. Moreover, pre-defined, quantitative categories such as calorie and protein intake

2 Of course, what is considered inedible is also culturally specific. In his study of famine in Tikopia, one of the Solomon Islands in Polynesia, Raymond Firth noted that, while people were willing to eat fibrous material such as tree bark, they still would not eat taboo foods such as some birds and bats (Firth 1959: 79). Indeed, more than a few social scientists have argued that in any society most people would rather die of starvation than eat foods they consider inedible or had obtained in an unacceptable way. Perhaps the first to make this point was Audrey Richards when she wrote: 'Culture imposes restrictions [on diet] where nature would have left them free' (Richards 1932: 8).

3 However, this study also suggests that Cuba's overall health indicators have been much higher than others in the region during other periods.

leave no room for qualitative accounts of scarcity and hunger, which are socio-cultural. It is the latter aspect of food scarcity which I wish to consider in this article.

Thirty years ago, Michel de Certeau (1984 [1980]: xviii-xix) reminded us that consumption—even within defined domains, such as nutritional intake—is also a kind of production, a means by which social actors (re)-create the physical and symbolic spaces in which they live. A few years earlier, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood made a similar point: ‘Consumption activity is the joint production, with fellow consumers, of a universe of values’ (Douglas and Isherwood 1978: 67). In the history of anthropology, strictly materialist perspectives on food intake (e.g. Harris 1986) have been contested by structuralist anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g. 1968 [1963]), Mary Douglas (2002 [1966], 1975b) and Marshall Sahlins (1976), who stressed symbolic and cultural ways of separating the edible from the inedible. Sahlins, for instance, argued that, while animals such as horses and dogs may have nutritional qualities, people in the United States do not eat them because they are categorized as ‘friends’ (Sahlins 1976: 170-6). Nor do meat preferences correspond to economic value: though there is a larger supply of steak in the US, it is, according to Sahlins, still set at a higher price than tongue, which is scarcer (*ibid.*).

Anthropologists such as Sahlins and others (Richards 1939; Firth 1959; Kahn 1986; Vaughan 1987; De Waal 1989, 1990; Sutton 2001) have used a symbolic framework to address cultural ideas of hunger and scarcity. In the analysis that follows, I continue along this line of thought. This theoretical framework is appropriate for the context of consumption in socialist Cuba since, as we shall see, some of the ways Tutaños dealt with food scarcities during my fieldwork period (2006-7) were linked to overarching symbols of the Cuban Revolution.

Before we come to the primary focus of the article, however, it is important to indicate that food scarcities are *not* new in revolutionary Cuba. As north American agricultural analyst Leon Mears asserted in the first years of the revolution: ‘Cubans have gone from being among the best fed people in Latin America to a diet below the area’s minimum nutritional standards’ (quoted in Forester and Handelman 1985: 174). Indeed, as I will argue below, the long-term ‘struggle’ for scarce goods in Cuba has become indicative of the very ways in which Cubans reproduce historical patterns of sociality:

For almost as long as the revolution has existed, Cuban sociality has been built around the practices of socialist consumption, from systems of queuing for goods, to sharing information about where items can be bought, to voicing hearty complaints about consumption with a dissatisfaction that could almost never be openly expressed about any other aspect of Cuban society (Pertierra 2007: 128)



Anthropologists who have tackled what John Davis refers to as the ‘sociology of crisis and disaster’ treat privation as a ‘normal’ aspect of everyday life (Davis 1992: 150, 152), countering ‘the assumption that, generally, contentment is the normal, culturally unmarked, state of affairs, while suffering is marked by its being unusual and demanding redressment’ (Hastrup 1993: 736). As one of the many groups of ‘food-insecure people’ (Pottier 1999: vii) in the world, Cubans must deal with crises such as food shortages on a periodic basis due not only to persistent sanctions by the United States, but also to inefficiencies in the state redistributive system, as well as the yearly onslaught of the hurricane season. Like many other peoples who live with scarcities, however, Tutaños faced with food shortages try to maintain ‘normal’ lives in the face of crisis. And they often do so by upholding social moralities and cognitions. As Raymond Firth, perhaps the first anthropologist to study crisis and disaster, argued, the physical realities of famine lead individuals to re-work pre-existing cultural categories; it is rare that they cause Malthusian disasters involving mass deaths (Firth 1959: 54-105):

Where lowering of the food supply takes place fairly rapidly, the strains on the social system are not simply nutritional—belly-gnawing; they depend on recognitions, sentiments, moral evaluations and symbols of social relations. They involve emotional attitudes to the hunger of wife, children and kinsfolk, moral attitudes towards giving food to starving neighbours; social attitudes to the presentation of food as a symbol of social status and social relationships. (ibid.: 52)

Local conceptualizations of food scarcities in Tuta, which near official norms in certain contexts and depart from them in others, structure how people deal with crisis on an everyday level. Like Alex De Waal in the context of famine in Darfur (1989, 1990), I will attempt to show for Tutaño society how outside interpretations of economic crisis are often at odds with insider views of scarcity. To do so, I will explain the way the idea of the national ‘Fight or Struggle (*la Lucha*)’ has been used by local people in Tuta, who have changed it to ‘the daily fight (*lucha*) for provisions’.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as I will argue, while outsiders<sup>5</sup> may regard statements such as ‘the fight for provisions’ and ironic contrasts

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4 In what follows, I make an analytical distinction between the capitalised version of *Lucha*, which refers to the national moral economy, and the lower-case *lucha*, which I use with reference to the local moral economy. I follow this distinction also in translating the word into English.

5 It is clear that I am positioning myself, at least in part, as an insider. This stance can only be justified by the fact that I was allowed to stay in Cuba as the ‘family member’ of a particular Cuban family, who created a fictitious familial relationship to ensure that the Cuban authorities would provide me with a *visa familiar* (family visa) rather than a *visa turística* (tourist visa). I was thus able to see and experience the ‘real’ Cuba as opposed to the typical encounters that tourists (and even academic visitors) have with Cubans. The latter must pay to stay in *casas particulares* (rooms rented out to tourists by Cubans who pay the government a hefty fee) or hotels, and so may only meet Cubans who can afford to rent them rooms, *jineteros* (street hustlers) or officials.

between daily realities and revolutionary ideals as direct attacks upon the foundations of Cuban socialism, I will show how such communicative tactics often reflect efforts to balance demoralizing realities on the one hand with moral norms to continue the national 'Struggle' of the Cuban revolution on the other.

## II. *La Lucha* and Cuban irony

According to some anthropologists, broaching the topic of food in (post)socialist contexts is a very good way to initiate discussions that may lead to the political (see Watson and Caldwell 2005 on Russia; Pertierra 2007: 82 on Cuba; Watson n.d. on China). The anthropologist's intentions aside, food and food provisioning are probably the most talked about subjects in Cuba, apart, perhaps, from health. Indeed, Anna Cristina Pertierra has recently argued that in Cuba '*everybody* complains about shortages and high prices... and nobody can be blamed for doing so. ...although Cuba is a society in which some things can't be spoken about, consumption is not one of those things' (Pertierra 2007: 45, emphasis in the original).

Though women are most often the cooks in the family, men, women and children alike must engage in the 'fight for provisions'. When greeting another on the street, it is common to hear the response: '*Estoy en la lucha...de provisiones* (I am [engaged] in the fight/struggle for provisions)' or just '*Estoy en la lucha* (I am in the fight/struggle)'. Indeed, when I arbitrarily asked one of my primary informants, Claudia, what she thought to be the three most important things in Cuba, she responded, with incremental emphasis: '1. food, 2. Food and 3. FOOD!' Laughing, she added that each corresponds to 'breakfast, lunch and dinner'.

With hindsight, I realized that Claudia's comment drew on a common joke in Cuba, to which we shall soon return. Suffice it to note here that such words like *lucha* have more than one signified: they not only indicate solidarity with the imagined Cuban national community in accordance with the political goal of 'Fighting' for a utopian future and against imperialism, but, because they incorporate the state's discourse, they are also politically neutral ways of expressing exasperation with the daily difficulties involved in provisioning for the household. Words like *luchar*, 'to fight' or 'struggle', work as buffers between individual frustrations with the way everyday life in Cuba is and moral ideals about how it *ought* to be. The unisemic reference to *lucha*, the normative framework that exists above individual experience, may become polysemic in the act of utterance, in the individual performance: 'To describe one's life as a struggle in the Special Period is to make a wry commentary upon the transition that many citizens have made from struggling *for* Cuban socialism to struggling *with* Cuban socialism' (Pertierra 2007: 42).

A comparable use of language has been noted in other (post)socialist contexts, where 'economies of shortage' (Kornai 1980) create the need for similar social

manoeuvring. Olga Shevchenko, for example, explains the dual purpose of ‘consumption narratives’ in the post-Soviet Russian context:

[C]onsumers use [consumption narratives] to voice their discontent (as when they bemoan the constraints and difficulties of being a consumer in both the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ Russian economy), but also to manage their predicament by devising a narrative framework in which the two can co-exist and be invested with value and meaning. In other words, *articulations* of crisis function simultaneously as *instruments* through which this crisis is managed and navigated. (Shevchenko 2002: 854)

Contrary to Shevchenko’s example of post-Soviet Russia, however, where consumption narratives are used primarily to assuage the consumers’ predicament, the dual purpose of signs in Cuba is not only a means by which an individual’s discontent may be disguised and/or managed. Indeed, language performances in Cuba such as jokes serve *both* as outlets for subversion,<sup>6</sup> *and* as ways to reconcile the state’s inability to secure general welfare with collective values that rest above individual experience. Thus while the word *lucha* may have two different meanings—one corresponding to the ‘is’ and the other to the ‘ought’—we must consider the way this distinction may be complicated in actual performance, that is, in localized contexts of Cuban socialism.

Pertierra argues that, for some of her informants, the contradiction between revolutionary values and everyday difficulties in provisioning for the household was not often made explicit. In reference to one woman’s account, Pertierra notes:

[She]...never seemed uncomfortable about distinguishing between her general pride in being ‘a Cuban woman’, supporting the revolution and its achievements, and yet criticizing the shortcomings of the Special Period that she observed had obliged her to struggle to provide good food for the household and to rebuild the house with years of economic sacrifice. (Pertierra 2007: 25)

Likewise, during fieldwork I was surprised to find that even people considered to be closely allied to the revolution—the *jefes* (state managers) of state enterprises, for example—used language that seemed at first quite anti-revolutionary. One of my informants, Ricardo, a *jefe* of a state dairy farm and general secretary of his Communist Party ‘work nucleus’, bewildered me in such a way. When I asked him a simple question: ‘What was the biggest hurricane before Ivan?’, remembering the destruction this tempest had caused, which postponed my second visit to Cuba in 2004, he responded: ‘The hurricane of 1959! We

6 Like Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (1989), I prefer to use the term ‘subversion’ rather than ‘resistance’. As in Yang’s China, the ‘oppositional economy’ in 2006-7 Cuba largely existed ‘in itself rather than for itself’ (Yang 1989: 51).

lost all our meat, we lost all our crops, the electricity went out, and it hasn't been the same since!' At this, friends and family sitting on the veranda of his sister-in-law's home burst into laughter and I joined in, though slightly confused. The year marking the success of the revolution was referred to as a moment of destruction rather than its usual depiction by locals and in official contexts as 'the triumph'.

On another occasion, whilst watching the title sequence of the daily *Noticiero Nacional de la Televisión Cubana* (National News of Cuban Television, abbreviated to NTV in the opening sequence), a former communist leader, Miguel, asked me whether I knew what 'NTV' meant. He did so with a twinkle in his eye. I told him the right answer and he contradicted me, 'No! It does not mean *Noticiero Nacional de la Televisión Cubana*, it means *No Tenemos Viandas* (we have no tubers/root vegetables)!' As tubers and root vegetables are mainstays in the Cuban diet, this joke seemed to be a direct attack on the state's distribution system.

Like the analysis of all linguistic acts, however, that of humour should not start from the assumption that language is a weapon to be used as an outcry against the power structure. Indeed, as Dow and Lixfeld argue, 'the standard political labels of "totalitarian" or "democratic" not only fail to adequately identify the defining conditions for political humour, but obscure the relationship between genre and context' (cited by Stein 1989: 90). Jokes of a political nature must be analyzed both within the context in which the joke is uttered and in relation to the particular language used by the speaker. In context, jokes may draw on continuity as well as critique.

As my fieldwork in Cuba progressed, I was to find that jokes like Ricardo's and Miguel's are very common in domestic settings. Some areas of the house, especially those furthest from the 'ears' of the street, are 'off-stage' contexts which James Scott regards as places for 'infra-politics...the obtrusive realm of political struggle' (Scott 2005 [1997]: 311). The Cuban phrase heard very often in Tuta: '*Candidad de la calle, obscuridad de la casa* (openness from the [view of the] street, obscurity from the [view of the] house)' probably means that one must be forthright about one's revolutionary conviction when one is in public but that this may become muddled in domestic settings. Such 'hidden transcripts' (ibid.: 314) play a significant role in social relations within what I call the domestic sphere, which encompasses both the physical household *and* unseen areas in town that may become important in securing household provisioning. Food scarcities are a daily concern for Tutaños, and as already noted it is common to hear talk of getting foodstuffs on the street in revolutionary language, e.g. engaging in 'the fight for provisioning'. But when this talk of scarcities enters the domestic sphere, it often becomes what some Habaneros have called a *tragicomedia* ('tragi-comedy'; Tanuma 2007: 50).

I have already emphasized, however, that performances heard in the domestic sphere, such as Ricardo's joke about the 1959 'hurricane', are more complicated than they seem to outsiders. They are not just homogenous acts of resistance against the power structure, as suggested by Scott's idea of household 'infra-politics' (Scott 2005 [1997]: 311). Actually, as I will try to demonstrate below, Cuban irony may *also* be a way in which Tutaños identify with that very structure.

Using the term 'co-evality' (borrowed from Fabian 2002 [1983]), Chris Gregory rejects strict dichotomies between subaltern and dominant cognitions (Gregory 1996: 204; 1997: 245). In a similar fashion, when analysing irony and other performative signs, one must not rely too much on the resisters/exploiters binary.

### III. Insider and outsider ironies

Sachiko Tanuma, a Japanese anthropologist who conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Havana in 2003-04, has recently attempted to understand Cuban irony (2007). Tanuma gauged the limits of Cuban humour by reading to Joanna, a Cuban sociologist, an ethnography that Tanuma claims to be a misrepresentation of the particularly Cuban way of using irony.<sup>7</sup> While Joanna first enjoyed the ethnographic detail of women engaging in 'the fight', stating: 'I really sympathize with the words of those women. I didn't know there were so many of them who thought a lot like me' (Tanuma 2007: 50), she changed her mind when she heard the end, which states: 'Cuban women certainly live in a situation... of profound failure to meet their expectations' (ibid., cited from Holgado Fernández 2000: 334). Indeed, as Tanuma notes, at the conclusion of the ethnography the Cuban woman made 'a disgusted face, looked down, shook her head, and said in a determined voice, "*No me gusta* (I don't like it)"' (Tanuma 2007: 50). According to Tanuma's account, though outsiders may associate language that targets the difficulties of the revolution (e.g. *la lucha*) with an unmitigated disapproval of revolutionary values, insiders do not. Indeed, this example shows that such a connection may breed disapproval or moral qualms.

Sidney Mintz apparently arrived at a similar conclusion in criticizing another ethnographic account which centred on the ineffectiveness of the Cuban state's distribution system, instead of explaining how the state's failure to eradicate scarcities is understood by the people who actually have to live with them.<sup>8</sup> When Tanuma met with Mintz in Japan, the latter related what he claimed to be a classic Cuban joke. It is very likely that this is the full version of Claudia's humorous comment about the 'three most important things in Cuba' mentioned at the beginning of this section, and for this

<sup>7</sup> The ethnography, *¿No es fácil! Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria* (*It's not easy! Cuban women and the crisis of the revolution*; 2000), is by the Spanish anthropologist Isabel Holgado Fernández.

<sup>8</sup> In writing of her meeting with Mintz, Tanuma does not provide the author or title of this ethnography.

reason it will be the central example in my analysis. ‘What are the three successes of the Cuban Revolution?—medicine, education and athletics. What are the three failures of the Cuban Revolution?—breakfast, lunch and dinner!’ Tanuma compares the use of irony in her encounter with Mintz to that in her interview with Joanna:

Of course, Mintz does know that food distribution in Cuba is far from perfect. He and Joanna share a sense of humor [sic] and make similarly ironical jokes. So why is it that they ‘dislike’ these ethnographic writings that are based on long-term fieldwork that also describe the current situation in Cuba in an ironical voice? ... [It is because] such writings...often reduc[e] the irony of the formerly committed insider to the ironic narrative of the observing outsider. (Tanuma 2007: 51)

Tanuma distinguishes between these two kinds of ironies using an analogy with a literary technique first used by writers of Greek tragedy:

The ironic observing outsider comments sarcastically on the incongruity between what is expected and what actually occurs. This irony is similar to ‘dramatic irony’—‘a literary technique, originally used in Greek tragedy, by which the full significance of a character’s words or actions are clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character’ (*New Oxford Dictionary*, S.V. ‘Dramatic Irony’). Just as the audience knows better than a character on the stage, observing outsiders know better than insiders. (ibid.: 51-2)

The argument is convincing, especially as Tanuma does not ignore the relationship between genre and context that others have criticized in analyses of political humour (Stein 1989: 90). But to demonstrate *why* insider irony is not the same as outsider irony, it is of prime importance to show *how* Cuban jokes are not just straightforward displays of resistance used to attack the state’s failure to ameliorate food shortages. Rather than focusing entirely on contrasting perspectives of insiders and outsiders as Tanuma does, I would like instead to concentrate on another dualism that occurs exclusively within the insider arena of language, one that is related to cultural notions of scarcity within Tutaño society.

In Tuta, as in all societies, every person must find a balance between the given structure of society and their particular version of it, between, for example, individualism and collectivism. The jokes given above, especially the ‘three successes and three failures’ joke, sit on the fulcrum between these two orders, though different interpretations weigh one side down more than the other. In Tanuma’s account, the outsider’s perspective weighs on the individualistic side—personal needs and desires for food security—while for Cuban insiders the scale teeters towards the collectivist side of social needs and values. But jokes are more complicated than this. While both sides are important, the



individualist side must carry more weight for the joke to be effective. This does not mean, however, that the collectivist side is thrust completely into the air. Mary Douglas writes about jokes as ‘total social situations’ which

brin[g] into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first. ...this joke pattern...needs two elements, the juxtaposition of a control against that which is controlled, the juxtaposition being such that the latter triumphs. ...a successful subversion of one form by another completes or ends the joke, for it changes the balance of power. [...] The joke merely affords the opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. [...] It is frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general. ...it is an image of the levelling of hierarchy, the triumph of intimacy over formality, of unofficial values over official ones. (Douglas 1975a: 96-8)

By inverting the dominant and subordinate forms, the ‘successes and failures’ joke works to empower Tutaños who engage in the daily ‘struggle’ for provisions. The subordinate form is represented by the weaknesses of the revolution, all of which relate to food scarcity, while the dominant form of Claudia’s and Mintz’s joke is what is considered revolutionary: exalting the successes of the revolution—medicine, education and athletics.

As implied by Douglas’s description of jokes cited above, and as Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1940, 1949) argued for joking relations between affines among the Dogon of Mali, witticisms that work to reverse the order of society usually do not overturn the entire social structure. While events may lead to changes in an individual’s relation to society, affectionate portraits of failure that reference such changes take place within a *shared* moral universe. As elsewhere, so for jokes in Cuba, ‘The person who does the mocking lives in the same world as the mocked’ (Tanuma 2007: 47).

Rituals such as speeches on commemorative days work to continuously remind individuals in society not only of its dominant structure, but also of its primary values and morals, its reason for being. Douglas contrasts such rites with ‘ritual pollution’, or direct attacks on the value system which cause ‘abomination...which contradic[t] the basic categories of experience and in so doing threate[n] both *the order of reason* and the order of society’ (Douglas 1975a: 106; my emphasis). As Douglas asserts, ‘ritual pollution’ is not the same as joking; the latter is instead a

temporary suspension of the social structure, or rather...a little disturbance in which the particular structuring of society becomes less relevant than another. ...*the strength of its attack is entirely restricted by the consensus on which it depends for recognition.* (ibid.; my emphasis)



A short diversion from the topic of Cuban irony is necessary to examine this ‘consensus’ in the present context: the central revolutionary values in Cuba.

#### IV. The national moral economy

In the national moral economy of Cuba, revolutionary persons are those who value social justice over individual wealth. Social justice is treated as a revolutionary *process*, a long, collective ‘Struggle (*Lucha*)’ against economic imperialism and exploitation, a persistent claim that ‘*un futuro mejor es posible* (a better future is possible)’. But the revolutionary process through which a prosperous social whole is created may also require that individuals in Cuba experience material deprivation, at least until the future date of abundance occurs. This need to relinquish individual desires for the collective good was highlighted in Castro’s lengthy address on 6 April 1961 to the Constitutional Committee for the Defence of the Revolution of the Construction Workers, which could have been made during my period of fieldwork by any high official:

[G]entlemen, enemies of the revolution, we are ready to deprive ourselves around here. [...] This we have done, and the future we are building for our people, cost us what it costs, whatever the deprivation, we will now pursue, the people know how, they have dignity! ...the workers cannot be scared off with deprivation, this revolution has occurred precisely because of all the deprivations that workers underwent, all the humiliation to which the poor people were subjected! [...] You do not scare them with poverty and deprivation, nor with sacrifice, because they know that such deprivation and sacrifice will benefit them tomorrow...deprivation today will be plenty tomorrow! Let the sacrifice of today’s happiness be with us tomorrow, when it bears fruit!

Long live the Revolution! Homeland or Death! We shall overcome! (Castro 1999 [1961])

The spirit of self-sacrifice is inseparable from what Cuban sociologist Luis Suárez Salazar refers to as the *heroísmo cotidiano* (‘daily heroism’; Suárez Salazar 2000: 292) of all Cubans engaged in the ‘fight for provisions’ and other daily difficulties. This value of ‘resisting’ difficult conditions is not only endorsed by Fidel and the Cuban government, but is also present at the local level. It is a primary element not only of Cuban national identity but also of local identity formation. For instance, when I told Tutaños that I travelled in Cuba by lorry (the least expensive and most uncomfortable way to travel) rather than by car (the most expensive way to travel), many exclaimed ‘You *are* Cuban!’ They assumed that, as a ‘rich’ foreigner, I would have chosen to travel in luxury rather than experience the frustrations and discomfort associated with the unreliable and crowded public transport system.

On another occasion, while I was conducting research for the Agrarian University of Havana in 2004-5, I chose to eat a nearly tasteless peso pizza for lunch with fellow Cuban students and professors, rather than dine at the special cafeteria reserved *exclusively* for foreign students, where more valued foods were served.<sup>9</sup> Upon taking my first bite, I looked up and saw that nearly all the Cuban students and professors standing in the long line to enter the standard Cuban cafeteria were staring at me. When I inquired about their strange attention, a friend told me, 'They are surprised to see a foreigner eating low-quality pizza when you could have had something better at the cafeteria for foreigners. [...] You really must be Cuban!'

From the very beginning of the revolution to the present, the official way to win the 'war of the people', the battle against imperialism symbolised most powerfully by US sanctions, is to 'resist' (material desires) and to 'Fight'. Indeed, one cannot travel anywhere in Cuba without seeing billboards that contain one or more of these concepts. Such ideas are linked to a pervasive optimism underlying the teleological idea that individual efforts today will reap collective rewards tomorrow. As Fidel has repeatedly said, '*Luchar por una utopía es, en parte construirla* (To fight for a utopia is, in part, to construct it'; quoted by Suárez Salazar 2000: 363). Local idioms I heard in Tuta on a daily basis are counterparts to Fidel's optimism: i.e. '*Mañana sera mejor* (Tomorrow will be better)'; '*Un mundo mejor es posible* (A better world is possible)'; '*No hay mal que por bien no venga* (Bad only happens for good'; my translations).

In the first years of the Revolution, Castro made his and the revolutionary leadership's direct faith in the persistence of the Cuban population very clear. When Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir visited Fidel in 1959, they were aware that the affiliation between the revolutionary leadership and the *campesinos* (peasants) was unique. During their tour of Havana Province, Sartre made an inquiry about this relationship to the *comandante* himself:

Sartre: Yesterday and today we've seen the intense relationship that you have with your people, but how do you yourself see this relationship?

Fidel: It is a mutual relationship. They influence us and we influence them. We visit a cooperative, we encourage the increase in production, they talk to us. This [encouragement] provokes in them a reaction. When I come back to visit them again, I see what they have done, I observe how much they have improved, this stimulates me, influences me.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, during my five-month stay in an academic visitors' residence, nearly every meal contained meat, a highly-valued food item.

Sartre observes that in the conversations between Fidel and the *campesinos* there is never any flattery, that Fidel always criticizes them. Fidel responds that they [the *campesinos*] are prepared to receive constructive criticism:

Fidel: The biggest lesson that one can take from this revolution is that the people have always been underestimated .... People that walk [the world] like this, without schools, without preparation, *it seems that they are being educated by the work that they are doing*. (Otero 1960: 131-2; my emphasis and translations)

The revolutionary process, a cultural form embedded in the national moral economy of Cuba, is characterized by a symbiotic relationship between workers and the revolutionary government (especially Fidel). According to this line of thought, working hard, not losing faith and being persistent are central revolutionary values for all Cuban people, which *will* lead to both material and moral rewards. With regard to the latter, many informants have proudly shown me certificates of merit from their workplaces, the highest being the title of *maestro de oficios* ('Master of Office'). Moreover, contrary to the claim that this kind of revolutionary devotion is on the wane, at least in the period 2006-7 many Cubans of the younger generation expressed to me the satisfaction they acquired from working hard at their jobs, whether provided by the state or private. Alfredo, for example, said he never tells people he is tired even if he has worked his two jobs for forty-eight hours with little (if any) rest. When I asked why I rarely hear him complain about being tired or say he does not want to do something required of him, Alfredo simply responded that to say these things would give the impression that he is 'afraid of work', which he is not.

Perhaps one of the best compliments one can give another person in Tuta is to describe them as a '*luchador/a* (fighter)'. I often heard this expression used in praise, not specifically of a person's revolutionary merits, but rather for being a 'good' person overall. Likewise, the ability to 'resist' has become a revolutionary value that is inseparable from working hard. Quite a few of my informants would most likely still agree with a man from Mayarí (eastern Cuba) who was interviewed by a Cuban-American sociologist in the early sixties: 'Fidel never lied to us about that. He said there would be times when there would not be enough and times when we would have all we want. Fidel never lied' (Yglesias 1968: 106). Indeed, the ability to 'resist' hard times was a quality Castro identified with the Cuban people from the very beginning. Just a week after the 'triumph', Castro conceded to a crowd of eager Habaneros:

I think that this is a decisive moment of our history: the tyranny has been overthrown. Our happiness is immense. But yet, there still remains much to be

done. We cannot fool ourselves, thinking of a future when everything will be easy; maybe in the future everything will be even more difficult. (Castro 2004 [1959]; my translation)

Yet while 'good' people are considered *luchadores* both on the street and inside the house, this does not mean that Tutaños do not recognize how hard their life is. In fact, perhaps the most common expression I heard on a daily basis was '*no es fácil*' (it is not easy), as other anthropologists have noted for the Cuban context (e.g. Holgado Fernández 2000). Most Tutaños (especially women) describe their lives as 'agitated', as there is always stress involved in procuring the next family meal, but they make such statements safely behind closed doors and window shutters. Furthermore, the need (and desire) to acquire commodities does not always coincide with the obligation to 'resist'. For instance, despite his tremendous work effort, Alfredo (mentioned above) claimed he constantly faced both political and economic 'blocks' when getting food and other needed or desired items.<sup>10</sup> Many other Tutaños found it difficult to deal with government monopolies on consumer goods such as cars made after 1959 and foods of higher quality, especially when they saw 'functionaries driving Audis and eating the best cuisine'. It seems that all Cubans are aware (even government officials)<sup>11</sup> of the contradiction between the moral drive to 'resist' and frustrations with the way the system is working on the ground. Yet the articulation by Tutaños of the positive and negative aspects of the revolution is cultural rather than economically rational. While most Tutaños complain about present scarcities (or, perhaps more frequently during the 2006-7 period, the inability to afford items that *are* available), the same people use revolutionary discourse in their valorisations of people who deal best with the situation. Daily grumbling about life is how many Tutaños identify themselves as 'fighters'; talking about difficulties often means one is continuing to 'resist'.

Being a 'fighter' in the local context does not always mean that one follows officially permitted rules, however. Some anthropologists of Cuba (Berg 2004: 48; Roland 2006: 156) have even argued that people use the term 'the fight' to describe illegal activity:

10 Descriptions of obstacles to provisioning in socialist society – for example, the need to rely on 'friends' rather than simply buying items at stores or hiring people for services – are by no means unique to Cuba. Consider one steel factory manager in Hungary during the Soviet era: 'Here, it's not enough to work hard at several jobs. One has to go through friends to get things done; one can't simply make a phone call, but must do errands in person; it's not possible to trust a professional to take care of house-building or repairs, you have to do it yourself; if you come home at night tired, you can't go out to eat somewhere but have to cook' (Fehérváry 2002: 374).

11 The official 'line' deals with contradictions by continuing to publicize 'auto-critiques'. The best known example of this is 'Castro's apology' of 1970 after he decided to shift from the ten-million-ton sugar drive to opening up the economy along Soviet lines. Yet while mistakes and shortcomings are publicly admitted on a regular basis, they are not at odds with the predominant idea of the dialectical materialist road to progress, whereby society must face contradictions in order to reach a higher stage.

The popularly invoked term *lucha*—which can take either the noun or verb form of ‘struggle’ or ‘fight’—encompasses [many] means of surviving in the Special Period. [...] The irony in the everyday usage of the term...is that it often involves either minor or major illegalities within the revolution’s moralistic system.... (Roland *ibid.*)

One should use caution, however, when making parallel associations between moral and juridical rules. As Max Gluckman (1965 [1955]) argued for the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia, so in all societies, there is a difference between legal rights based on laws enforced in the courts on the one hand, and moral rights or ‘the pressure of public opinion, individual conscience and social reciprocity’ on the other (Fortes 1969: 237). As used in the local moral economy, the term *lucha* may incorporate both legal and illegal activity; I have emphasized, however, that it is still very much related to overarching values embedded in the national moral economy. Legal rules may be broken in everyday life, but there is a moral difference in the local economy between acceptable and unacceptable illegal activity, a distinction which stems from the wider cultural system (for a more in-depth analysis of the issue of legality and morality in Cuba, see Wilson 2009: Chapter 3).

As with illegal acts of provisioning, grievances about present-day challenges for the household economy are not merely expressions of resistance to overarching values in Cuban society. It is in this light—one that incorporates *both* the difficulties and contradictions of everyday material realities *and* the historical values and symbols embedded in Cuban society—that Cuban irony and other linguistic performances should be analysed. Thus while we have seen above that the dominant and subordinate forms must oppose each other in the ‘successes and failures’ joke (‘the three successes’ vs. ‘the three failures’ of the revolution), the contradiction that results is not ‘axiomatic’ (Gregory 1997: 9); it is not a stark contrast between pro-revolutionary or anti-revolutionary, collectivism and individualism, the state and the house (*ibid.*: 12-14). As opposed to an axiomatic contradiction, the ‘successes and failures’ joke is more like what Gregory (*ibid.*: 10-11) calls a ‘commonplace contradiction’, one that reflects a particular balance between two or more viewpoints, a ‘coexistence of rival cognitions’ (*ibid.*). Indeed, many people who use irony in Cuba are *both* critical of the present state of affairs *and* sympathetic to revolutionary goals, as illustrated by Tanuma’s conclusions:

While the jokes told by my friends may sound critical of and sarcastic toward the political leaders and the state, most of [my friends] had been faithful revolutionaries until the beginning of the Special Period. [...] Their shared sentiment then was not complete resentment toward the revolutionary ideas and institutions, but sad disillusion toward the present situation. What makes their *cuentos*<sup>12</sup> and jocular

12 Tanuma found three definitions of the word *cuento* during her fieldwork, which are also interesting for the present context: 1. story, 2. joke and 3. lie (Tanuma 2007: 54).

comments ironic is *their half-belief in and adoration of the revolutionary figures and... mythical stories that they are mocking*. (Tanuma 2007: 57; my emphasis)

Arguably, there are very few people in Tuta who think positively about the term 'counter-revolutionary', no matter how many jokes or complaints about food scarcity are told. And, as we have seen, the idea of engaging in 'the fight for provisions' is related to being revolutionary (even if this means breaking legal rules). Tutaños who have dealt with scarcities during the revolution do so, in varying degrees, to continue working towards the goals of the revolution. Their 'struggle' for provisions is collective and is buttressed by a long-term view of a better future stemming from the national moral economy. As Émile Durkheim indicated, 'The ideal society is an aspect of real society, myth is history for those who recreate it' (cited in Sahlins 1976: 106-13).

## V. Conclusion

The way Tutaños deal with contradictions between the normative and the actual is tied to specific cultural forms that have evolved in Cuba over time. Indeed, despite the variations in the ways individuals act in the everyday 'rituals' (James 2003: 7) of provisioning and consumption, social institutions—which are often created by locals themselves, such as humour and etiquette—provide moral continuity and uphold the normative order. As Firth wrote of Tikopia, so for Cuba, challenges to the order wrought by scarcity have not undermined moral continuities that determine how people shift on and off the normative path. Ceremonial meetings and transactions, institutions such as structured hierarchy, and even tacit rules such as etiquette all work to ensure 'the survival of...social life in its systematic form' (Firth 1959: 105).

'Channels of communication' (Douglas 1975a: 4), such as irony, allow Tutaños to incorporate present-day challenges and contradictions in Cuba into established classifications that draw on moral ideas about the present and future of revolutionary society. As Marcel Mauss and his uncle Émile Durkheim stressed, such classifications are as related to emotive values associated with collective memories as they are a product of individual rationalities (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]: 86-7, cited by Needham in his introduction, 1963: xxii-xxiii). Official and local valorisations co-exist, and people constantly switch from one to another (Gregory 1996: 204; 1997: 245). Between two ends of the spectrum—on the one hand following the rules, on the other breaking them—exists a grey area instituted by the people themselves. Indeed, at the everyday level of household reproduction, Tutaños must be *bricoleurs*, creating new stuff out of given cultural material.



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# STILL 'TAMING THE TURBULENT FRONTIER'? THE STATE IN THE FEDERALLY ADMINISTERED TRIBAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN<sup>1</sup>

MAIRA HAYAT

## Introduction

This article explores how the state, from British colonial times to the present day, has engaged with the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (hereafter FATA) of Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> The growing literature on the state in political anthropology, where it is conceptualized in terms of everyday processes of state formation producing state effects, will be referred to. This serves as a supplement and corrective to traditional political science concepts, such as the Weberian ideal-type state structure, which often obscures more than it explains, especially in the context of postcolonial politics. In this article, this theoretical analysis is contextualized vis-à-vis the FATA, and an answer is sought to the question: how has the state manifested itself in the FATA?

A view of the state as being in a continuous process of formation makes resistance to it a crucial component of the discussion; the section on colonial history (Section II) revisits the colonial encounter in the FATA by critiquing colonial representations of 'fractious Pathan tribals' and taking from such representations what they reveal about

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1 Accounts of British colonial rule, such as the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1979), frequently referred to the 'pacification' of 'turbulent tracts' and 'fanatical colonies' of 'ferocious, blood-thirsty' Pathans along what is now the Pakistan–Afghanistan border. Such representations of the tribal areas proved self-fulfilling, *inviting* and *legitimizing* taming. In *The Problem of the North-West Frontier 1890-1908*, C.C. Davies, a British officer who served on the frontier during the Third Afghan War in 1919 and in operations in Waziristan from 1921 to 1922, makes generous use of labels such as 'turbulent tribesmen' and 'the wild caterans of Yaghistan' (1932: 18, 187). In an interview with a senior government official who served in the districts of Peshawar, Kohat and Hangu in the 1980s and 1990s, I was asked about my paper's title. My answer, 'Taming the Turbulent Frontier', drew the following response: 'It's like what you do to a cup of tea. There is bound to be turbulence if you stir with a spoon. And here, you don't have just one spoon...there are so many...the American, Afghan, Russian, Indian and Pakistani are all at work' (interview conducted on July 1, 2008).

2 The FATA comprise seven agencies: Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, Orakzai, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. The main ethnic group are the Pathans or Pukhtuns.

the repertoire of 'weapons of the weak' employed by the Pathan tribals in resisting the colonial onslaught. Both colonial accounts and more recent literature typically see every act of resistance emanating from the tribal areas as a form of fanatical religious expression. The present analysis places Pathan resistance to the colonial onslaught in a trope that differs from the excessively simplistic one of 'fighting the infidel', thus permitting a more holistic analysis of resistance as the emphasis shifts from the (perceived) exclusively religious nature of resistance to other aspects. The forms of resistance documented in the memoirs of colonial officers who served on the frontier and in Imperial Gazetteers reveal acts of resistance such as banditry, raiding, theft, the spreading of rumours and lying that qualify as classic 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985). It will be shown how portraying diverse forms of resistance as 'outbursts of fanatical frenzy' de-politicized them and, in the colonial period, constituted a refusal to recognise resistance as such.



SOURCE: Official website of the FATA Development Authority, Peshawar. <http://fatada.gov.pk/map.php>.

Especially in the current situation, where 'Talibanization' is believed to be rapidly spreading, such stereotyped portrayals of the FATA and its local inhabitants imbue the course of events with a sense of historical inevitability: given that this region has a history of 'Mad Mullahs' and 'Fakirs of Ippi', suddenly the Taliban seem natural creatures of this

terrain. The active, artificial creation of the Taliban during the anti-Soviet 'jihad' is thus camouflaged by a false narrative of inevitability.

What is most disturbing in contemporary accounts of the religious element in the region is the tenacity with which the same narratives that characterized colonial scholarship—of an antiquated, static region mired in tradition, its people possessing an inherent proclivity to being swayed by religious fanatics, its timelessness—reappear today. I argue, at variance with such widely accepted wisdom, that the region is not invariably resistant to state penetration and integration, and that the rhetoric of the 'traditional' founding of legislation such as the Frontier Crimes Regulation 1901 is dubious at best.

This article argues for a change in focus in scholarship on the tribal areas of Pakistan by shifting the emphasis from 'Pathan tribal society' and its notorious as well as valorised resistance to the state to 'the state' itself. Whereas most scholarship repeats ad nauseam how the 'ferocious Pathans' of FATA have never been conquered, the present analysis considers the subject from a hitherto underexplored perspective—the phenomenon of the state in the region and its failure in several crucial respects.

Centrally, this article makes an argument against the 'theoretical apartheid' that so-called tribal societies have been subjected to. The exclusivism of the so-called tribals and the unique political trajectories of tribal systems distort reality, in addition to being a convenient cover for the state's neglect. Analyses that pit tribal systems as inherently opposed to and resisting the state absolve the latter of any responsibility owed to such segments of society. They also cast the local population of the FATA in the static roles of the inhabitants of a closed, essentialized, almost pristine world that is impervious to change. The article shows how such views of the FATA as a closed system resistant to change or the involvement of the state are not tenable.

## I. (Mis)Representations

[Some] factors inherent in the character of the Pathan and his way of life: the Pathan [is] a hard man reared in a hard school, his life [is] dominated by the law of badal or retaliation.... (Elliott 1968: 69)

[There are many] difficulties associated with the assimilation of *tribal peoples* into the national state...*such* people do not easily make the transition from tribesmen to citizen...they seem more content with the old ways; indeed, they often actively resist national assimilation. The particularistic loyalties characteristic of indigenous political structures evidence a surprising vitality, with the result that relations between the government and tribal people become strained, even confrontational. (Swidler: 1977)

How do you rule an area the nature of which is reflected in its vernacular name: Yaghistan (the Land of the Unruled)...what makes this land and its people so intractable.... [The Pathan tribesmen are] a numerous and virile people still possessed of tribal affiliations. (Spain 1963: 2, 3)

Even more forbidding than rocks and snow are the locals, a bewildering array of tribes and clans known collectively as the Pashtun. The Pashtun may be the most ungovernable people on Earth. They are divided into dozens of tribes and hundreds of clans, which are usually at war with each other. The presence of an invader (even a pair of journalists from the National Geographic) unites the tribesmen just long enough to drive out the interlopers. Then they go back to shooting at each other.... Through an arched window I see a hard-eyed, turbaned man, possibly Taliban, lurking in the shadows of a mulberry tree watching me as I watch him. (McGirk 2004)<sup>3</sup>

Extreme tribal views are not new and predate the international counterterrorism operation in the region [FATA] by decades. (Gannon 2007)<sup>4</sup>

The people of Waziristan feel that they are the toughest, the noblest, the bravest of the very brave. They are not intimidated by anyone. Throughout history, Waziristan has been invaded by empire after empire, and was never subjugated. With that history in mind, the Wazir and Mahsud tribes are very confident. They are simple people. (Ahmed 2008)<sup>5</sup>

Such portrayals of tribal life in the FATA represent the mainstream, majority view. To hold that the tribal areas were not affected by the consolidation of colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent simply does not square with the profound impact that colonial policies of indirect rule, such as the *maliki* system, colonial legislation and the demarcation of the Durand Line, had on the FATA. Thus, statements such as Nina Swidler's are untenable: the colonial impact, as this article and recent scholarship such as Mukulika Banerjee's *The Pathan Unarmed* (2000) demonstrate, was profound.

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3 McGirk, 'On Bin Laden's Trail', *National Geographic Magazine*. <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/print/features/world/asia/pakistan/pashtun-text> (accessed: July 16, 2008). In 1958, Olaf Caroe likened the 'Mahsud to a wolf (and) the Wazir to a panther...both are splendid creatures; the panther is slier...the wolf-pack is more united...and more dangerous' (1958: 393).

4 In Jayshree Bajoria and Carin Zisis, 'Pakistan's Tribal Areas'. Council on Foreign Relations. October 26, 2007. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/11973/pakistans\\_tribal\\_areas.html#8](http://www.cfr.org/publication/11973/pakistans_tribal_areas.html#8) (accessed: 15 June, 2008).

5 Akber Ahmed, 'U.S. Covert Action in Waziristan', *The Globalist*. (January 23, 2008). <http://www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=6737> (accessed: June 5, 2008).

A study of popular images of the Pathan reveals the varied colonial interests they served. Charles Lindholm (1996) argues that images of the Pathan changed as the British shifted from a 'forward' policy to a 'closed border' one. As forward policy advocates were pitted against the Pathans in battle, the images of the Pathan became negative ('blood-thirsty and fanatical'); conversely, closed-border policy administrators had more favourable views of the Pathans (1996: 9). Nonetheless most colonial accounts and recent scholarship see the Pathans as particularly susceptible to Islamic symbols, hence their desire to wage 'holy war'. Robert Nichols (2001) is one of the very few scholars to have explored how what might just as well be interpreted as routine secular resistance to a colonial presence has historically been seen singularly through a religious lens, with the effect of depoliticizing the resistance.

Postcolonial scholarship continues to view the tribals of the FATA as the members of a static society that lacks any internal dynamic of change and is impervious to external influence. But consider a development seemingly as mundane as the construction of a road in the tribal areas. Akbar Ahmed, a social anthropologist and former political agent in the FATA, wrote of 'the social implications of the road as a factor of change and its impact on tribal structure and lineage organization involving the emergence of new groups' in the Mohmand Agency (1980: 341). The construction of the road meant enhanced economic mobility and advancement for many groups in the local population, and over time a distinct class of bus owners emerged. Consider also the following statements by officials of the Rural Works Programme in the Mohmand Agency: 'then (some years earlier) we begged them (tribesmen) to take schemes. Now [in the 1970s] they chase us for schemes. Now there is less enmity. People want to be better off' (Ahmed 1980: 344). The role of the road as a harbinger of changes in attitude and in economic and social practice is evident from such statements. Moreover, from the 1980s onwards, the FATA were impacted by change much less benign and more drastic than mere road construction. Thus, any argument denying the force and fact of change in the FATA is indefensible.

This assertion is bolstered if one examines statistics on out-migration from the FATA. A large number of locals migrate (both temporarily and permanently) from the FATA to the Gulf States and other parts of Pakistan, including the settled districts of the North-West Frontier Province in search of employment, primarily as labourers (Ahmed 1980: 345; see Tables 1A and 1B).

The FATA's treatment as a static, unchanging society can be explained by the latter's classification as a 'tribal society'—tribes, typically, have been viewed as timeless, primordial social forms. Writing about the widespread 'study of tribes using an ahistorical anthropology', Mahmood Mamdani explains how 'the history of struggles of colonised

peoples to control their own destinies—in other words, the history of their democratic struggles—was easily interpreted as some kind of a pathological “tribal” response. Thus, the overloaded nature of the term “tribalism” in the literature of anthropology and political science, as some kind of a coming to surface of the real nature of the “native”, stripped of the veneer of civilisation...’ (1992: 92).

Akbar Ahmed writes that ‘the idea of the social contract...central to the understanding of Western, market, industrial and democratic societies’, when applied to a ‘pre-industrial, tribal and Asian society’ can be very misleading (1976: 9).<sup>6</sup> These reservations are important, for one cannot deny that, while ‘the state’ is organic to most parts of Europe, it was an imposition on much of the non-European world in the wake of colonial rule. However, as Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat point out, the characteristics associated with European states have come to constitute universally accepted benchmarks for ‘proper’ state behaviour (2001: 6). It also cannot be denied that ‘the Western imagination of the state...remains the globally most powerful idea of political order in the twentieth century’ (ibid.: 7). Hansen and Stepputat present a way forward in suggesting that one ‘abandon totalizing and culturalist notions of certain enduring “Eastern” or “Western” forms of state and instead disaggregate and trace how various languages of stateness, not necessarily all purely Western in origin, have been spread, combined, and vernacularized in various parts of the world’ (ibid.).

Such ‘anthropologicist museumizing’<sup>7</sup> also obscures the simple fact that, with the emergence of the ‘modern state as the focal point for political mobilization...ever more social groups [find] themselves compelled to strive to capture, or influence, the core institutions of the state in order to advance their own objectives’ (Axtmann 2004: 260-4). In Michael Mann’s conceptualization, as the ‘state *pulls* society into its political space, at the same time as it tries to shape society according to its own objectives, state–society relations are tightened and social relations are *caged* within the national terrain...’ (Mann, cited in Axtmann 2004: 261).

The concept of *theoretical apartheid* detailed in Section IV is used to argue that, not only does denying change and exaggerating the religious factor make of the FATA a virtual ‘tribal museum’ (Cheema and Nuri 2005: 142), it also has the effect of justifying abject neglect on the part of the larger, dominant state system. This article argues that the post-colonial state, albeit imposed on the area, has failed in fulfilling its obligations. Whether we call it a social contract or not is, for our purposes, redundant.

6 Barkey and Parikh explain that colonial states possessed interests ‘separate from those of the society they ruled, as their autonomy and legitimacy were not contingent on their relations with the colonized society’ (1991: 531, 544).

7 Spivak 1992: 46 in Nikita Dhawan, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak German?’ <http://translate.eipcp.net/strands/03/dhawan-strands01en> (accessed: July 19, 2008).



## II. The colonial encounter in the northwest: a reappraisal

The colonial encounter with the tribal areas dates back to 1849, when the Punjab was formally annexed by the colonial administration. For almost a decade after that, India remained the territory of a trading company, which meant giving the priority to profit maximization over efforts at improving administration (Elliott 1968: 86). As already noted, colonial policy vis-à-vis the tribal areas vacillated between a 'forward' or expansionist policy and a 'closed border' policy that favoured restrictions on expansionist tendencies. While such epithets were used to describe official policy, they reflected nothing more than a desire to give a semblance of consistency to an extremely ad hoc way of governing the tribal areas.<sup>8</sup>

The peculiarity of colonial policy in these areas—namely that there *was* no consistent policy—is attributable in large part to the buffer-zone status conferred on the region. As Ainslee T. Embree explains with reference to the north-western tribal belt, '[buffers served as] built-in mechanisms for dealing with the impact of intrusive political and social forces. [The colonial state] wanted the cheapest and most efficient political structure that would permit ultimate control but would not require direct administration of the kind that existed in British India' (1977: xvi, xvii).

In contrast to the many scholars who underscore the inability of the colonial state to do much more than follow a loose policy of indirect rule, James Spain contends that the colonial state had cogent reasons for a policy under which questions of assimilation and administration never arose (cf. Embree 1977: xviii). Given the lack of productivity of land in the tribal territories and the resultant lack of revenue potential, there was little reason for the central power to be concerned with the daily lives of the people in these areas (1977: 5). He holds that the colonial state had only two interests in the borderland: it provided warriors for the royal army and was essential for reasons of passage.

Colonial policy was patently inconsistent, but the ultimate motive for all colonial adventurism lay in keeping the Russian menace at bay. The Russian threat (albeit imagined) necessitated a buffer zone, and frontier regions, broad and zonal by definition, admirably fulfilled the need for such imperial limits.

Until 1876 the non-interventionist school was dominant in the colonial administration, and a policy of masterly inactivity was followed. In 1878, the system of political agencies that is still in place today was adopted. In the 1890s, a forward policy, characterized by the *maliki* system, began to take shape (Davies 1932: ix, 3). Richard I. Bruce, the Commissioner of the Derajat, implemented a variation of the Sandeman system in Balochistan as the *maliki* system in the tribal areas (Bruce 1900: 2). Under this system, certain *maliks* (tribal chiefs) were selected by Bruce and given the responsibility

<sup>8</sup> See Davies 1932: 182.

for producing a certain number of their tribesmen for service as levies. In return for allowances, and aided by the levies, the *maliks* were expected to control their respective tribes (Bruce 1900: 2; Davies 1932: 125).

Proponents of the system extolled its implications for 'turning the wild tribesmen from enemies into friends...and bringing them by degrees within the pale of civilisation' (Bruce 1900: 4). It was also claimed that the *maliks* co-opted by the British represented 'traditional' authority. In reality, the system functioned in an almost chaotic manner; the following is an account written by F.W. Johnston, who served on the frontier in the 1890s:

Jambil was made a Malik, doubtless on the principle, which led to so much trouble later, of 'reconciling the malcontents'. Another, Jaggar Abdur Rahman Khel, began to make raids in Zhob, and did a considerable amount of damage. He was promised a Maliki if he would desist, which he did. Three others raided a Bhittani village in British territory and killed 4 men. When they were called upon to answer for their misdeeds, they said they wanted to be Maliks. Accordingly they were made Maliks. When Jambil and Jaggar were made Maliks all the Abdur Rahman Khels began to raid. Accordingly every house-holder was made a Malik. The fact is that the Maliks were chosen in the most slip shod fashion. (Johnston 1903: 46-50)<sup>9</sup>

Just as the *maliki* system was justified on the basis of upholding tradition, so too were the FCR or Frontier Crimes Regulations, an extremely oppressive piece of legislation enacted in 1872 and still in force today. Davies justifies the notion of joint tribal responsibility enshrined in the FCR by stressing that the 'the intensely democratic constitution of the majority of Pathan tribes rendered any distinction between the guilty and the innocent extremely difficult' (1932).

Writing about the colonial invention of indigenous traditions, John Clammer remarks: 'In their attempt to codify [custom] they [the colonizers] imposed a uniformity on what was previously a wide variety of usage. It is apparent that no one traditional system of political, social, or proprietary organisation existed. These ideas were *reified* and made uniform by the British and became enshrined in the native regulations' (1973: 491). Martin Chanock (1985) similarly explains the general phenomenon whereby colonial administrations sought to convert the flexibility of custom into the rigidity of rules.<sup>10</sup> Thus, for instance, while under Pathan custom a *jirga* would be called when the tribesmen deemed it necessary, under the FCR, *jirgas* were convened by political agents and deputy commissioners. Furthermore, the *jirgas* thus convened would consist of handpicked *maliks* sympathetic to British interests. In an incisive analysis, David

<sup>9</sup> Johnston's *Notes on Wana*, recorded in Nichols 2005.

<sup>10</sup> See also Geschiere 2001:169.

Killingray remarks that customary law was designed to underpin the colonial presence, the priority being not the rule of law but supporting the colonial structure (1986: 413). In her description of colonial ways of dealing with itinerant tribes such as the Koravas in the Indian subcontinent, Meena Radhakrishna (2001) explains that the real reason for legislation such as the FCR was to circumvent the judiciary in the colonial administration's crude dealings with the tribesmen.

The FCR was tailor-made to *tame* the tribesmen: it did away with the need for measures such as *habeas corpus*, allowed arrests on mere suspicion, authorized collective punishment and mass arrests, and restricted the movements and activities of the tribes. Writing about the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, Radhakrishna explains how the act originated in the courts' refusal to accord legality to some of the practices of the police administration in dealing with the tribes. Not to be deterred by judicial niceties, the administration soon got around this hindrance by making a law to authorize the same practices: 'The Act originated from the fact that the Courts declined to accord legality to some of the practices of the police administration. This led to authorizing by law of the very same practices' (Radhakrishna 2001: 26-8).

Certain underlying features of colonial rule characterized both the closed border policy and the forward policy. Hansen and Stepputat suggest that colonial states, by virtue of their 'excessive centralization, habits of summary governance at a distance, lack of independent judiciaries, and the heavy-handed techniques deployed to control the majority of [their] populations', were not *normal* states (2001: 11). Imperial powers, for instance, used excessive force: Lieutenant Lumsden used to ride around villages that were refusing to pay revenue, armed with artillery to make them think that the colonial administrators 'were going to blow them out of the world', and orders to 'burn villages and destroy crops' were regular features of colonial policy in the tribal areas (Nichols 2001: 121, 174). In another instance in 1866, every building in the villages of Sangao, Mian Khan, and Barmoul were levelled, elephants being used to flatten walls (*ibid.*: 181).

The defining feature of colonial policy in the tribal areas was thus its coercive aspect. Ahmed gives the example of an extremely brutal blockade imposed on the Michni Mohmands in 1916. The tribe was excommunicated from British India, and to keep the Mohmands from entering the 'Settled Areas', nearby villages were destroyed and two wires were strung up, one of which was charged with electricity. The wire extended over a distance of seventeen miles, and within one year four hundred Mohmands had been electrocuted (Ahmed 1980: 40-67).

During blockades, the tribesmen subjected to them were allowed no contact with those inside British territory. This meant the cessation of all trade and, as the tribal areas had never been isolated, self-sufficient closed-systems, it was supposed that they

would soon surrender. Punitive expeditions were also frequent: there were eleven military operations from 1857 to 1877 and twelve from 1877 to 1881 (Caroe 1958: 348). They generated much debate in British Parliament, and while some in the colonial administration criticized such 'indiscriminate slaughter' whereby whole tribes were punished for a malcontent's offence, others relied on sanctimonious rhetoric. Davies justified such brutality thus: 'when the tribesmen continued to murder *our* subjects and to harass *our* borders, then the ultimate sanction was force. It was our bounden duty to protect our own; and for this reason, and this alone, can punitive expeditions be considered justifiable' (1932: 127, my emphasis).

### *The Durand Line*

The Durand Agreement was signed in 1893 by Amir Abdur Rehman Khan, Amir of Afghanistan, and Henry Mortimer Durand, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, with the aim of demarcating the respective spheres of influence of the Afghan Amir and the British across which neither party was to interfere in any way (Davies 1932: 161). The boundary line was not based upon accurate topographical data; during the process of demarcation, it was discovered that certain places marked on the Durand map did not actually exist (ibid.). Many 'ethnic absurdities' were perpetuated, such as handing over to the Amir the Birmal tract of Waziristan, which divided the Darwesh Khel Waziris between the British and Afghan spheres of influence (ibid.: 162). Another ethnic violation was the manner in which the boundary cut the Mohmand tribal area into two separate parts. Clearly, the colonial administrators were not concerned with ethnological requirements or sensibilities—there is no evidence that the Durand agreement was a tripartite agreement or that the tribesmen were consulted in the demarcation of the boundary (ibid.: 175). Davies frankly concedes the impossibility of satisfying ethnic sensibilities and serving British military aims at the same time; the ultimate purpose of the boundary line was to have a line of resistance against Russian expansion.<sup>11</sup>

The people of the area were nonetheless often able to circumvent the boundary line. Maddox remarks that, as imperial boundaries were drawn, they came to overlay, not replace, existing linkages; rather than remain locked into arbitrary 'tribal' boxes, people crossed frontiers (Maddox 1998: 437). Thus, while maps created one level of reality, the process of transformation occurred at others, as people continued to follow their 'own

11 While the boundary may have served immediate imperial needs in avoiding confrontation between British and Russian imperial interests, 'the price paid for such Victorian peace is now apparent' (Kirk 1962: 164). The Pakhtunistan issue remained a bone of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan for many years after 1947. While Pakistani government officials deem the issue a non-negotiable one, Afghanistan continues to challenge the legitimacy of the boundary, over which, to this day, both governments exercise only nominal control. For a detailed account of successive Afghan governments' refusal to recognise the line, see Embree 1977. A detailed discussion of the Pakhtunistan issue is beyond the province of this article.

maps'. Neither the Amir nor the British were able to bring peace to the frontier region. Pathan resistance rendered the border virtually redundant and artificial (Caroe 1958: 350; Davies 1932). Consequently, another treaty had to be signed between the British and the Amir on August 8, 1919. This was also continually resisted as the Mahsud tribes of Waziristan fought on. Eventually, large permanent garrisons had to be stationed in Razmak and Wana, as the 1930s continued to be an extremely turbulent period, with uprisings breaking out all around Peshawar (Davies 1932: 162-4). The border continues to be important to this day as a bone of contention between the Afghan and Pakistan governments. More recently in the 'war on terror', it has proved to be ineffective in 'containing' the terrorists on either side, leading many to blame the border's porosity for the lack of success in the war against terror.

It is not hard to see that the colonial state was not interested in 'governing' the tribal areas. Although it relied on the tribesmen to aid it in safeguarding the subcontinent by securing the safety of its north-western frontiers from the threat of Russian invasion, it was otherwise content to rely on contractual agreements with *maliks* to maintain 'law and order' by whatever means. This will serve as a crucial benchmark when analysing the Pakistani state's policies in Sections III and IV (below), for it brings out the incongruity of that state in continuing previous colonial policies.

#### *Rationalising resistance*

The reappraisal of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that follows is intended as a corrective to imperial observations that all too readily dismissed manifestations of a decades-long movement as spontaneous, emotional and transitory expressions of a depoliticized 'fanaticism' (Nichols 2001: 94). Assumptions of Islamic or Pakhtun solidarity, whether fanatical or millenarian, in the face of imperial invasion are overly simplistic (ibid.: 103). 'Much is made of the leader who appeared, generated an emotional wave, and then failed when confronted with a steady and sustained imperial presence...but attention has not been given to the role of considered, local political and economic self-interest' (ibid.: 100). These varied interests included Hindustani ideologues, Pakhtun shareholders and their dependants defending their crops, and local elites (*maliks*) gauging where their best interests lay (ibid.).

Stressing the irrationality and supernatural nature of the resistance was one way in which the colonial administration tried to rationalize the resistance they faced. Consider the bafflement they were experiencing:

The people seem to have lost their heads and all view their own interests in a blind belief that we should be turned out of the country. Ignorant, bigoted, and priest-ridden, the vast majority of the inhabitants believe...that the Mad Mullah has the

heavenly hosts on his side, and that, when the British advance to the attack, the mouths of their rifles and guns would be stopped.... Thousands of tribesmen whose ferocity (has been) heightened by religious enthusiasm flocked to join him. Drunk with bhang, maddened by fanaticism, they fell upon our positions in Malakand. (Davies 1932: 109, writing about the 1897 anti-imperial uprisings)

In reality, the 1897 uprisings along the frontier drew in diverse segments of the local population, not all of whom supported the 'Mad Mullah' for religious reasons. The Orakzais, for instance, joined the uprising because they opposed the establishment of posts on the Samana ridge. Similarly, support from Bajaur and the Mohmands was the result of resentment at the penetration of tribal territory by the Chitral Reliefs (Elliott 1968).

Colonial reports were devoid of the realization that acts of violence and property damage in the frontier region resembled other types of British-Indian 'dacoities' that 'often occupied the ill-defined borderland between individual, localized crime and collective defiance of state authority'. Much later, Akbar Ahmed also described 'the Pathan millenarian movements' as 'basically an Islamic tribal response to an expanding and non-Islamic imperial power' (1976: 17; see also Rittenberg 1977). Clearly, as already noted, both colonial and contemporary accounts seem interested only in recognizing the religious character of the resistance. Such views are misleading, for not only do they tend to dismiss resistance as merely fanaticism—irrational, fantastic and not to be taken seriously—they also have the effect of denigrating efforts at resistance. As Hollander and Einwohner caution, 'restricting the analysis of resistance to purely religious expression narrows the conceptual parameters of resistance' (2004: 535). Conversely, recognizing that religion may have been just one of several other motivating factors contributing to a complex social movement of anti-imperial resistance conduces to a more holistic analysis (Nichols 2001: 92).

The inventory of outrages perpetrated by the tribesmen reveal a classic use of 'weapons of the weak', with no necessary or dominant religious underpinning. These acts of resistance included robberies, carrying off of flocks and herds, house-breaking, trespassing and pilfering shops in markets in the Settled Districts—in Davies' words, 'too numerous, and, in many cases, too insignificant<sup>12</sup> to warrant description' (1932: 121). Interestingly, when feuding bands looted each other's crops and the colonial officer arrived in the village to investigate, he was met with a refusal by the villagers to disclose the offenders' names. Consider how Davies understood these simple acts of resistance and non-cooperation: 'villagers had been known to go to prison rather than disclose

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12 The desire to force acts of resistance into ideological slots can also explain the current tendency to view resistance emanating from the FATA as religious fanaticism and not as reflecting a combination of reasons (discontent with the state for its pro-US stance, economic and political dissatisfaction etc.).



the names of offenders; and, what was worse, had been *forced* to assist the Mahsud in his depredations' (Davies 1932: 120, my emphasis). The portrayal of residents of the settled areas as hapless individuals in need of British protection is unmistakable.

In addition, there was at times a refusal to recognise resistance at all. Davies' (1932) accounts for 'trouble' on the frontier thus: 'it is my considered opinion that political propaganda, especially from 1890 onwards, has been the most potent cause of unrest. It has been Afghan intrigues...which have incited the tribes to rebel against the British Raj. Were it not for Afghan and other political intrigues the local problem of tribal control would have been solved long ago' (1932: 180, 187).

There is evidence that Afghan amirs did regularly incite tribal *maliks* to create trouble for the British, but attributing the restiveness of the entire tribal belt to external intrigues demeans the efforts of the tribesmen to resist. Similarly, successful attempts at resistance were acknowledged only grudgingly. Elliott writes about the success of Pathan resistance in the following words: 'although there were occasions—and not too many of them—when the Pathan secured some spectacular local victory over the army, he succeeded because he was a brilliant opportunist who snatched a fleeting opportunity when conditions were all in his favour. It does not imply that he was a better fighting man than the British or Indian soldier. If anything the boot was on the other foot' (1968: 287).

#### *Whither the subaltern?*

This section examines the role and position of tribal *maliks*. Originally coined by Gramsci, 'subaltern' is a broad term inclusive of all 'subordinated groups'—peasants, agricultural labourers, factory workers, tribals and women (Hanlon 1988: 191). At the most fundamental level, the fact of being colonised would itself be enough to turn the colonised into subalterns. Thus, all Pathans (in fact, all Indians of the subcontinent) were subalterns, tribesmen and *maliks* alike. However, this dichotomy is overly simplistic, as it does not take into account the disparate interests of, and strategies and roles adopted by, the colonised in coming to terms with colonial rule.

Accounts of inter-tribal conflict and of how some tribes sought advantages by siding with the British vis-à-vis other tribes are seen by scholars such as James Scott and Gilbert Joseph as proof of the hegemonic ability of the powerful. But the Cambridge school historians such as Christopher Bayly offer an alternative analysis. According to this perspective, the fact that segments of the colonized sided with the colonizer against other segments of the colonized symbolizes agency on the part of the latter. This, in turn—problematically for the subaltern studies literature—renders the colonizer–colonized dichotomy unclear. Were the *maliks* who aided the British in 'taming their own tribes' also colonizers, or were they representatives of the colonized interacting with the colonizer on terms that suited them and furthering their own interests? This raises several



thematic issues such as whether we can speak of a monolithic subaltern at all? As Bayly notes critically, 'down almost to the very bottom of society every subaltern was an elite to someone lower than him' (2000: 126).<sup>13</sup> Can we then demarcate rigid lines between imperial power and disempowered culture (Nichols 2001: 229)?

In fact, to view tribal *maliks* as representatives of their tribes is a misrepresentation of reality, for tribal chiefs had to 'keep people in their place' and used their authority to exploit those whom they ruled—thus the local tribals were subjected to a sub-colonialism of the tribal elite (Killingray 1965: 417). Could not the tribal *maliks*, who were paid allowances by the British in return for controlling their tribes, be seen more accurately as part of the colonial administration instead of the colonized? Nichols describes this predicament thus: 'the middlemen (are) those given short shrift by the subaltern school, because they occupied an uneasy marginal role between the elite and the subaltern... they provided a meeting ground for the accommodation of elite and [subaltern] politics' (2001: 123). This suggests that notions such as *collaborating classes* are more useful than simplistic binary categories between the powerful and the subalterns.

But while the subaltern school may be faulted for not giving sufficient attention to the unique position of the collaborating classes, the Cambridge school of history mentioned above can also be criticized. While the latter school, pioneered by Christopher Bayly, vests agency in segments of the colonized population, it ends up treating colonial regimes as continuations of prior indigenous regimes. Similarly, for David Scott, colonialism, far from constituting a complete break with the past, can be shown to have an organic, internal connection with it (1995: 195). This has the effect, as Partha Chatterjee argues, of 'making the colonized the authors of their own domination' (in Scott 1995: 195). Consequently, 'colonialism as a distinctive formation, all but disappears...(it) spirit(s) away the violent intrusion of colonialism and make(s) all of its features the innate property of an indigenous history' (ibid.).

If there is any continuity, it is between the colonial and post-colonial periods, as the next section will show.

### III. Between use and neglect: post-colonial engagement with the FATA

At the time of partition in August 1947,<sup>14</sup> Pakistan inherited fifteen military battalions, six of which were stationed in Waziristan. A much celebrated agreement between Jinnah and the tribes, purportedly based on considerations of good faith and heralded as a confidence-building measure, led to troop withdrawals from posts such as Waziristan and

13 Originally 1988, cited in Joseph 1990.

14 The decision that the tribal areas would be made a formal part of Pakistan was finalized at a joint tribal session held in Peshawar in April 1947. The Khyber, Kurram, North and South Waziristan agencies existed in 1947, Mohmand Agency was granted agency status in 1951, and Orakzai and Bajaur agencies were demarcated in 1973.

Razmak. It is now generally realized that the withdrawal of troops was necessitated by a shortage of soldiers in Kashmir, where fighting broke out with India soon after Pakistan's creation. The manifestation of the state in terms of the presence of troops is a contentious issue, and one of contemporary urgency, given the fact that in 2001, 80,000 Pakistani troops were deployed in the FATA for the first time since Pakistan's creation in 1947.<sup>15</sup>

Writing about the heavy police presence in Muslim communities in Mumbai, Thomas Hansen suggests that a dominant presence of police stations and police posts is an indication that an area is being treated as merely a 'security problem'. Viewing such manifestations of the state negatively, he refers to 'the (presence of the) police force [as] an ever present and dreaded representation of a *hostile* state' (Hansen and Steppatut 2001: 244). Hansen's caution is valid, especially given the criticism that recent military action in the FATA has been attracting. However, we should qualify Hansen's arguments in respect of such manifestations of the state in the FATA. Consider, for instance, the discrepancy between the infrastructural presence of the state (in the form of government schools, hospitals and roads) in the FATA and other parts of Pakistan. There are only thirty-three hospitals in the FATA, and the road density there is 0.17 km per square km of area against a national average of 0.26. In terms of such indices, the FATA compare highly unfavourably with all other parts of Pakistan. This scenario, coupled with the negligible troop presence in the region, amounts to its virtual abandonment by the state. If the inhabitants of the FATA are unable to see such forms of the state, the latter cannot be made real for them in any form, hostile or benevolent (cf. Hansen and Steppatut 2001: 5). Thus, while the police presence may on the one hand signify an oppressive state, it may also, and crucially, be taken to symbolize the state's engagement with the region and its recognition of the need to protect it.

By and large, as already noted, Pakistan has continued former colonial practices in governing the FATA. Even when modern political practices have been introduced, change has been cosmetic, with traditional authority figures being privileged.<sup>16</sup> From 1947 to 1954, the FATA were represented in Pakistan's first constituent assembly by only one member. In 1973, for a total of 37,000 *maliks*, eight seats were reserved in the National Assembly. Adult suffrage was introduced in the region in 1996, but the Political Parties Act of 1954 does not apply to the area. In 2002, reforms under the Legal Framework Order increased the number of reserved seats from eight to twelve. Under the Local Government Ordinance of 2001, a modified local government model was introduced

15 S. C. Moore. 'US Aims to Turn Hostile Pakistani Tribes Friendly'. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSISL306697> (accessed: July 27, 2008).

16 The official *maliks* have grown immensely in wealth owing to the favours they receive from the government, and 'a cleavage within society is becoming perceptible' (Ahmed 1980: 143). Only *maliks* are allowed to vote for candidates to the National Assembly or receive building contracts, and they obtain quotas for food rations at special prices (sugar, tea, flour).

in the FATA. Although local agency council elections were held in December 2005, an interview with one political agent revealed their calculated meaninglessness: 'we decided to stage these elections...really, they were a sham...everything was decided and known from before...elections and all don't work for that region.'

Although human rights constitute a 'hallmark of the modern nation-state' in contemporary state practice (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 284), the FCR is an instance of anachronistic legislation—colonial and inherently oppressive—the continuation of which embodies human rights violations on many levels. The entire constitution, including the Fundamental Rights clauses (Articles 8 to 28 of the 1973 Constitution), has been rendered inapplicable by virtue of a single non-obstante clause, Article 247 (5). The FCR gives political agents virtually unlimited judicial prerogative to fine, blockade, detain and seize hostile groups and confiscate or demolish property in the tribal areas (Sections 21-34). Section 21 of the FCR, for instance, gives the political agent the power to arrest the members of a culprit's tribe, confiscate his property, and prevent communication between his tribesmen and those in the settled districts (IPRI 2005).

To illustrate post-1947 state policy vis-à-vis the FATA, the following periodization will be used: from 1947 to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; from the Soviet invasion to General Zia-ul-Haq's death and the end of Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the USA; neglect of the FATA till the events of September 11; and September 11 onwards, with the FATA being a focal point in the 'war on terror'.

The practice of using tribal *lashkars* to fight the Indian army in Kashmir was begun soon after the creation of Pakistan (Ahmed 1980; Jalal 2008). Pakistan inherited a severely truncated army, necessitating its dependence on the frontier tribes to provide manpower for the war against India. It is now commonly accepted that the tribals were armed by the state to fight its wars. This deliberate weaponisation of society in the FATA reached its peak in the 1980s following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the mujahideen were showered with technologically advanced weapons (see Lindholm 1996: 96; Rubin 1995).

Apart from the use of tribal *lashkars* to do the fighting in Kashmir, between 1947 and 1972 the tribal areas were 'left to their own devices' (Major-General Nasir Ullah Babar, cited in Ahmed 1976: foreword). The Bhutto era witnessed increased, albeit random state involvement in the FATA: road-building programmes were initiated, abandoned cantonments were occupied, old forts such as Datta Khel Ladha and Tiarza and the Razmak camp were reactivated, the Nahakki Pass was crossed for the first time since 1935, and extensive power and electrification schemes were begun (Caroe 1958: 529; Ahmed 1980). It is a reflection on the nature of military governments—and Pakistan has

had several—that the sole serious development effort in the FATA prior to September 11 was initiated by a civilian government (1971-1977).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan marked the beginning of a new phase in Pakistan's engagement with the FATA, an engagement that is in large part responsible for the current imbroglio. To attribute the disruption of society in the FATA to events as recent as those of September 11 does not provide an accurate picture of reality. Historicizing the situation enables one to contend, more usefully, that this is a society that saw its 'natural' course of change and development rudely interrupted when thousands of locals were recruited by the US and Pakistani authorities during the Cold War (and thousands of foreign *mujahideen* were brought into the FATA) and *manufactured* into what we know today as the Taliban. The story of how the world abandoned the Taliban and Afghanistan following the end of the Cold War is well known. The FATA once again slipped into a state of obscurity, and annual development funds fell to very low levels.

The FATA remained in this state of neglect until suddenly, after 9/11, the spotlight once again shifted to the region. Instead of the Pakistani state finally assuming responsibility for the task of state-building in its tribal north, it buckled to US pressure and embarked on military action in the FATA. The compulsions of the war on terror overpowered policy-making in Pakistan, relegating issues of state-building and integration to secondary importance. Thus, 'the only relationship today with the tribal peoples is through the missile and the bomb' (Ahmed 2008).

In the context of bloody military action in the FATA and the panic and desperation this is causing, commentators and scholars alike are advocating a return to the colonial system of indirect rule. Nostalgic for the system in place before military action was initiated in the FATA, Akbar Ahmed states:

the administration was like a triangle and the political agent was at the top. This was an old colonial structure from the British days and had many critics, but it was, by and large, better than anything else that Pakistan or the region could offer. What has happened after 9/11 is that, thanks to the U.S. strategy of choosing a strictly military approach, the political agent has been sidelined and the Pakistan army now runs all affairs. Musharraf abolished the administrative structure that had prevailed until recent times. A vacuum has therefore formed at the district or agency level of administration throughout Pakistan. [The solution is to] restore those pillars...to restore the old practices. It is a colonial administration and Americans are not a very colonial people. The Americans are used to a mayor who is elected for a fixed period (Ahmed 2008).<sup>17</sup>

17 Akbar Ahmed, 'Dealing with Pakistan's Wild West', *The Globalist*. (January 24, 2008). <http://www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=6738> (accessed: June 5, 2008).

This statement is shocking and disturbing in its advocacy of a return to the same dysfunctional, oppressive governance structures—unfortunate colonial legacies—the dangers of which are commonly recognised. Misuse of FATA's special constitutional status has converted the region into a 'veritable junkyard', said one senior government official when interviewed. 'The region has been allowed to become a haven for fugitives and criminals, smugglers of weapons and contraband, and kidnapping for ransom.' That the pre-9/11 state was consistently failing the FATA is clear from the existence of parallel governments in several agencies of the FATA. Another official said the following: 'The Bara Tehsil and Tirah Valley of Khyber agency are notorious dens for kidnappers. People are kidnapped from Mardan district and brought to Malakand agency. The state was not taking action, so the citizens took matters into their hands and the locals of Mardan formed an *Amn jirga* [peace council] that raised a *Danda Bardar* (stick-wielding) force to fight the kidnappers.' In short, the pre-September 11 system was a dysfunctional one.

Return to a system that was colonial in nature and calculated to be oppressive would subject the post-colonial state to allegations of grave malpractice. The human rights violations embodied in the FCR, the corruption the political agents are notorious for, the exploitative *maliki* system and a general lack of concern for the locals of the FATA were the conditions obtaining before September 11. That the FATA became such a ready safe haven for militants (local as well as foreign) highlights the culpability of the state's historical dealings with the FATA—vacillating between use and abandonment—in contributing to the current crisis.

#### IV. An argument against apartheid

What fascinates most scholars studying tribal societies such as the FATA is their independence from and resistance to integration in the state. In the absence of representative surveys conducted in the FATA documenting the local population's opinions on the desirability and need for change (such as greater integration into the Pakistan state system), it would be presumptuous to advocate change assuming that this is what the local population desires.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless the possibility that they do desire change should be taken into account. Consequently, this section will identify some factors of change that, in and of themselves, contradict the notion of a tribal isolate that is invariably averse to increased state involvement.

Akbar Ahmed, in *Pukhtun Economy and Society: Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society* (1980), provides a detailed account of multiple aspects of tribal life in the Mohmand Agency. He argues that the tribal areas provide 'ideal

<sup>18</sup> Research for this work revealed only two surveys: one was conducted by Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP) in 2006 and the other by the Department for International Development (DFID) in 2003. The CAMP survey excludes the Bajaur and North and South Waziristan Agencies, while the DFID survey is restricted to the Kurram, Khyber and South Waziristan Agencies.

laboratory conditions' for testing the hypothesis that tribal society has remained intact in the tribal areas of Mohmand. He uses case studies from the tribal areas and settled areas of Mohmand Agency respectively to understand what an 'original', 'home-made' Mohmand model would look like, and where and how far deviances have occurred from it (1980: 32). Ahmed's ideal-type model is a timeless one, and the Pukhtuns in it 'are as they are, now and forever'. Let us take his problematic thesis that 'a pure and ideal-type structure exists in the tribal belt' as the pivot for the following discussion (1980: 59).

It is interesting that, while Ahmed recognizes the same factors of change that underlie the argument in this article that tribal society in the FATA has experienced sufficient change to make an emphasis on its isolation and uniqueness meaningless, he nonetheless concludes that the ideal-type tribal society persists (1980). The factors causing and representing change include the emergence and growth of first the colonial and then the postcolonial state, social change producing material values, a desire for social mobility and a concomitant rejection of castes and hierarchies, and the politics of the vote (Ahmed 1976: 132). My article extends the analysis to exogenous<sup>19</sup> factors such as the emergence of a distinct economic class benefitting from drugs and weapons trafficking, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the emergence of the Taliban, in a bid to understand better the process of change in the FATA.

Ahmed rejects the possibility that clashes between different systems [the state and tribal systems] may have produced a synthesis; instead he contends that 'the encounters [were] mechanical and their ferocity merely helped to confirm existing social reality and cultural boundaries' (1980: 59). While Ahmed contends that tribal societies are 'incorrectly seen in the process of sedentarization and detribalization and hence on the evolutionary path to becoming agricultural-peasant societies', I argue that without introducing value-judgments or invoking an evolutionist framework,<sup>20</sup> an objective appraisal of changes in the FATA is sufficient to convince one of the need to view the tribal areas not as analytical and real-life isolates, but as part of a society that is impacted just as much by events as other parts of the country.

To begin with, in the colonial period, by encouraging the growth of the chiefly *malik* class in the tribal areas, 'the foundation of conflict, contradiction and dysfunction in... society...was created' (Ahmed 1980: 70). While Ahmed admits that 'the very core of tribal democracy was touched', he concludes, paradoxically, that it 'remained a closed system' (ibid.). He stresses the autonomy and hence the agency of the tribesmen by describing 'how each party, on its own operative level and with its own specific goals in

19 The use of the word 'exogenous' is meant to highlight the fact that, while some factors of change are routine and common to most societies, others are not natural or normal, such as, for instance, the creation of the Taliban. These factors require deliberate planning and active, artificial creation.

20 The discussion is not on the desirability, or otherwise, of the change but on the fact of change itself.



view, attempt[ed] to divert and subvert the larger situation for its own purposes' (ibid.: 81), but the underlying fact remains that the tribesmen were *compelled* to engage with the state.

Bernt Glatzer, who has conducted years of fieldwork in Afghanistan and Pakistan and their border areas, notes how the tribals have gradually been forced to come to terms with the practical realities of a Westphalian world order (2001: 381). Whereas many years ago most Afghan refugees would talk of *mantaqeh*, which implies a fuzzy and flexible notion of area, they now make regular use of words such as *sarhad* and *hadood* ('boundary'), both of which imply fixed boundaries. In their use, one discerns a process of coming to terms with the state.

One argument against FATA's greater incorporation into the Pakistani state asserts that FATA locals are averse to such integration and the 'development' associated with it. But an interview with one political agent revealed a different dynamic: 'If a road is built in an area, the political agent's jurisdiction and the ambit of the FCR expand along the length of the road. Thus, the tribals are wary of the oppressive concomitants of development, not development itself'.<sup>21</sup> Another plausible reason for the tribals' aversion to integration is the association of the post-colonial state and its policies with its oppressive, exploitative and frequently brutal colonial predecessor (Ahmed 1980: 57). This should be seen as the failure of the post-colonial state to break free from its colonial past and build legitimacy anew, rather than as reflecting an inherent tribal aversion to involvement with states.

Claims about the hold of 'tradition' over tribal society in the FATA are also questionable. Even today, those who defend the FCR argue that it is in agreement with tribal 'tradition' and 'values', despite what scholars such as Chanock and Radhakrishna have revealed about the real colonial goals served by draconian legislation such as the FCR (discussed in Section II). Chanock, examining the ways in which 'traditions were maintained and manufactured', writes that 'the law was the cutting edge of colonialism, an instrument of the power of an alien state and part of the process of coercion. The customary law, far from being a survival, was created by...changes and conflicts' (1985: 3, 4). In reality, 'a body of law was created which was neither customary nor British: customary law was neither "there" nor traditional' (ibid.: 57-61).

As with traditional legislation, so also with the very notion of tribes. Post-colonial scholars such as Chanock, Mamdani, Asad and Berry (1995) take the analysis to an altogether higher level by stressing the constructedness of tribes. Expressing scepticism about the notion of 'tribal' societies, Talal Asad and Roger Owen comment: 'A famous traditional feature of most Middle Eastern countries has been something called the tribe, a socio-political entity which is usually thought of as being only loosely integrated

21 Interview with a political agent of Orakzai Agency, conducted in July 2008.



within the central state, because it has its own leaders, its own customs, etc.' (Asad and Owen 1983: 72). 'The tribe, conceived as a discrete group with an established system of customary law, was a convenient concept for the system of indirect rule' (Chanock 1985: 9). However, literature on the FATA and its inhabitants continues to adhere to essentialized, classical notions like tribe and kinship. For instance, Charles Lindholm holds that the 'the primary factor which must be kept at the forefront of any analysis of Pukhtun politics is that society was and is organized on the basis of kinship' (1996: 74). This leads him into simplistic assertions, for example, that 'the fundamental concept of the society is that all those related through a common male ancestor should stand united against outsiders. In theory, the fifteen million Pukhtun of Pakistan and Afghanistan should be capable of coming together to fight invaders' (ibid.).

Robert Nichols is rare amongst scholars for sharing the emphasis of the present article on the multiple changes that the FATA have undergone (2001). Nichols explores the processes of *contact*, *integration* and *confrontation* that have occurred across multiple arenas as successive imperial systems of order and political hierarchy encountered Pakhtun 'tribal' practices (2001: xiv). Contemporary analyses, then, ought to gauge the extent to which the 'multidimensional process of contact, recruitment, and exploitation led to regional integration and/or subordination vis-à-vis wider imperial and global processes' (ibid.: xv).

Some basic statistics such as those on the high rates of out-migration from the FATA lend support to the assertion that the FATA are not a static, sequestered region unaffected by change (Tables 1A, 1B).

TABLE 1A: PERCENTAGE (%) OF PAKISTANI WORKERS LEAVING\* FROM THE NWFP

District/Region	1981–2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Peshawar	3.7	4.43	4.43	3.26	3.82	4.12	4.04
Tribal Areas	5.85	5.03	5.03	4.87	4.76	4.42	4.08

Table modified from that compiled by Gallup (Pakistan) based on Bureau of Emigration data and published by the Gulf Research Centre.<sup>22</sup>

\*Leaving for the Gulf States, European countries, the United States and 'Other' countries. The figures contain no further specifications. However, they serve the useful purpose of supporting the contention (to counter Ahmed 1980) that the assertion of a closed, pure ideal-type model of the tribal areas is untenable.

- The 1998 Census Report for Orakzai Agency refers to out-migration from the agency as a possible explanation for the fall from 233 persons per square kilometre (1988) to 147 persons per square kilometre in 1998 (p. 15).

22 [http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article\\_id=15962](http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=15962) (accessed: July 29, 2008).

- The 1998 Census Report of Kurram Agency testifies to the profound impact of out-migration of labourers: 'The quality and construction of the houses have improved with the prosperity brought in (by) the people working mostly in the Middle Eastern Countries' (p. 5).
- Since military action in the FATA started in 2004, several thousand FATA residents have been forced to flee to other parts of Pakistan 'as refugees rather than accept Taliban rule. The Pakistani Taliban have killed hundreds of tribal *maliks* and members of civil society such as journalists, doctors and businessmen' (Rashid 2008).<sup>23</sup>

TABLE 1B: MIGRANT POPULATION BY PLACE OF BIRTH

Place of Enumeration	Migrant Population	Same prov. but different district	Place of Birth									
			NWFP	FATA	Punjab	Sindh	Balochistan	Islamabad	Azad Kashmir	Northern Area	Other Country	Not reported
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>10,829,264</b>	<b>5,705,447</b>	<b>943,944</b>	<b>126,577</b>	<b>1,136,386</b>	<b>280,668</b>	<b>131,529</b>	<b>27,379</b>	<b>236,371</b>	<b>16,793</b>	<b>2,219,225</b>	<b>4,945</b>
Rural	3,920,429	2,463,090	137,487	66,564	119,162	96,739	41,445	4,604	62,917	1,997	922,447	3,977
Urban	6,908,835	3,242,357	806,457	60,013	1,017,224	183,929	90,084	22,775	173,454	14,796	1,296,778	968
<b>NWFP</b>	<b>647,725</b>	<b>444,006</b>	-	<b>82,785</b>	<b>75,341</b>	<b>14,512</b>	<b>3,330</b>	<b>3,405</b>	<b>3,758</b>	<b>1,489</b>	<b>19,099</b>	-
Rural	265,635	185,806	-	56,198	12,795	3,416	612	472	1,561	206	4,569	-
Urban	382,090	258,200	-	26,587	62,546	11,096	2,718	2,933	2,197	1,283	14,530	-
<b>Punjab</b>	<b>6,701,256</b>	<b>4,341,896</b>	<b>346,607</b>	<b>15,783</b>	-	<b>213,235</b>	<b>36,092</b>	<b>20,352</b>	<b>156,907</b>	<b>5,363</b>	<b>1,560,790</b>	<b>4,231</b>
Rural	3,202,624	2,045,309	91,318	8,863	-	86,521	16,817	3,958	49,929	1,399	894,591	3,919
Urban	3,498,632	2,296,587	255,289	6,920	-	126,714	19,275	16,394	106,978	3,964	666,199	312
<b>Sindh</b>	<b>2,832,937</b>	<b>805,382</b>	<b>487,441</b>	<b>24,693</b>	<b>759,887</b>	-	<b>89,138</b>	<b>3,412</b>	<b>45,093</b>	<b>8,124</b>	<b>609,608</b>	<b>159</b>
Rural	280,837	181,110	13,150	633	41,207	-	23,761	174	1,573	91	19,112	26
Urban	2,552,100	624,272	474,291	24,060	718,680	-	65,377	3,238	43,520	8,033	590,496	133
<b>Balochistan</b>	<b>249,615</b>	<b>114,163</b>	<b>33,282</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>59,181</b>	<b>26,778</b>	-	<b>210</b>	<b>6,175</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>8,356</b>	<b>555</b>
Rural	86,242	50,865	13,136	132	13,793	4,967	-	-	235	10	3,072	32
Urban	163,373	63,298	20,146	650	45,388	21,811	-	210	5,940	123	5,284	523
<b>Islamabad</b>	<b>397,731</b>	-	<b>76,614</b>	<b>2,534</b>	<b>241,977</b>	<b>26,143</b>	<b>2,969</b>	-	<b>24,438</b>	<b>1,684</b>	<b>21,372</b>	-
Rural	85,091	-	19,883	738	51,367	1,835	255	-	9,619	291	1,103	-
Urban	312,640	-	56,731	1,796	190,610	24,308	2,714	-	14,819	1,393	20,269	-

SOURCE: adapted from [http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/other\\_tables/migrant.pdf](http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/other_tables/migrant.pdf).

Ahmed also describes a trend whereby FATA locals drift to towns or migrate abroad looking for work. For instance, he tells us that there were over a million Pukhtuns in Karachi in 1977 (1980: 99, 100). 'There is a tendency for Pukhtun society to move uni-directionally from *nang* [tribal] to *qalang* [settled] in acts of migration' (1980: 99; also 100, 122).

Even after recognizing such indices of change, Ahmed (1980) construes the processes of change that turn *nang* areas into *qalang* areas as deviance from a so-called pure *nang* tribal model. The present article suggests an alternative interpretation: first, that processes

23 Ahmed Rashid, 'How to succeed and fail in FATA'. *Daily Times*, May 2, 2008.

of change over the years have so profoundly impacted on the *nang* areas that one may not meaningfully speak of an untainted *nang* model at all; and secondly, that the *qalang* areas represent changes to the 'original' model, as well as the new, changed model itself, and not mere deviance from a supposed 'original'.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1980s, change came massively to the FATA. Afghanistan became the site for the last Soviet–U.S. proxy war. The blueprint for the Afghan 'jihad' was prepared by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in collaboration with the Inter Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) of Pakistan (Mamdani 2004: 130). Also supporting the 'jihad' were Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Britain, China, the Philippines and Israel (ibid.). The strategy was to flood Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal areas with all kinds of weapons and the most radical Islamist recruits (ibid.: 126-9). As recruits arrived from Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, the U.S. and Britain, the tribal areas became a truly 'global village'. Some 35,000 Muslim men from 43 Islamic countries fought as *mujahideen* (fighters in a holy war) between 1982 and 1992 (ibid.). Of these 'hyphenated identities' (Mamdani's phrase)—Afghan-Arabs, Afghan-Algerians, Afghan-Indonesians and so on—some were mercenaries or adventurers, while others fought for 'the cause' (ibid.: 131-4). In April 1993, there were 2800 Arabs registered as residents of the NWFP; there were three hundred Arab militants in Peshawar in the early 1990s (Bukhari and Rana 2007: 11); among foreigners, there were 5000 Saudis, 3000 Yemenis, 2000 Egyptians, and 2800 Algerians (ibid.; Rubin 1995; Mamdani 2004).

In ISI-run training camps in Pakistan, recruits were 'taught' the necessity of 'holy war' against the 'godless communists' and trained in war tactics. CIA training incorporated local Afghan skills of disembowelling and slitting throats (Mamdani 2004: 126, 138). From 1986 to 1994, children's textbooks for use in the *madrassahs* were designed by the University of Nebraska under a USAID grant. A fourth-grade mathematics textbook read: 'The speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 metres per second. If a Russian is at a distance of 3200 metres from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian's head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead' (Mamdani 2004: 137). When Pakistani *madrassah* students were taught the Urdu alphabet, the Urdu letter *kaaf* stood for Kalashnikov, *khay* for *khoon* (blood) and *jeem* for *jihad* (ibid.: 138).

Victor Turner's notion of liminality, originally used in the context of rites of passage, is amenable to application in diverse contexts. Let us apply it to the process of 'manufacturing' the *mujahideen* (who went on to become the Taliban) just outlined. While Turner sees liminality as having positive properties—a storehouse of possibilities and a source of creativity—liminality is also the site and time of stripping bare, of violence: '[Liminal

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24 See also Asad and Owen (1983: 73).

entities] must obey their instructors implicitly...it is as though *they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew*' (1974: 95, my emphasis).

This stripping bare of pre-liminal attributes occurs in seclusion (as in Pakistan's peripheral tribal areas): 'In liminality...the initiand...has been...*set aside* from the main arenas of social life in a seclusion lodge or camp' (2002 [1974]: 97). To be emphasized here is the sense of disruption and sharp disjunction, the intentionality and artificiality (in the sense of not being natural) inherent in the process of *making* someone liminal. In Turner's schemata, the liminars are *ritual liminars* in that 'they have cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity' (ibid.). Also, ritual liminars are moving, symbolically, to a higher status. Thus 'their being stripped of status temporarily is a "ritual", an as-if, or make-believe stripping...' (ibid.).<sup>25</sup>

But if one takes out the element of make-believe and rituality, liminality becomes a rather dark, permanent (un)certainty, as in fact it did for the thousands of *mujahideen*, gathered in *madrasahs* in Afghanistan and Pakistan's north-west, 'trained' mentally in religious rhetoric and physically in military tactics, supplied with advanced weaponry, taught to kill, and then abandoned without a ritual of reaggregation into 'normal' life.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the expectation was that, once the Soviet threat had ended, the *liminars* would somehow trickle back into routine life. Instead, some trickled into Pakistan's tribal north-west through the porous border, others returned to their home countries, and still others remained in Afghanistan and in 1994 formed the Taliban government.

Perhaps the expectation was also that they would shed their violent *habits*. But Bourdieu reminds us that the habitus is *embodied* history (1990: 56); its *dispositional* aspect renders it beyond conscious control as it determines tendencies of perception and practice (1977: 22; Rey 2004: 335). In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu describes habitus thus:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions (1990: 53)....The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee...their constancy

25 Turner (1974a: 97) distinguishes liminars from 'marginals', who are, simultaneously, members of two or more groups, e.g. migrant foreigners and persons of mixed ethnic origin. Marginals, unlike ritual liminars, have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity. But liminality is the more useful concept here: it involves an *artificial* rupture and thus highlights the process by which *mujahideen* were *actively* recruited. Marginality does not highlight this *intentionality*, and it appears more as a descriptive label than a concept: people migrate, just as they are born of mixed-race unions. Thus I find liminality useful in analysing the *mujahideen*.

26 Turner recognizes that transition may become a permanent condition (1974a: 107), but his emphasis is on ritual liminality in which the initiand is always reintegrated (ibid.: 99).

over time. (ibid.: 54) [...] ...the *habitus*...is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. (ibid.: 56)

Mahmood Mamdani, an anthropologist at Columbia, is one of the very few scholars to have pointed out the link between the violence the Taliban became notorious for and their history (2004: 161-2). Indeed, after the Afghan war, almost every major 'terrorist' attack was traced to the *ex-mujahideen* (ibid.: 139; Roy 1994: 114).

Military action in the aftermath of September 11 is worsening the disruption in a society already rent by such divisions and convulsed by external and internal pressure.<sup>27</sup> In the chaotic aftermath of military action in the FATA, more than a million residents have been displaced (ICG 2009). Several hundred tribal *maliks* have been killed by militants who opposed the *maliks*' attempts to negotiate with the state authorities for peace in the region. Ahmed Rashid (2008) speaks of the 'civil society which the army failed to protect in FATA when the Taliban and al' Qaeda came to settle there after 2002'.<sup>28</sup> This local civil society, which is all too often obscured from the public view, includes, inter alia, tribal leaders, religious leaders, journalists, businessmen, schoolteachers and shopkeepers. In the myriad accounts and commentaries on the FATA, Rashid is perhaps the only writer to direct attention to the silent victims of the multi-faceted tragedy facing the FATA. The fact that references to the tribal belt invoke images of a terrorist-infested region is a testament to the obscurity that the residents of the FATA have been forced into. Historically, the region has been seen as just that—a region (a whole). Attention needs to be redirected to the innocent victims of the battle being staged in the region. These civilians, in mortal danger from the militants and from state-sponsored Pakistani and American military action alike, are fleeing to refugee camps or setting up local *lashkars* for their defence. Yet despite their present predicament and history of neglect by the Pakistani state, they attract scant attention to this day.

It is a tragic irony that, while the notion of the subaltern, originally formulated to refine histories of colonial encounters, does not explain much in the colonial era (see Section II), it becomes appropriate in the post-colonial era. In the encounter of the postcolonial state with the FATA, the locals, as witness to the disruption of their society, were the subalterns.

## V. Conclusion

This article has focused on a region that is only under the nominal control of the Pakistani state and is an anachronism in today's Westphalian global community of nation states.

<sup>27</sup> See Rubin 1995: 30.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed Rashid interview, February 28, 2008. *Harper's Magazine*. <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2008/02/hbc-90002504> (accessed: July 20, 2008).

It has offered an evaluation of the role of the state in the FATA and argued that 'tribal societies' should be viewed just like other ordinary parts of society, being like them subject to constant and rapid change.

This process of mapping change took us back to the British colonial era. In dealing with the post-colonial era, an attempt was made to highlight the culpability of several actors in *manufacturing* 'the Taliban'. These arguments culminated in an argument (in Section IV) against treating the FATA as a timeless region inhabited by traditional tribals.

The situation in the FATA is a story of the disruptive effects of brutal external interference, exploitation and abandonment, rather than reflecting inherent Pathan traits or the force of tradition. This society—rent by divisions, serving as a laboratory for human experimentation and forced into a frame of ahistoricity—testifies to the culpability of numerous actors in creating the turmoil that characterizes it today.

Eight years ago, in 2001, when Pakistan officially pledged support for the US-led 'war on terror', many Pakistanis came out in protest, accusing the government of succumbing to US pressure and aiding in the invasion of a sovereign Muslim country, Afghanistan. Pakistanis repeatedly questioned whose war they were fighting—Osama bin Laden, after all, had declared war against 'the infidels', i.e. the West. However, President Bush then demanded a loyalty test, failing which would brand one a 'terrorist': 'Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground.'<sup>29</sup> Pakistan made that choice, led by a military dictator who subsequently benefitted immensely from the financial aid that alliance with the US brought. Thus began Pakistan's 'war on terror'. Sceptics of the military action in the FATA and adjoining regions deem the Pakistani state an aggressor, fighting the Americans' war against its own people. This is, at best, an over-simplified portrayal of a far more complex situation. For the US and its allies in the West, the problem is one of terrorism alone. For Pakistan, the issue of terrorism is inextricably intertwined with the additional, fundamental challenge of state-building and integration. Thus, if anything, it is Pakistan's war, with the difference that Pakistan, unlike the US, confronts a dual challenge.

The 'problem' in the FATA predates the events of September 11, 2001, the event that focused the world's attention on the region. Due to the pressure brought to bear on Pakistan by the US and its Western allies, Pakistan is being forced to address a situation which is the result of the *historical* neglect of complex issues of governance and state-building, now inextricably mingled with the fight against international terrorism.

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29 CNN.com [online] (2001). Bush Announces Opening of Attacks. <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/10/07/ret.attack.bush/> (accessed: 20 June 2009).



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BLACK NO MORE:  
TOWARDS A NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDIES OF SOCIAL  
SPACE CONNECTED WITH THE 'INFORMAL ECONOMY'

MAŁGORZATA IREK

*Black no more* is the title of a satire on the colour-based 'caste' system in North America.<sup>1</sup> In the novel, the logic of the system in which a black skin colour is a signifier of a lower 'caste' has been reversed: through the invention of a technology making a Black person perfectly white, the Blacks become a shade whiter than the Whites, after which the colour white becomes the negative signifier. A similar system-reversing technology is needed to remove a bias in research on the social space connected to the 'informal economy', which in fact very much resembles the (in)famous 'swamp of the Negro'<sup>2</sup> problem': an endless debate involving value marked terms and moral judgments, self-powered by a rhetoric which went round in circles for years, with no way out.

Just as the terms 'Negro'<sup>3</sup> and 'Black' were not only fuzzy but also negatively value marked,<sup>4</sup> denoting a person of inferior status,<sup>5</sup> the terms used to describe 'informal' economic activities, such as the 'Black Economy', 'Shadow Economy', Subterranean Economy, 'Grey Zone', 'Shadow Sphere', 'Underground Activities', 'Semi-legal

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1 Schuyler 1989.

2 For more information on this debate, see Irek 1994. It was eventually cut short by the Myrdal study (Myrdal 1944). The now historical term 'Negro' (defended by W.E.B. DuBois, who claimed that changing the label would not change the situation) was considered less derogative than 'African' and was used by Black intellectuals in the New Negro intellectual movement. Eventually it was replaced by 'Black'.

3 Luschan 1927. Due to the large mixed population in the US it has not been possible to mark a clear line around who exactly falls within the category. There was the 'one drop of Negro blood' argument in which a person who had only one ancestor documented as Black was deemed to be Black, regardless of skin colour.

4 This is not redundancy: a term can be marked for value in either way; see below, p. 220.

5 Schwarz and Disch 1970: 6-7. The authors quote the connotations of the word 'black' when used for racist purposes: soiled, dirty, malignant, deadly, disastrous and sinister. Biblical imagery was blamed for the moral connotations of black in respect of 'sin, damnation, death, despair, ugliness and evil'.

Activities', 'Informal Sector' and 'Irregular Activities',<sup>6</sup> denote the inferiority of such activities, as well as of all the social actors participating in them. Apart from a lower place in the hierarchy of values, the terms also involve a negative moral judgment. Used as a part of this term, 'Black' is as bad as 'Underground' or 'Subterranean', which also contain connotations of hell. 'Grey' and 'Semi-legal' are better than 'Black' but still not exactly good, while 'Informal' and 'Irregular' are not quite good, although not as bad as 'Black'. Whatever the choice of words, the above terms signify the same problem, it being a matter of the personal preference of the researcher which one he decides to use.<sup>7</sup> The present article uses the word 'Informal', which is the most general and neutral of them all, and which has been accepted by international organizations.<sup>8</sup>

The category of 'informality' is in itself as problematic as that of 'race' (where the morphological variations within one category are greater than between two different categories),<sup>9</sup> and it is considered to be the main source of the conceptual crisis immanent in the studies of the 'informal economy'.<sup>10</sup> The exact semantic content of the very word 'informal' is hard to specify, its understanding relying on common sense: according to a brief entry in Fowler and Fowler's English dictionary, which has been regularly reprinted since the mid-1920s, 'informal' is 'something without formality, or not in due form', while a half page-long entry describes 'form' as a 'shape, an arrangement of parts', 'visible aspect, something visible or tangible', 'mode in which a thing exists or manifests itself' and 'a set order'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the adjective 'informal' denotes something shapeless, lacking arrangement, invisible or intangible, devoid of a mode in which it can manifest itself, and something without a set order. When used to describe a social category, the word 'informal' makes a negatively value-marked and hardly precise term useless in accounting for any regularities (set order), but it is still the most neutral and most appropriate of all the currently used alternatives mentioned above, such as black, shadow or grey. It also

6 Gutmann 1985. He lists informal economy, together with black, irregular, shadow, unofficial, moonlight, twilight, second, submerged, clandestine, unobserved, concealed and back door economy, as aliases of his preferred term 'subterranean economy'.

7 Carson 1993, Gutmann 1985.

8 Keith Hart introduced this term in the 1970s as the part of the phrase 'informal economy', which shortly afterwards became popular with the World Bank and ILO as the 'informal sector', used to describe activities that take place outside official institutions. See Hart 1985.

9 The concept of 'race' was developed long before human genetics and was based on the morphological differences between different persons and groups of people. Systematic research on these morphological differences, using anthropometric methods, was conducted by Rudolf Virchow and the scholars he influenced, especially Felix von Luschan and his friend Franz Boas, who concluded that 'race' does not exist. See Irek 1994, Luschan 1927.

10 Feige 1985. The conceptual crisis arises from the lack of any precise definition clearly indicating the scope of the field of research, which manifests itself in both the vagueness and the plurality of the terms used — aliases that are not differentiated from each other.

11 Fowler and Fowler 1976.

permits the category to be extended *ad infinitum*, for something shapeless and devoid of form has no limits.

In sociological thought, 'form' is defined tautologically as 'the form of something which is its structure, its skeleton, its grammar',<sup>12</sup> as opposed to its content. Forms 'negate the continuity of matter by introducing distinctions that make things separate'.<sup>13</sup> According to this definition, as the only way to experience the world is through forms, it is assumed that the whole human world is formally constituted and therefore it has a discontinuous nature. Thus, something lacking in 'form' has to be continuous. Hart, who introduced the term 'informal economy', defines informal as 'something failing to reproduce the pattern of some established form',<sup>14</sup> form being 'the rule', 'conformity', 'predictable and easily recognized', 'the invariant in the variable' and 'a prescriptive idea of what should be universal in social life'. And since, according to him, the dominant form of social life over the last century has been that of the nation state bureaucracy (where the nation state is the way in which the capitalist mode of production is organized), whatever is informal goes on outside the gaze of the national bureaucracy.<sup>15</sup>

This concept is coherent with the classic definition developed by American economists. It describes as the 'informal', alias 'underground economy' all economic activities not reported to a taxman,<sup>16</sup> thus grouping under one label activities as different as a wife cooking a dinner for her family and organized mafia crime,<sup>17</sup> and establishing a discursive space marked by two axes: that of the economy, and that of the nation state. The fact that the category of the 'informal economy' has been conceptualized in the context of the nation state is of crucial importance for research on the social space in which informal economic activities are carried out: by definition, this is the space hidden from the control of the state. In other words, under the present definition, the state is necessary for this space to exist.

Although the economy is at the core of the concept of unreported, 'informal' activities—as is shown by the terminology used across different disciplines in the social sciences, such as *black markets*, undocumented *labour*, *workforce* migration, illegal *employment* or the *informal sector*—the social space in which these activities are embedded extends far beyond the production and exchange of goods and services. It is not some separate area or sector, like a slice of brie cheese, nor is it the lower layer of a structure,

12 Definition in Rapport and Overing 2007: 153, after Simmel.

13 'Form and Content' in Rapport and Overing 2007.

14 Hart 1985: 56.

15 Hart 2005. Quoted from version in the Memory Bank, pp. 1, 2 and 7 (accessed 29.12.09).

16 Feige 1985.

17 Pahl 1984, Carson 1993.

which might be conceptualized as a hidden basement under a house, nor an underground area where the creatures of the night go about their unsavoury business,<sup>18</sup> nor even the bottom of an iceberg, where the part hidden under water supports the one third that is visible on the top. It is more like the whole of an iceberg, since the social space of formal activities is contained within the space of the informal ones.

Even a person involved in the most formal structures, such as the state's jurisdiction or bureaucracy, can engage in both formal and informal economic activities at the same time.<sup>19</sup> When a president of a nation state has his tea made for him by his wife, he is engaged in an unrecorded economic activity, not to speak of situations in which the bureaucracy, including presidents, openly engage in informal economic activities that are definitely less benign than drinking tea, such as nepotism, corruption or participation in organized criminal networks. The point is that 'formality' and 'informality' are not two different social spaces, but attributes of the same social space. Moreover, they are not mutually exclusive: the same person can have both formal and informal functions, and the same activity can be formal and informal at the same time. Technically, the only distinction is whether or not the activity in question is recorded, that is, written down in a form which is controllable by the state. When the activity is not recorded, it is up to commonsense judgment to work out the qualitative difference between the proverbial housewife cooking a family dinner and organized mafia crime.

The social space in which both formal and informal activities take place is best represented by the metaphor of the human body, in which the informal space would be pictured by connective tissue (*textus connectivus*), with institutions pictured as bones, cartilage and fat, and whatever is not institutionalized as the rest: the shapeless, dynamic, changeable and omnipresent vital fluids that flow across all structures to make the organism work as a whole.<sup>20</sup> This 'rest' is the space of the informal networks, understood after Boissevain and Kadushin as open ended sets of ego centred relationships 'created and negotiated by people in the process of trying to work and manage the system'.<sup>21</sup>

These relationships are non-prescribed, are not mandated by culture or institutions, and can be of very different natures: the links between the people engaged in the network (nodes) may be purely transactional, purely emotional or a mixture of both, they can be defined by kinship, friendship, love, sex, sympathy or common interest, they can

18 Henry 1993.

19 As distinct from the concept of one person temporarily slipping in and out of the informal sector, or using informal activities in the initial stage of social mobility and then discarding them after obtaining some formal status. See Ferman et al. 1993.

20 I.e. blood, lymph and menzenchyma.

21 Boissevain 1968, Kadushin 2004. This is an open ended network concept, different from the network defined as 'a specific set of linkages among a definite set of persons'. See also Mitchell 1969: 3.

be one-sided or reciprocal (mutual), they can be democratic (horizontal) or based on patronage (vertical),<sup>22</sup> and they can also vary in scope, intensity and complexity. Some nodes in an individual's network can be connected by many links (e.g. kinship, love, common interest, a family business), while others have single characteristics. The type of relationship in every single link of a network is variable in time, so that it is impossible to find some repeatable pattern: networks flow like a Heraclitean river.

An individual person's active network can be limited to a certain number of people, whereby biological factors and geographical distance are considered to be limiting factors in the 'activeness' of a network.<sup>23</sup> But on the other hand, an individual person's network of less than 150 people can easily stretch in geographical space from Beijing through Moscow and Warsaw to Berlin and further to Chicago<sup>24</sup> and cut across different formal and informal structures, such as ethnicity, nation, class, race, religion or interest group. And even if it is assumed that the majority of people have limited personal networks (which in the era of computer communication and cheap transport may be disputable), this would be of no consequence to the network as a whole: the scope of an individual person's (ego's) network is not a limitation on the size of the whole set. Since each single individual in a network is a centre of his or her own network, with each new link, the number of individuals in a set grows at a geometrical tempo, and although egocentric networks obviously do overlap, it is enough that there exist only two non-overlapping nodes to maintain this geometrical growth. This implies an infinite number of sets of interconnected and overlapping networks, an endless network of networks.<sup>25</sup> Due to their lack of definite shape, unlimited scope and ever-changing, 'liquid' nature, informal networks seem to be chaotic developments that are difficult to conceptualize in an orderly and precise way. Although it has long been implied that within this 'irregular' social space there are some patterns, even naming these patterns is problematic. Boissevain called the wider networks 'non-groups' because they lack the stability and permanence of corporate groups, with a subclass of more 'tightly knit coalitions of persons with a degree of patterned interaction and organization', which he called quasi-groups.<sup>26</sup> Departing from this concept, one looks for quasi-structures or 'foggy' structures as regular elements of society, thus producing a logical contradiction by claiming that 'not regular' is regular.

Discovering these 'irregular regularities' through empirical research is extremely difficult. The basic problem is a methodological one: the researched activities are by

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22 Lomnitz 2002.

23 Dunbar 1993, Kadushin 2004.

24 Irek 1998.

25 Castells 2000.

26 Boissevain 1968: 543, 550.



their nature informal, and since informality defies formality they cannot be researched by formal methods, for in the very moment of recording them their informal nature is destroyed,<sup>27</sup> as if one were to research the habits of a jellyfish by taking it out of the water. Also, the hidden nature of informal activities makes it difficult to obtain comprehensive data from the actors involved, who often refuse to talk about their informal activities or give false information on purpose.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore impossible to achieve accuracy in quantitative research, which is the main method in economics, sociology and human geography: whatever quantitative data are obtained, they are mere approximates.<sup>29</sup>

Of all disciplines in the social sciences, anthropology, with its qualitative methods such as participant observation and informal interviews, seems most suitable for researching informal social networks. However, it is in anthropology where the swamp grows seriously deep, due to anthropologists' habits of contextualization and defiance of clear-cut categories as such. There is no theoretical perspective in anthropology that can embrace this social space as a whole without simultaneously destroying its essence, which rests in both its infinite dimension and its dialectical opposition to the nation state. Although anthropology, as the name clearly indicates, was developed as a 'holistic science of man', it has long lost its holistic dimension and has been split into numerous subfields and anthropologies of different disciplines and of geographical regions,<sup>30</sup> offering no general framework for describing continuity of any sort. Despite the recent trend to try and glue it back together again and to reclaim what has been appropriated by other disciplines such as human biology or psychology,<sup>31</sup> research within so-called 'holistic anthropology' still presents a highly segmented picture, if any, of 'the whole'. This approach makes it possible to use a single object or an action as an excuse for a long, Proustian journey through possible associations and aspects, these, however, being limited to the immediate geographical area in which the object is found or the action takes place, like a settlement in Australia or Amazonia. In fact, through the re-inclusion of the scientific disciplines, the image of 'the whole' has been significantly blurred by splitting every single aspect of an action or an object into even more layers of description, like passing light through a prism. The technique of re-creating the 'holism'

27 Henry 1993.

28 The validity of surveys has been questioned on the ground that the responses are not true. People lie about their hidden activities out of a fear of being punished for tax evasion (Gutmann 1985). Also, the very assumption of the honesty of research participants who take part in illegal activities is highly questionable (Williams and Windebank 1998). Where economic success depends on activities being hidden, people do not reveal anything to strangers (Elwert 1994, Irek 1998) and often lie in expectation of winning the researcher's sympathy or when they consider that it could profit them (Girtler 1990).

29 Salt 2005, Williams and Windebank 1998.

30 Fardon 1990.

31 Parkin 2007.

by mechanically assembling different articles into one book does not work, nor does putting several departments together in one building: we are still left with a selection of several segments of the social, unless, of course, holism remains an ‘odd-job word’<sup>32</sup> that has nothing to do with ‘the whole’.

A common denominator is needed, some perspective through which it is possible to ‘synthesize’ at all: until then, ‘holistic anthropology’ remains just another sub-discipline of anthropology in which the analysis of human activities is still contained within certain borders. Thus, the question should be not how to glue anthropology back, but rather how to create meaningful links across these borders and ‘moving frontiers’. Ingold’s concept of ‘linear development’<sup>33</sup> seems to be a step in the right direction, but again it is based on an organic image: that of a fungal mycelium, which usually is not directly ‘open-ended’ but forms a perfect circle and eventually a ring, leading us back to the good old German concept of the *Kulturkreis*.

This geographical limitation of the researched space is also reflected in the very analytical tools of anthropology, which were developed for supposedly isolated, pre-industrial societies in which the state was not a shaping factor, hence one cannot use them to describe something that relies on the existence of the state. One other reason making these tools unsuitable for the description of informal networks is the ‘Bongo Bongo’<sup>34</sup> logical loop: whatever social phenomenon in Western society is being discussed, it is placed in the context of certain distant ‘isolated’ societies and of different possible theories regarding similar situations until it becomes meaningless, for in the process of contextualization the essence of something that is not clearly defined to start with leaks out through the fuzzy fringes of categories. Such tools do not even account for the very difference between the formal and the informal.

Structuralism, with its ‘synchronic’ perspective, its ability to generalize and to depart from philosophical humanism, with its moral questions,<sup>35</sup> would have been an appropriate framework were it not for the fact that the ‘structure’ is a pure concept not related to the empirical world<sup>36</sup> and failing to account for agency, like the concept of structure in Marxism. And informal networks are all about agency, about individuals

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32 Ibid.

33 Ingold 2007. It bears similarities to the Deleuzian rhizome. The fault in Ingold’s linear concept, if applied to informal networks, is that it excludes the possibility of the simultaneous presence of one person in two places, which in the era of virtual communications is no longer sustainable.

34 Vertovec 2007. I am referring to his jocular remark on the impossibility of finding truly new perspectives in anthropology. ‘Bongo Bongo’ is the synonym of an exotic fancy land that does not exist. Interestingly enough, the tendency of anthropologists to refer to societies ‘untouched by civilization’ had already been criticized a hundred years ago. See Luschan 1927.

35 Kuper and Kuper 2004.

36 Allen 1990.

constantly moulding and remoulding their social reality. Researching this reality cannot be done within a theory that does not account for the empirical space or that neglects the role of agency.

In line with the tendency to segmentation (and the Marxist typology of economic systems), anthropological research on the informal economy was split into three types of society: capitalist, socialist and 'third world'<sup>37</sup>—one speaks of informal economies, rather than one economy. While in capitalist society the informal economy was viewed as the invisible hand of the market's reaction to overregulation by the state, a relic of pre-industrial times, a safety valve for social tension, a means of capital accumulation or a survival strategy in times of shortage,<sup>38</sup> in the socialist economic area it was presented more like an institutionalized pathology resulting from the 'stretched limits of decency'<sup>39</sup> characteristic of the 'highly bureaucratized' communist system. Only since the end of the Cold War has the political bias been removed and the 'pathology' approach softened.<sup>40</sup> In developing countries, for which the term 'informal economy' was introduced in the context of the poverty of the third world's big cities, it has been seen as a specific mode of economic existence, necessary for survival in the face of a weak or non-existent state economy.<sup>41</sup>

More recent research on the 'informal economy' in Western societies has centred mostly on the themes of ethnicity and social networks, again with the unintended connotation of ethnic networks being causally linked to informal activities. Since it is through the themes of migration and ethnic networks that most of the interdisciplinary research on the subject of the 'informal economy' has been carried out, the connotation has been extended across all the disciplines involved. Consequently, the vast majority of studies are caught up in the swamp logic, having to prove over and over again that 'informal' activities are not clandestine crimes 'perpetuated by 'creatures of the night'<sup>42</sup> and spread by migrants into the otherwise healthy host society like some infectious illness, but the survival strategies of so-called 'ordinary people'.<sup>43</sup> Such works typically start with a disclaimer saying, for example, that there are no causal links between illegal work and

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37 It would go beyond the scope of this article to discuss the current situation in informal economy research. Everything that current perspectives have to offer has been thoroughly exploited by the collective work of leading specialists in the field, edited in 1993 by Ferman, Berndt and Henry, where the bibliography alone has sixty pages. Some updating was added five years later by Williams and Windebank (1998). Nothing new had been said since then, only new ethnographic cases added to the great bulk of research.

38 Feige 1985, Gutmann 1985, Pahl 1984.

39 Sampson 1986, Bru and Laski 1985.

40 Ferman et al. 1993, Giordano 1994.

41 Geertz 1979; Elwert and Fett 1982; Elwert, Evers and Wilkens 1983; Hart 1985, 2005.

42 Henry 1993.

43 Vasta 2004; Jordan and Duvell 2002; Duvell 2004.

migration, after which they proceed to study the illegal employment of migrants from country X. Another tactic is to try and bypass the swamp by inventing new euphemisms intended to depart from the negative value marking of the terms involved. This, however, gets us no further, for euphemisms such as 'foggy structures' still remain mired in the logic of the swamp: the terms 'foggy' or 'shadowy' still denote something that is inferior to 'clear' and 'bright'.

Some general framework for interdisciplinary studies of informality is needed to bypass the swamp, but although it has already been noted that the shapeless and continuous nature of the social networks that fill the informal space invites a horizontal perspective,<sup>44</sup> an appropriate theoretical approach has not yet been found. Such an approach should be applicable on a global scale like that used in migration research into transnationalism, but freed from the limitations of the transnational perspective, which, while bypassing state borders in its efforts to overcome 'methodological nationalism'<sup>45</sup>—understood, after Martins, as a default theoretical perspective which assumes the presence of a nation state as the basic unit in the study of the social space<sup>46</sup>—creates borders between different ethnicities within the same state. Also, despite its 'trans' claim in the title, transnationalism is still bound by the lingering perspective of a 'nation',<sup>47</sup> as is reflected in the presence of 'nationalism' in the very name. At present it produces ethnic group-centred research into particular minorities, communities and networks in a given state and their links with another state, known as the 'home' country,<sup>48</sup> but leaves a dramatic cleavage between different ethnic groups in the same nation state. What is left out might be described as 'trans-ethnicity', which would account for cross-ethnic links.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in its present form the transnational perspective still does not account for the continuity of the social space, but simply represents a different arrangement of vertical axes while chopping the horizontal axis up into manageable bits.

If one could remove the vertical axis of the state structure from the discursive space and forget about hierarchy of any sort, one could observe a smooth flow of information, goods, services and emotions along the links between the 'nodes'. Using such a horizontal perspective, one could concentrate on how the links are actually created, as advocated by 'actor network theory' or ANT, which at the moment is the only horizontal theory in the social sciences applicable for research into informal networks, although only within

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44 Hinds 2003.

45 Glick Schiller 2009.

46 Martins 1974; Nowicka 2007: 36.

47 Bommes 2005.

48 Cohen and Vertovec 1999; Vertovec 1999.

49 Wimmer 2007, Vertovec 2007.

a limited scope.<sup>50</sup> But then again, removing the perspective of the state would mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater: as indicated earlier, the very definition of informality on which this concept in social research is currently based depends on the state. Moreover, to create a truly horizontal perspective, one would have to attempt the clinical removal of hierarchy, which is a vertical concept per se. Even if such an operation were possible it would only be so in a closed environment such as a laboratory, and only to some degree, for at present, even under the strictest rules of ANT, making the social landscape flat in absolute terms is not possible technically.

In ANT verticality returns by the back door in the form of hierarchy: it has to be included in the 'thick' description, in which 'thick' is understood in the commonsense meaning of the world, as detailed and meticulous,<sup>51</sup> which in ANT replaces contextualization. The very requirement of the 'thick description', which involves slow, ant-like work in the meticulous construction of numerous sets of different records, practically excludes the possibility of accounting for the infinite dimension of the horizontal line and makes it methodologically impossible to move across large distances: the space has to be cut into bite-size units.<sup>52</sup> Whether the critics of the so-called 'linguistic trend' in the social sciences like it or not, to make any sort of description, be it thick or thin, one needs two things: perception (understood as a mental process including both reception and conception) to observe, and language to express. And although one cannot deny the existence of pre-and extra-linguistic forms of communication, these have no pragmatic validity for the actual process of scholarly description: scholars communicate their findings through verbal expression, as distinct from any form of empathy, body

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50 Latour 2005. In ANT, horizontality is achieved, among other things, by eliminating the subject/object distinction, which is considered vertical (Lechte 1994). Putting people into one epistemological category with objects involves another swamp-like debate (Collins and Yearley 1992) for, unlike non-humans, human actors are capable of creative thinking, their acts are influenced by emotions, and they have linguistic competence. For the purposes of the present article, it is enough to state that such a logical manoeuvre has a limited application to informal networks defined as egocentric links between people. It works only in an environment such as a scientific laboratory or production site, where the non-human elements (such as bacteria cultures or machines) can be said to 'act' and therefore can be included in the network together with the human actors, including the observer him- or herself. However, these are very specific circumstances: the space is limited, and the 'acts' of the non-humans are performed in a repeatable series—they are not creative. Under such circumstances, the observer has unlimited time to describe every single element, including his or her own reaction. But while the fundamental requirement of a scientific experiment (or machine production cycle) is its repeatability—so that if an ANT researcher misses some action, s/he can come back to the same moment in the next cycle—in the open space the same situation cannot be recreated, the observer must remain the subjective 'other', and the non-human objects do not 'act' by themselves (unless in a natural disaster) and do not have their own egocentric networks.

51 Latour's concept is distinct from Geertz's thick description, understood as the attention given to the contextual meaning of action. See Geertz 1973.

52 The 'cutting of the network' is thus done by the researcher. This is a different situation from that described by Strathern, where the networks are cut by the actors/actants themselves. See Strathern 1996.

language or 'affectation'.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of whether it is inborn or learned, *de facto* human perception is at least to some extent vertically constructed,<sup>54</sup> and so is language.<sup>55</sup> There is no proof to the contrary, and even the discovery of neurons in the human mind, which are responsible for registering a sequence of events which constitutes our sense of time, does not undermine the verticality of perception, for a 'sequence' can be conceptualized as much horizontally as vertically. Once we introduce the concept of horizontality, we are moving within a space ordered by the Cartesian coordinates, and whichever way we decide to twist them, we will always end up within a space with both horizontal and vertical attributes.

Since it is not possible to obtain an ideally isometric social landscape, the pragmatic question is not how to get rid of verticality, but how to control it. This cannot be done under present conditions, where the two axes of reference are being persistently confused by scholars of different disciplines and trends, arbitrarily attributing verticality and horizontality to different notions. As it happens, the major contribution to this situation came from within structuralist thought, where the idea of 'horizontal' research germinated. The early structuralists of the Kazan School of linguistics proclaimed horizontality even before it became an avant-garde philosophical idea of Nietzsche, a rival to the popular dialectical thought of Hegel.

Jan Nieciśław Boduin de Courtenay and his student Mikołaj Kruszewski applied the tools of mathematical logic to language research. They rigorously divided the research space using two axes: whatever was historical was called diachronic and put on the vertical axis, while on the horizontal axis they placed whatever was contemporary, calling it synchronic. But they were aware that this distinction was not identical with that of 'static' versus 'dynamic', for as Boduin de Courtenay noticed, 'static' is just a form of 'dynamic'.<sup>56</sup> It was de Saussure who, about two decades later, mixed these two pairs of categories after taking over the foundations of structural linguistics from the Kazan school.<sup>57</sup> While the former demanded equal attention to synchronic and diachronic research, de Saussure rejected diachronic (vertical) research as represented by the omnipresent *Junggramatiker*, who were preoccupied with the evolution of Indo-European languages, in favour of synchronic (horizontal) research, which concentrated on the description (rather than prescription) of contemporary human language as such. In doing so, he failed to recognize that the opposition of static versus dynamic was not the same

53 For a very recent description of affectation, see Navaro-Yashin 2009.

54 To perceive one entity as different from another, at least one binary opposition is necessary to exist. Such an opposition is by nature vertical (hierarchical). See Dumont 1980.

55 Chomsky 1957, Lyons 1969.

56 Fisiak 1975.

57 Godel 1957.



as synchronic versus diachronic,<sup>58</sup> and he used the horizontal perspective to describe vertical phenomena (structure). Since at that stage there was an immediate feedback between the mainstream of linguistics and anthropology, with anthropologists such as Boas and Malinowski also researching linguistic issues,<sup>59</sup> the problem was transferred to anthropology.

By the time Lévi-Strauss, the main proponent of de Saussure's teaching in anthropology, published his *Tristes Tropiques*, structuralist research in linguistics already had its own eighty year-long history, therefore technically it could no longer claim 'synchrony' and be considered 'horizontal' in the de Saussurean sense.<sup>60</sup> And it was only two years after Lévi-Strauss's work appeared<sup>61</sup> that the linguists managed to order their axes of reference. Chomsky's transformational grammar brought back the rigour of the Kazan school's concept of horizontality and verticality:<sup>62</sup> this was synchronic in the sense that it did not account for historical development, and vertical because it described vertical transformations developing through different levels of language, from deep structure to surface. But unlike in the first half of the previous century, the mainstreams of the two disciplines were already too far removed from each other for direct feedback to be possible. Social scientists were no longer mainstream linguists, and an anthropologist capable of drawing Chomsky's derivative tree or of explaining the various systems of mathematical logic, would have been an exception rather than the rule. Thus, useful tools developed by linguists have been waiting to be used by social scientists ever since. The recent reaction against the 'linguistic trend' dominating the social sciences<sup>63</sup> is thus like staging a mutiny against a captain who has already long since left the ship. Linguistics does not explain the world or society but language itself, so on that basis alone it cannot be criticized for not being abstract enough to interface with all aspects of the social field.<sup>64</sup> Such criticism proves that knowledge of linguistics (understood as the theory of language) is no longer present in the social sciences. In fact, many problems, especially those connected with interdisciplinary research, arise precisely from the lack of linguistic rigour.

58 Fisiak 1975.

59 Boas, for example, discovered that the basic unit of human language is not the word but the sentence. This became an axiom for the later TG (transformational grammar) linguistic model developed by Chomsky. See Fisiak 1975.

60 Language is dynamic, so whatever system was being described eighty years earlier was no longer valid and had to be modified.

61 *Tristes Tropiques* was published in 1955, Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1957.

62 American linguists were influenced by the Kazan school via the Prague school, as represented by Roman Jakobson. Fisiak 1975.

63 Navaro-Yashin 2009.

64 Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

While de Saussure confused the Cartesian coordinates in linguistics, Nietzsche—who is considered the father of today's horizontal thought,<sup>65</sup> and who also rejected history and verticality of any sort by trying to leave the Cartesian space altogether to 'venture into the open sea'<sup>66</sup>—brought this confusion to a higher level by encouraging an arbitrary interpretation of space. His classification was not based on synchrony versus diachrony, but on the distinction between 'static' and 'dynamic' elements. Unlike the linguists he considered history 'static', since whatever was in the past was a *fait accompli* which could not be changed. His concept deemed history to be vertical,<sup>67</sup> together with all other notions, categories and phenomena, which Nietzsche himself considered static, such as the concepts of actor, cause, the very distinction of subject versus object, the notions of identity, objective truth, idealism, dialectical thought and the thought of everyday bureaucratic hierarchies, as well as the equality of democracy. For Nietzsche there was no horizontal axis in Cartesian understanding, yet his idea of dynamic events—of the creative thought which is itself subjective, of life or rather of the will to live and of instable differences and values—is understood as horizontal.<sup>68</sup>

Although Nietzschean horizontality, which is also called a philosophy of difference, consists in the instability of differences and the permeability of all barriers and boundaries and therefore may seem like a promising perspective for research into informality, it is far too abstract for this purpose. It creates chaos by allowing for an arbitrary prescription of verticality to such linear categories as equality and democracy. Also, it assumes a closed system, whereas the informal space is open. Moreover, the essence of Nietzschean horizontality, the idea that the world is a game of dice repeated an infinite number of times so that eventually the outcomes are repeated,<sup>69</sup> is mechanical and does not account for agency any more than structuralist or Marxist dialectical thought. In the world thus constructed there is no place for emotions, nor for the commonsense judgments that constantly shape human society: they do not influence the Nietzschean game of dice, nor Lévi-Straussian structure, nor the Marxist class war. And it is through such commonsense judgments that the social is negotiated: they are the interface between structure and agency.

But as Nietzsche did not distinguish between subject and object, he did not need any interface: agency and structure were not relevant for his horizontal thought. This, however, was consistent within his own system: by the law of his own philosophy, Nietzsche was entitled to do whatever he wanted with space. Poetic license was written into his

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65 Deleuze 1962.

66 Safranski 2003.

67 Lechte 1994.

68 Deleuze 1994.

69 Lechte 1994.

horizontality and, through this license, every creative thought of a philosopher meant entering a desert and creating a new world. Nietzsche's ideas enjoyed wide reception, and it goes beyond the scope of the present article to describe all worlds, theoretical works in which the horizontal and vertical aspects have been creatively confused ever since, culminating in the Deleuzian concept of the transcendental, like the Emersonian God, the rhizome<sup>70</sup>—the epitome of the philosophy of difference.

Following Nietzsche's call for an independent, horizontal thought that dissolves identities rather than making them concrete, and abandoning Cartesian coordinates altogether in search of some completely new system that has been invented from scratch, is not related to any previous thought and is unbiased by a priori categories, would be like reformatting a computer and losing all its data. Besides, unless something is done about linguistic expression, this will always remain a futile exercise: as discussed above, since any new system still has to be expressed in language, it will have to use categories which are inscribed within it. In other words, however horizontal or open the system might claim to be, it will always to some degree be vertical and biased by the linguistic categorical a priorism. It is then more pragmatic to take advantage of the achievements of social thought to date. However, to do this one needs to clean out the Augustan stable and to disentangle the horizontal aspects from the vertical ones in order to obtain a clearly marked discursive space, thus allowing us to escape from the overpowering perspectives of state, class and economy. Apart from a clearly marked space, the new theoretical framework also needs a set of logically ordered terms and categories with a simple system, permitting the prescription of a definite semantic content for each separate term.

This can be achieved by applying the tools used by structural linguistics in order to sharpen those used in social sciences. This should be done on a very basic level to make the whole process accessible to non-linguists, so that any scholar can make the terms he or she uses more precise. These tools can be found within the semantic theory which was developed as a part of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Grammar,<sup>71</sup> where each word (lexical entry) can be represented as a semantic matrix built of so-called semantic markers.<sup>72</sup> These are 'atoms' out of which the meanings are composed: different combinations of a small number of these 'atoms' create a large number of meanings. The markers have binary characteristics: each marker is either positive (+) or negative (-). Where the marker can be both present and absent, the entry is neutral for that marker, and when it does not apply at all, the entry is unmarked for that particular marker.<sup>73</sup>

70 Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

71 Chomsky 1957.

72 Katz and Postal 1964.

73 The system proposed in the present article is different from the original, which had to be significantly modified in making it simple.

So, for example, a semantic matrix for the word 'boy' consists of the following semantic markers: <+noun ^ +countable ^ +animate ^ +human ^ +masculine ^ -mature>.<sup>74</sup> In biological sciences the marker [mature] entails additional distinctive features, these being: < biological and physical maturity >; in theology and philosophy the additional distinctive features are <value and innocence and purity>; in psychology <emotional and intellectual maturity> will be relevant; and in the social sciences the additional distinctive features of the term [boy] are [status] and [power], which are vertical markers: one can have high or low status, great or little power. Another vertical marker is value: it can be low or high. Thus, [boy] has a lower position in the biological sciences than a mature person, and also a lower status and less power than a [man]. Being marked (negatively) for <maturity and status and power> [boy] is clearly a vertical category, so an additional marker [+vertical] can be added to make its verticality visible. This will make it clear that the word must be used with caution: the innocent [boy] can become a derogatory category. A man placed in the category [boy] will be reduced to the lower status. And indeed, during slavery in North America, black men regardless of age were called [boy]. On the other hand, the notorious [race] is per se a non-vertical category, a fact which cannot be stressed enough, since this undermines the very foundations of racism.

Using this method, it is possible to develop a set of semantic markers for the terms and categories used in the social sciences. This will allow us to use a term such as 'perception' in its original meaning developed by the science of psychology and then, if necessary, to use discipline-specific distinctive features as additional distinguishers in order to make it workable in other disciplines like anthropology or sociology. Such a system will make it possible to mitigate hermeneutics, so that the semantic content of each term will no longer be left open to creative misinterpretations by scholars in other disciplines. The proposed system will also allow us to mitigate a priorism by controlling the categories themselves. Once verticality is used as a semantic marker, it becomes visible that the major categories used in the social sciences are vertical by definition, through being marked for status, value and power. So, for example: level, hierarchy, class, nation, society, clan, family, state and kinship are vertical; relatively few categories such as, race, ethnicity or neighbourhood are not marked for verticality; while structure, group or network can be defined in both ways, as either vertical or non-vertical categories.

Using such tools, it is possible to construct a theoretical framework based on the Restricted Verticality Principle, in which informal social space is no longer defined as the part of social space that escapes the control of the state, but as the total social space minus what is controlled by the state. This definition instantly orders the discursive space by reversing the current assumption: the primacy of the formal over the informal is wiped

74 Fisiak 1975. For practical reasons, I used slightly different graphical symbols from those used by Fisiak.

off, the state is removed without destroying the informal social space, and moreover the negative value marking included in the currently used term 'informal' is transferred to the 'state' through the negative connotations of the word 'control': now it is the state that 'corrupts' the free space of informality.

In such a perspective, verticality can be significantly limited. Even if the vertical axis is still kept in the background, it is prevented from disrupting the continuity of horizontal flow by reappearing and 'cutting' it every time a vertically marked category or term is used. This will enable a 'vertically unbiased' observation and analysis of dynamic, shapeless and continuous phenomena, such as informal networks, to be made. The Restricted Verticality framework is based on the following axioms:

1. formal and informal are attributes of the same social space; and
2. formal events are the subset of informal ones, not the other way round; and
3. categorical a priorism is mitigated by analytical terms being controlled for vertical marking; and
4. negotiations based on commonsense judgments are viewed as an interface between structure and agency; and
5. the researcher himself is not excluded from the common sense principle; and
6. there is no obligation to quote intellectual genealogies; and
7. cartographic 'mapping' replaces metaphorical mapping.

To remove itself even further from the existing perspectives and their limitations, this framework should have a distinct umbrella label, such as Informality Studies. This would make it possible to accommodate interdisciplinary research in which there is actually some understanding between the practitioners of the different disciplines, achieved through the same perspective of Restricted Verticality and the linguistic obligation to use translatable terms and categories across the disciplines involved, as well as across different languages. This may lead to research that will allow us to bypass more than one swamp and to concentrate on the qualitatively new social phenomena that are emerging right in front of our eyes as a result of the IT revolution and the current freedom of movement, unprecedented in the history of mankind.

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIETY  
REPORT ON CENTENARY CONFERENCE  
“WHAT’S THE MATTER” IN ANTHROPOLOGY?

The year 2009 was the centenary of the Oxford University Anthropology Society. Although in abeyance from 1989 to 2001, it can claim to be the oldest such society still in existence in the University at the present day.<sup>1</sup> The major event organized by the Society to celebrate this important centenary was the above conference, held at St Hugh’s College, Oxford, on 13 May 2009. The conference was chaired by Professor Penny Harvey (University of Manchester), and the invited speakers were Professor Tim Ingold (University of Aberdeen), Professor Daniel Miller (University College London), Dr Dan Hicks (University of Oxford) and Professor Stephen Woolgar (University of Oxford). An introductory address was given by Dr Robert Parkin (University of Oxford and sometime Secretary of the Society), and Professor Harvey also chaired a discussion panel following the main presentations. The theme of the conference was as set out below:<sup>2</sup>

Social scientists are developing ways of thinking about relationships to take into account our interaction with everyday objects. Expressions of sociality are being extended beyond the individual, to include aspects of personality cultivated by the experience of living in the material world around us. But how does the material world catalyse relationships and how do those relationships create the person? Are we enskilled by materiality, or governed by it? How do the properties of objects impose aspects of their ‘personality’ onto us? How can we characterise those relations if they aren’t simply ‘social’? And how far can anthropology take these ideas and provide culturally informed theories which may be useful to the social sciences generally?

The event was conceived following a series of discussion groups, run by the OUAS, on ‘The Philosophy of Science’. This is where the main organisers—the former OUAS President, Kate Fayers-Kerr, and Ian Ewart—met and decided to try to invite some of

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1        A brief history of the Society was produced to coincide with the centenary of the teaching of anthropology in Oxford in 2005. See Robert Parkin, ‘Oxford Anthropology as an Extra-curricular Activity’, in Peter Rivi re (ed.), *A history of Oxford anthropology*, Oxford: Berghahn 2007.

2        Reproduced from the [Society website](#), (accessed 31 December 2009).

the speakers to discuss many of the issues raised. However, the members of the OUAS committee all contributed, as well as a fleet of volunteers. The OUAS treasurer, Adam Gilbertson, was especially forbearing. The OUAS would also like to thank Sarah Raine and Nick Shapiro for introducing two of our speakers. Finally, Melody Cox and the undergraduate representatives—Joseph King, Inese Smidre, Matthew Ball and Vererie Mocker—all contributed a great deal to the running of the event on the day.

Kate Fayers-Kerr  
Robert Parkin

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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ALAN BARNARD, *Anthropology and the Bushman*, Oxford & New York: Berg 2006, x, 179 pp.

Alan Barnard is a leading authority on the anthropology of the Bushman, with over thirty years' experience in the field. He is already the author of a comprehensive synthesis, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa* (1992), which provides an overview of the various Khoisan-speaking peoples. The current book, as the title indicates, is not really about the anthropology of the Bushman, but about anthropology and the Bushman—or better still, anthropologists and the Bushman. It is a complete history of individual anthropologists' (and others') encounters with and representations of the Bushman, ranging from the 15th to the 21st centuries.

The first few chapters adopt a strictly chronological approach. The first encounters with Bushman were made by explorers and settlers who were mostly concerned with the distinctive physical characteristics of these peoples, but already also with the distinction between hunters and herders. The first recognisably anthropological accounts were those of Victorian folklorists and linguists—especially Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd, who compiled an extensive collection of stories told by the /Xam people of the Cape Colony. These were swiftly followed by the earliest ethnographic forays to the fringes of the Kalahari Desert, notably by Bleek's daughter Dorothea. The pivotal part of the book is Chapter 5, 'Amateurs and Cultural Ecologists', which covers the popularisation of Bushman ethnography in the 1950s and 1960s by Lorna Marshall and her family—who had no formal anthropological training, hence the chapter title—as well as the ecologically minded George Silberbauer and Richard Lee. From then on the chronological framework loosens as the volume of ethnography increases and the diversity of perspectives multiplies. The subsequent chapters cover economic anthropology—in particular, the notion of the 'original affluent society', in Marshall Sahlins's famous phrase; mythology and symbolism, which oddly enough have been more central to the archaeology of southern Africa (in the form of rock art studies) than to its ethnography; and the 'Kalahari debate' between those who thought that Bushman were largely untouched by contact with pastoralists and revisionists who saw them as part of a wider economic system. Finally, Barnard tackles advocacy and development work by anthropologists and others—often in partnership with Bushman groups—and the self-representations of the Bushman themselves, along with the use of representations of the Bushman by politicians and the media.

A key strength of the book is its sensitivity to the changing contexts in which anthropologists and others have worked. As a big name in the field himself, the author knows or knew many of the other big names quite well. He shows us the personalities involved and how their actions made sense to them at the time, rather than simply shooting down outmoded theoretical or methodological approaches. The vivid personalities help make the book a remarkably easy read—at times it is more like having a fireside chat with a favourite uncle than wading through a history of anthropology. Yet this is also a valuable resource for anyone interested in going deeper into hunter-gatherer studies: it contains 21 pages of references covering every aspect of Bushman life from every period of anthropological study, all embedded within a coherent narrative describing the development of the anthropological ideas that have shaped these works. The coverage of several Japanese, German and Afrikaans ethnographers, as well as British and North American authors, is particularly welcome and adds to the overall impression of balance in the book.

Barnard's occasional forays into archaeology, linguistics and physical anthropology further add to the well-rounded feel of the book. But when he strays from social anthropology into these other disciplines he can be guilty of oversimplification, as when he argues that most theoretical perspectives within archaeology are variants of either processualism or post-processualism: 'Approaches labelled Marxist, feminist, symbolic, cognitive, interpretative, contextualist and so on are essentially permutations of post-processual perspectives' (p. 97). This is like saying that anthropological theory boils down to either functionalism or post-modernism—and anyway, much Marxist and cognitive archaeology is arguably more similar to processualist than post-processualist approaches. In his old-school, avuncular way, Barnard may also be guilty of not taking seriously enough the possible sexist and primitivist connotations of using a word like 'Bushman' to describe a group of people. He does mention early on that he prefers this descriptor to San because the latter was coined as a pejorative term by neighbouring pastoralists—yet it is not until eight pages before the end of the book that he gets around to defending the term 'Bushman' against charges of sexism, and rather unconvincingly. He writes that the usual feminine and masculine plural terms are 'Bushman women' and 'Bushman men'—implying that 'the Bushman' is properly the descriptor of the people as a whole—but to my ears, the phrase 'a Bushman man' still sounds wrong, and he does not use it in this book. And if the neuter term *Buschleute* is now preferred in German, as he maintains here, why not use a similarly neutral term in English? Moreover he offers no real defence against the charge that the epithet might make these people seem inappropriately savage and bestial—even though, as he also states on this page, 'Bushmen [sic] do not see themselves as bush-dwellers, but as inhabiting camps' (p. 139). He merely notes that those Bushman who know of the term 'San' have tended to prefer the term 'Bushman.'



At 147 pages of text, the book is not over-long, and its length might have been increased with extended discussions of theoretical issues, and perhaps a chapter on the impact of classic Bushman studies on disciplines beyond anthropology (such as evolutionary psychology, where they have influenced the key concept of the environment of evolutionary adaptedness). The book also left me slightly disappointed because I wanted to find out more about Barnard's own theoretical ideas and his 'regional structural comparison' approach, which involves the systematic ethnographic comparison of specific aspects of the ways of life of several neighbouring groups. To leave readers wanting more is not a serious fault, however, especially when there are so many pointers to show us where to find it. This book works very well as a comprehensive yet accessible history of Bushman ethnography, and is strongly recommended to anyone with even a passing interest in hunter-gatherer studies.

GORDON INGRAM

**MONISHA DAS GUPTA**, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States*. Durham NC & London: Duke Univ. Press 2006, ix, 238 pp.

Monisha Das Gupta begins her book on non-citizen South Asian immigrants' struggles for rights by describing a 'ritual of humiliation' that would be familiar to many South Asian immigrants, as well as those South Asians who have had experiences with foreign embassies in their own countries. Her unpleasant experience at the immigration office in Boston for the annual renewal of her work permit serves as the introduction to a work that describes, admirably nuanced, the complexities that groups of 'aberrant' immigrants encounter in their struggle for rights that are not based on full citizenship. These aberrant immigrant elements—feminist, queer and labour groups—adopt a transnational South Asian identity that defies religious, national and regional boundaries in order to claim rights as migrants. In Gupta's words, 'they want rights to move with them' (p. 19).

Gupta highlights the 'emotional content of impersonal bureaucratic processes' and shows that structural forces such as global migration, transnationalism, border controls, neoliberal reform and economic deregulation are not just distant macro-level phenomena that have no bearing on people's lived experiences (p. 2). She underscores the everyday lived reality of the legal category of the immigrant (p. 4). Gupta shows how their discourse and activities free rights from restrictive notions of citizenship and so defy nationalism and patriotism as conventionally understood (p. 26). Her arguments are refreshing and radical, as when she suggests that citizenship should be seen as a 'violent mechanism through which the state creates legitimate and illegitimate members of the national body' (p. 258).

The book charts how three kinds of organizations—feminist, queer and labour—have challenged the monopoly of citizenship over human rights through their struggles to be granted rights as immigrants, not citizens (p. 4). Her rich ethnography of seven South Asian organizations builds upon interviews with core members of these organizations in New York, New Jersey and Boston, together with attendance at the organizations' general meetings, speaker events, festivals, film screenings and workshops. The choice of these organizations springs from her past involvement with one of them, South Asian Women for Action (SAWA).

The immigrant organizations she studies surfaced on the political scene in the United States in the mid-1980s and 1990s. As the South Asian community in the US grew in number and diversity in the 1980s and 1990s, conditions were conducive to the rise of organizations exercising 'space-making politics' premised on the recognition of underlying differences within the South Asian community. Gupta construes their rise as symptomatic of the limitations of mainstream organizations that practice 'India-centered, elite, accommodations politics' or 'place-taking politics' (p. 9). The organizations that are the subject of Gupta's study practice, instead, 'space-making politics'.

The *place-takers* strive to be immigrant success stories through accommodations, rather than confrontational and transformative politics. They subscribe to the image of unproblematic, 'good' and hence 'successful' racial subjects, and they also constitute the mainstream South Asian immigrant community in the United States. Conversely, the *space-makers* deconstruct the image of a monolithic racial category of South Asians to reveal sharp divisions along gender, sexual and class dimensions. *Space-making* organizations symbolize spaces of legal innovation as they challenge the link between citizenship and rights. Not only do they reject rights based on citizenship, they also do not rely on universalist notions of personhood as the basis for their rights demands; instead, they demand rights for groups (for instance, groups of migrant workers' dependents). Their struggles have led to the construction of a transnational complex of rights premised on mobile rights, which casts doubt on the hitherto taken-for-granted link between rights and citizenship.

The first chapter examines the *place-taking* politics of the Association of Indians in America (AIA), founded in 1967, and describes its acceptance of the terms of belonging in the United States and its willingness to assimilate and contribute economically without demanding anything in return (p. 53). The AIA's efforts aimed at carving out a separate space for 'people of Asian Indian heritage', which would allow them to escape being pigeonholed into one of the two dominant 'white' or 'black' categories. The AIA's assimilative politics came to represent the South Asian mainstream's political activities as it served as an example of a 'model migrant organization' adhering to the notion of citizenship as requiring a contribution to be made. However, the AIA's reliance on

ethnicity and race as the defining characteristics of South Asians obfuscated divisions based on gender, sexuality and class, and hence did not satisfy the needs of non-citizen immigrants, immigrant women, sexual minorities and low-wage workers (p. 54).

In the second chapter, Gupta examines the competing claims of cultural authenticity by *place-takers* and *space-makers*. In her discussion, Gupta highlights not just how place-takers refuse to recognize divisions amongst themselves, but also how they are guilty of patriarchal oppression and forced heterosexuality in the name of culture. By labelling immigrants as either authentic South Asians or 'corrupted Americans', based respectively on their conforming to or rejecting mainstream standards, the place-takers have arrogated to themselves the function of gatekeepers of their self-defined, 'authentic' South Asian immigrant community.

The experiences of domestic workers, queers and low-paid members of the working-class threaten the place-takers' mythical 'immigrant success stories' and their portrayal as a model minority. Thus, those in trouble are ostracized by the place-takers and are seen as aberrant individuals. Gupta sees this denial of problematic co-ethnics as the place-takers' way of combating racism, which views immigrants with suspicion as potentially troublesome (p. 58). While place-takers tend to see women victims of domestic abuse who speak out as home-breakers and try to rationalize the men's violence as the outcome of economic pressures (for instance), the space-making organizations highlight the structural conditions that make immigrant women vulnerable to such abuse.

Gupta shows how place-takers' values of family solidarity, obedience and self-help square with the American state's aim of making immigrants self-reliant. Consequently, those who do not fare well economically and socially are easily condemned as failures who are themselves responsible for their adversity because of their own shortcomings.

While part of the structural explanation for the exploitation and vulnerability of low-paid and informal workers, immigrant women and queers lies in the mainstream community's power to define who qualifies as a genuine South Asian and who does not, the other structural component relates to the state and its laws (explained in Chapter 3). Gupta explains this dynamic by taking domestic violence as an example. While domestic violence is widely seen as a manifestation of the culture of the immigrant's country of origin, Gupta shows that patriarchy is not just cultural—it is actively bolstered by immigrant legislation in the United States, which makes immigrant women dependent on their spouse's status as a citizen for their own legal status. This forces them to choose between protection from abusive husbands or deportation (pp. 83, 86). Thus, an oppressive culture works in complicity with the state, resulting in a 'double subordination' for many immigrant women.

Another structural factor contributing to the exploitation of the space-makers is capitalism itself. Gupta describes how capitalist forces work to make the primary labour market flourish at the expense of the secondary market comprising immigrant labour. She argues that first-world states and global capital benefit from the supply of skilled and unskilled labour provided by immigrants, even as they exploit them for their immigrant status by slotting them into contradictory categories such as illegal, legal yet nonresident, and legal and resident yet noncitizen (p. 13). Thus, labour is extracted from them, but their rights are not recognized (p. 14).

The Introduction and first three chapters of the book lay down the broader discursive, historical and legal framework which the space-making organizations work within and against. The remaining three chapters are comprehensive case studies describing, in turn, the struggles of feminist, queer and labour organizations. In conclusion, the book attains its goal: through an illuminating ethnography of *space-making* organizations and their struggles for migrant rights and a transnational rights regime, it makes a powerful case for a rights regime that does not hinge on full citizenship.

MAIRA HAYAT

ANNETTE AURÉLIE DESMARAIS, *La Vía Campesina: globalization and the power of peasants*, London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, & Halifax: Fernwood Publishing 2007, xi, 238 pp.

*La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the power of peasants* is a notable work about an international, 'peasant'-led movement that attempts to counteract the idea of food and land as commodities within capitalist relations of production upheld by the WTO and other dominant actors in the global trade of foodstuffs. In line with anthropological studies of power and organisations, the author not only addresses contestations over the meanings of food, agriculture, development and the idea of peasanthood, but also treats the emergence of Vía Campesina (VC) as a politically-charged process within the domain of civil society. Much of this analysis of VC's organizational culture is left to the end of the book, however, and earlier chapters often leave little space between the moral stance of the subject under study and the author's own point of view. Indeed, although *La Vía Campesina* makes an indispensable contribution to our understanding of the most wide-ranging peasant movement in history, it is informed throughout by an overt political stance, which arguably strays from the critical tradition of social sciences such as anthropology.

Trained in geography, Desmarais centres on the various scales at which the primary actors (*i.e.*, the VC, NGOs, the WTO, the UN, transnational corporations, etc.) are situated, and highlights certain interrelations between people and place, 'North' and 'South', the local and the global. Yet this theoretical approach, as well as Desmarais's

position as an insider (at the date of publication, the author was a member of the VC technical support staff), has likely affected which discourses the author chooses to highlight and which are left out. Indeed, while she demonstrates an awareness of her 'privileged position' (p. 18) as an insider, Desmarais does not reflect upon the ethical implications of her own situated position and how this may have shaped the kind of data collected and the resulting analysis. For example, the VC's concept of food sovereignty—the notion that access to food should be inseparable from localized and culturally-valued ideas and actions—becomes the crux of the book's argument, while historical and social reasons why the more economically based notion of food security has gained legitimacy in global circles are largely absent.

Though Desmarais acknowledges the importance of treating ideas such as food sovereignty as discourses that contribute to community-formation (e.g., p. 38), her undue attention to the VC world view precludes her from demonstrating why the discourse of the market has become so prevalent, and so we remain unaware of how one may confront the latter on its own terms (if, indeed, this is the aim). Her ubiquitous contrasts between a 'political economy of profit' and a 'moral economy of provision' (p. 68, in reference to Parajuli 1996: 39) or equivalent polarities would be better treated as part of the very discursive scheme to be deconstructed, not least because market as well as community-based models for the economy have been historically legitimated in both political and moral terms (perhaps the best demonstration of a moral and political account of the market idea and ideal was given by Gunnar Myrdal in his seminal work: *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory*. 1953. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul). Such a perspective would have shed more light on the various historical actors at play who have determined the present-day position of 'peasants' on the world stage, a crucial starting point for any applied scholarship for change.

MARISA WILSON

ROY ELLEN (ed.), *Modern crises and traditional strategies: local ecological knowledge in island Southeast Asia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007, xiii, 272 pp. (Studies in Environmental Anthropology and Ethnobiology 6).

Edited by Roy Ellen, Professor of Anthropology and Human Ecology at the University of Kent, *Modern Crises and Traditional Strategies* is the result of a symposium at the Ninth International Congress of Ethnobiology in 2004. Ellen argues in his introduction that, contrary to the assumptions of many development practitioners and other agents of modernization, traditional ecological knowledge remains a valuable resource in the modern era, not in spite of recent changes but often because of them.

The nine chapters that follow underscore this point with detailed case studies from island Southeast Asia during the years 1996 to 2004. Rajindra K. Puri describes the subsistence strategies on which Kenyah and Penan peoples of Borneo rely during crises such as the 1997 El Niño. Rini Soemarwoto examines the Kasepukan of upland Java, who have largely rejected 'green revolution' rice on both practical and cosmological grounds, choosing instead to maintain their diverse array of local rice varieties. At the same, they register these local varieties with the authorities, showing that some concessions have been made to bureaucratic regulations.

In two separate chapters, Johan Iskandar and Roy Ellen describe the Baduy of Java, for whom swidden farming is not merely a subsistence base but also a ritual obligation and identity marker. The Baduy have maintained this system despite considerable pressure by the government to modernize their farming. As a result, they have fared much better in recent climatic perturbations than those groups who have adopted modern irrigation-intensive agriculture. Yet the Baduy have also taken advantage of certain outside influences: they sell non-rice crops, engage in wage labour, and have adopted a government-favoured tree species due to its close fit with pre-existing agricultural knowledge and practices.

Hermien L. Sospelisa provides a case study from the island of Buano in the Maluku province of Indonesia. Agricultural modernization programmes often assume that conditions will remain stable, while traditional subsistence methods take future variability into account by diversifying the portfolio of resources. At the same time, traditional methods cannot anticipate every possible future disruption, and in certain crises newer strategies such as reliance on the market economy will be favoured. Sospelisa illustrates this point through the successive shocks—El Niño, drought, and religious violence—that the people of Buano experienced in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Simon Platten argues that the people of the Minahasan plateau in north Sulawesi have a 'tradition of change'; their recent adoption of carrots as a crop has upheld rather than undermined their social structure. Dario Novellino examines the Batak of Palawan Island in the Philippines, for whom subsistence practices are not a monolith but rather 'a multiplicity of opportunistic responses, open-ended processes and coping strategies aimed at ensuring everyday survival' (p. 185). They must cope in particular with government- and NGO-favoured restrictions on their swidden farming, conditions which now vary with electoral, rather than ecological, cycles.

Laura S. Metzner Yoder demonstrates how older practices of protecting forests in East Timor have been revived in the years following independence, with encouraging results. Michael R. Dove explains why the inhabitants of Mount Merapi—one of the world's most dangerous volcanoes—have resisted the government's encouragement to relocate: locals have developed longstanding attachment to the land as well as strategies to cope with, and even to take advantage of, living on a volcano.



The central arguments—that traditional ecological knowledge remains valuable and viable in the modern era, that its strength lies in its local specificity as well as its ability to incorporate change, and that government policies must respect this—are broadly convincing. However, they would be even more convincing if they did not seem, at times, assumed *a priori* and defended in partisan terms. For instance, in his introduction, Ellen includes ‘irrigation’, ‘commercial cash-cropping’, and ‘road-building’ on his list of ‘crises’. But these are not crises in themselves, only developments with various risks and opportunities, like modernity as a whole. By defining them as ‘crises’, he has answered the question before asking it. Taken as a whole, the volume seems to demonstrate the immense value not only of traditional ecological knowledge but also of the market economy, which itself forms part of the diverse portfolio of resources that ‘traditional’ methods seek. This more balanced view is latent in the book’s material but backgrounded by most of the contributors; both local rejection and local acceptance of modern changes are taken as proof of insiders’ wisdom against outsiders’ folly. At the same time as traditionally oriented peoples are described in rich detail, government officers appear only as faceless ideologues and bumbling interventionists. A related imbalance in the book stems from the fact that the case studies are taken from the region’s most traditionally oriented groups. Johan Iskandar quotes a Baduy saying (p. 115):

Restrictions should not be violated  
 Taboos should not be changed  
 What is long should not be shortened  
 What is short should not be lengthened  
 What is other must be considered other  
 What is forbidden must be forbidden  
 What is right must be considered right

Whatever the merits of the system being defended, this is a profoundly conservative statement which may not be shared by the majority of the region’s inhabitants. The possible unrepresentativeness of the case studies does not undermine the book’s conclusions, but may limit them and thus ought to have been more squarely confronted in the introduction. Some chapters could also have benefited from improved thematic organization; the concluding section of a chapter often introduces new basic material when only a summary and a discussion are called for.

Despite these blemishes, Ellen’s volume remains a persuasive, detailed, and original contribution to the study of traditional ecological knowledge in the modern era.

PETER RUDIAK-GOULD



ELIZABETH HALLAM and TIM INGOLD (eds.), *Creativity and cultural improvisation*, Oxford and New York: Berg 2007 (ASA Monographs 44), xx + 327 pp.

This collection of essays attempts to expand the implications of creativity and improvisation. One of its most striking contributions is the emphasis placed on the process of creativity, which opens up the scope of creative life, resulting in an eclectic collection of ethnographic accounts exploring the diverse implications of improvisation and creativity.

Following Whitehead's definition of creativity (1938 [1926]: 410), Ingold explores creativity as the movement of becoming, or what Whitehead calls 'concrecence'. In this context, Ingold and Hallam (p. 5) seek to elevate copying and imitation by stressing how they involve a 'complex and ongoing alignment of observation of the model with action in the world'. This process of negotiation is what they take to be improvisation, which is shown to lie at the heart of creativity.

In order to illustrate this, Hallam and Ingold introduce the historically constructed polarity between innovation and improvisation. Innovation is defined as a novelty stemming from new creativity or from the creativity of the present; improvisation, on the other hand, is relegated to a mere convention, copying some former act of creativity (cf. Leip 2001).

One reason for improvisation coming to be seen as secondary to creativity, Hallam and Ingold suggest, is that creativity is judged backwards, or rather innovation is judged by the *product* and not the *process* of a 'creation'. This has led to creative innovation being labelled posthumously, or backwards. Improvisation, they suggest, is rather the sum of the process of creativity, and may rather be read forwards in time. Amar Mall, in a discussion of the southern Indian practice of Kolam (patterns of interwoven lines, traditionally drawn by Tamil women to protect and cleanse their houses and temples), illustrates just how much creativity is about the practice or process rather than simply the product. This is significant, since the rise in printed books of Kolam designs has been suggested as stagnating local creativity. Mall (p. 74) shows that, far from executing a pre-designed plan, the design by no means precedes the execution but develops as the work proceeds. It is most often said in relation to Kolam that 'It's come', since the unpredictability of the process means that they have to find their way as they go, and any novelty is only apparent when they 'arrive'.

Many of the ethnographies support Hallam and Ingold's point that to follow a plan or to execute a design involves much improvisational creativity. Patricia Hughes-Freeland illustrates this point most clearly in her study of Javanese dance. Typical explanations of Javanese dance traditions interpret the disciplined regimes as allowing no scope for individual expression and imply a Foucauldian discipline and body politic. Hughes-Freeland, however, illustrates how discipline and expression go hand in hand, to the extent that controlled and very formalised movements are actually liberating for

experienced dancers. Although the dance is explained to novices in terms of a series of prescribed steps, in order to achieve the desired aesthetic of flowing water in the movements, an experienced dancer must move in a 'flexibly responsive way', that is, 'continuous, sustained and measured' (p. 214), rather than rigidly moving to the musical structure. The movements become automatic, which allows a space for creative presence that transcends constraints, allowing for freedom and even subversion, which are central to any complete understanding of the dance.

Nakamura's account of Japanese calligraphy illustrates Hallam and Ingold point that even traditions need maintenance to prevent them from deteriorating. She argues that unlike western tradition, which places innovation at the heart of tradition, Japanese calligraphy springs instead from the creative source of imitation, with successful copying being called *rinsho*. However, rather than mechanically copying, to achieve *rinsho* the calligrapher must internalise the principles embodied in the classics, ultimately making them his own. It is this that is valued, and it is this that keeps a tradition alive.

Drawing on relational thinking, a cornerstone of Ingold's (cf. 2000) work, Hallam and Ingold continue to challenge the opposition between tradition/continuity and change. Creativity, they argue, is still seen to be more about change, and change is judged posthumously. They show how an individualistic notion of creativity is connected to the historical shift in European ideas in body concepts, from earlier principles of flux and generativity, to an individualistic, bounded and stable body. Rather than seeing creativity as an event and tied to the extraordinary actions of a particular individual, Hallam and Ingold encourage us to consider creativity as inseparable from our engagements with the world.

Many of the contributors to this volume illustrate that improvisation is relational because it is entangled in a mutually responsive way with many factors. Richard Vokes even illustrates the way ethnographic fieldwork involves not only the network of relations of people but also things, the mobilisation of which he compares to the hybridisation outlined by actor-network theory. Karin Barber (pp. 33-4) challenges the notion that innovation and creativity arise from gifted individuals, suggesting rather that it arises from 'cooperative mutual attunement', where something happens that exceeds the sum of the individual contributions.

By examining creativity in a forward direction, this temporal shift allows many of the contributors to re-incorporate improvisation into the creative process. Even the traditional or the old, or old people, as Catherine Degnen demonstrates, are shown to be creative by reading creativity forwards in time. Karin Barber goes some way towards establishing a level playing field for improvisation in creative pursuits. She emphasises how a performance that aims for the perfection of a model or tradition involves as much improvisation as a performance that is not aiming to imitate anything.

The final section of collection focuses on the creativity of anthropological scholarship itself. Initially this section seems to be something of an outlier to the other contributions, apparently challenging the overall cohesion of the whole collection. However, Clara Mafra (p. 318) ties it all together; paraphrasing Ingold (1993), she argues that ‘anthropology is a discipline capable of grasping and teaching something about a world in process’, a process which includes the anthropologist as much as the ‘Other’.

However, one gets the impression that the ethnographies in this collection are not always moving in the same direction. This is a tribute to the subtlety of the argument that Hallam and Ingold outline in the introduction. At first what they are saying appears quite simple, but in actuality they are suggesting a significant paradigm shift, one that requires the contributors to challenge many assumptions surrounding the concepts of creativity and improvisation. Subsequently, some contributions are more conclusive than others.

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KATE FAYERS-KERR

MARTIN JONES, *Feast: why humans share food*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, xiv, 364 pp.

*Feast* attempts to explain why humans share food, a question immediately evoking Glynn Isaac’s prediction of a chimpanzee’s response when asked to comment on the behavioural differences between our two species: ‘These humans get food and, instead of eating it promptly like any sensible ape, they haul it off and share it with others.’ This apparently anomalous behaviour has long attracted speculation among archaeologists, forming the basis of Isaac’s ‘home base’ model and launching three decades of often fierce debate regarding the hunting abilities, cognitive capacities and social strategies of our hominin ancestors. Many of the classic debates are neglected here, with Africa under-represented and Asia completely absent—a peculiar omission given that the development of agriculture is a central focus—yet the book in many ways benefits from an approach that selects key sites and illustrates emerging analytical technologies, providing a fresh look at an entrenched and too often dichotomised series of questions.

After an initial meal at Gombe, the book follows a broadly chronological path through the archaeological record of changing human diets and the social encounters that

accompany the consumption of food, though the evidence necessarily pertains primarily to the former, with the latter being inferred from evidence of varying reliability. We dine with chimpanzees, Neanderthals and Cambridge academics, each chapter beginning with the now standard popular science device of a colourful and often wildly speculative vignette of life (and dinner) at the time. Jones highlights the merits of new technologies for the analysis of the often fragmentary evidence of human food remains, adeptly switching between the results of microscopic analyses and their broad-scale implications for the reconstruction of diet. Having mastered this blend of micro-science and macro-explanation in *The Molecule Hunt*, Jones here provides a thoroughly accessible synthesis of the technology behind the reconstruction of prehistoric diets.

The book achieves a rare success in blending general evolutionary principles with the particular social constructs that lend meaning to human gatherings in specific contexts. In evoking both Darwinian analyses and concepts derived from anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss, Jones goes beyond the typical and ignorant social anthropological assertion that humans possess an ethereal and undefined quality that sets us apart from mere beasts whilst simultaneously sidestepping the ubiquitous slant towards determinism. Thus the evolutionary relationship between diet and encephalisation is juxtaposed with specific examples of feasting from particular archaeological sites, most of which are chosen so as to provide temporally controlled snapshots in the progression of human food procurement. Though this selection procedure risks falling foul of Binford's 'Pompeii Premise', whereby the recovered remains of activities spanning years, decades or centuries are interpreted to reflect a single socially salient episode, the case studies are generally well chosen and the conclusions well made.

Overall, *Feast* provides a gentle yet reasonably comprehensive introduction to a string of cutting-edge techniques and their application to a series of intriguing and lucidly recounted archaeological case studies. These studies are woven together to form a compelling story of the importance of food and food-sharing to evolving human societies; there is little new here, but the synthesis is more than welcome.

MATT GROVE

**PETER LUETCHFORD**, *Fair trade and a global commodity: coffee in Costa Rica*, London; Ann Arbor: Pluto Press 2008, xii, 226 pp.

As the title of his concise yet detailed ethnography suggests, Peter Luetchford is concerned with the interplay of the Fair Trade movement and the processes of production and trade involved in a highly globalized commodity market—coffee. Luetchford resists the tendency in the literature to quantify economic or social impacts, instead choosing to

highlight the areas of disjuncture and overlap between the value systems of smallholder coffee farmers and the Fair Trade movement. His analysis of the dynamics of Fair Trade is thus a unique and highly relevant contribution to the debate on its appropriateness as a development strategy. On the other hand, to make this argument he requires significant ethnographic detail about life in the Tilarán highlands of Costa Rica, which is sometimes achieved at the cost of a clear and robust analysis of Fair Trade relationships.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first two chapters provide the transnational, national, and local contexts in which integration into the Fair Trade market takes place for nine coffee-producing cooperatives belonging to the conglomerate Coocafé. In the first chapter, Luetchford shows that policy action and social values in Costa Rica have facilitated and supported a rural development strategy which has been rooted in the cooperative form since the early twentieth century. A more localized history of modernization and the improvement in material wealth among the members of one of the nine cooperatives, Coopeldos, is described in Chapter 2. The analysis challenges popular conceptions of Fair Trade as a catalyst for development, revealing it to be a marketing strategy which can only be engaged with once favourable policy contexts and successful, ethically motivated cooperative managers are in place.

Yet, the author's simplified portrayal of some Fair Trade actors detracts from this otherwise nuanced and insightful argument. For example, my own ethnographic research with a Fair Trade cooperative in Chiapas, Mexico, showed that cooperative managers pursue power and financial fortunes, sometimes at the expense of cooperative members, even as they seek to provide 'the best possible service' and 'development' (p. 49) for their members. Although Luetchford does pay attention to intra-cooperative politics throughout the book, he seems to see the problem as one of farmers' perceptions rather than as a possible lived reality. Moreover, my investigations showed that the Alternative Trade Organizations to which coffee is sold vary dramatically in their commitments to producers' welfare and to the ethical principles of Fair Trade. Local perceptions and actual impacts of Fair Trade are contingent on the individuals involved, and Luetchford's own rich material would be well complemented by a comparative perspective. His rather cursory explanation of the history of Fair Trade in the introductory chapter leaves him insufficiently prepared to engage adequately with threats to the sanctity of the movement's principles as it expands into mainstream markets.

The following three chapters of the book comprise a second section that analyses how uncertainties involved in agricultural production induce smallholders to dissociate morality from commerce. These chapters discuss how 'Fair Trade' producers' decisions in coffee and labour markets are motivated by pragmatism rather than morality, and their tendency to prioritize economic viability over egalitarian and organic production models. The author

asserts that producers 'do not associate commodity markets with ethics', and that this divides them from consumers whose acts of purchasing are motivated by morality (p. 53). While his refusal to romanticize coffee producers is important for a critical analysis of the Fair Trade movement, Luetchford thereby creates a problematic binary between 'surprisingly rational' Costa Rican farmers and an unidentified (though European) group of ethically motivated consumers. For example, it is unclear what 'light is thrown on our own ideas on the economy' by farmers' use of terms relating to risk to describe their economic lives (p. 59)—and furthermore who this 'our' represents. Luetchford provides a strong rebuttal to the essentialized 'Fair Trade' producer depicted in much of the literature, but not attempting to deconstruct the consumer in the same way, he sometimes reproduces the producer-consumer distance that Fair Trade itself seeks to close.

The final section of the book seeks to identify the 'moral imagination' (p. 105) of smallholder farmers in their household and village economies. The author argues that local values reflect a resistance to capitalist ideology, while eloquently acknowledging the complexities and historical transformations in their relationships with markets. He shows that the moral economies which the previous section could not locate in labour and commodity markets can be found outside these arenas, as reflected by the importance attributed to subsistence agriculture (particularly in the *milpa* or maize plot), the rejection of self-interest in the informal economy and in personal relationships, and the belief that true value derives from the earth rather than from market exchange. Thus, perhaps ironically, Fair Trade shoppers do indeed satisfy their desire to 'consume ethics', but mainly with regard to the set of producers' relationships that exist outside Fair Trade markets themselves.

This ethnography should be deeply appreciated for the coherence of its structure and presentation, the care and detail in the construction of the case study, and the uniqueness of the project in a sea of impact studies that too often take the cultural relevance of Fair Trade for granted. The author also offers his insight into gender discrimination within local economies and cooperative structures in a discussion which, although brief, helps to address what has become a gaping hole in our understanding of the impacts of Fair Trade (a research area being pioneered by Sarah Lyon). Still, some acknowledgement of the existence of a political economy of Fair Trade consumption and more attention to the history and critical challenges the movement has faced would have strengthened the overall contribution to our understanding of this form of alternative exchange.

KATHLEEN SEXSMITH



DANIEL MILLER, *Stuff*, Cambridge and Malden: Blackwell and Polity Press 2009, vii, 169 pp.

Material anthropology offers insights into culture through the relationships between people and things: how things are made, used, valued, interpreted, savoured, discarded, and used to express or create the self and/or community has significance for the understanding of any culture. Since anthropology's 'material turn' in the 1980s, several scholars in the nascent field have felt the need to stand up and account for the validity of studying material culture, especially those things which at first glance might appear superficial to other anthropologists (such as jeans, CDs or charity shop bric-a-brac). The case for a study of material culture has already been made vehemently in innumerable publications, which poses a challenge for Daniel Miller's new volume, *Stuff*. Miller is surely one of the most prominent and widely read anthropologists working in the field of material culture. This arises not only from the historical significance of his contributions made when the field of study first emerged in earnest in the 1980s, but also from the breadth of his enquiries over the years, which have taken in people from Trinidad to London and India, and cultural phenomena as disparate as clothing, the Internet and soft drinks. Miller's wide readership and high profile are surely also aided by his breezy, readable writing style, taken to its extremes in his latest publication, *Stuff*.

The book does not present new work by Miller, but rather is intended to be read as a summary of his works so far, as such acting as a gateway text into the field for students and scholars who are unfamiliar with material anthropology. His first chapter combats the notion that material culture is inherently superficial through an analysis of clothing and its importance in self-expression, as well as its ability to constrain bodies and proscribe identities (a discussion of saris in this chapter provides excellent fodder for Miller's arguments). Miller's second chapter questions the validity of constructing an overarching theory of material culture, whilst his third examines the importance of the domestic sphere in public and private life, asking how we accommodate stuff into our lives and our homes. In the fourth chapter, Miller tackles the immaterial world of the Internet and media, steering his discourse to examine how material anthropology studies can be applied to better the lives of those struck by poverty, loss and bereavement. This last theme feeds into the book's final chapter, in which Miller examines the importance of the loss of material goods in people's lives, and the significance of mementoes and acts of divestment.

Miller is obviously at pains not to burden his text with dense theory or lengthy citations. Coming fast on the heels of his last, more self-consciously populist work, *The Comfort of Things*, he deftly displays a talent for the uncluttered presentation of ideas, largely eschewing complexity without compromising the integrity of his arguments. By constantly placing his fieldwork centre-stage, Miller allows the empirical realities of



ethnography to bolster his key proposals and repeatedly encourages readers to question and reflect upon material culture and their relationships with their own 'stuff'. This approach similarly leads to neat and clear explanations of dialectical theory, semiotics, the verbose and (sometimes) baffling worlds of Hegel, Bourdieu and Strathern, and how they relate clearly to analyses of material culture that bolster the understandings of the anthropological discipline.

There are without doubt problems in covering this much ground in such a slim volume using such an informal, almost conversational tone, for at times Miller does not go as deeply into his material as one might hope. Purely in subjective terms, Miller's writing is peppered with irreverent self-references and attempts at humour, which, depending on the reader, render the text at turns compelling and frustrating. Perhaps the aim is that this digest volume will engage intrigued newcomers to Miller's *oeuvre* through its lack of pretension, but nonetheless readers are urged to seek out Miller's original publications of these works, for they are eminently readable and engaging in their own right. *Stuff* is intended as the first of two volumes, the second of which (the forthcoming *Consumed by Doubt*) 'will be concerned with the causes and consequences of consumption', including the negative aspects of our relationship with materiality—poverty, environmental degradation and disenchantment. That volume promises to offer something new and vital to Miller's canon. The present volume, however, acts neither as an all-encompassing textbook for students of material anthropology nor as the vehicle for new ideas on the materiality of the human condition. Yes, we are convinced of the merits of material anthropology from Miller's text, but no more so than we were by the many other broad volumes that have claimed to act as manifestos for the study of material culture. As such, readers acquainted with Miller's works may find something lacking in finishing *Stuff*, whereas others new to material anthropology might find themselves inspired to contemplate, think and read about the world of 'stuff' that bit more deeply.

ANDREW BOWSHER

**EVA REICHEL**, *Notions of life in death and dying: the dead in tribal Middle India*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers 2009, 118 pp.

Eva Reichel's book is a comparative account of the conceptual and ritual interrelatedness of life and death in Middle India based on the ethnographic work of Piers Vitebsky among the Sora, Simeran M. Gell among the Muria Gond, Ulrich Demmer among the Koya, Charles McDougal among the Hill Juang and Michael Yorke and John Deeney among the Ho, and interspersed with brief comparisons and contrasts from the author's own short period of fieldwork among the Ho of Orissa.

Structured in six chapters elaborating on notions of death and dying in Middle India, the book's main argument is that people's concepts of and reactions to death are culturally determined and socially constructed. Death is an essentially universal phenomenon, an important rite of passage, but its representations in ritual and mourning vary cross-culturally and are fundamentally different in 'modern' Western societies and 'traditional' societies. The argument is based on Louis Dumont's theoretical discussion highlighting the different values of individualistic western and holistic eastern societies resulting from their different types of social organization. 'Traditional' societies are holistic, i.e. they place the stress on the society as a whole and not on its individual members, who are only conceived of as constituent parts of the whole; 'modern' societies, by contrast, are individualistic, i.e. they place the stress on the individual person as a measure of all things. Hence the fundamentally different concepts of death and its ritual representation. In 'modern' societies, death and life are two distinct categories: death occurs within a delimited period of time and is followed by a ritually prescribed period of mourning, after which the corpse is removed from 'the social context of the living'. Most importantly, death is a personal and private matter affecting only a limited number of blood relatives and friends. In 'traditional' societies, death is a social event which affects the wholeness of the community. In holistic societies life and death form a continuum, a circle whereby the life force of the dead is utilised in fertility and regeneration rituals for the benefit of the living. Death is conceptualised as a transition, a transformative initiation into another form of sociality (the afterlife). Here the author elaborates on the seminal works of Robert Hertz and Arnold van Gennep on the tripartite structure of death as a rite of passage and its significance for the continuity and perpetuation of life, as well as on Maurice Bloch's and Jonathan Parry's work on the regeneration of life implicit in mortuary rituals in 'traditional' societies. Especially fruitful for the theoretical discussion is Bloch's work on the differing concepts of the person in western societies (the indivisible person) and in holistic societies (the divisible person, *dividuum*), which underpin the fundamentally different concepts of death.

The author persuasively demonstrates that in the Tribal Belt of Middle India death is not perceived in the latter sense, that is, not as a termination of life but as an ongoing transformative process which links the living and the dead in an interdependent relationship which transcends physical death. This relationship is periodically reaffirmed and reconstituted through rituals of commensality and healing, name-giving ceremonies, sacrificial offerings, agricultural ceremonies of annual renewal and village festivals, as well as in the course of everyday interaction and communication (e.g. the Sora dialogues with the dead) which require the active involvement of the ancestors. In the various ethnographies summarised in the book, the dead continue to be involved in the lives of the

living in various symbolic ways, especially through the intermediation of ritual specialists (mediums, shamans etc.) but also in dreams etc. Thus the Sora communicate with their dead (*sonum*) on an everyday basis in large public gatherings aimed at negotiating and re-negotiating the relationship between the living and the dead and at assisting the dead in their gradual ritual transformation from dangerous Experience *sonums* through the transitional category of Earth *sonums* (who might or might not be dangerous and reside in various natural sites) to become eventually the benevolent and nourishing Ancestor *sonums*. The dead of the Hill Juang pass through a similar transformation from a potentially malevolent ghost to a benevolent ancestor which might take as long as twenty years to complete and culminates in the name-giving ritual in which a child is given the name of a deceased person from the generation of the child's father's father. The mortuary rituals of the Koya serve to reinforce kinship ties between the dead, the living and their affines, who perform a crucial role throughout the three phases of the mortuary ritual (i.e. the cremation rites, the installation of a memorial stone and the ritual bringing back of the dead person's soul, which is believed to reside in a special pot inside the house). The Muria Gond distinguish between malicious and benign ancestor spirits; the former reside in the uncontrolled space of the forest, whereas the latter are believed to dwell in ancestral pots inside the controlled and sacred space of the house. Similarly, Ho relations between the living and the dead reveal matters of kinship and ancestral protection granted to lineage members (transferral of land rights, agricultural produce and cattle). For the Ho the souls of all members of the patrilineage reside in a special sacred place inside the house and provide for the perpetuation of kinship relations, as ancestors are deemed necessary throughout the process of the construction of the social person.

*Notions of life in death and dying* is a valuable overview of the conceptualisation of death in different tribal groups in Middle India and would be of interest not only to students of social anthropology but also to everyone who is interested in the anthropology of South Asia in particular and the anthropology of death in general. The rich ethnographic material on the Koya, Hill Juang, Sora, Muria Gond and Ho summarised by Eva Reichel demonstrates that the meaning of social phenomena cannot be revealed in isolation, but only in their interrelationship with other social phenomena within the social system of a given society. And focusing on death might in some cases provide culturally specific notions of life.

ILIYANA ANGELOVA

**ANDREA S. WILEY and JOHN S. ALLEN**, *Medical anthropology: a biocultural approach*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, xvii, 459 pp.

With this volume, Wiley and Allen have set out to provide an introductory handbook to medical anthropology, based on the understanding that health must be studied as a biocultural process. It is a worthy goal. Medical anthropology as a discipline developed from a growing awareness in the 1970s that health and illness are social as well as biological events; therefore it followed that they should be studied as a biocultural process. Yet Wiley and Allen only partly achieve their goal.

The problem begins with their definition of bioculturalism as any perspective that 'considers the social, ecological, and biological aspects of health issues, and how these interact within and across populations' (p. 5). In other words, it is a synthesis of the social and biological approaches to health-related issues. However, Ulijaszek (2007: 21) provides a similar definition, with one notable difference: 'In biological anthropology, biocultural approaches are those that explicitly recognise the dynamic interactions between humans as biological beings and the social, cultural and physical environments they inhabit'. Ulijaszek qualifies his definition with the preface 'biological anthropology'. As one reads Wiley and Allen's handbook, it becomes clear that what they are providing is a bio-anthropological introduction to biocultural medical anthropology. Having established it as such, it can serve as a good work of reference for students of medical anthropology, as well as for any health practitioner seeking a more nuanced approach to health treatment issues.

However, while any attempt to introduce a discipline in a single volume gives rise to some simplifications, Wiley and Allen have left some fairly significant omissions. For example, when they define a biocultural approach to health, they fail to highlight the controversy surrounding the issue. This is despite the fact that many academics have gone so far as to say that, rather than succeeding in combining biological and cultural aspects, biocultural approaches are actually fundamentally flawed. Ingold (2007), calls bioculturalism a 'complementarity' approach: he argues instead for the 'obviation' approach that does away with conventional distinctions between body, mind and culture (ibid.: 210). By failing to contextualise their definition within this wider debate, Wiley and Allen give any newcomer to the discipline the misleading idea that there is only one definition of bioculturalism.

Due to the way they have mislabelled the handbook, Wiley and Allen deserve criticism for focusing too much on the biological aspects of health. They note the over-privileged place that western biomedicine has given to the individual body, and in the same breath they state that 'Biocultural analysis considers the individual body as a starting point' (p. 7). They also state, largely uncritically, that biocultural approaches follow biomedicine

by relying on the fundamentally predictable ways in which diseases alter the biological functions, and that 'Biocultural analyses most often make use of biomedical categories of disease and use them as a standard...for cross cultural comparison' (ibid.). Some of these statements are more accurate than others, but either way, what is lacking is a context that explains to the reader that this is the authors' approach to bioculturalism, and that it is far from being a perfect approach.

Similarly, their definitions of key terms such as 'disease', 'illness' and 'sickness' are overly narrow, leaving out the complexity surrounding them. They define 'disease' very much as Kleinman did (1980), as 'a physiological alteration that impairs function in some way' (Wiley and Allen, p. 11). Yet scholars such as Lewis (1975) have long been aware that 'disease' must be understood as the product of a unique western and scientific definition, and not as an objective reality. Medical anthropology is now very aware of the sociology of knowledge, yet Wiley and Allen have not exploited the opportunity to explain this to their readers.

Even a perfunctory examination of the table of contents reveals that the categorisation of health issues is predominantly based on biomedical categorisations. Ignoring the highly variable and subjective nature of biomedical categories, even within a biomedical framework, to find them at the heart of a biocultural approach to medical anthropology illustrates the conservative and uncritical nature of this book. Although classic biomedical categories are accompanied by more cross-culturally sensitive categories, such as 'health and healers', or 'stress, social inequality, and race and ethnicity', the overall result falls short of the book's goal of exploring the dynamics between the biological and social aspects of health by not being sufficiently critical of the categories and terms used.

Many of these criticisms of this handbook might be better directed at the field of bioculturalism in general. Achieving a true synthesis of biological and cultural approaches to health is complex if not fundamentally flawed. Also, the North American approach to medical anthropology is more in line with biological anthropology when compared to the approach taken in the UK. However, this does not remove the central criticism, which is that the authors have failed to highlight these issues, thus failing to alert the readers to the limitations of their introduction. In so doing, they have reduced what is still a very thorough and useful handbook to a biological anthropologist's approach to bioculturalism. They introduce many of the key themes in medical anthropology, and the book has a clear layout, useful information, and discusses a wide range of issues. The problem is largely that the authors have not labelled the book correctly, but as long as readers are aware of this, it is a valuable introductory volume and work of reference.

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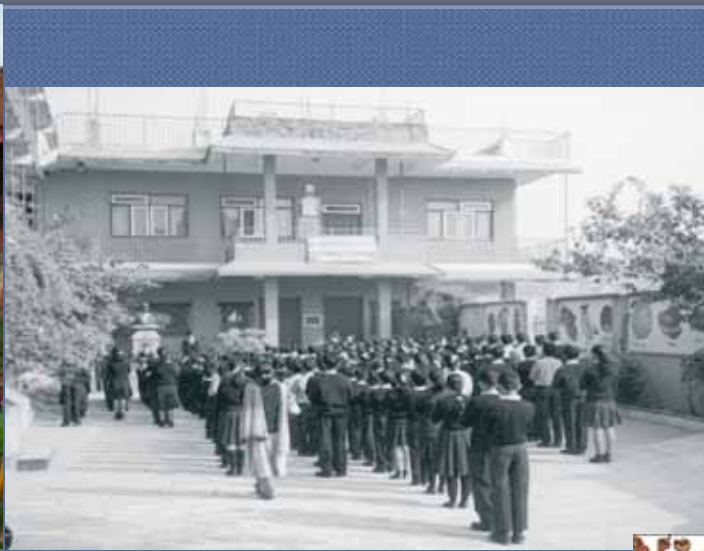
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KATE FAYERS-KERR



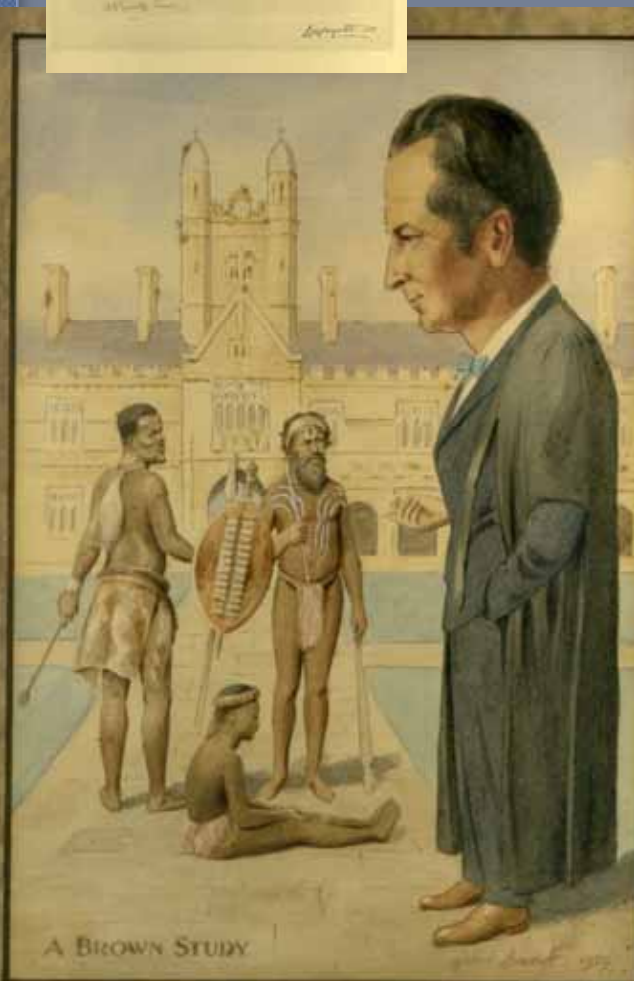
# The Awkward Social Science? Anthropology on Schools, Elections, and Revolution in Nepal

David Gellner

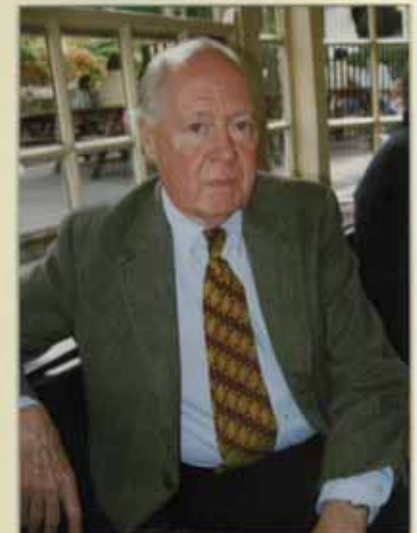




# Anthropological Ancestors



Maurice Freedman  
1920 - 1978



# Anthropology today?

Imagine Gary Larson's Far Side cartoon of anthropologists approaching over the hill and the grass-skirted 'natives' hiding their standard lamps and VCRs



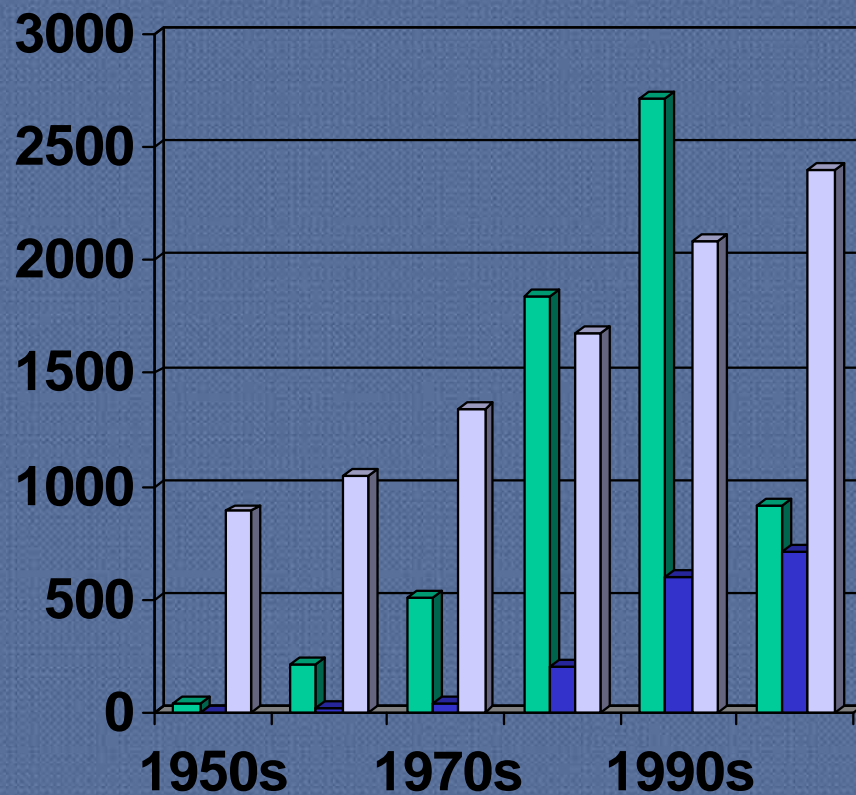
Bruce Parry

"The hope is that they will teach the military to behave in more 'culturally appropriate' ways and reduce the need for lethal force."  
(BBC R4 programme on Human Terrain System)

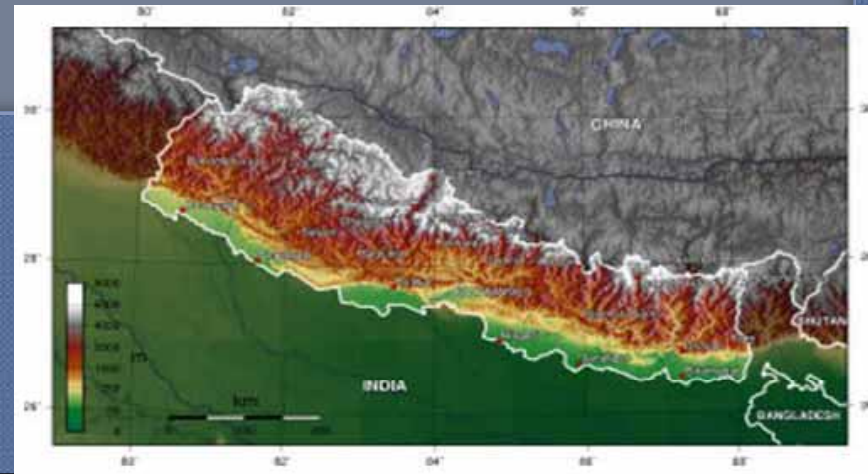




# Foreign aid to Nepal 1950-2003

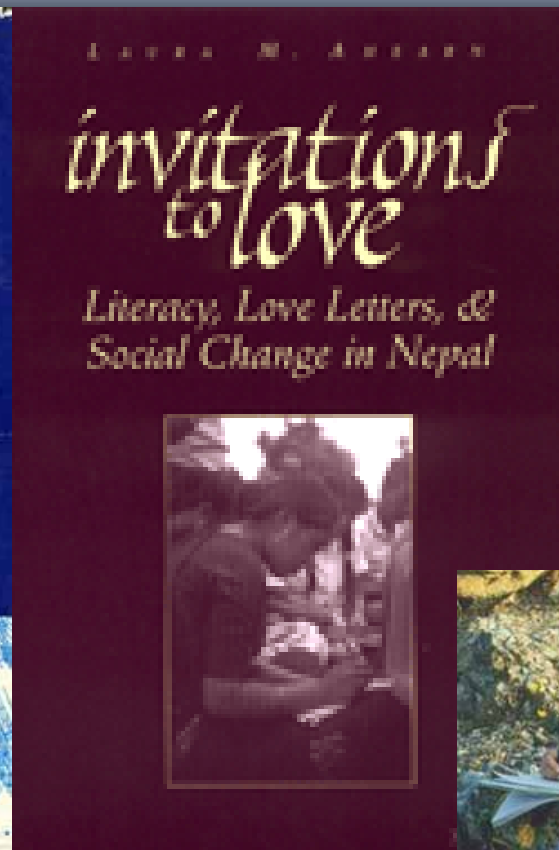
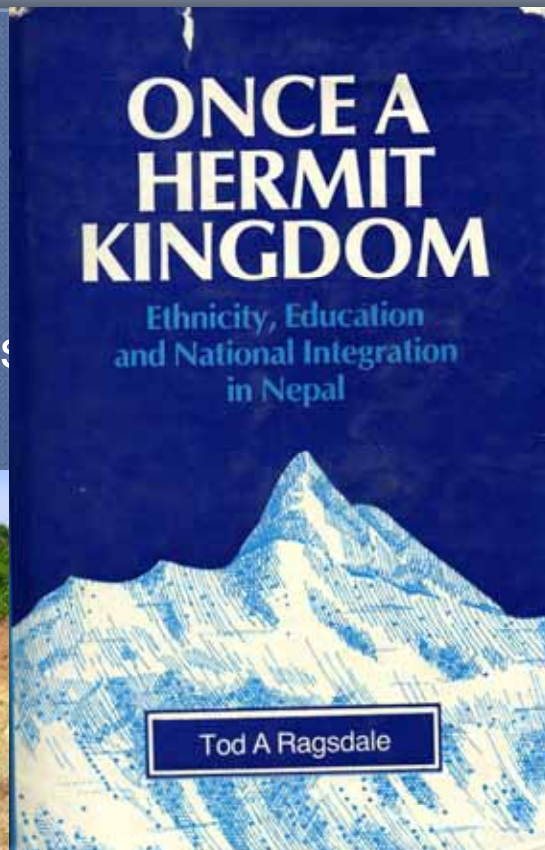


Aid in \$m  
Aid p.c. in NC  
Pop in 10,000



# Classics on education in Nepal

Tod Ragsdale in Laos  
2004-5



Laura Ahearn

Gender Trouble Makers  
Education and Empowerment  
in Nepal

Jennifer Rothchild

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group





# Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi: flagship for Newar cultural nationalism



**HIKIVA.org**

a Katano International Volunteer Association, Japan



From the Hikiva website:

## **HIKIVA Scholarships and Loan Funds Program**

Hikiva has been continuously adding up different scholarship schemes to the students of Nepal since 1990. Currently, HIKIVA is providing more than 450 scholarships to the students from three different schools Jagat ,i.e. **JAGAT SUNDAR BWONEKUTHI** (School), Kathmandu, **NIL BARAHI PRIMARY SCHOOL**, Bhaktapur, and **SATYAVATI HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL**, Dhading.

Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi:  
founded 1990;  
First contact with Japanese in  
1991;  
New buildings from 1993.

# Stakeholders in JSBK

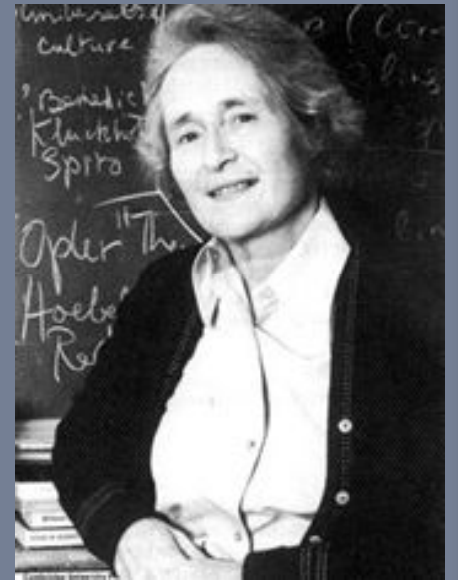
1. Nepal Bhasa Misa Khala (female Newari activists)
  2. Children
  3. Children's parents
  4. Sponsors (individuals; today: 6,000 NC = £50 p.a.)
  5. Sponsors: HIKIVA
  6. Teachers (and other staff)
  7. School Board (male Newar cultural nationalists)
- Preservation of Nepal Bhasa (Newari)
  - Giving poor children an education
  - Enabling children to 'compete' with others from good private schools
  - Development through raising educational levels





## Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*

“Any institution that is going to keep its shape needs to gain legitimacy by distinctive grounding in nature and in reason... Any institution... starts to control the memory of its members... It provides the categories of their thought, sets the terms for self-knowledge, and fixes identities. All of this is not enough. It must secure the social edifice by sacralizing the principles of justice.”



# Constituent Assembly elections, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008



P. Chauhan (UML candidate) opens the voting at Pokhariya, Parsa 4, at 7.30 a.m. (he won the seat)



Carter Center Short-Term Observer Team number 17, standing on the Indian border

Counting the votes in a Birganj high school, watched by the candidates' representatives





# Three f.a.q.s about revolution in Nepal

1. What role did the Royal Massacre (1/6/01) play?
2. Were the Maoists backed by China?
3. Are they really Maoists?



President Hu Jintao  
and King Gyanendra  
in Jakarta, 23/4/05



# Three paradoxes of revolution in Nepal

1. China in 1960s and 1970s vs. China in the 1990s.
2. Nepali Maoists in opposition vs. Nepali Maoists in government.
3. China's attitude to the Maoists before and after they formed part of the government



PM Dahal meets PM Wen Jiabao, 24/8/08, in Beijing

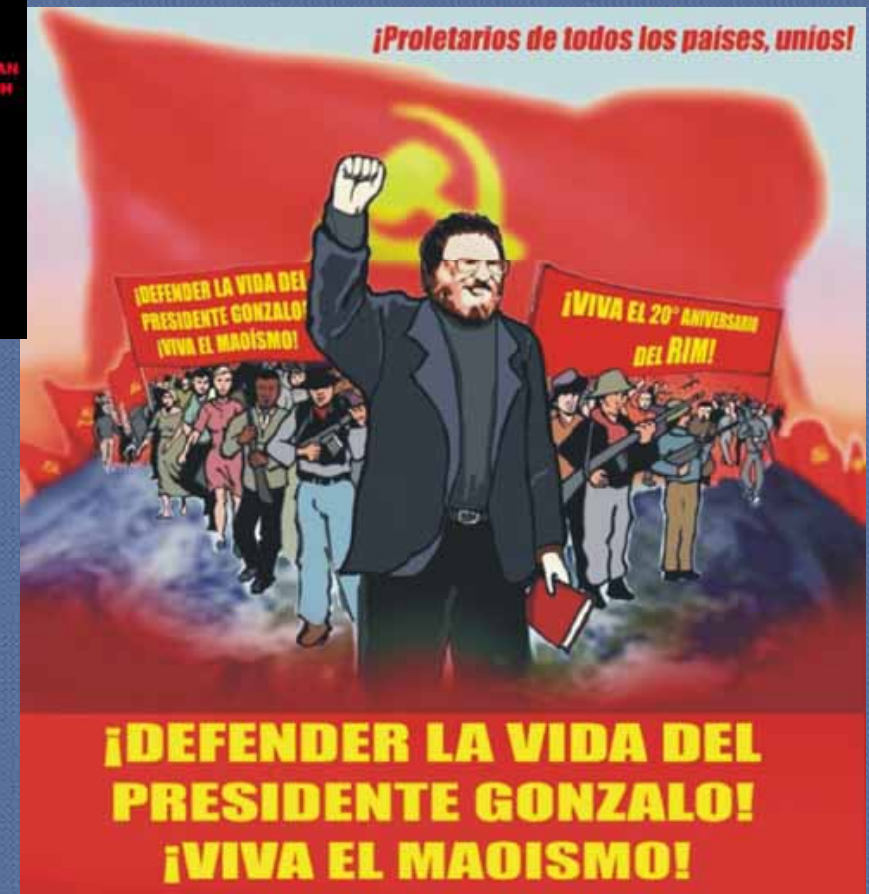




# Peru-Nepal comparison



“The Peruvian experience suggests that economic and social frustrations experienced by graduates from ethnic minorities and other low castes could well be translated into support for the all-encompassing political ideology of Maoism with its promise of a 'new republic' of equality and democracy.” (Nickson 1992: 381)





# Anthropological contributions to the study of Maoism in Nepal

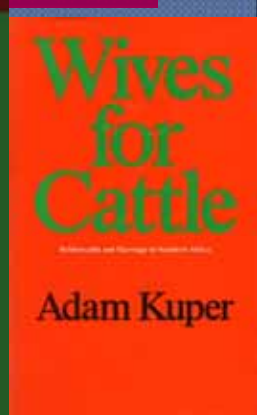
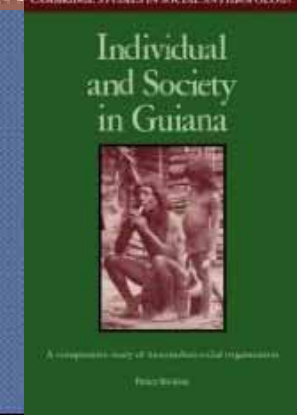
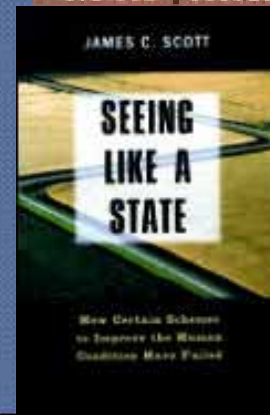
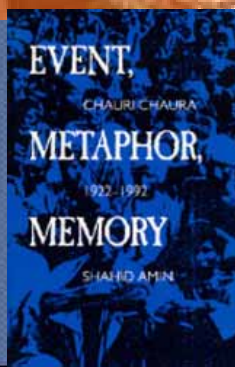
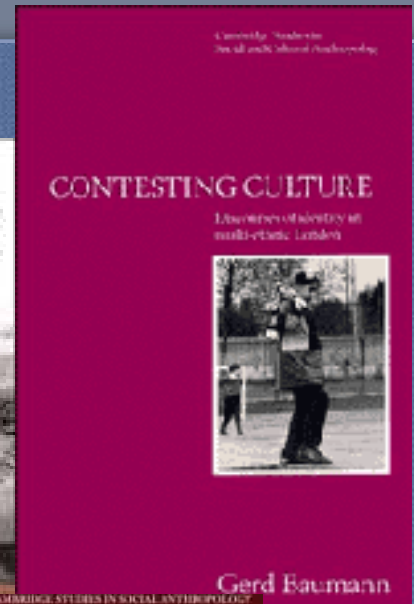
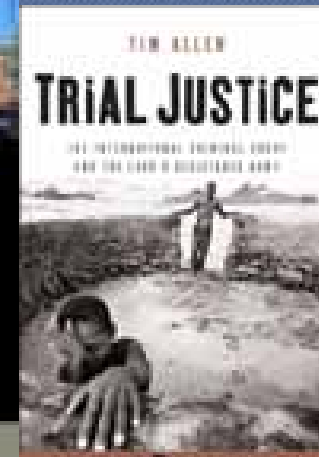
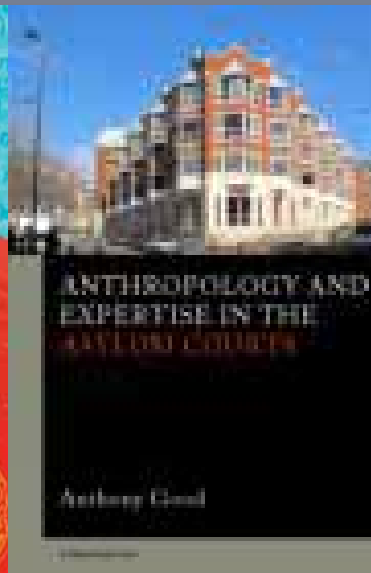
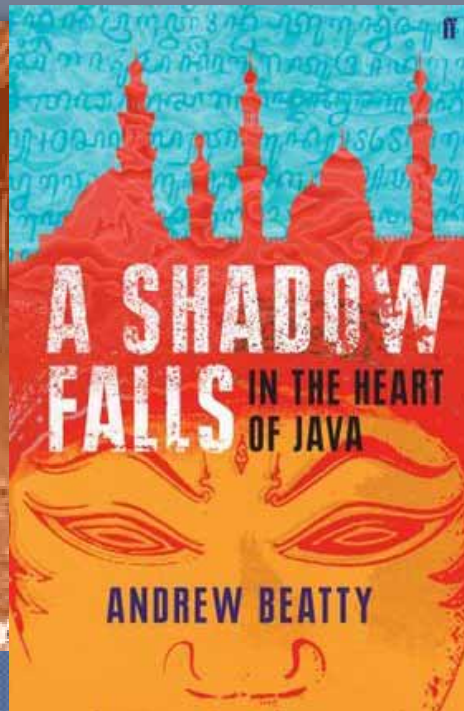
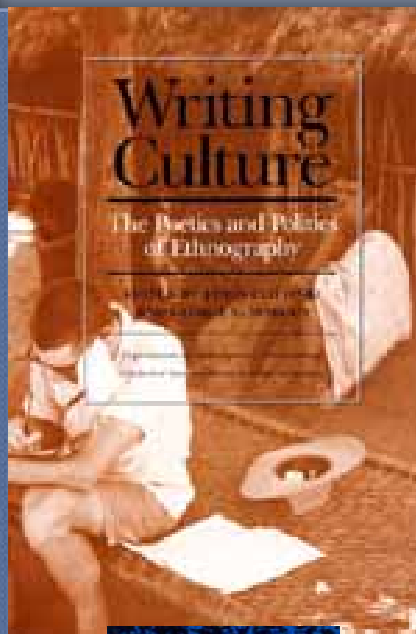
1. Everyday life under Maoism
2. Symbolism and ritual of Maoism (cult of the martyrs)
3. Youth and empowerment
4. Gender



Headline  
4/2/09:  
Kathmandu  
proclaims  
8,000 Maoist  
martyrs



# Anthropology today



# EP to Michael Gilsonan

